



Marcin Kula
Professor Emeritus, University of Warsaw
Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw

Piotr Michałowski, ca. 1845–1855, "Jews,"
oil on canvas. Sukiennice Gallery,
National Museum in Kraków.

Newcomers to the National Home¹

In a certain sense, the history of all nations starts with migration. Though it may seem hard to believe, we are all said to have come from Africa. Moreover, in Europe at least, it was not until after the early-medieval migrations that our ancestors settled down, roughly speaking, in the places where we now live. If it were not for that great wandering of peoples, it is likely that Serbs and Croats would be living areas of what we now call Poland, whereas we Poles would probably be on the other side of the Urals (if, of course, the continuity of the same groups were retained!). The last to arrive to take their place at this European table were the Hungarians, after their "conquest of the homeland" (as they call it) on the Danube. But even after occupying their potential homelands, all the European societies have continued to strongly intermingle, migrations and collateral phenomena (such as wars) have been nothing unusual, and the ethnic stability of individual groups is more or less as much of a myth as the notion of Germans as tall blonds, once promot-

ed by (as it would happen) the short and dark-haired Hitler. Incidentally, it is worth giving some consideration to what the concept of ethnicity actually means, as all too often it gets applied unthinkingly, at least in fields of the humanities.

Nationalist ideologies, depicting their countries as being nation-states, frequently fail to consider the quite numerous "admixtures" that occurred during the course of long-ongoing migrations. Ideologies touting the notion of "racial purity" or raising such slogans as "Poland for the Poles," "a true Poland of true Poles," etc. are senseless, not only because of their wickedness but in terms of the material truth. The kind of "selective inbreeding" that is used in animal husbandry to obtain specific traits occurs among humans only in very rare groups isolated by geography, history, and/or culture. Even in the case of prolonged isolation, however, such inbreeding is never quite entirely complete.

The idea of cultural purity is similarly senseless. Suffice it to mention the elements of different cultures that are present, for instance, in the works of Poland's great writers and artists; suffice it to mention the cultural syncretism of Wawel Castle in Kraków. No less importantly in today's times, it is worth bearing in mind how much European civilization has gained in history from Arab civilization, or through it as an intermediary.

¹ This paper addresses certain issues raised in my article *Narody a migracje. Esej z socjologii historycznej* [Nations and Migrations: An Essay on Historical Sociology]. *Studia Migracyjne – Przegląd Polonijny*, 2013, no. 2, pp. 5–13 (reprinted in: Marcin Kula, *Kartki z socjologii historycznej* [Pages from Historical Sociology]. Warsaw: Scholar. 2014. pp. 10–35).

Even the very notion of a territory that rightfully belonged to a certain group of founders of the nation back in times long ago is a myth (a notion that is very important in national ideologies: the idea of the homeland, be it a territory actually held onto, regained, lost, or even imagined). The chain of events could have worked out otherwise, after all. It is not that a certain more or less uniform group seized (or imagined that it seized) a given territory; rather, the people who by various consequences of fate happened to be living in a given territory instead ended up binding together to form a group, without actually having inhabited these lands “since time immemorial.” Thinking of the Iron-Age archeological site in Biskupin in Poland as having been a fortress of Slavs (the ancestors of the Poles?) makes as much actual sense as the use of the name “Regained Territories” to describe the areas ceded by Germany to Poland in the wake of WWII (a term eagerly encouraged by the allegedly internationalist communists). If anything, the kind of justification invoked by quite a number of groups is more sensible in this case: “We are the ones who plowed these lands (who turned these forests into fields, deserts into fields, bogs into fields, ruins into cities....), so therefore they are ours.”



As is well known, there are nevertheless nations that do not aspire to a uniform ethnic genesis, to a single territory, even to a single culture. They have taken in certain groups formed significantly or even predominantly of migrants; nations that emerged in later times, including up to this very day. And they are faring quite well today, although in the latter half of the 19th century the Americans, for instance, had the same kind of fear with respect to, say, immigrants from Ireland or the Polish lands, as are manifesting themselves in Poland today with respect to Muslims. They were also afraid of various deviations and diseases that would be brought in.² To tell the truth, they did not find the newcomers easy to deal with. No one understood the poor, cowering Irish, who moreover spoke their own language, and no one wanted to understand them. On the doors of potential places of employment, signs were posted saying “No Irish need apply.” In various situations, immigrants had terrible reputations. In the late 19th century, in the anthracite coal fields of Luzerne County in Pennsylvania studied by Adam Walaszek, Italians and Jews, like the Irish before them, were not considered people of the white race.

2 At an election campaign rally in Maków Mazowiecki, Jarosław Kaczyński said the following in the context of the potential influx of immigrants: “There are, after all, anxieties about of the appearance of very dangerous diseases that have long not been seen in Europe: cholera in the Greek islands, dysentery in Vienna, various types of parasites, protozoans, not dangerous in the bodies of those people, which can be dangerous here. That does not mean discriminating against anybody... But things need be checked...” (cited according to TVN 24 and the Internet). On the fears once harbored about the state of health of immigrants in the United States, compare Małgorzata Szejnert, *Wyspa Klucz*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Kraków 2009, *passim*.

Peasant immigrants were viewed negatively, their behaviors seeming “wild.”³ During the trial occurred after the massacre of strikers the town of Lattimer in 1897, Slavs were described as “Niggers.”⁴



We can speak of some nations that have been predominantly shaped by emigration processes in various periods of history (Poland) and others that have been more on the receiving side (traditionally France). However, these roles have shifted over time (Sweden, Ireland, and France in modern times). Even from the countries of the three Americas, which emerged in their current form thanks to the flow of immigrants, waves of emigration of varying scale have also occurred. There are also some nations which have been particularly frequently involved in the phenomenon of migration. Hence the sad “joke” referring to the realities experienced by the Jews (in whose case the notion of nation is particularly complicated): “Where do you feel at home? On the road!”

The phenomenon of people becoming amalgamated into nations as a consequence of movements could take, and did indeed take highly diverse forms, including some very far removed from voluntary migrations in search of a better livelihood (without even delving into how the very notion of “voluntary” is not as straightforward as it might seem). There exist whole nations that have been resettled on the orders of despots, in a greater or larger share. Migrants might have lived under duress as slaves, exiles, indentured servants, forced laborers, soldiers taken into captivity and/or cast far away from their homes by war, as criminals, as exiles, and/or prisoner/exiles, as war fugitives. They might have been present as political, ethnic, and/or religious outcasts. They might have been displaced persons, who found themselves in this predicament for various reasons – such as regime changes, shifting borders, or war-related transfers. Migrants might have come in search of wealth (the Iberian migrations to America, today called Latin America). They may have come as colonial settlers, including as settlers or bureaucrats in para-colonial situations (such as the movement of people towards Poland’s eastern borderlands).

Incoming migrations have often been decisive for the degree of homogeneity of the recipient nations. Upon arrival, immigrants met with widely differing situations. They may have been accepted as newcomers into an already existing group. However, the nation might build itself against them. The indigenous population may have been very numerous, less numerous, or simply eradicated by incomers. Migrants

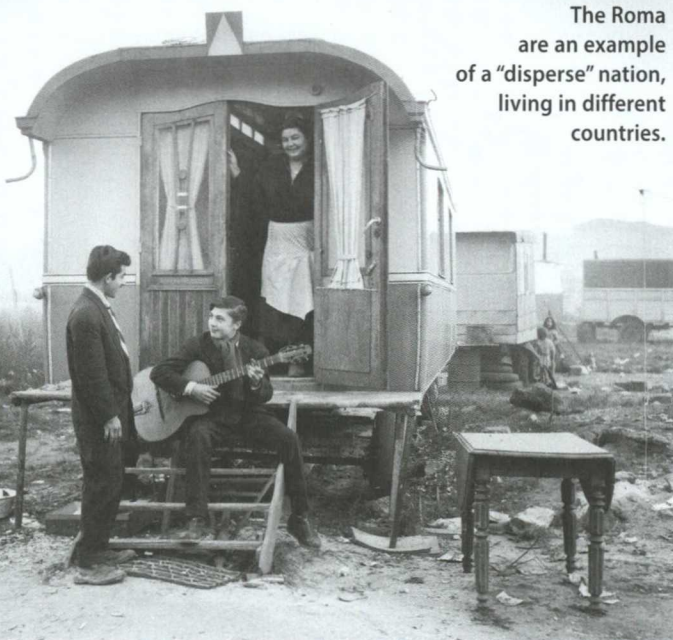
3 Adam Walaszek, *Życie na pograniczu i „życie pomiędzy”. Polacy w zagłębiu antracytowym w Luzerne County, Pensylwania, z innymi grupami w tle (1753–1902)* [Life on the borderland and life “between”: Poles in the anthracite coal fields of Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, against the backdrop of other groups (1753–1902)], Wydawnictwo UJ, Kraków 2011, p. 112.

4 *Ibidem*, p. 97.

may have incorporated themselves into the local population, they may have sought to dominate it, or they may have actually done so. Sometimes immigrants had to adapt themselves to a greater or lesser extent in a subordinate role to the society that they came into contact with, but sometimes they were the ones who took the dominant position and who determined the dominant vision of the nation.

Migration currents have been decisive for the homogeneity of nations: through history, down to this very day, we have seen a whole continuum of such states, ranging from rarified dispersion all the way to complete concentration in one place. Examples of the former situation can be found in the Jews (until recently) and the Roma. No ideal example of the latter exists, as there is no nation that does not have its own emigrants somewhere, but we can name some that have not dissipated very much in their histories.

The Roma are an example of a "disperse" nation, living in different countries.



BE&W

It is easy to list nations that have large diasporas (the Chinese, Indians, Jews, Irish, Poles, Cubans ...) or small ones (the French, Germans...). Those diasporas are also frequently not comparable. A diaspora spread around the whole world, like that of the Chinese, is one thing, whereas the accumulation of Cubans largely in Miami is something different.



Thinking about migrations and migrants sometimes plays a significant role in the lives of nations. Nationalists might want to "purge" the nation of "foreigners" and sometimes attempt to actually do so ("ethnic cleansing"). The phenomenon of migration may bolster the national awareness, strengthening the question of "Who are we?" in both those arriving and in the receiving society. Emigrants, who when living abroad have a more acute sense of belonging to the home nation than

before, may have the effect of increasing the national awareness of the home country from which they emigrated. Here Ireland and Poland can serve as examples.

Migration waves may homogenize elements of national identity in the super-national dimension. Elements of symbolism that have traditionally been linked to individual nations are now wandering about today's world, together with migrants (though not exclusively so). Nations, in turn, may want to strengthen such elements of their identity, in a defensive reaction. Their members or their elites may raise slogans against newcomers, utilizing their presence as a political argument. Politicians who make use of this instrument, it seems, nevertheless do realize nowadays that most of these immigrants can never be sent off to any Madagascar. Hitler may have expelled or murdered even those Jews that were most deeply rooted in Germany, but the most demagogic politicians do sometimes take the existing state of affairs into account. Some sort of acceptance and integration will be inevitable with respect to the immigrant groups present in individual countries; the question is whether this will ultimately entail (or has to entail?) their being accepted into the national community. The question is also whether newcomers and their descendants will want this. Perhaps the model of acting together while retaining different identities will be more realistic. One thing is certain: contrary to the hopes of certain citizens of the recipient countries, those people are not going to be leaving, and we have to have hope that no new Hitler arises – although the instruments he applied have been used recently, such as in Bosnia for instance. It is also worth bearing in mind that immigrants have quite often enriched the culture of their host country. Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski, as more recent migrants, had to adapt and seek the recognition of a nation comprised of earlier migrants and their descendants. It should be appreciated that they did indeed attain that recognition – something that attests well both to them and to the recipient communities. Peter Rusev, a Bulgarian immigrant to Brazil in the 1940s, similarly had to adapt to a society comprised of migrants; his daughter Dilma Rousseff became president of Brazil (in 2011). Last but not least, it is not a bad thing to recall that Barack Obama's father was born among the Luo, in the Kenyan province of Nyanza, and studied at the University of Hawaii thanks to a scholarship for foreign students. It is not a bad thing to recall that quite a few of the greatest minds of the 20th century were migrants or their nationality was a subject of dispute. "In the days before his theories were shown to be correct, Einstein worried constantly. 'If Relativity proves right', he once said, 'the Germans will call me a German, the Swiss will call me a Swiss, and the French will call me a great scientist. If Relativity is proved wrong, the French will call me a Swiss, the Swiss will call me a German, and the Germans will call me a Jew.' In 1933, when Einstein sought refuge in Paris from the Nazis, the Collège de France refused him employment because

of his German citizenship, thereby obliging him to leave for the USA.”⁵ Kafka is today generally considered to be a Czech by the Czechs, a Jew by the Jews, an Austrian by the Austrians, and a German by the Germans.⁶



In today's times, there has appeared a possibility that was very limited until quite recently: a nation uniform in certain respects, while significantly diverse in others. The possibility of the existence of “nations within a nation” – to use the expression formulated by Jerzy Jedlicki in the context of discussing Polish Jews.⁷ Some time ago, such phenomena were limited to, say, Switzerland and Belgium (let us hope that the modern course of history does not sweep away the latter example). Even in typical immigrant countries, national uniformity was still being sought not that long ago, although in such cases this could only be the kind of uniformity that stems from amalgamating everyone with everyone else (as no common ancient ancestor could be invented).

In certain countries nowadays, a diversity of nationalities functioning within the framework of an “umbrella nation” is still hard to imagine. However, such trends do exist. A certain



BE&W

French journalist once asked an Algerian woman, living in France as a French citizen, whether she was prepared to sing *La Marseillaise* as her own national hymn. She responded in the affirmative – but on condition that she could sing it in Arabic. However, there is (unfortunately?) little chance that the French might consent to this or analogous solutions. In Poland, despite all our evolution, something of this sort would be highly unlikely, as would someone not from the circle of Catholic or at least Christian tradition being elected president. Here, it seems, few people will recognize what Jerzy Stuhr said in the context of fearing that someone might graffiti-scrrawl the question “Is Stuhr a Polish surname?” on his fence: “I am a Pole

because I pay taxes in this country, I speak Polish and I have a Polish passport. Is that sufficient? Please do not demand greater love for the homeland from me.”⁸

Let us hope that there will not be many people eager to spray-paint such a challenge on his fence (or rather, none at all!), but many people will not agree with the concept of nation that Stuhr formulated. Its antithesis, however, at one time brought about the situation that culminated in the murder of Polish President Narutowicz, with the motivation that he had been elected on the back of non-Polish votes.⁹



Acceptance for groups of diverse origins and often diverse cultures is all the more important an issue at this point, not only because people of different cultures are flowing into Europe today but simply because people are becoming ever-more mobile. Most countries in the world, besides, are not nation-states. Perhaps they will change their imitative ambitions towards creating civil society and becoming a home for different cultural groups. Perhaps they will accept, more broadly than now, the ideal of an open civil society, respectful of multiculturalism (multinationalism). This ideal has never yet been fully instantiated anywhere – as ideals are by nature something that can never become a reality. Certain countries (Australia, the United States, Canada, Brazil) are close to it. Moving in this direction is difficult. It represents a reversal of the phenomena that people are most often accustomed to: the primacy of the phenomenon of nation, the primacy of the nation's own affairs over those of others, and the dominance of the nation-state concept. The issue depends not only on one's stance towards the national idea and multiculturalism, but also significantly on the economic situation. The two may go hand-in-hand. Even typical immigrant countries shut their doors to newcomers as WWII drew near, including to the Jews thrown out by Hitler, both because of the Great Depression and out of a fear of negatively perceived foreigners. Perhaps in certain situations we will reach a consensus for cultivating two or more traditions under the framework of an “umbrella” nation. Something of this sort has been happening in the United States for some time now. Perhaps there will emerge syntheses or amalgamations of many cultures – something that has already happened in certain situations in history, serving quite a few individuals and countries well. Content roams about nowadays, children are born to mixed marriages, brought up in an environment different than the original environment of their families. A given group does not have to end up being assimilated without a trace. Asian groups in the United States on the one hand adapt well to their

⁵ Norman Davies, *Europe: A History*. Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 857.

⁶ Mariusz Szczygiel, *Gottland*, Wydawnictwo Czarne, Wołowiec 2010, p. 240. The author cites the opinion of Alexej Kusak.

⁷ Jerzy Jedlicki, *Naród w narodzie* [Nation within a Nation], *Więź*, 1976, no. 11, pp. 134–140.

⁸ Jerzy Stuhr, *Tak sobie myślę... Dziennik czasu choroby* [I was just thinking... A journal from a time of illness], WL, Kraków 2012, pp. 204–205.

⁹ To mention a recent publication: Patryk Pleskot, *Niewiadomski. Zabić prezydenta* [Niewiadomski: To Kill a President], Demart, Warsaw 2012, *passim*.



JAKUB OSTALOWSKI

Professor Marcin Kula

is a historian and sociologist, professor emeritus at the University of Warsaw, lecturer at the Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw, and member of the PAS Committee on Human Migration Research.

environment, but on the other they do so only minimally in quite a few aspects. The Roma are generally quite well adapted to the religions they encounter, but have frequently remained highly distinctive in numerous other aspects. In the case of migrating Jews, this has played out in various ways. Jews are frequently depicted as being a fundamentally distinct group, having difficulty adapting to a given country – but that usually loses sight of the Jews who have been assimilating for generations. When we speak of any sort of migrants, we are generally thinking of those who remain distinctive – because how might we notice those who have melded into the new society? We should also bear in mind that the process of migrants melding into new societies hinges not only upon the attitudes of the two sides – although this too is important – but also on many factors of a socioeconomic nature, which are hard to describe here. However it is worth bearing in mind that the defensive strategy of immigrants against getting mixed with a new society is sometimes adopted when people are worse off.

Unfortunately, the reaction provoked by an influx of immigrants involves strengthening the traditions and culture of the recipient nation. It would be hard to expect today’s French to consent to Muslim prayers on the streets. This is an issue of symbolic importance, and symbolism is a very important element of social life. Here we are talking about a sign of dominance over space. The ways the French behave on this issue are analogous to the aversion of the Swiss to accepting the spatial dominance of newly-erected minarets. What the Swiss want, not surprisingly, is for their space to be dominated by church towers, the way things have “always” been. Despite the difficulties and obvious failures that have occurred in quite a few countries on the path towards multiculturalism, it will often be inevitable.

In the Indian-Creole countries of Latin America, where this issue is a very serious problem on account of the Indian “reawakening,” there is a great chance that a syncretic tradition will emerge. South Africa is invoking multiple cultures and will be doing so to an ever greater extent; its existence indeed hinges upon it. Sooner or later, Poland, too, will have to reconcile itself with accepting significantly more diverse cultural reference-points. It already felt such a need back in the interwar period, given that as much as one-third of the Polish state’s population was made up of representatives of national minorities. Things went badly then, and today these groups

predominantly do not live in Poland anymore. Most often, what gets written is not the history of the country per se, but the history of Polish-Poles. If minorities appear in our considerations, it is generally in the context of relations between groups, especially the problems they pose to the state, which was indeed not necessarily friendly to them. Very often it is not considered that they, too, were citizens of the Republic of Poland. After WWII, the problem of different cultures on the country’s territory disappeared – for well-known, unfortunate reasons. If it did appear, it was more of little intensity, because of the great internal migrations. As Henryk Wujec recently recalled, “I was recently visiting a friend of mine in Western Pomerania. The daughter of the local village leader was getting married and the bride and groom really wanted to appear in folk costumes. But what costumes should they appear in, being from Western Pomerania? So they concocted a costume comprising elements that invoked various parts, an amalgamation from the whole world – Lithuania, and Ukraine and central Poland.”¹⁰ This same issue of trying to come to terms with a diversity of cultural reference-points stands a chance of again resurfacing in Polish culture (in a different form, not just for the sake of commemorating a pleasant occasion) as a consequence of the influx of immigrants. This time, we should hope that things go better than they did in the interwar period. There is no other path.



Migratory processes become part of the national mythology, and even foundation myths (the Great Trek of the Boors, the arrival of the founding fathers of the United States). They are sometimes revered as constitutive episodes in the history of nations (the expeditions of the *bandeirantes*, the conquerors of the Indians and the interior of Brazil, and the conquest of the Wild West in the United States). In Poland there is a positive, mythologized legend of the political emigrations of the 19th and 20th centuries. The canonical vision of national history may also include the negative memory of migratory phenomena – such as the memory of the postwar expulsions of numerous Germans (including the “Brno death march”).

However, there are no simple rules for how historical episodes, including those involving migrations, go down in history. Interestingly, the expulsion of Poles by the Soviets did enter the canonical vision of Polish history, whereas the resettlement of “Poles from beyond the Bug River” did not really make a great mark. The population of the Western Lands with Poles did not really do so either, or if so only locally. Conscious historical policy seems to play a less significant role in the case of such choices, than is typically thought in Poland. ◀

¹⁰ Henryk Wujec. “Spotkałem nawet szczęśliwych rolników” [I Even Met Farmers Living Happily] (interview with Henryk Wujec by Michał Olszewski), *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 26 VIII 2012.