

A Catholic safe haven: University students from Eastern Europe in Spain during Francoism

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ABSTRACT: In 1946, Madrid became home to a Catholic university residence, the *colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol*, which catered specifically to refugee students from Eastern Europe who had fled the aftermath of the Second World War and the creation of Communist regimes in their home countries. This residence hall, which housed about 800 students from 20 nationalities between its opening in the postwar era and its rededication in 1969, was part of the anticommunist governmental strategy to overcome the political isolation that Francoist Spain found itself in. It was also part of the efforts of the Catholic church to support refugees from Eastern Europe in the early Cold War. This article aims to bring these strands together, focusing on the founding of the residence hall as a Catholic and governmental endeavor. In a second step, the article focuses on the residence hall itself, considering the agency of the residence's officials and its students, and contemplating the residence's academic and exile networks both in Spain and internationally.

KEYWORDS: Cold War; Emigration; Residence hall; Exile organizations; Catholic organizations; Madrid university; Anticommunism.

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RESUMEN: En 1946 se fundó una residencia universitaria católica en Madrid, el colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol, que atendía específicamente a estudiantes refugiados de Europa del Este que habían huido de los regímenes comunistas en sus países de origen. Esta residencia, que albergó a unos 800 estudiantes de 20 nacionalidades entre su apertura en la posguerra y su reorientación en 1969, formaba parte de la estrategia gubernamental anticomunista para superar el aislamiento político en el que se encontraba la España franquista. También fue parte de los esfuerzos de la iglesia católica para apoyar a los refugiados de Europa del Este a principios de la Guerra Fría. Este artículo tiene como objetivo unir estos hilos, poniendo el foco en la fundación de la residencia universitaria como esfuerzo católico y gubernamental; también en el día a día de la propia residencia, considerando las vivencias de funcionarios y estudiantes, y contemplando sus contactos con las redes académicas y de exilio de la residencia.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Guerra Fría; Emigración; Colegio mayor; Organizaciones de exilio; Organizaciones católicas; Universidad de Madrid; Anticomunismo.

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On the last day of the year 1946, the Spanish daily newspaper *ABC* reported on the recent arrival of 18 Ukrainian university students in Madrid. They were preceded by a group of Polish students who had arrived just before Christmas Eve.¹ In the new year, on January 6, 1947, a second group of Polish students reached the Spanish capital.² From then on, more arrivals of foreign students were counted almost monthly.³ These were the first of hundreds of students from Eastern and Central Europe who, after having experienced flight and displacement in the aftermaths of the destructive Second World War and the ensuing Cold War, came to Spain in search for a place to finish their university education and to restart their lives.

Spain might at first seem to be an unlikely destination for these young refugees from Central and Eastern Europe, as the country not only had traditionally very limited relations with that region but mainly was, in the 1940s, an impoverished country under a strict rightwing dictatorship that touted isolationist tendencies. But in 1946, Madrid became the home of a Catholic university residence, the *colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol*, that catered specifically to refugee students from Eastern Europe, offering them a temporary home and financial aid to finish their university studies. From its founding in 1946 to its rededication in 1969, this university residence hall was home to about 800 students of 19 different nationalities who had fled Communist countries (Eiroa San Francisco, 2018, p. 9).⁴ It was, according to its own documentation, the only institution of its kind worldwide.⁵

In its design and its objectives, this university residence hall was a Catholic-Francoist joint venture of state and church: As will be detailed later on, it was conceived as a Catholic institution to confront a mounting humanitarian crisis regarding refugees from Eastern Europe in the early postwar years. It was also part of an initiative of the Spanish government to strengthen the country's international reputation as an anticommunist bulwark in the ensuing Cold War. Both state and church were thus influential in the orientation and organization of the residence

hall. However, as will be argued in this article, the *colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol* also developed its own agency. As part of both academic networks (with very close ties to the University of Madrid) and of networks of exile organizations, both staff and residents of the *colegio mayor* had ambitions that went beyond those posed by the founding institutions.

This article aims to bring these strands together, focusing first on the founding of the residence hall as a Catholic and governmental endeavor, while also, in a second step, considering the agency of the residence's officials and its students, and contemplating the residence's academic and exile networks both in Spain and internationally.

This approach allows us to concentrate on three aspects and relations that have so far been largely ignored or read out of context—and unjustly so, I believe. First, the rich research literature on Eastern European refugees and exiles during the Cold War has largely skipped Spain as one of the destinations of émigré communities.⁶ It is true that the Eastern European exile communities in Spain were small compared to any of the major emigration destinations,⁷ but I argue that Francoist Spain represents a specific case as an alternative haven for Central and Eastern European refugees: For some, it was—in contrast to most major exile destinations—a distinctly Catholic and conservative destination. For others, it was a significant stop on route to Latin America, thereby highlighting the importance of the southern half of the Americas to its more studied northern counterpart for Cold War emigration. A third, quite influential group among the émigré communities chose Spain for its political rightwing orientation under Francisco Franco both during and after the Second World War. The former alliance of Francoist Spain with Nazi Germany and fascist Italy led in the postwar years to a continued amiability toward representatives of both defeated dictatorships as well as other aligned fascist and far-right authoritarian states. Tellingly, Ante Pavelić, the leader of the Croatian fascist organization *Ustasha* and dictator of the Independent State of Croatia from 1941 to 1945, or Horia Sima, ultimate leader of the Romanian fascist organization *Iron Guard* (from 1938 to 1941), were two of the more well-known exiles in postwar Spain.⁸ Others, such as Jozef Cieker, the former ambassador to Spain of the wartime Slovak republic under Jozef Tiso, simply stayed on in Madrid after the war. These figures of wartime politics continued to exude political influence

¹ *ABC* 'Estudiantes ucranianos, en Madrid', 31 December 1946, p. 24, and with photography on p. 5. <https://www.abc.es/archivo/periodicos/abc-madrid-19461231-24.html> [accessed 25/11/2023].

² Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1948): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria 1946-48*, Madrid, [OCAU], pp. 11, 14.

³ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1948): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria 1946-48*, Madrid, [OCAU], pp. 11 and 14.

⁴ The nineteen nationalities of Eastern Europe, China and Palestine which were represented overtime at the *colegio mayor* will be itemized further below. The Spanish students enrolled at the residence hall would constitute the twentieth nationality. However, they were hardly ever mentioned in the documents.

⁵ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1951): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1950-51*, Madrid, [n. n.], p. 29. In a similar vein, the *United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration* (UNRRA) founded an "international university" based in Munich, catering directly to university students who found themselves in camps for displaced persons. This university was short-lived. See Holian, 2008.

⁶ The research literature generally focuses on the main centers of exile activities, mainly in North America and in France, Great Britain or Germany. It is impossible to give an adequate overview here. Emigration from Eastern Europe during the Cold War is broadly covered in Mazurkiewicz, 2020; Slany, 1993. Several studies concentrate on international exile organizations, such as Mazurkiewicz, 2009, 2012. Much of the research is concentrated on specific national émigré groups, such as Heikkilä, 2021; Lukasiewicz, 2023; Raška, 2015; Stola, 2010. See also Lukes, 2002.

⁷ José Luis Orella (2016, p. 118) quotes the Spanish census on foreign residents in Spain in 1947 with, among others, 434 Hungarians, 118 Romanians, and 119 Yugoslavs.

⁸ For a larger context of these emigration trends, see Le Normand, 2020; Scutaru, 2020.

both in the respective exile communities and in their good relations with the Francoist government. Some of them, especially Jozef Cieker, will also play an important role in the formation of the *colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol*. While obviously, the exile communities represented a broad political spectrum, refugees of extreme rightwing political conviction were certainly welcomed and sometimes even aided by the Francoist regime.⁹ Research on Eastern European exile communities in Spain, then, can shed light on a non-democratic and strongly Catholic refugee destination during the early Cold War.

Second, the existing (scarce) research on the *colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol*, or even on Eastern European exile in Spain more generally, has not facilitated the inclusion of this specific case in larger debates on exile, on Cold War politics or on academic mobility. Two articles concentrate explicitly on the *colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol*. While valuable for their detailed information on the founding and organization of the residence hall, they lack a larger contextualization and interpretation of its relevance for the university, for the exile communities or for the political objectives of government institutions (Eiroa San Francisco, 2005; Orella Martínez, 2016). Other studies have concentrated on specific national communities and general relations between Spain and individual countries and therefore do not aim to offer a wider view of the intricate relations between various exile communities and the Francoist state more generally.¹⁰

And finally, on a much more general note, it is surprising how little critical attention university residence halls have gotten in historical research. This is the case for research focusing on social history, on *Alltagsgeschichte* or even on university history. While residence halls may generally have been interpreted as mere accessories to the study of academic life at the universities, the scattered research has, in contrast, highlighted the relevance of these institutionalized academic living quarters for the formation of long-lasting artistic or intellectual circles (as an example *par excellence* the *Residencia de Estudiantes* in Madrid, which housed during the first third of the 20th

century important groups of the intellectual and artistic elite such as the poet Federico García Lorca, the painter Salvador Dalí, the filmmaker Luis Buñuel and the physician and Nobel prize laureate Severo Ochoa), for the integration of women into the academic sphere, or as political tools (regarding, for example, the politics of integration or supervision of foreign students).¹¹

Thus, this article attempts to bring these three strands together, as it focuses mainly on the first ten years—as the most formative—of the *colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol*. The sources, in part archival material (from the General Archive of Universidad Complutense de Madrid), in part memoirs by residents of the *colegio mayor*, and especially publications by the residence hall and its supervising institution, the OCAU, offer a multifaceted perspective on the institution in its social context as well as on the residence' directorate and its students, on governmental and Catholic representatives as agents in their own right.

In a first step, this article will concentrate on the founding and management of the *colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol*, reflecting on its national and international networks and their political and ideological implications. This residence hall was first and foremost a Catholic institution, which included the support of a growing Catholic network, both lay and institutional. In a second step, the article analyzes the national origin of the students as well as their academic profiles, before concentrating on their complicated situation as both émigrés and highly qualified job seekers. In a third step, the article will consider the inner dynamics of this international residence hall and the agency of its residents. For the residents, it was more than an academic residence; it became both a temporary home for those students exiled from Eastern Europe and the center of their national exile activities.

THE FOUNDING AND FUNDING OF THE COLEGIO MAYOR IN COLD WAR TIMES

With the end of the Second World War, Spain found itself in increasing isolation. The Spanish *caudillo* Francisco Franco had lost its main political allies, Nazi Germany and fascist Italy, and was now confronted with a mounting international campaign to oust Spain from international cooperation. The year 1945 saw the beginning of an international quarantine of Spain when the country was excluded from membership of the United Nations. This trend would only continue with the exclusion from the Marshall Plan in 1947, and then from both NATO and the Council of Europe in 1949.¹² To counteract the increasing isolation, the Spanish government launched a staunch anticommunist campaign that would facilitate the country's integration into the Western camp in the commencing Cold War. The government's support of the *colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol* can be understood as part of these measures to build an anticommunist résumé. On Decem-

⁹ On Eastern European exile in Spain and its (partial) adherence to radical rightwing ideologies, see Eiroa San Francisco, 2007, 2018; Faraldo, 2012.

¹⁰ For example, on Czechoslovak-Spanish relations, see Timko, 2020, 2022; Vurm, 2007. Specifically on Slovak emigration, see Katrebová Blehová, 2021. On Polish exile in Spain, see Faraldo, 2008, 2012; and, more geared toward the Polish section of *Radio Nacional de España* than on Polish exile in Spain in general, Bogdan, 2011. On the Romanian exile community in Spain, see Luque Hernández, 2015. A valuable source is certainly the published memoirs of Eastern European émigrés in Spain. Mostly, however, they touch upon the *colegio mayor* Santiago Apóstol and generally on the specific situation of university students only fleetingly, while concentrating more on other aspects of the émigré communities. Among these should be mentioned publications by former students such as Chajma, 1998; Kolmajer, 1998b; Yarymovych, Bilyk and Volynskyi, 1997. Voices of Eastern European émigrés in Spain on other topics are, for example, Kolmajer, 1998a; Łobodowski, 1980, who concentrate on their work at *Radio Nacional de España*. For more information on foreign language broadcasts of RNE to Eastern Europe, see Lemmen, 2023.

¹¹ See, for example, Lemus López, 2022; Núñez Nadal, 2022; Ribagorda, 2010; Sáenz de la Calzada, 1986; Varela Olea, 2022.

¹² See Fernández García and Pereira Castañares, 1995, pp. 123-129; Portero, 1989; Sanz Díaz, 2007; Sánchez González, 2015.

ber 6, 1946, the government published a decree about the founding of the *colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol*, with the objective to accommodate “those students, graduates and professors who, exiled from their home countries because of the religious persecution by atheist communism, ask for asylum and protection in order to continue their academic studies in Spain.”¹³

The *colegio mayor*, however, was not a government creation. Instead, it was first proposed in an international Catholic setting, namely in the context of *Pax Romana*. This lay Catholic organization was, in its own words, an “International Union of Catholic Students”¹⁴ which focused on uniting “Catholic students and academics worldwide” (Sánchez Recio, 2005, p. 213). The idea to provide residence halls for students who had fled Eastern and Central Europe in the postwar years and the ensuing Cold War was first presented at the regional congress of *Pax Romana* in London in 1945, where the idea was picked up by the Spanish delegation. During its XIX international congress in 1946, which was to take place in Spain, the Spanish representatives could already propose the founding of a university residence hall in Madrid for students from Eastern Europe (Eiroa San Francisco, 2005, pp. 265-266; Orella Martínez, 2015, pp. 59-60; 2016, pp. 119-120).

This Spanish delegation to *Pax Romana* was led by three men who would be highly influential in the founding of the *colegio mayor* and would become central figures in the Spanish cultural, political, and religious life of the 1940s and 1950s. The first was Joaquín Ruiz-Giménez, at the time president of *Pax Romana* as well as professor of Philosophy of Law at the University of Sevilla (Muñoz Soro, 2006, p. 264). He was strongly involved in the cultural and political life of the Francoist regime, as he would, at the end of 1946, become director of the *Instituto de Cultura Hispánica* (Institute of Hispanic Culture) in Madrid, and in 1948 Spanish ambassador to the Vatican, before, in 1951, being appointed minister of national education (Lago Carballo, n. d.). The Spanish delegation also included the bishop Casimiro Morcillo González, who later on would become archbishop of Madrid-Alcalá (Cárcel Ortí, n. d.). And, finally, there was Alfredo Sánchez Bella, a member of various powerful Catholic organizations, most notably *Opus Dei*, who would continue to occupy leading positions at central cultural institutions before being sent as ambassador to countries such as Colombia and Italy. He was also secretary general of *Pax Romana*. Sánchez Bella would continue to play an important role at the *colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol* as its founding director until 1948 when he became director of the *Instituto de Cultura Hispánica*. Eventually, he became minister of information and tourism (Cuenca Toribio, n. d.).

These names suggest that from the beginning on, a

¹³ Spain. Decree of December 6, 1946, about the founding of the University residence Hall ‘Santiago Apóstol’ at the University of Madrid. *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, 14 December 1946, no. 348, p. 8735.

¹⁴ Congreso Mundial de Pax Romana (1946): *XIX Congreso Mundial de Pax Romana*, El Escorial, [n. n.], [n. p.].

group of highly influential men with strong ties both to the Catholic church and to the highest ranks of the Spanish Francoist political and cultural spheres set in motion the idea of the *colegio mayor*. The support of these entities would prove crucial for the rapid founding process of the institution, which took only a couple of months. The first step was, in October 1946, to create a foundation, the *Catholic Charity of University Assistance* (Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, or OCAU), a Spanish legal entity with total autonomy which was to oversee and administer the planned residence hall. The prestige of this foundation, and implicitly also that of the *colegio mayor*, is once again demonstrated by the choice of its first (and long-time) president, José María Otero Navascués. A world-renowned optician and director of the Institute for Optics of the *Spanish National Research Council* (*Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas*, or C.S.I.C.) as well as member of the *Royal Academy of Sciences*, Otero Navascués was well-versed in the academic, political, and Catholic circles of the capital, which was certainly useful in his quest for political insight and financial capital (Andrés Martín, n. d.).¹⁵

It was only consequent, then, that the founding of the *colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol* was officially decreed by the Spanish government only shortly after, on December 6, 1946. The otherwise a rather dry language of the *Official State Bulletin* (BOE) introduced this decree with a moral statement that bespoke the shared Catholic identity of the Spanish nation and many of the Eastern European peoples:

The Spanish nation, with clear knowledge of the heavy responsibilities which the union of Christian brotherhood imposes on all believers in the current global situation, [...] will award a spontaneous welcome, through persons and private institutions, to Polish, Lithuanian, Croatian, Ukrainian and other university students who, far from their homelands, are searching for a refuge in the Spanish hospitality in order to reconstruct their fractured lives, to complete their university studies and to put themselves in the situation to keep delivering their own valuable contribution.¹⁶

Beyond this legal, emotional, and moral introduction of the *colegio mayor* to the public, the Spanish government showed its recognition through the regulation of financial support, as the new *colegio mayor* was to be endowed on equal terms with the other student residences in Spain.¹⁷

The long list of financial sponsors, both national and international, once again indicates the special status enjoyed

¹⁵ See also Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1948): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria 1946-48*, Madrid, [OCAU], pp. 10-11.

¹⁶ Spain. Decree of December 6, 1946, about the founding of the University residence Hall ‘Santiago Apóstol’ at the University of Madrid. *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, 14 December 1946, no. 348, p. 8735.

¹⁷ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1949): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1948-49*, Madrid, OCAU, pp. 6-7.

by the *colegio mayor*. The main financing entity was the Spanish government, with a relevant sum from both the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A substantial sum was also contributed annually by US-American Catholic institutions, first by the *National Catholic Welfare Council*, and later by the *National Federation of Catholic College Students*. Even the Pope gave a considerable sum for the foundation of the *colegio mayor* and, in subsequent years, contributed to the fellowships offered by the university residence.¹⁸ In addition to this institutionalized funding, the OCAU also knew how to mobilize Catholic lay people over the years. Motivated among others by the information bulletin of the OCAU *Christianitas* which reminded its readers that “to help the OCAU is to help the members of your own Mystical Body that suffer for their faith,”¹⁹ the institution created a viable network throughout Spain, with more than a thousand members in Madrid already by 1950. Other local branches were opened in Huesca, Pamplona, Jaca or Gerona. The local branch at Zaragoza with 250 members even took on their own students and financially supported six female university students of Slovene nationality who resided in the capital of Aragón.²⁰ By 1952, the local branch in Barcelona was supporting eleven foreign university students who studied in the Catalan capital.²¹

THE OPENING OF THE *COLEGIO MAYOR*

Once the founding of the *colegio mayor* was decreed in early December 1946, the first students arrived only two weeks later, highlighting the urgency to support exiled students in dire situations. However, the first months proved highly improvised as the allocated building for the *colegio mayor* was still under construction. In the beginning, the new residents were put up in boarding houses or in private homes, until, on May 2, 1947, the actual building of the *colegio mayor* was inaugurated close to the campus of Madrid University with a capacity of 110 residents.²²

The first annual report of the *colegio mayor* hints at an early admission process that put less value on academic achievements and highlighted rather its ambitions as a rescue mission to save young Catholic students from

camps for refugees or for prisoners of war, even stretching its budget to provide for as many students as possible.²³ Only since the first full academic year 1947-48, the admission procedure would be handled in a more orderly fashion, focusing more on academic merits and inserting stricter age limits.²⁴ The students were outfitted with food and lodging as well as clothing, study material, medical services and some pocket money. Some received an additional fellowship that would cover their expenses and leave them a small allowance. Right away, the students were offered Spanish lessons, and some took the first exams in their chosen subjects as an initial step to entering the Spanish university system.²⁵ The possibility of getting a university degree and, at the same time, being provided with food, lodging and financial support proved attractive to many potential candidates: In the year 1948-49, the *colegio mayor* received 1500 applications, “of the most diverse places and through the most diverse channels, of university students that met the criteria to be selected by the OCAU.”²⁶ This might have been an all-time high, but application rates stayed elevated in consequent years. In 1950-51, the residence hall received 500 applications, and officials expected even more in the following years due to the planned closure of the *International Refugee Organization* (IRO) as the main institution to deal with the massive refugee crisis in the postwar years, and to the at the time unclear future of refugee care in Europe.²⁷ In the year 1951-52, “numerous” applications came “from all over Europe, America and China.”²⁸ The constant high number of applications and the reference to the work of the IRO serve as an apt reminder of the continuing dire situation of many refugees from Eastern Europe well into the 1950s.

Despite the limited space at the student residence, and regardless of the constant financial problems, the number of students financially supported by the OCAU increased constantly. Most beneficiaries lodged at the *colegio mayor*, an all-male dormitory, while others were financially supported outside of the residence hall. This included men

¹⁸ Cf. *Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria* (1948): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria 1946-48*, Madrid, [OCAU], pp. 26-27, and *Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria* (1951): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1950-51*, Madrid, [n. n.], pp. 30-32.

¹⁹ As declared, among similar motivational slogans, in a form of advertisement. See *Christianitas. Boletín de información de la OCAU*, 1 (1948), [n. p.].

²⁰ *Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria* (1950): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1949-50*, Madrid, Editorial Magisterio Español, p. 14.

²¹ *Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria* (1952): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1951-52*, Madrid, [n. n.], p. 19.

²² The address was calle de Donoso Cortés, 63. See *Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria* (1948): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria 1946-48*, Madrid, [OCAU], p. 12.

²³ *Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria* (1948): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria 1946-48*, Madrid, [OCAU], pp. 8-9.

²⁴ These measures were being implanted ever more strictly. *Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria* (1952): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1951-52*, Madrid, [n. n.], p. 9.

²⁵ *Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria* (1948): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria 1946-48*, Madrid, [OCAU], p. 14. Kolmajer (1998b, pp. 285-287), one of the first Slovak students to arrive at the *colegio mayor* in Madrid, describes the experience of settling in, which implied first and foremost mastering the Spanish language, but also getting used to a highly international environment in a foreign city.

²⁶ *Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria* (1949): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1948-49*, Madrid, OCAU, p. 5.

²⁷ *Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria* (1951): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1950-51*, Madrid, [n. n.], p. 9.

²⁸ *Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria* (1952): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1951-52*, Madrid, [n. n.], p. 12.

and some—very few—women who enrolled at universities in Zaragoza, Barcelona and other cities. The exact number of residents is somewhat unclear despite the detailed account in the annual reports, as the numbers are not always coherent. They also fail to mention the contingent of about a dozen Spanish students who resided at the *colegio mayor* and who were referred to in other contexts in the reports.²⁹ But the tendency is clear: Despite constant financial constraints, the OCAU supported an increasing number of students each year, from about 152 in 1947-48 to 170 in 1949-50 and more than 175 in 1950-51.³⁰ In these years, the number of students counted as residents at the *colegio mayor* always exceeded the capacity of the building itself, suggesting rather tight quarters. In 1949-50, 141 students were residents, while in 1952-53, the number was at 136.³¹

The high demand by prospective students and the initial success in securing sufficient funding for several years in a row led in the early 1950s to enthusiastic expansion plans. In 1951, a project was announced to construct a new building closer to the university that would house up to 200 students, and to open another residence in Barcelona for up to 80 foreign students.³² By the academic year 1951-52, the plots of land had been chosen, and an architect was hired. Even the design was already considered, as the new residence was to evoke “in its ornamentation and decoration some of the characteristics of the home countries of the residents.”³³ In the end, however, none of these expansions were realized. It may well be that the Spanish government eventually refused to sign up for this project after not being able to secure sufficient funding. No other attempt was made to enhance or modify the infrastructure of the residence hall.

A RESIDENCE HALL FOR EXILED STUDENTS: A PROFILE

A central task of the *colegio mayor* was the search for suitable candidates for the residence program. As explained in its first annual report, the goal was to support those university students who had left their homelands in Eastern Europe for fear of religious or political repression after a Communist takeover, and who now were dispersed

throughout Western Europe and beyond.³⁴ The issue was pressing. In 1946, many refugee students were still in refugee camps or in camps for prisoners of war in Italy, Germany, or Austria. *Pax Romana* counted about 6000 student refugees from Poland alone in these camps.³⁵ In Italy, about 300 young Ukrainians were interned, a group consisting of both students and former soldiers (Orella Martínez, 2016, p. 121). Others, again, applied as refugees from various countries such as Sweden.³⁶ Information about the new residence hall for refugees in Madrid was spread mainly through various national Catholic student organizations such as the *Federation of Slovene Catholic Students*, the *Society of Ukrainian Catholic Students Obnova*, the *Center of Slovak Catholic Students*, and others (Eiroa San Francisco, 2005, p. 276). In fact, these exile organizations became highly influential in the selection of students. Already in September of 1946, an agreement was struck with the *Polish Catholic Action in Exile*, stating that all future Polish residents would be chosen by this organization.³⁷ This arrangement was kept in the long term, effectively installing these exile organizations as gatekeepers to the *colegio mayor*.

In the first ten years, according to the newspaper *ABC*, 423 students of 19 nationalities passed through the *colegio mayor*. The largest national groups were represented by 85 Poles, 65 Ukrainians, 55 Croats, 48 Slovenes, and 42 Hungarians. In numbers, the next groups were the Chinese with 29 students (the first Chinese arriving at the *colegio mayor* in the academic year 1949-50), 21 Slovaks, 21 Romanians, and 12 Czechs. The smallest national groups were Latvians (9), Georgians (8), Byelorussians (6), Serbs and Estonians (each 5), Russians (4), Lithuanians (3), Bulgarians and Albanians (each 2), and one Palestinian.³⁸ In the following ten years, the overall number of residents would grow to more than 800 (Eiroa San Francisco, 2018, p. 9).

Not only was the national background of the students highly diverse, but also their choice of field of study. Most students were enrolled in Law, Medicine, Pharmacy, Chemistry, Political Sciences or Economics, as well as

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21. Kolmajer (1998b, p. 286) mentioned “a few Spanish” students at the *colegio mayor*.

³⁰ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1949): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1948-49*, Madrid, OCAU, p. 16; Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1950): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1949-50*, Madrid, Editorial Magisterio Español, p. 6; Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1951): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1950-51*, Madrid, [n. n.], p. 6.

³¹ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1953): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria 1952-53*, Madrid, [n. n.], pp. 10-13.

³² Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1952): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1951-52*, Madrid: [n. n.], p. 20.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³⁴ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1948): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria 1946-48*, Madrid, [OCAU], pp. 6-10.

³⁵ Congreso Mundial de Pax Romana (1946): *XIX Congreso Mundial de Pax Romana*, Madrid, [n. n.], pp. 126-131, here from Orella Martínez, 2016, p. 120.

³⁶ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1948): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria 1946-48*, Madrid, [OCAU], p. 11. See also Eiroa San Francisco, 2005, pp. 275-276.

³⁷ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1948): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria 1946-48*, Madrid, [OCAU], p. 9.

³⁸ ABC “Una institución española de alcance universal,” 17 June 1959, pp. 43-45. <https://www.abc.es/archivo/periodicos/abc-madrid-19590617-43.html> [accessed 25/11/2023]. The actual number of nationalities was twenty, as there were also Spanish students housed at the residence hall. However, while they were mentioned sporadically in some annual reports, they never showed up in the statistics of the *colegio mayor*. Therefore, it is not surprising that they were omitted as well in this counting of nationalities during the first ten years.

various fields of engineering. Some went to the faculty of Philosophy and Humanities. Others, again, studied Visual Arts or at the music conservatory.³⁹ While the majority of students would strive for an undergraduate degree, the number of PhD students was quite high. For example, 18 of the residents in the academic year 1954-55 were PhD students or Postdocs.⁴⁰

SHOULD THEY STAY OR SHOULD THEY GO? THE RESIDENCE' MISSION

In 1946, when the first idea of a *colegio mayor* for students from Eastern Europe was formulated in the international context of the *Pax Romana*, the stated objective was to concentrate in Spain all those students who would continue their travels to Latin America. The objective was to teach them Spanish and to “give them a preliminary formation in order for them to exercise their professions under any circumstance.”⁴¹ Only in some cases was help offered to find employment in Spain.⁴² At that time, the role of Madrid as a hub for those escaping Europe in the postwar atmosphere and as a transit point for those hoping for a new beginning in Latin America was already well established in other contexts as well. This included the so-called “ratlines” or escape routes that sprang up after the end of the Second World War to aid fascist and Nazi leaders and collaborators to leave Europe. Considering the political leaning of the Francoist regime and its tolerance or even outright support of refugees from former rightwing organizations and fascist dictatorships, it is only consequential that some of the most active “ratlines” went through Spain (Del Hierro, 2022). In this sense, independent of their political leaning, the Eastern European students would have been seen as part of a larger group of refugees passing through Madrid on their way to one of the Latin American countries.

However, by 1948, the objectives of the *colegio mayor* had shifted, from a mainly preparatory hub for those destined to emigrate to Latin America to more political ambitions as an educational center for the “future apostles and leaders” of a prospective post-communist Eastern Europe.⁴³ As the directorate of the *colegio mayor* stated, these “apostles and leaders” would then be able to “re-establish a Christian society”⁴⁴ in a region where communism would have left only “misshapen, atomized and demor-

alized masses.”⁴⁵ In the at times quite poetic language of the annual reports, the students were considered to be the “ferment and yeast in the Christian reconstruction of their countries.”⁴⁶ These claims to create the leaders of a Christian Eastern Europe also explain the aspirations for a broad education at the *colegio mayor*: The residence hall not only offered access to an academic education at the University of Madrid, but it also provided a spiritual and moral formation, interlaced with physical activities.⁴⁷

This change of objectives meant that the plans for the immediate future of the residents were changing as well. After graduation, the students were urged to stay in Spain where they were to build their lives and professional careers while waiting for the moment to return to their countries of origin. Otherwise, the fear was that, once the graduates would cross the Atlantic and settle in the Americas, they would be lost to the cause of re-establishing a post-communist Christian society in Eastern Europe.⁴⁸ The annual report of 1949-50 made this change in politics very clear when it stated explicitly that the *colegio mayor* was “not conceived of as a transit point for later emigration to America.”⁴⁹

This objective, however, was met with various obstacles. The closest to home was the labor law in Spain which clearly disadvantaged foreign workers (Torquemada, 2009, pp. 44-47). Representatives of the *colegio mayor* or the OCAU took it upon themselves to change the current law. But, judging by the formulations used in the annual report of 1949-50, the officials were frustrated that, three years into the education of foreign university students and with an increasing number of completed university degrees to show for, the job market in Spain stayed all but shut for their graduates. In not very subtle words, the report hoped to open paths to the labor market for the students, despite “the lack of understanding and the selfish sentiments of many [in Spanish society].”⁵⁰

Finally, in 1950, a new labor law was passed (Torquemada, 2009, pp. 94-97). However, it remained difficult to provide all graduates with jobs in Spain. The directorship of the *colegio mayor* was all the more grateful to the *Spanish National Research Council* (CSIC) to have offered eight fellowships specifically for graduates of the *colegio mayor*.⁵¹ To circumvent the legal traps for their

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1950): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1949-50*, Madrid, Editorial Magisterio Español, pp. 13-14.

⁴⁷ Colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol (1949): *Reglamento*, Madrid: n.p., p. 8.

⁴⁸ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1949): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1948-49*, Madrid, OCAU, pp. 5-6.

⁴⁹ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1950): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1949-50*, Madrid, Editorial Magisterio Español, pp. 13-14.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 13-14.

⁵¹ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1952): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1951-52*, Madrid: [n. n.], p. 14.

³⁹ For an overview of the university courses chosen, see the various annual reports *Memoria de la OCAU* from 1948-49 to 1954-55.

⁴⁰ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1955): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria y del colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol, 1954-55*, Madrid: Gráficas Argüelles, pp. 19-23.

⁴¹ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1948): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria 1946-48*, Madrid, [OCAU], p. 10.

⁴² Ibid., p. 17.

⁴³ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1949): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1948-49*, Madrid, OCAU, p. 4.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

academic protégés, the officials of the residence hall even contemplated the option of dual citizenship for their graduates.⁵² Finally, three years after the new law had come into effect, the annual report for 1952-53 could announce that “the majority of university students [at the *colegio mayor*] could stay in Spain, and some of them found advantageous positions and were in demand by important industrial entities.”⁵³

The difficult access to the labor market was not the only issue to be dealt with. The employment of graduates from the *colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol* was made even more complicated by the lack of recognition of their university diplomas. In 1947, a first step was made when prior studies at foreign universities would be recognized and counted toward the Spanish degree at the University of Madrid.⁵⁴ But it was only in 1954 that the university degrees of foreign students, even if executed entirely at the University of Madrid, were finally validated and therefore of use for a career in Spain.⁵⁵ Even then, the validation was only temporary, as it was issued for only ten years with an option to prolong it for another decade (Orella Martínez, 2016, p. 121).

The lack of job opportunities in Spain was surely a push-factor for emigration to the Americas. A pull-factor was the hope for a better life in both North and South America. In the first few years, the students’ emigration was mainly directed to Latin American countries. One of them was the Croat José Franić,⁵⁶ resident of the *colegio mayor* with a degree in economic sciences, who, together with his Spanish wife, boarded a ship in Santander for Chile on July 16, 1950.⁵⁷ Others left for Venezuela, Peru, or Argentina, and only some chose Northern America as their final destination.⁵⁸

In the year 1951-52, the *colegio mayor* noted an increase of students who left Madrid for a new life abroad, some even before having graduated, “due to extraordinarily favorable circumstances for emigration, especially to the United States.”⁵⁹ This positive interpretation of the United States’ immigration laws is rather surprising. It is

true that around this time there was a slight opening in US immigration regulation. But the U.S. escapee program from 1952, which had been conceived of to offer 300,000 visas to refugees, largely failed, and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 implemented soon after effectively reaffirmed the quota system’s discrimination against East Europeans that had been in place since 1924 (Zahra, 2016, pp. 230-240). Despite the Cold War rhetoric, the USA exhibited “calculated kindness” only to those of certain world regions and those with certain skills (Loescher and Scanlan, 1986; see also Carruthers, 2005). Still, the young and highly educated students and graduates of the *colegio mayor* ticked various boxes as attractive immigrants, so that in the year 1951-52, seven students and graduates (four Croats, two Poles and one Czech), two of them holding a PhD, left for a new life in the USA, while the Croat Pedro Vukota, with a doctorate in political science, left for Buenos Aires.⁶⁰

The US-American *Refugee Relief Act* of 1953, finally, was supposed to provide 58,000 refugee admissions over two years. But not only did it prove ineffective. It also caught the students of the *colegio mayor* in a legal blind spot. While this Act catered to refugees who had fled from communist countries, it allotted special nonquota visa only to those who resided “within the European continental limits of the member nations of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization or in Turkey, Sweden, Iran or in the Free Territory of Trieste.”⁶¹ This did not, however, cover Spain, which would only become a NATO member decades later in 1982. Again, officials of OCAU became active and, in December of 1954, made their case via the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to a member of the American House of Representatives who was on a state visit to Spain.⁶² It was the same congressman, Emanuel Celler, who would eventually be one of the main sponsors of the *Immigration and Nationality Act* of 1965, which finally removed discrimination against both Southern and East Europeans as well as immigrants from other world regions (see Orchowski, 2015).

THE COLEGIO MAYOR AS A PLACE OF RESIDENCE: EVERYDAY LIFE AT THE SANTIAGO APÓSTOL

The *colegio mayor* was not only a place of accommodation for academics. It was also, and importantly, a place of residence for many who had lost their first home. On six floors, at any given moment, between 110 and 150 young men of up to 20 nationalities lived together in relatively small quarters. The joint daily life was organized around their studies and structured by joint meals in the

⁵² Ibid., p. 11.

⁵³ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1953): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria 1952-53*, Madrid, [n. n.], p. 14.

⁵⁴ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1949): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1948-49*, Madrid, OCAU, p. 8.

⁵⁵ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1955): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria y del colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol, 1954-55*. Madrid: Gráficas Argüelles, p. 16.

⁵⁶ The names of all foreign residents were always written in Spanish version in the documentation related to the residence hall.

⁵⁷ [N. n.] (1950) “Crónica del Colegio.” *Christianitas. Boletín de información de la OCAU*, 2/8, n. p.

⁵⁸ [N. n.] (1951) “Cuatro años de labor,” *Christianitas. Boletín de información de la OCAU*, 3/10, n. p.

⁵⁹ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1952): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1951-52*, Madrid: [n. n.], p. 11.

⁶⁰ [N. n.] (1951) “Vida del colegio,” *Nosotros* 3/1, p. 16; [N. n.] (1951) “Crónica del Colegio,” *Christianitas. Boletín de información de la OCAU*, 3/10, n. p.

⁶¹ US Public Law 203 (the *Refugee Relief Act*), 7.8. 1953. See Carruthers, 2005, pp. 919-930.

⁶² Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1955): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria y del colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol, 1954-55*, Madrid: Gráficas Argüelles, pp. 17-18.

dining hall and religious service at the in-house chapel. The *colegio mayor* also offered a library and on-site medical care.⁶³ There were cultural and sport events, film screenings and lectures, some of which were voluntary and some obligatory.⁶⁴ Friendships bloomed as well as national rivalries. Summer vacations were spent together, and weddings were celebrated.

A focus on the *colegio mayor* as a place of residence not only shifts attention to the specifics of this environment but also highlights the agency of the foreign students. While a certain cultural and academic program was surely the norm in the prestigious *colegios mayores* of any of the universities in Spain, the specific composition of the residents—not only their highly international background but also their specific situation as exiles—was notable in the organization of the daily life at this specific residence hall.

The academic and cultural extracurricular activities were organized as part of the “cultural section,” later subsumed under “Formative Studies.” In the academic year 1948-49 alone, this cultural section organized 27 lectures on topics such as the “Spiritual situation in Europe and the world,” “Problems of the Spanish youth at university,” “The economic and social situation in Spain,” as well as on trends in Eastern European literature and art. The list of lecturers included various central figures of Spanish intellectual and public life, such as Adolfo Muñoz Alonso, professor of philosophy at the University of Murcia (and later rector of the University of Madrid), and José María del Moral, national director of the university student association *Spanish University Union* (Sindicato Español Universitario, SEU), as well as prominent figures of the Eastern European exile in Spain, such as Jozef (in Spanish fashion written as José) Mikuš, former minister of Slovakia in Madrid from 1940-1944, or the well-known Polish writer Józef Łobodowski. Other presentations were given by some of the student residents themselves. Not all talks were equally successful: According to the annual report of 1948-49, the students were mostly interested in talks on current affairs, while topics related to art were of genuine interest only to a smaller crowd.⁶⁵

The following years show a similar selection of topics, focusing on Spanish history and culture, theological and philosophical issues, and current affairs in Eastern Europe. In 1949-50, the well-known author of the reference encyclopedia on bullfighting José María de Cossío spoke about “Bulls and bullfighters,” Commander Benito Gómez Oliveros presented a talk on an important battle during the Spanish Civil War titled “How we defended Alcázar,” and José María Mohedano, secretary general of OCAU, introduced “The Spanish catholic literature” to

his foreign audience.⁶⁶ It was also in this year that some students organized additional study groups according to their needs. The interests were broad: One group specialized on political-economic topics and featured academic works by some of the residents, while another offered an English course, taught by some of the more advanced students themselves.⁶⁷

The year 1951-52 saw lecture series by, among others, the director of the Spanish National Library Luis Morales Oliver on “The ascetic and mystic concept of man in Spanish culture.” Other lecturers included reverend Raimundo Pániker, professor at the Pontifical University of Salamanca, and Antonio Deryng, professor at Madrid University and former dean of the Catholic University in Lublin, on contemporary problems of public law. The Romanian exile Jorge Uscatescu, professor at the University of Barcelona, presented a series of lectures on “The current political morphology.”⁶⁸ However, the lecture series that drew the most interest and participation was on “The reconstruction of Sovietized Europe,” which was hosted among others by central figures of the East European exile in Spain, such as the professors Uscatescu and Deryng, as well as Pavao Tijan, a central figure of the Croatian exile community in Madrid and initiator of the Croatian program at *Radio Nacional de España*.⁶⁹

This academic offer seems to have been successful, as both the topics and the speakers were kept in the following years. In 1952-53, the *colegio mayor* offered, again, lectures on Spanish culture, theological-philosophical problems, and economic-social issues.⁷⁰ Once again, the “Seminar on contemporary problems” drew the largest audience, with presentations such as “The philosophical foundations of Marxism” by Józef Łobodowski, as well as lectures on “The political objectives of communism,” “The Cold War,” or “The interior world of the Communist man,” all given by residents of the *colegio mayor* themselves.⁷¹

The students were also involved in various artistic presentations, some with more and some with less success. Musical performances were generally lauded as great successes, represented mainly through the Polish and the Ukrainian choirs, both of which routinely performed at public events.⁷² The residents also curated art exhibitions, both inside the *colegio mayor* and in other venues such as

⁶⁶ *Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria* (1950): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1949-50*, Madrid, Editorial Magisterio Español, p. 25.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria* (1952): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1951-52*, Madrid: [n. n.], p. 23.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26. See also Juez Gálvez (1997).

⁷⁰ *Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria* (1953): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria 1952-53*, Madrid, [n. n.], pp. 25-26.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

⁷² *Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria* (1949): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1948-49*, Madrid, OCAU, p. 17.

⁶³ Kolmajer (1998b, p. 286) mentions the in-house doctor, dentist and barber at the *colegio mayor*, as well as the chaplain who held daily mass at the in-house chapel.

⁶⁴ *Colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol* (1949): *Reglamento*, Madrid: n.n., article 30.

⁶⁵ *Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria* (1949): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1948-49*, Madrid, OCAU, pp. 16-17.

the *Círculo Medina*, to positive acclaim.⁷³ Other events, however, were viewed rather skeptically even by the residents themselves. A theater play, titled “The bus left without him,” written by one of the residents and staged at the *colegio mayor*, was judged to have been unsuccessful for its “strangeness” of the topic, the “seriousness” of the text and the overall lacking talent of the actors.⁷⁴

Sports, on the other hand, were a large part of daily life at the residence, which also ensured regular contact with other residence halls in Madrid. Soccer, volleyball, basketball and chess drew the most participants, and, according to the annual reports, the teams of the *colegio mayor* were quite successful in all of them. Whether the foreign students in Madrid were actually responsible for the popularization of volleyball in Spain, as stated by José Luis Orella, might remain an open question, but the annual reports do mention not only strong participation in this sport but also frustration with the low skills of the other teams (Orella Martínez, 2016, pp. 127-128).⁷⁵

Finally, as early as 1950, the *colegio mayor* started offering film screenings to their residents. As the report for the year 1952-53 described, six film screenings were organized that year, each one consisting of one feature film and two or three documentaries.⁷⁶ The program included American staples such as the romantic drama *Saratoga Trunk* (USA, S. Wood, 1945) with Gary Cooper and Ingrid Bergman. Other films were chosen in order to introduce foreign students to Spanish cinema and culture. These included films that covered the Spanish civil war (from a Francoist perspective) such as *Sin novedad en el Alcázar* (IT, A. Genina, 1940), the loss of the colonial Empire with *Los últimos de Filipinas* (ES, A. Fernández-Román, 1945), or historical dramas such as *Reina Santa* (ES/PRT, H. Campos, R. Gil, 1947).⁷⁷ These activities also show, once again, the integration of the residence hall in a broader network of cultural institutions in Madrid, as some of the films were loans by organizations such as the *Institute of Italian Culture*.⁷⁸

Next to the academic, cultural and sports education, the *colegio mayor* put much emphasis on religious formation. Some of the main highlights were certainly the pilgrimages that a large part of the resident body participated in, and which highlighted the Catholic orientation of the *colegio mayor*. The first pilgrimage was to Santiago de

Compostela during the holy year of 1948. With a reported number of 130 participants, almost all residents and staff took part in this pilgrimage.⁷⁹ This trip was only topped in importance by another pilgrimage, this time to Rome, in the year 1950-51, with 125 resident students participating as well as the director, the chaplain, the administrator and the secretary general. The pilgrimage was packed with religious services and sightseeing and was crowned by an audience with the Pope.⁸⁰

These pilgrimages were certainly the highlights of each academic year. But religious service was also part of everyday life at the *colegio mayor*. At Holy mass attendance was required.⁸¹ Occasionally, additional religious services were offered in various languages.⁸² The religious service was accompanied by talks given by distinguished guests. Generally, they were of rather academic nature, and the invited speakers were part of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. These included reverend Máximo Palomar del Val who spoke on “Pío X and Christian democracy,” or reverend Díez-Alegria on “The wisdom of the philosophy of Saint Thomas.”⁸³ But religious education went further. In the year 1951-52, the residence hall organized a “Study week” about marriage and matrimonial and family life. The seven presentations covered topics such as “The sexual problem,” “The meaning of marriage,” “The enemies of marriage,” or “The substantial form of marriage.”⁸⁴ It does not seem to be a coincidence that this very specific (and intimate) “Study week” was organized in the same year that the first weddings of residents of the *colegio mayor* were announced.

Between sports and culture, academic stimulus and religious service, the *colegio mayor* offered its students a great variety of extracurricular activities. However, the student body as a whole did not always engage as much in these extracurricular activities as was hoped for by the board. The annual report of 1949-50 generally tried hard to paint the extracurricular activities in the best light and to show its students both as studious and as engaged in these activities, but had to concede that the collaboration of the collegiate community was lacking in effort.⁸⁵ A year

⁷³ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1951): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1950-51*, Madrid, [n. n.], p. 13.

⁷⁴ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1955): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria y del colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol, 1954-55*, Madrid: Gráficas Argüelles, p. 61.

⁷⁵ See also Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1951): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1950-51*, Madrid, [n. n.], p. 27.

⁷⁶ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1953): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria 1952-53*, Madrid, [n. n.], p. 23.

⁷⁷ *Christianitas. Boletín de información de la OCAU* 5/13 (1953), p. 15.

⁷⁸ *Nosotros* 3/1 (1951), p. 16.

⁷⁹ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1949): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1948-49*, Madrid, OCAU, p. 9.

⁸⁰ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1951): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1950-51*, Madrid, [n. n.], pp. 11-13.

⁸¹ Colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol (1949): *Reglamento*, Madrid: n. n., p. 21.

⁸² Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1950): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1949-50*, Madrid, Editorial Magisterio Español, p. 12.

⁸³ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1951): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1950-51*, Madrid, [n. n.], p. 23.

⁸⁴ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1952): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1951-52*, Madrid: [n. n.], p. 27.

⁸⁵ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1950): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1949-50*, Madrid, Editorial Magisterio Español, p. 30.

later, the annual report had to state—despite a long list of activities—a “partial fiasco” of some of the sections.⁸⁶ This lack of commitment to certain tasks, as well as the acknowledged success of certain lectures over others hint at the agency of the students in the profiling of the residence hall, an aspect which will be further detailed in the next paragraphs.

THE COLEGIO MAYOR AS PART OF AN EXILE NETWORK

In contrast to the “partial fiasco” of some of the events, there was one aspect that seems to have captured the interest of many of the students. Especially the larger national groups at the residence hall were in close contact with their own national exile organizations, which proved to be very active at the *colegio mayor*.

Various of these organizations prepared presentations at the *colegio mayor*, often inviting the respective national exile community in Madrid to join the events, thus turning the *colegio mayor* into a venue for various national communities. The *Organization of Catholic Hungarian Students in Exile*, for example, organized in the early 1950s some public talks that were attended by “the entire Hungarian resident colony in Madrid.”⁸⁷ The Polish students even had two exile organizations to choose from, the *Association of Polish University Students in Spain* and the *Catholic University Association Veritas*. Between the two, the Polish community could offer activities throughout the academic year.⁸⁸ The Slovene exile organization *Danica*, again, would offer talks, workshops or religious events every other week at the *colegio mayor*.⁸⁹ Both the Byelorussian and the Chinese students were noted as quite active in their respective national community. Especially the Chinese residents were in close contact with other students from China residing in Madrid, with whom they organized events such as film screenings.⁹⁰

This contact with exile organizations did not only lead to close cooperation with the national communities in Madrid. It also connected the students with exile communities all over the continent and, indeed, shaped that landscape of student exile organizations in Europe. Some students regularly took part in international meetings of these organizations. Ukrainian students, for exam-

ple, were invited in 1955 to go to London to participate in the annual international meetings of the *Association of Catholic Ukrainian Students Obnova*. In the same year, residents went to Nottingham or to Leuven for other international meetings of student associations.⁹¹ This international engagement led to the transfer of the headquarter of various of these organizations to the *colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol*, making Madrid one of the centers of Eastern European student exile organizations in the early 1950s. This was the case of the organization *Obnova* of Ukrainian Catholic university students in exile when a Ukrainian resident of the *colegio mayor* became president of the organization.⁹² Similarly, the *Federation of Catholic Slovene Students Danica* moved its headquarters to the *colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol*, where it also published its monthly journal “Stanovec.”⁹³ Finally, this was also the case of the *Federation of Catholic Slovak Students abroad*, which moved its headquarters in 1953 from Leuven to Madrid. The president of the organization became Jozef Kolmajer, a student and resident at the *colegio mayor*.⁹⁴ These examples show the impact of this unique residence hall on the activities and geography of student exile organizations in the early Cold War. But this international engagement also influenced the events at the *colegio mayor* and its relationship with the wider exile communities in Madrid. While the directorate of the residence hall, in its own words, “encourage[d] the activity of the different national associations which have been established in the *colegio*”⁹⁵, this cooperation with and even the leadership of these organizations gave the student body more say in the orientation of the residence hall and its role as a cultural, academic, political and even religious center in Madrid.

SUMMER PLANS AND WEDDINGS: PRIVATE LIFE AT THE COLEGIO MAYOR

For the residents as emigrants, the *colegio mayor* became much more than a residence hall. Indeed, I would argue, that it became a second home. This can be seen especially regarding non-academic activities planned outside the academic year and outside the primary functions

⁸⁶ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1951): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1950-51*, Madrid, [n. n.], p. 20.

⁸⁷ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1953): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria 1952-53*, Madrid, [n. n.], p. 36. See Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1952): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1951-52*, Madrid, [n. n.], pp. 14-15, for an example about the involvement of the Romanian community in Madrid.

⁸⁸ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1953): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria 1952-53*, Madrid, [n. n.], p. 37.

⁸⁹ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1955): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria y del colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol, 1954-55*, Madrid, Gráficas Argüelles, p. 31.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1955): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria y del colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol, 1954-55*, Madrid, Gráficas Argüelles, p. 38.

⁹² Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1951): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1950-51*, Madrid, [n. n.], p. 15.

⁹³ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1953): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria 1952-53*, Madrid, [n. n.], p. 36.

⁹⁴ Ibid. This was confirmed in the memoir of Kolmajer (1998b, p. 286). The presidency of the Slovak exile organization stayed in Madrid until at least 1955. Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1955): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria y del colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol, 1954-55*, Madrid, Gráficas Argüelles, p. 33.

⁹⁵ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1953): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria 1952-53*, Madrid, [n. n.], p. 35.

of the residence hall, as was the case with the planning of summer vacations and the organization of weddings.

All activities of the *colegio mayor* paused in the month of August. However, the specific setup of the international student body meant that they could not go home or visit their family. At the same time, the students were, by and large, dependent on financial support for any kind of summer activity. From early on, various summer schools at Spanish universities invited some of the foreign students to take part in their summer programs, such as the universities of Santiago de Compostela, Oviedo or Santander. Some students had the possibility to spend their summer at one of the hostels of the *Spanish University Union* at places like Navia, Bergondo, Arbucias or Marbella. Others again were invited to spend their summer in residences provided by the Catholic church or private sponsors. Antonio Correa Veglison, vice-president of the OCAU, invited up to 18 students each year to spend several weeks at his estate in Catalonia.⁹⁶ Only some could and would spend their summers independently, financed by the fellowships given to a few lucky students.

Similarly, the wedding celebrations at the *colegio mayor* suggest that the residence hall also took over some tasks and responsibilities generally connected to family life. Not only were these private celebrations and important milestones in the lives of the residents celebrated at the residence hall. It was also the high-ranking officials of the residence, of the university or of the exile communities in Madrid who took on roles in these ceremonies traditionally reserved for family members.

The first weddings at the residence hall were celebrated in 1950, three years after the first foreign students had arrived in Madrid. It was in that year that the Ukrainian student Jurij Drodowskyj married Elvira Palacios Alcalde, while Román Buczok, another Ukrainian fellow, married María Cruz Mayo, and the Croat José Frančić wed María Isabel Fargos del Río. According to the annual reports, which covered these first weddings proudly and even included photos of the married couples, the weddings were quite large, celebrated by all staff and residents of the *colegio mayor*.⁹⁷

The same year, the Croat José Franich Lale wed his “most beautiful Spanish fiancé, señorita Isabel Forgas del Río, very elegantly dressed,” and “our piano-player” Stanislaw Wyszomirski from Poland married the “amiable

señorita Margarita Cámara.”⁹⁸ The list goes on. In the academic year 1950-51, there were four weddings, and another four in 1952-53.⁹⁹ Only in the first ten years, the *colegio mayor* counted 53 weddings among its residents.¹⁰⁰

Not only were the weddings celebrated at the residence hall and in attendance of staff and residents. The ceremonies included some high-ranking figures of various national exile communities in Madrid. In the first weddings, the role of best man went to Luis Felipe Pallardo, professor of medicine, as well as to the director of the *colegio mayor* José Cieker, and to Srećko Dragičević, former minister of Croatia in Spain. José María Otero Navascués, the long-standing director of OCAU, was chosen to be the best man even twice. In all of these cases, staff and officials took over the role of family members, exchanging private relations with official ones.¹⁰¹

CONCLUSION

The *colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol* was a very unique institution, both in a national and international context. Founded in 1946, it was used as an early tool of Cold War politics, born both of a desire to address the postwar refugee crisis in Europe and as an attempt to return Spain to the fold of the international community. From the outset, it was a joint venture of state and church. Both Catholic and governmental institutions secured the funding and the founding of this residence hall with its very specific mission. It was also an international endeavor, as central decisions were largely left to various national exile organizations and their own political agenda. Eastern European exile organizations such as the Ukrainian *Obnova* or the *Polish Catholic Action in Exile* were responsible for the selection of the student body, thus exerting central influence over the composition of the student body.

But soon, both the management (the directorship at the residence hall and the officials of OCAU) and the students themselves developed their own agency, influencing and changing the mission of the residence hall. While clearly adhering to the original political and Catholic anticommunist mission, the management went out of its way to facilitate the integration of the residence’s graduates into the Spanish labor market, and to aid emigration, especially to North America, attempting to influence labor and immigration laws, and to recognize university degrees both nationally and internationally.

⁹⁶ See, for the respective years, Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1950): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1949-50*, Madrid, Editorial Magisterio Español, pp. 6-7; [N. a.] (1950) “El verano de los colegiales,” *Christianitas. Boletín de información de la OCAU* 2/8, n. p.; Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1951): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1950-51*, Madrid, [n. n.], pp. 5-6; Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1953): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria 1952-53*, Madrid, [n. n.], pp. 32-33; Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1955): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria y del colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol, 1954-55*, Madrid, Gráficas Argüelles, pp. 38-39.

⁹⁷ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1950): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1949-50*, Madrid, Editorial Magisterio Español, pp. 11-12 and 18-19.

⁹⁸ [N. a.] (1950) “Noticias,” *Christianitas. Boletín de información de la OCAU* 2/8, n. p.

⁹⁹ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1951): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1950-51*, Madrid, [n. n.], p. 8; [N. a.] (1953) “Noticias de la OCAU,” *Christianitas. Boletín de información de la OCAU* 5/13, p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ ABC “Una institución española de alcance universal,” 17 June 1959, pp. 43-45. <https://www.abc.es/archivo/periodicos/abc-madrid-19590617-43.html> [accessed 25/11/2023].

¹⁰¹ Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria (1950): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1949-50*, Madrid, Editorial Magisterio Español, pp. 18-19; [N. a.] (1953) “Noticias de la OCAU,” *Christianitas. Boletín de información de la OCAU* 5/13, p. 4.

The students, again, had their own agenda and influenced the *colegio mayor* in their own way. Most of them probably did not consider themselves the “future apostles and conductors of Eastern European countries”¹⁰², which the mission statement of the residence hall originally expected them to become. Rather, as the annual reports of the *colegio mayor* suggest, many even left before graduation if a temporary opening in US immigration policies facilitated entry to North America, although Latin American countries (as well as Australia, Canada, and other countries) also proved to be highly attractive destinations to finally settle down and start their adult lives.

During their time at the *colegio mayor*, the residents influenced the academic debates, represented the residence hall to a larger audience through artistic performances and sports competitions, and turned Madrid into a hub of Eastern European exile organizations. All this also influenced the *colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol* as an academic institution. Mainly during the 1940s and 1950s, the residence hall was able to organize lecture series with speakers from renowned academic centers in Spain, as well as the most notable representatives of the Eastern European exile communities. The academic impact is also mirrored in the high number of postgraduate degrees that the residents pursued at the University of Madrid. In the long run, however, the academic success was less obvious. Due to restrictive employment laws and a difficult labor market, many graduates of the *colegio mayor* left Spain and went on to other countries. The internationalization of Spanish academia was, in this case, rather temporary.

The *colegio mayor* as a “safe haven” for students who had fled communism stayed active for a total of 22 years. However, external and internal factors contributed to its loss of relevance and, eventually, to its conversion into a regular *colegio mayor* without a regional focus regarding the national origin of its residents. By the 1960s, the number of students from Central and Eastern Europe at the *colegio mayor* had dropped drastically. While more detailed sources about the student composition of this decade are lacking, a list of participants of a course offered at the residence hall in 1966 suggests that most of the student body by then was Spanish.¹⁰³ This might not come as a surprise. Since the 1950s, it had become exceedingly difficult to flee Eastern European countries, and it had become clear that the Communist regimes were to stay for a long time. The Spanish capital thus lost some of its appeal in contrast to other destinations with better long-term prospects for refugees.

Despite these changes in the student body, the Slovak José Cieker remained in the position of director of the *colegio mayor*, and he continued to see it as his mission to provide students from Eastern Europe with the opportunity to finish their university studies. In the academic year 1968-1969, four students from behind the Iron Curtain

were taken on as new residents.¹⁰⁴ The final blow came in 1969. In January of that year, José Cieker, the longtime director and most vocal proponent of the *colegio mayor*, died after almost twenty years in office. In the same year, political relations relaxed between Spain and Eastern Europe, as the Franco regime started to diplomatically recognize the countries behind the Iron Curtain and to conduct trade relations with them (Eiroa San Francisco, 2018, p. 15). In this new atmosphere, a state-sponsored anticommunist *colegio mayor* became a liability. In April 1969, and disregarding the few foreign students left at the residence hall, the official *Bulletin of the State* (BOE) announced the end of the original mission of the *colegio mayor*: “Having lost the social importance and the necessities which the *colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol* has originally attended to [namely the education of students from Eastern European countries],”¹⁰⁵ the *colegio mayor* was now taken from the administration of the OCAU and “put directly under the university and the Ministry of Education and Sciences.” Thus, on April 1, 1969, the residence hall became a regular *colegio mayor* in Madrid without any regional focus or specific political mission.¹⁰⁶

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¹⁰⁴ AG UCM, OM 1883, Letter from the *colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol* to the rector of the University of Madrid, 21.1.1970.

¹⁰⁵ Spain. Decree 530/1969 of 27 March 1969, about the inclusion of the *colegio mayor Santiago Apóstol* into the regular regimen of university residence halls. *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, 1 April 1969, no. 78, p. 4763.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria* (1949): *Memoria de la Obra Católica de Asistencia Universitaria, 1948-49*, Madrid, OCAU, p. 4.

¹⁰³ Archivo General de la UCM [AG UCM], OM 488, document “Curso de Teología, 1966-1967.”

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