

**Kai Johann Willms\***

## **Émigré scholars as “agents of Westernisation”? Comparative reflections on the cases of Poland and Germany**

**Uczeni emigracyjni jako „agenci westernizacji”? Refleksje porównawcze na przykładach Polski i Niemiec**

### **ABSTRACT:**

Exile is a profoundly transcultural phenomenon: Émigré scholars bring knowledge and ideas from their homeland to their host societies, gain new insights from their position between two cultures, and have the potential to initiate intellectual transformations at home. The 20th-century waves of intellectual migration from Europe to North America established new connections between both sides of the Atlantic, introducing European knowledge into the American discourse while simultaneously facilitating the circulation of ideas back to Europe. The present article uses this process of “Westernisation” as a *tertium comparationis* for comparative reflections on the 20th-century intellectual emigration from Poland and Germany. It argues that the two émigré communities were not as structurally different as a superficial reading of the existing literature might suggest, and that the “Westernising” effects of intellectual migration could be a fruitful area for future comparative research on these two national cases.

### **KEYWORDS:**

*exile, transnationalism, circulation of ideas, “Westernisation”, comparative research*

---

\* Kai Johann Willms – University of Basel, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-6095-1186>, e-mail: [kai.willms@unibas.ch](mailto:kai.willms@unibas.ch).

**STRESZCZENIE:**

Emigracja jest zjawiskiem głęboko transkulturowym: uczeni na emigracji przenoszą wiedzę i idee z ojczyzny do społeczeństwa przyjmującego, zyskują nowe wglądy dzięki usytuowaniu między dwiema kulturami, a także mogą inicjować przemiany intelektualne w kraju pochodzenia. Fale migracji intelektualnej XX w. z Europy do Ameryki Północnej stworzyły nowe powiązania po obu stronach Atlantyku, wprowadzając europejską wiedzę do amerykańskiego dyskursu i zarazem ułatwiając cyrkulację idei z powrotem do Europy. Niniejszy artykuł traktuje proces „westernizacji” jako podłoże do refleksji porównawczych nad XX-wieczną emigracją intelektualną z Polski i Niemiec. Autor dowodzi, że obie społeczności emigracyjne nie były tak strukturalnie odmienne, jak sugerowałby pobieżny ogląd literatury, oraz że „westernizujące” efekty migracji intelektualnej stanowią obiecujący kierunek przyszłych badań porównawczych nad tymi dwoma przypadkami.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:**

*emigracja, transnarodowość, cyrkulacja idei, „westernizacja”, badania porównawcze*

**1. Introduction**

The world wars and dictatorships of the 20th century brought a new quantitative and qualitative dimension to the phenomenon of intellectual exile, which has existed since antiquity. The sense of displacement and alienation experienced by émigré intellectuals, reminiscent of György Lukács' concept of “transcendental homelessness”, has often led scholars to portray them as emblematic figures of the modern era<sup>1</sup>. While involuntary migration can be a source of trauma and biographical crises, it can also foster intellectual innovation and establish new connections between different cultures of knowledge. Émigrés introduce ideas and styles of thought from their home countries into their host societies. At the same time, their transcultural experience often prompts them to critically rethink their native intellectual traditions. If they return to their homeland after peace and academic freedom have been reestablished, or if their work attracts the attention of their

<sup>1</sup> See on this point J. Neubauer, *Exile: Home of the Twentieth Century*, [in:] J. Neubauer, B.Z. Török (eds.), *The Exile and Return of Writers from East-Central Europe*, Berlin 2009, pp. 4–103, here p. 6.

compatriots at home, they can also initiate significant intellectual change in their native environment<sup>2</sup>.

Poland and Germany both experienced waves of intellectual emigration in the 20th century that demonstrate these epistemic effects particularly well. Yet systematic comparisons between the two national cases remain relatively rare<sup>3</sup>. There are certainly obvious differences between the 20th-century Polish and German émigré communities, which make comparative approaches challenging. While German émigrés after 1933 escaped from a homegrown dictatorship, Polish exile after 1939 resulted from the occupation of the country by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Furthermore, while exiled German intellectuals had the opportunity to return to a liberated country after 1945, or at least to engage in a free dialogue with the West German public, most Polish émigrés decided to stay in exile following the establishment of a communist regime in Poland and maintained a system of institutions, journals, and personal networks that aimed to keep Polish culture in exile alive until Poland's transition to democracy in 1989. These different circumstances had profound consequences for the ways Polish and German émigrés understood the tasks of the emigration and for their attitudes towards their host societies and their compatriots at home.

However, as I will demonstrate in this article, the Polish and German émigré communities of the 20th century also exhibit certain similarities that would be worth exploring in more detail. This concerns, in particular, their role in a process that can be described as intellectual "Westernisation". For both Polish and German émigré scholars, the historical relationship between their respective home country and the "Western world" was an important subject of reflection; in many cases, this reflection focused on what prompted Germany and Poland to deviate from a typically "Western" path of development, and what could be done to reintegrate these Central European nations into the West. After the fall of Nazism in Germany and communism in Poland, some émigré scholars also actively contributed, on an academic and intellectual level, to the process in which their homelands became closely entangled with Western countries where the émigrés had

<sup>2</sup> On the potential epistemic effects of intellectual migration see also P. Burke, *Exiles and Expatriates in the History of Knowledge, 1500–2000*, Waltham 2017, pp. 16–33.

<sup>3</sup> For an instructive attempt see K. Dybciak, *Porównanie emigracji niemieckojęzycznej i polskiej po 1933 i 1939 roku*, [in:] idem, *Swojskość na obczyźnie: O różnorodności kultury emigracyjnej w XX wieku. Eseje i rozprawy z lat 1981–2022*, Warsaw 2024, pp. 448–475.

settled, particularly the United States<sup>4</sup>. Rather than interpreting the term “Westernisation” normatively as a linear path towards democratization and liberalization, I understand it as a tendency towards convergence of intellectual discourse on both sides of the Atlantic<sup>5</sup>. In contrast to the alternative concept of “Americanisation”, “Westernisation” emphasizes that this convergence was not a one-sided transfer of American ideas to the European continent, but that European actors played a crucial role in the circulation of ideas in both directions across the Atlantic<sup>6</sup>.

The article is divided into two parts: First, I analyse the structural differences between the two émigré communities and discuss whether these differences were as fundamental as some of the existing literature suggests. Second, I examine how individual émigrés reflected on the relationship between their home countries and the “West”, and tentatively pursue the question to what extent Polish and German émigrés exercised a “Westernising” influence on the intellectual life of their home countries – a question that deserves to be addressed in more detail by future comparative studies. I place particular focus on émigré historians and political scientists who settled in the United States. Émigrés in other world regions, such as German communists in the Stalinist Soviet Union and Polish exiles in the wartime and postwar Middle East, are not taken into consideration.

<sup>4</sup> For the German case, this thesis has already been elaborated upon, among others, by A. Söllner, “Agenten” der “Verwestlichung”? Zur Wirkungsgeschichte deutscher HitlerFlüchtlinge, [in:] P. Burschel, A. Gallus, M. Völkel (eds.), *Intellektuelle im Exil*, Göttingen 2011, pp. 199–217; M. Krämer, *Westernisierung der Geschichtswissenschaft: Transatlantische Gastprofessoren im Umfeld der Historischen Zeitschrift*, Berlin–Boston 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Anselm Doering-Manteuffel describes “Westernisation” as “a circular communication that takes place at the level of concepts and ideas, influences the change of ideas of political and social order and controls the adaptation of existing ideas to a differently formatted model”. A. Doering-Manteuffel, *Amerikanisierung und Westernisierung*, Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte, 19 August 2019, [https://docupedia.de/zg/Doering-Manteuffel\\_amerikanisierung\\_v2\\_de\\_2019](https://docupedia.de/zg/Doering-Manteuffel_amerikanisierung_v2_de_2019) [22.08.2025].

<sup>6</sup> See on this point the review article H. Nehring, “Westernization”: A New Paradigm for Interpreting West European History in a Cold War Context, “Cold War History” 2004, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 175–191.

## 2. Two different types of émigré communities?

A superficial reading of the existing literature could easily lead to the assumption that the scholars and intellectuals who emigrated from Germany after 1933 and from Poland after 1939 represent two opposite types of émigré communities. This concerns, first, the question of *who* emigrated. In the German case, Jewish scholars who escaped the discriminatory and later exterminatory policies of the Nazi regime played a particularly strong role in the émigré community. Many of them had already experienced marginalization in German academia before their emigration and took a stand against German ethnic nationalism. A smaller group of academics emigrated because of their political opposition to Nazism and the elimination of academic freedom in Germany after 1933<sup>7</sup> – in particular scholars of a left-wing political orientation, such as those associated with the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, some of whom contributed significantly to the development of left-wing political theory and activism in the United States after their emigration<sup>8</sup>.

The community of academics who emigrated from Poland after 1939, on the other hand, comprised not only Jewish scholars and left-wing political opponents of Nazism but also many members of the academic elite who had been loyal supporters of the Polish governments of the 1930s and now faced persecution by the German and Soviet occupiers. In cooperation with the Polish government-in-exile, émigré scholars who belonged to this academic elite started organizing institutions and journals during the war, which were supposed to keep the Polish humanities and sciences alive at a time when they were existentially threatened in Poland<sup>9</sup>. The hopes of most Pol-

<sup>7</sup> For a statistical overview of how many German academics lost their positions due to discrimination for 'racial' or political reasons after 1933 and of how many of them emigrated see M. Grüttner, *The Expulsion of Academic Teaching Staff from German Universities, 1933–45*, "Journal of Contemporary History" 2022, vol. 57, no. 3, pp. 513–533. See also Dybiak, op. cit., p. 457.

<sup>8</sup> Particularly well-known is the relationship between Herbert Marcuse, who emigrated from Nazi Germany because of both his Jewish background and his political views, and the American New Left. See, for instance, T. Wheatland, *The Frankfurt School in Exile*, Minneapolis 2009, pp. 296–334.

<sup>9</sup> For a comprehensive overview of Polish academic institutions in exile see J. Draus, *Nauka polska na emigracji w latach 1945–1990*, [in:] L. Zasztowt, J. Schiller-Walicka (eds.), *Historia nauki polskiej. Tom X: 1944–1989, Część II: Instytucje*, Warsaw 2015, pp. 485–681.

ish émigré scholars to return to their homeland were shattered when it became clear that Poland would emerge from the war as a satellite state of the Soviet Union with a communist political system. Consequently, after 1945, the Polish émigré community developed a predominantly anti-communist profile, often finding itself on the conservative side of Cold War political debates in Western countries.

At least during the early Cold War, the majority of Polish émigré scholars also remained faithful to the idea of maintaining institutions of their own with the purpose of preserving the scholarly and intellectual traditions of interwar Poland. This constitutes a second major difference between the German and Polish émigré communities, i.e., the question of how émigrés scholars organised themselves and how they understood their role within the host societies. Recent studies on the German intellectual emigration to North America after 1933 argue that many émigrés were willing to acculturate into their new environment<sup>10</sup> and that this willingness facilitated their relatively smooth integration into the American academic milieu. Instead of returning to postwar West Germany, many émigrés continued their careers in the United States after 1945 and became influential voices in the American intellectual discourse<sup>11</sup>. Researchers of the Cold War Polish émigré community, on the other hand, tend to emphasize that many Polish-born academics and political activists in the United States refused to fully assimilate into their host society and that Poland remained at the centre of their thought and actions – despite, or perhaps because of, the impossibility of returning to Poland in the short term. From this perspective, a gradual acculturation of Polish and other East Central European émigrés was an unintended result of

<sup>10</sup> See on this paradigmatic development within the field of German *Exilforschung* (exile studies) in particular S. Becker, *Transnational, interkulturell und interdisziplinär: Das Akkulturationsparadigma der Exilforschung. Bilanz und Ausblick*, [in:] D. Bischoff, S. Komfort-Hein (eds.), *Literatur und Exil: Neue Perspektiven*, Berlin 2013, pp. 49–69; P. Farges, “I’m a Hybrid”. (W. Glaser): *Hybridität und Akkulturation am Beispiel deutschsprachiger Exilanten in Kanada*, “Exilforschung: Ein internationales Jahrbuch” 2009, vol. 27, pp. 40–58.

<sup>11</sup> The historian Udi Greenberg, for example, states that “German émigrés enjoyed remarkable mobility and rapidly became part of the American elite”. U. Greenberg, *The Weimar Century: German Émigrés and the Ideological Foundations of the Cold War*, Princeton 2014, p. 19. On the factors that increased or decreased the German-speaking émigrés’ chances of establishing themselves in the academic environment of the United States see also C. Fleck, *Etablierung in der Fremde: Vertriebene Wissenschaftler in den USA nach 1933*, Frankfurt a.M. 2015.

the necessity to economically survive and of the intention to pursue political agendas in the new environment, not a desired goal in itself<sup>12</sup>. Drawing on a typology by the sociologist Danièle Joly, one could argue that Cold War Polish émigrés belonged to the category of "Odyssean refugees", whereas émigrés from Nazi Germany fell into the category of "Rubicon refugees". "Odyssean refugees" typically remain focused on their native country and pursue the collective project of changing the political system at home, for which they maintain networks with exiled compatriots and activists of the domestic opposition. Being committed to the goal of returning, they refuse full assimilation to their host society. "Rubicon refugees", on the other hand, are often members of ethnic or religious minorities and do not strongly identify with the national culture of their native country. Instead of hoping for the possibility to return, they primarily strive for acceptance in their new environment. Even if they organise themselves collectively, this serves the goal of improving their position within the host society<sup>13</sup>.

Such a contrasting juxtaposition, however, would not do justice to the considerable heterogeneity of both émigré communities. While there can be no doubt that many refugee scholars from Nazi Germany had a Jewish background, the Polish émigré community did not exclusively comprise members of Poland's Christian, Polish-speaking majority population either. Researchers who defend the view that the Polish émigré community was virtually ethnically homogeneous argue that scholars who belonged to one of interwar Poland's national minorities usually joined organizations of their respective ethnic groups in exile and did not become part of the "Polish émigré community" in the sense of an entity with institutions and a discursive sphere of its own<sup>14</sup>. However, there are numerous counterexamples to this view. One example was the political scientist Bohdan Osadczuk, who grew up as a member of the Ukrainian minority in interwar Poland, later taught

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, A. Mazurkiewicz, *Unwilling Immigrants: Transnational Identities of East Central European Exiles during the Cold War*, "Studia Migracyjne – Przegląd Polonijny" 2015, vol. 41, no. 4(158), pp. 159–171. On the centrality of Poland for the thought and actions of the wartime émigrés and on their self-conception as political exiles see also A.D. Jaroszyńska-Kirchmann, *The Exile Mission: The Polish Political Diaspora and Polish Americans, 1939–1956*, Athens 2004, pp. 13–14.

<sup>13</sup> D. Joly, *Odyssean and Rubicon Refugees: Toward a Typology of Refugees in the Land of Exile*, "International Migration" 2002, vol. 40, no. 6, pp. 3–23. See also A. Mazurkiewicz, op. cit., p. 163.

<sup>14</sup> See on this point K. Dybciak, op. cit., p. 458.

at the Free University of Berlin, and was a frequent contributor to the Polish émigré journal “Kultura” and one of the main architects of its agenda of Polish-Ukrainian rapprochement<sup>15</sup>. The sociologist Theodore Abel, whose ancestors had migrated from Westphalia to Poland and who had studied with Florian Znaniecki at the University of Poznań, did not only gain recognition for teaching his discipline at Columbia University and the City University of New York, and for applying Znaniecki’s sociological methodology to the study of the Nazi movement in Germany<sup>16</sup>; he was also a founding member of the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America (PIASA), a key institution for the community of Polish émigré scholars in the United States. Abel continued to participate in activities of the institute throughout his career despite not fully identifying as “Polish”<sup>17</sup>. Most importantly, a significant number of Polish-Jewish scholars found refuge in Western countries after 1939 and became involved, to varying degrees, in the affairs of the Polish émigré community. In particular, assimilated, Polish-speaking Jews such as the literary scholar Wiktor Weintraub and the sociologists Feliks Gross and Aleksander Hertz continued to publish partially or even exclusively in Polish and cooperated closely with émigré journals like “Kultura”. Gross took on a leadership role in the Polish émigré community in the United States by serving as executive director of PIASA<sup>18</sup>. Even Polish-Jewish scholars who

<sup>15</sup> On Osadczuk’s biography see, among other publications, B. Kerski, A.S. Kowalczyk (eds.), *Ein ukrainischer Kosmopolit mit Berliner Adresse: Gespräche mit Bohdan Osadczuk (Aleksander Korab)*, transl. A. Grzybkowska, Osnabrück 2004.

<sup>16</sup> See T. Abel, *Why Hitler Came into Power: An Answer Based on the Original Life Stories of 600 of His Followers*, New York 1938 (on the influence of Znaniecki’s methodology *ibid.*, p. 2).

<sup>17</sup> See on Abel’s upbringing and national self-identification the autobiographical fragment *My Youth*, in: The Hoover Institution Library and Archives, Collection 50000: Theodore Fred Abel Papers, b. 25, f. 49, and his diary entry from 11 July 1934, *ibid.*, b. 17, f. 3. On his attitude toward PIASA see the diary entry from 16 May 1942, *ibid.*, b. 18, f. 4. On the general history of PIASA see B. Dorosz, *Nowojorski pasjans: Polski Instytut Naukowy w Ameryce – Jan Lechoń, Kazimierz Wierzyński. Studia o wybranych zagadnieniach działalności 1939–1969*, Warsaw 2013.

<sup>18</sup> On the circumstances of his election to this position see K.J. Willms, *Between Integration and Institutional Self-Organisation: Polish Émigré Scholars in the United States, 1939–1989*, [in:] S. Berger, P. Müller (eds.), *Dynamics of Emigration: Émigré Scholars and the Production of Historical Knowledge in the 20th Century*, New York 2022, pp. 124–138, here p. 132. On Gross’ biography see in general, among other publications, G. Kubica, “A Real Krakauer”: *Feliks Gross and His Cracovian Roots*, “The Polish Review” 2007, vol. 52, no. 2, pp. 147–170.



did not actively participate in Polish émigré life often described their youth in Poland as a formative period and acknowledged having been influenced by Polish intellectual discourse. While the experience of belonging to a minority group was not as characteristic for the average Polish émigré as for refugee scholars from Nazi Germany, research should nonetheless take into account that the Polish émigré community was also ethnically heterogeneous.

Similarly, the political differences between the two communities should not be exaggerated. The comparatively strong presence of Marxist intellectuals among the community of German-speaking émigrés should not distract from the fact that scholars of centrist or right-leaning persuasions – such as the realist scholar of international relations Hans Morgenthau, the classical liberal economist Ludwig von Mises or the conservative historian Hans Rothfels – also had to escape from the Nazis because of their Jewish ancestry. The Polish émigré community, on the other hand, included not only conservative anti-communists but also liberals and democratic socialists. This does not only concern representatives of the 1968 wave of predominantly Jewish emigration from the People's Republic of Poland, but also émigrés such as the aforementioned Feliks Gross and the literary scholar Manfred Kridl, who fled Poland in 1939 and refused to return after the establishment of the communist regime, or the poet and professor of Slavic literatures Czesław Miłosz, who famously defected from the diplomatic service of the People's Republic in 1951. The opposition to "totalitarianism" – a phenomenon and concept that many émigrés made the subject of their research – was a cause that united large parts of both communities of German and Polish scholars in the United States, as can be seen in particular from the joint work of the German-born political scientist Carl Joachim Friedrich and his Polish-born student Zbigniew Brzeziński on a definition of "totalitarianism"<sup>19</sup>.

Finally, even the conflict between acculturation and acceptance in the new environment on the one hand, and the preservation of the native cultural heritage on the other, was not solved in as diametrically opposed ways by Polish and German émigrés as it might seem at first glance. It is noteworthy that in both cases, a generational shift occurred. The differences between the two national communities can be observed most clearly observed among first generation émigrés who had already completed their academic education before going into exile. While in the Polish case, a desire to protect the

---

<sup>19</sup> C.J. Friedrich, Z. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, Cambridge 1956.

intellectual heritage of the Second Polish Republic prevailed<sup>20</sup>, first-generation émigrés from Germany were often more willing to embrace exile as an opportunity to critically engage with the intellectual traditions of the culture that had excluded them, and to self-identify as members of their host society – as Hannah Arendt expressed: “we don’t like to be called ‘refugees’. We ourselves call each other ‘newcomers’ or ‘immigrants’”<sup>21</sup>. This did not preclude that some of them felt like outsiders in an academic culture they had not been originally socialized in. Younger émigrés from both Germany and Poland who graduated from universities in their host societies faced significantly less linguistic and cultural barriers preventing them from joining the academic mainstream. In the United States, they often started identifying as “Polish-American” or “German-American” instead of “exiles”, and were relatively successful in introducing their knowledge of the history and culture of their home countries into scholarly discourse<sup>22</sup>. At the same time, many of them also remained involved in intellectual debates in their homelands and followed the process of democratization in West Germany after 1945, as well as in East Germany and Poland after 1989, with particular attention. Does their respective role in these processes make it meaningful to describe them as “Westernisers” of German and Polish intellectual life?

<sup>20</sup> For this reason, the historian Andrzej Friszke described the émigré community as “a continuation, a direct extension of the existence of the Second Republic” and criticized that this adherence to interwar traditions had made it difficult to react to postwar political and social changes. See A. Friszke, *Życie polityczne emigracji*, Warsaw 1999, pp. 489–490.

<sup>21</sup> H. Arendt, *We Refugees* [1943], [in:] eadem, *The Jewish Writings*, J. Kohn, R.H. Feldman (eds.), New York 2007, pp. 264–274, here p. 264.

<sup>22</sup> On the phenomenon of these second-generation émigrés see, among other publications, C. Epstein, *The Second Generation: Émigré Historians of Modern Germany in Postwar America*, [in:] A.W. Daum, H. Lehmann, J.J. Sheehan (eds.), *The Second Generation: Émigrés from Nazi Germany as Historians*, New York 2016, pp. 143–151; A. Nowak, *Emigracja „drugiego pokolenia”: Refleksje i pytania na marginesie biografii Piotra Wandycza i Leopolda Łabędzia*, “Studia z Dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej” 2015, vol. 50, no. 1, pp. 103–117. On the generational conflict that ensued within the Polish émigré community in the 1970s and its effects on the institutions of this community see also K.J. Willms, *Between Integration...*, pp. 131–132.

### 3. Polish and German émigré scholars as "Westernisers"?

A discussion of the potential "Westernising" effects of the 20th-century emigration from Poland and Germany should begin with a brief sketch of the role that "the West" as an intellectual concept played in the political and cultural imagery of these two Central European nations. Since the 19th century, "the West" served in both German and Polish discourse as a rhetorical tool that helped to construct one's own national identity in relation to an imagined larger cultural community. In both cases, attitudes towards "the West" were characterized by a persistent ambiguity. German liberal nationalists of the mid-19th century identified with the idea of belonging to an enlightened, progressive, and democratic "West" in opposition to an allegedly irrational, backward and despotic "East", but found this idea difficult to reconcile with conflicts of interests between the envisioned German nation state and Western powers, particularly France. Later, conservative adherents of German nationalism continued to distinguish Germany from an imagined barbaric "East" – a discourse that increasingly assumed a racialized, anti-Slavic and antisemitic character – yet they simultaneously harboured resentment toward an allegedly shallow and decadent civilization of the "West". This self-imagination of Germany as an opponent of the "West" reached a climax with the outbreak of the First World War when German intellectuals – most prominently Thomas Mann – positioned the imagination of an unspoiled, demonic German "Kultur" against a bourgeois, antiheroic Western "Zivilisation". The German "ideas of 1914" were contrasted with the Western "ideas of 1789". After Germany's defeat in 1918, the concept of "the West" became associated with the newly introduced democratic form of government, but did not experience a substantial revival; many intellectuals felt more attracted to contemporary antimodern, antiliberal concepts of supranational identity, such as the notion of *Abendland*, which was famously employed by Oswald Spengler<sup>23</sup>.

In comparison, Polish imaginations of "the West" during the 19th and early 20th centuries seem to have been decidedly more positive. In the era of partitions, members of the Polish intelligentsia evoked the narrative of

<sup>23</sup> On the diachronic shifts in German attitudes towards "the West" see R. Bavaj, M. Steber, *Introduction: Germany and "the West". The Vagaries of a Modern Relationship*, [in:] eidem (eds.), *Germany and "the West": The History of a Modern Concept*, New York 2015, pp. 1–37; specifically on the *Abendland* discourse see D. Pöpping, *Abendland: Christliche Akademiker und die Utopie der Antimoderne 1900–1945*, Berlin 2002.

Poland as a bulwark of the Western world against despotic, “Oriental” Russia in order to mobilize domestic and international support for the Polish national movement. In particular, Polish exiles in Western Europe lobbied in Britain and France for their national cause and their interpretations of the relations between Slavic cultures – Adam Mickiewicz’s lectures at the *Collège de France* in the 1840s are a prominent example<sup>24</sup>. In contrast to the German discourse at that time, Western countries were predominantly regarded as potential allies of the Polish nation against the partitioning powers. However, the fact that Western support for Poland in the 19th and early 20th centuries often proved less reliable than expected could be a cause of anti-Western resentment. As the historian Jerzy Jedlicki observed, there was also a divide between 19th-century Polish liberals and conservatives regarding attitudes towards “the West”: While liberals believed that following a path of development towards “Western” modernity could help Poland overcome its perceived “backwardness”, conservatives argued that the bygone Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had represented a truly “Western” political and social system – one that was superior to the industrial civilization of contemporary Western Europe<sup>25</sup>.

Both German and Polish émigrés in the 20th century reflected extensively on the relationship between their homelands and “the West”. In the German case, these reflections centred around the question of which problematic deviation from an ideal path of development toward “Western” liberal modernity had caused the moral catastrophe of National Socialism. For Hannah Arendt, the problem lay not so much in a specifically German national character but in general European political tendencies<sup>26</sup>. Still, she regarded both Nazism and Bolshevism as specifically non-Western because their origins could be traced to the characteristics of “continental imperialism”,

<sup>24</sup> On the lectures see S. Fiszman, *Comparative Aspects in Adam Mickiewicz’s Lectures on Slavic Literature*, “The Polish Review” 1981, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 19–45; on the broader discursive context see A.K. Wise, *Russia as Poland’s Civilizational “Other”*, [in:] A. Maxwell (ed.), *The East–West Discourse: Symbolic Geography and Its Consequences*, Oxford 2011, pp. 73–92. On the impact of Polish exiles on British and French discourses see also G. Varouxakis, *The West: The History of an Idea*, Princeton 2025, p. 39.

<sup>25</sup> J. Jedlicki, *A Stereotype of the West in Postpartition Poland*, “Social Research” 1992, vol. 59, no. 2, pp. 345–364.

<sup>26</sup> See on this point G. Varouxakis, op. cit., p. 250; A. Söllner, *Zwischen Europa und Amerika – Hannah Arendts Wanderungen durch die politische Ideengeschichte*, “Leviathan” 2008, vol. 36, no. 2, pp. 292–310, here p. 295.

in particular pan-Germanism and pan-Slavism, in opposition to the inter-related, but distinct phenomenon of Western "overseas imperialism"<sup>27</sup>. She also emphasized that Hitler did not understand himself as a defender of "the West" against the threat of Bolshevism "but always remained ready to join 'the Reds' for the destruction of the West, even in the middle of the struggle against Soviet Russia"<sup>28</sup>.

Émigré historians from Nazi Germany often focused more on a specifically German deviation from "the West". In this regard, they have sometimes been credited with anticipating the narrative of a *Sonderweg* – a special path of German historical development compared to the West – that later became an influential explanation for the rise of Nazism in Germany among social historians in West Germany<sup>29</sup>. In particular, émigrés like Fritz Stern and George Mosse analysed the genealogy of antiliberal ideology in Germany as a factor in the country's divergence from the West<sup>30</sup>. It is noteworthy, however, that West German social historians in the 1970s paid little attention to the works of émigrés like Stern and Mosse, and built their *Sonderweg* thesis on the analysis of social and political structures, particularly on an alleged contradiction between dynamic socioeconomic development and political stagnation in German history. Meanwhile, émigré historians tended to focus on cultural and intellectual history. Both approaches intersected in their critical perspective on German history, especially on anti-Western political tendencies in Germany. West German social historians knew that this critical perspective enjoyed the support of their American colleagues, including the émigrés<sup>31</sup>.

This support for a critical approach to German history can indeed be regarded as an example of a "Westernising" influence of émigré scholars. While

<sup>27</sup> See the Chapter 8 of H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 2nd, enlarged ed., New York 1958, pp. 222–266.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 309, footnote 13.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, G.A. Eakin-Thimme, *Die emigrierten Historiker als Vermittler sozialgeschichtlicher Ansätze?*, "Comparativ" 2002, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 63–85, here p. 83.

<sup>30</sup> F. Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology*, Berkeley 1961; G.L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich*, New York 1964.

<sup>31</sup> P. Stelzel, *The Second-Generation Émigrés' Impact on German Historiography*, [in:] A.W. Daum, H. Lehmann, J.J. Sheehan (eds.), op. cit., pp. 287–303, here pp. 295–299.

relatively few émigré scholars from Nazi Germany returned after 1945<sup>32</sup>, some of those who did – be it permanently or as guest professors – exerted a considerable influence on the humanities and social sciences in postwar West Germany. Hans Rothfels at the University of Tübingen contributed to positioning contemporary history as a research field in the academic landscape, while Hans Rosenberg influenced a younger generation of German historians, particularly through teaching as a guest professor at the Free University of Berlin in 1949 and 1950<sup>33</sup>. Even more important was the role of émigrés and returnees in the establishment of political science in West Germany. Alfons Söllner describes them as “obstetricians” of a discipline that was deliberately designed as a “science of democracy”<sup>34</sup>, breaking with older traditions of German thinking about politics and introducing “Western” ideas.

In contrast to these attempts to break with German intellectual traditions, Polish émigrés of the early Cold War period built on older concepts and tried to popularize in the American discourse the idea that the division of Europe decided at the Yalta Conference was unjust, and that Poland and other satellite states of the Soviet Union were historically and culturally a part of “Western civilization”. This is especially true for the historian Oskar Halecki, who developed the concept of “East Central Europe” as one of the four historical regions of Europe that had always had strong political and intellectual affinities with “Western Europe”<sup>35</sup>. The success of these attempts to change the American mental map was limited, however, by the fact that Halecki and other first-generation Polish émigrés tended to understand “Western civilization” differently than many of their American contemporaries – while the former emphasized timeless spiritual values as the essence

<sup>32</sup> According to Michael Grüttner, 14.7% of the university teaching staff who emigrated after being dismissed from German universities returned to Germany after 1945. M. Grüttner, op. cit., p. 528.

<sup>33</sup> See on their impact, among other publications, W. Schulze, *Refugee Historians and the German Historical Profession between 1950 and 1970*, [in:] H. Lehmann, J.J. Sheehan (eds.), *An Interrupted Past: German-speaking Refugee Historians in the United States after 1933*, Washington 1991, pp. 206–225, here pp. 223–224.

<sup>34</sup> A. Söllner, “Agenten”..., pp. 205–210.

<sup>35</sup> O. Halecki, *The Limits and Divisions of European History*, New York 1950; idem, *Borderlands of Western Civilization: A History of East Central Europe*, New York 1952. There are numerous analyses of Halecki’s mental mapping of Europe; for a brief overview in English see M. Zadencka, *The Shape of Europe in the Work of Oskar Halecki, Józef Mackiewicz, and Marian Kukiel*, [in:] M. Zadencka, A. Plakans, A. Lawaty (eds.), *East and Central European History Writing in Exile 1939–1989*, Leiden–Boston 2015, pp. 263–281.

of "the West", the latter highlighted the level of socioeconomic development and technological innovativeness<sup>36</sup>.

Younger Polish émigrés such as the historian Piotr Wandycz and the poet Czesław Miłosz conceptualized "the West" in a way that was significantly more compatible with contemporary American perspectives. While they continued to insist that Poland and "East Central Europe" had historically and culturally more in common with Western Europe than with Russia, they also acknowledged ambiguities in Polish attitudes towards the West. "The Poles are half-Westerners and half-Easterners in their outlook and habits"<sup>37</sup>, Wandycz wrote in a study on the history of Polish-American relations, and Miłosz even stated that "the feelings Poles have about the West are at the very least ambivalent, and deep down perhaps even malevolent"<sup>38</sup>. In the 1980s, such nuanced approaches sparked a debate about the identity of "Central Europe", in which Miłosz – alongside the Czech émigré writer Milan Kundera – was one of the main protagonists, and which had an immense resonance in the public spheres of Western countries<sup>39</sup>. While German émigrés contributed to the "Westernisation" of West German political culture by critically revising German intellectual traditions, Polish émigrés could thus be considered "Westernisers" insofar as they lay the intellectual groundwork for the integration of their homeland into Western organizations after the fall of communism in 1989. This is most obviously true for the political scientist Zbigniew Brzeziński who, while identifying as an American of Polish descent rather than as a Polish émigré in the United States, was very well connected to the Polish émigré community and was one of the most influential

---

<sup>36</sup> See on this point K.J. Willms, A "Clash of Definitions"? Polish Émigré Scholars and the Cold War Discourse of Western Civilization, "The Exile History Review" 2024, vol. 3, pp. 75–93. On the existence of two highly divergent conceptions of "Western civilization" see also G. Chamedes, *Transatlantic Catholicism and the Making of the "Christian West"*, [in:] C.A. Lerg, S. Lachenicht, M. Kimmage (eds.), *The TransAtlantic Reconsidered: The Atlantic World in Crisis*, Manchester 2018, pp. 139–155.

<sup>37</sup> P.S. Wandycz, *The United States and Poland*, Cambridge 1980, p. 417.

<sup>38</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *Native Realm: A Search for Self-Definition*, transl. C.S. Leach, London 1981, p. 134.

<sup>39</sup> See on this debate, among other publications, J. Labov, *Transatlantic Central Europe: Contesting Geography and Redefining Culture Beyond the Nation*, Budapest 2019; G. Varouxakis, op. cit., pp. 280–282.



supporters of the integration of East Central European nations into the EU and NATO in American political discourse of the 1990s<sup>40</sup>.

The question of whether Polish émigrés also contributed to the “Westernisation” of intellectual culture in their homeland by transmitting Western knowledge and ideas to Poland is more difficult to answer and requires further research. On the one hand, publications of the émigré publishing house Instytut Literacki, which were distributed in the Polish underground press, provided channels of communication between Polish émigrés and activists of the domestic opposition even before 1989. As a result, émigré scholars were able to participate in the formation of an alternative political and social discourse in Poland<sup>41</sup>. However, just like in the German case, few émigrés returned permanently to Poland after 1989, and according to Rafał Stobiecki, the works of émigré historians were initially marginalized in post-communist Poland<sup>42</sup>. This has significantly changed in recent times. Since the 2010s, Polish research on the political and intellectual history of 20th-century emigration has been developing dynamically and increasingly includes not only scholars who continued to write in Polish in exile and were primarily active in émigré institutions, but also those who acculturated into their host societies and became part of Western academic milieus. Whether this increased interest in exile and its transcultural dimension can be interpreted as a symptom of “Westernisation” remains to be judged by future historians.

## Conclusion

At first glance, exiled Polish and German scholars in the 20th century seem to represent different types of émigré communities. While the former escaped from an occupied country, were in some cases loyal supporters of the prewar

<sup>40</sup> For his stance on this issue see, for example, Z. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, New York 1997, pp. 79–86. On his support for Poland’s accession to NATO see also E. Luce, *Zbig: The Life of Zbigniew Brzezinski, America’s Cold War Prophet*, London 2025, pp. 416–420.

<sup>41</sup> On the distribution of *Instytut Literacki* publications, in particular the magazine “Kultura”, in Poland see B. Wiaderny, “Schule des politischen Denkens”: *Die Exilzeitschrift “Kultura” im Kampf um die Unabhängigkeit Polens 1947–1991*, Paderborn 2018, pp. 35–36; J. Labov, op. cit., p. 148.

<sup>42</sup> See R. Stobiecki, *Klio za wielką wodą: Polscy historycy w Stanach Zjednoczonych po 1945 roku*, Warsaw 2017.



government, and focused on keeping a threatened national culture alive in exile, the latter fled a homegrown dictatorship, had often experienced marginalization before their emigration, and strove to critically revise German intellectual traditions. However, a closer look reveals that the differences between the two cases should not be overstated. Both communities were politically heterogeneous, comprised members of national minority groups – especially Jews – and underwent significant generational change. Most importantly, it would be worthwhile to further explore their role as agents of “Westernisation” in the sense of a convergence of intellectual discourse in North America and Central Europe. Polish and German émigrés who settled in the United States not only introduced knowledge and ideas from their places of origin into the American discourse but also contributed to fostering the circulation of ideas across the Atlantic and, even if only to a small extent, to integrating their home countries into the Western alliance.

## References:

### Archival sources:

The Hoover Institution Library and Archives, Collection 50000: Theodore Fred Abel Papers, b. 17, f. 3; b. 18, f. 4; b. 25, f. 49.

### Published sources and secondary literature:

Abel T., *Why Hitler Came into Power: An Answer Based on the Original Life Stories of 600 of His Followers*, New York 1938.

Arendt H., *We Refugees* [1943], [in:] H. Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, J. Kohn, R.H. Feldman (eds.), New York 2007, pp. 264–274.

Arendt H., *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 2nd, enlarged ed., New York 1958.

Bavaj R., Steber M., *Introduction: Germany and “the West”. The Vagaries of a Modern Relationship*, [in:] R. Bavaj, M. Steber (eds.), *Germany and “the West”: The History of a Modern Concept*, New York 2015, pp. 1–37.

Becker S., *Transnational, interkulturell und interdisziplinär: Das Akkulturationsparadigma der Exilforschung. Bilanz und Ausblick*, [in:] D. Bischoff, S. Komfort-Hein (eds.), *Literatur und Exil: Neue Perspektiven*, Berlin 2013, pp. 49–69.

Brzezinski Z., *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, New York 1997.

Burke P., *Exiles and Expatriates in the History of Knowledge, 1500–2000*, Waltham 2017.

- Chamedes G., *Transatlantic Catholicism and the Making of the "Christian West"*, [in:] C.A. Lerg, S. Lachenicht, M. Kimmage (eds.), *The TransAtlantic Reconsidered: The Atlantic World in Crisis*, Manchester 2018, pp. 139–155.
- Doering-Manteuffel A., *Amerikanisierung und Westernisierung*, Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte, 19 August 2019, [https://docupedia.de/zg/Doering-Manteuffel\\_amerikanisierung\\_v2\\_de\\_2019](https://docupedia.de/zg/Doering-Manteuffel_amerikanisierung_v2_de_2019).
- Dorosz B., *Nowojorski pasjans: Polski Instytut Naukowy w Ameryce – Jan Lechoń, Kazimierz Wierzyński. Studia o wybranych zagadnieniach działalności 1939–1969*, Warsaw 2013.
- Draus J., *Nauka polska na emigracji w latach 1945–1990*, [in:] L. Zasztowt, J. Schiller-Walicka (eds.), *Historia nauki polskiej. Tom X: 1944–1989, Część II: Instytucje*, Warsaw 2015, pp. 485–681.
- Dybciak K., *Porównanie emigracji niemieckojęzycznej i polskiej po 1933 i 1939 roku*, [in:] K. Dybciak, *Swojskość na obczyźnie: O różnorodności kultury emigracyjnej w XX wieku. Eseje i rozprawy z lat 1981–2022*, Warsaw 2024, pp. 448–475.
- Eakin-Thimme G.A., *Die emigrierten Historiker als Vermittler sozialgeschichtlicher Ansätze?*, "Comparativ" 2002, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 63–85.
- Kerski B., Kowalczyk A.S. (eds.), *Ein ukrainischer Kosmopolit mit Berliner Adresse: Gespräche mit Bohdan Osadczyk (Alexander Korab)*, transl. A. Grzybkowska, Osnabrück 2004.
- Epstein C., *The Second Generation: Émigré Historians of Modern Germany in Postwar America*, [in:] A.W. Daum, H. Lehmann, J.J. Sheehan (eds.), *The Second Generation: Émigrés from Nazi Germany as Historians*, New York 2016, pp. 143–151.
- Farges P., "I'm a Hybrid". (W. Glaser): *Hybridität und Akkulturation am Beispiel deutschsprachiger Exilanten in Kanada*, "Exilforschung: Ein internationales Jahrbuch" 2009, vol. 27, pp. 40–58.
- Fizman S., *Comparative Aspects in Adam Mickiewicz's Lectures on Slavic Literature*, "The Polish Review" 1981, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 19–45.
- Fleck C., *Etablierung in der Fremde: Vertriebene Wissenschaftler in den USA nach 1933*, Frankfurt a.M. 2015.
- Friedrich C.J., Brzezinski Z., *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, Cambridge 1956.
- Friszke A., *Życie polityczne emigracji*, Warsaw 1999.
- Greenberg U., *The Weimar Century: German Émigrés and the Ideological Foundations of the Cold War*, Princeton 2014.
- Grüttner M., *The Expulsion of Academic Teaching Staff from German Universities, 1933–45*, "Journal of Contemporary History" 2022, vol. 57, no. 3, pp. 513–533.
- Halecki O., *The Limits and Divisions of European History*, New York 1950.
- Halecki O., *Borderlands of Western Civilization: A History of East Central Europe*, New York 1952.
- Jaroszyńska-Kirchmann A.D., *The Exile Mission: The Polish Political Diaspora and Polish Americans, 1939–1956*, Athens 2004.
- Jedlicki J., *A Stereotype of the West in Postpartition Poland*, "Social Research" 1992, vol. 59, no. 2, pp. 345–364.

- Joly D., *Odyssean and Rubicon Refugees: Toward a Typology of Refugees in the Land of Exile*, "International Migration" 2002, vol. 40, no. 6, pp. 3–23.
- Krämer M., *Westernisierung der Geschichtswissenschaft: Transatlantische Gastprofessoren im Umfeld der Historischen Zeitschrift*, Berlin–Boston 2021.
- Kubica G., "A Real Krakauer": Feliks Gross and His Cracovian Roots, "The Polish Review" 2007, vol. 52, no. 2, pp. 147–170.
- Labov J., *Transatlantic Central Europe: Contesting Geography and Redefining Culture Beyond the Nation*, Budapest 2019.
- Luce E., *Zbig: The Life of Zbigniew Brzezinski, America's Cold War Prophet*, London 2025.
- Mazurkiewicz A., *Unwilling Immigrants: Transnational Identities of East Central European Exiles during the Cold War*, "Studia Migracyjne – Przegląd Polonijny" 2015, vol. 41, no. 4(158), pp. 159–171.
- Miłosz Cz., *Native Realm: A Search for Self-Definition*, transl. C.S. Leach, London 1981.
- Mosse G.L., *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich*, New York 1964.
- Nehring H., "Westernization": A New Paradigm for Interpreting West European History in a Cold War Context, "Cold War History" 2004, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 175–191.
- Neubauer J., *Exile: Home of the Twentieth Century*, [in:] J. Neubauer, B.Z. Török (eds.), *The Exile and Return of Writers from East-Central Europe*, Berlin 2009, pp. 4–103.
- Nowak A., *Emigracja „drugiego pokolenia”: Refleksje i pytania na marginesie biografii Piotra Wandycz a i Leopolda Łabędzia*, "Studia z Dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej" 2015, vol. 50, no. 1, pp. 103–117.
- Pöpping D., *Abendland: Christliche Akademiker und die Utopie der Antimoderne 1900–1945*, Berlin 2002.
- Schulze W., *Refugee Historians and the German Historical Profession between 1950 and 1970*, [in:] H. Lehmann, J.J. Sheehan (eds.), *An Interrupted Past. German-speaking Refugee Historians in the United States after 1933*, Washington 1991, pp. 206–225.
- Söllner A., *Zwischen Europa und Amerika – Hannah Arendts Wanderungen durch die politische Ideengeschichte*, "Leviathan" 2008, vol. 36, no. 2, pp. 292–310.
- Söllner A., "Agenten" der "Verwestlichung"? Zur Wirkungsgeschichte deutscher Hitler-Flüchtlinge, [in:] P. Burschel, A. Gallus, M. Völkel (eds.), *Intellektuelle im Exil*, Göttingen 2011, pp. 199–217.
- Stelzel P., *The Second-Generation Émigrés' Impact on German Historiography*, [in:] A.W. Daum, H. Lehmann, J.J. Sheehan (eds.), *The Second Generation: Émigrés from Nazi Germany as Historians*, New York 2016, pp. 287–303.
- Stern F., *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology*, Berkeley 1961.
- Stobiecki R., *Klio za wielką wodą: Polscy historycy w Stanach Zjednoczonych po 1945 roku*, Warsaw 2017.
- Varouxakis G., *The West: The History of an Idea*, Princeton 2025.
- Wandycz P.S., *The United States and Poland*, Cambridge 1980.
- Wheatland T., *The Frankfurt School in Exile*, Minneapolis 2009.

- Wiaderny B., "Schule des politischen Denkens": Die Exilzeitschrift "Kultura" im Kampf um die Unabhängigkeit Polens 1947–1991, Paderborn 2018.
- Willms K.J., *Between Integration and Institutional Self-Organisation: Polish Émigré Scholars in the United States, 1939–1989*, [in:] S. Berger, P. Müller (eds.), *Dynamics of Emigration: Émigré Scholars and the Production of Historical Knowledge in the 20th Century*, New York 2022, pp. 124–138.
- Willms K.J., A "Clash of Definitions"? Polish Émigré Scholars and the Cold War Discourse of Western Civilization, "The Exile History Review" 2024, vol. 3, pp. 75–93.
- Wise A.K., *Russia as Poland's Civilizational "Other"*, [in:] A. Maxwell (ed.), *The East–West Discourse: Symbolic Geography and Its Consequences*, Oxford 2011, pp. 73–92.
- Zadencka M., *The Shape of Europe in the Work of Oskar Halecki, Józef Mackiewicz, and Marian Kukiel*, [in:] M. Zadencka, A. Plakans, A. Lawaty (eds.), *East and Central European History Writing in Exile 1939–1989*, Leiden–Boston 2015, pp. 263–281.