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The Problem of “Polishness” in the London Student Periodicals (*Życie Akademickie* – *Kontynenty*)

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Abstract: This article presents the views and opinions expressed in two London periodicals published in the 1950s and 1960s by Polish students living in exile, namely *Życie Akademickie* and *Kontynenty*, focusing on the problem of preservation of “Polishness” among Polish emigrants of the younger generation. In the first part of the text, the views presented, include those of the members of the older generation of emigrants and refugees (e.g. Czesław Miłosz or Witold Gombrowicz), giving advice to the young, as well as of the young themselves (e.g. Wiktor Poznański or Wojciech Gniatczyński). The second part of the article refers to the notion of patriotism and the problem of national vices, which were also subject to a discussion which went on in the émigré press. The aim of the article is to illustrate the discrepancies between the attitudes of two – or even three – generations of Polish emigrants, concerning the issue of Polish national identity.

Keywords: Polishness, emigration, national identity, émigré press

The London environment of the Polish youth that concentrated initially around the periodical *Życie Akademickie*, and later around its subsequent mutations, up to the moment when the well-formed and mature poetic group “Kontynenty” started to issue their monthly periodical. The young writers, remaining in exile, were forced, to reflect upon their belonging to the Polish nation and upon the category of Polishness in general. This subject matter kept appearing and reappearing from the beginnings of the periodical, and later in its subsequent incarnations, and – due to a significant differentiation of the environment – it was differently presented. This article is an attempt to reconstruct the views and standpoints of individual authors. What is interesting about the discussion on emigration, Poland, patriotism, tasks and obligations of exiles, is the fact that quite frequently people who were taking part in it were so young, that they either did not remember their homeland at all or only vaguely. As the author using initials B. N. (Bogdan Niemczyk?) wrote in *Życie Akademickie*:

For the generation that comes to maturity and goes to college now, their fatherland is connected with fragments only, small and unimportant. One of my friends told me that all she remembered from Poland was a fence around the house and some little bridge over the river. That much only. Will that bit be enough for the bond with the things long-deserted not to be broken? For many of the young boys and girls, even their parents' house is not a platform, because they don't have it anymore. The young have to face that problem.¹

What is "Polishness"? How can we define it? What elements constitute it, contribute to it? These are the questions which each emigrant had to ask himself or herself,² especially a young one, who, deciding to stay abroad, wanted to remain Polish in the full understanding of the word.

In the January 1952 issue of *Życie Akademickie*, Franciszek Buczkowski was describing the problem of the national identity of emigrants in the following way:

Something that requires constant defence cannot be worth defending. [...] it is not us that defend Polishness, but Polishness defends us, our feeling of consistency.³ The person who does not feel that Poland in him, does not feel that he grows out of it, lives on as a human being, constantly outgrows it [?], accepted only some different ideas about Poland and that is why it seems to him, that he constantly has to defend them. He does not defend Poland, but his ideas. And since nobody can live in the state of constant defence, so he discards Polishness, or looks for support among strangers. However, finding support in something foreign creates a feeling of dependence and is the source of a feeling of uncertainty. It does not free us from the feeling of being endangered.⁴

Being rooted in Polishness – but that real one, full and rich – was, thus, to protect against the danger of losing one's identity, was to be a solid base upon which a refugee could build the feeling of self-value, could oppose external influence and feel a strong bond with his home nation. Without it, émigrés – especially the young ones, who had not had time to root themselves in the Polish soil – were endangered by denationalization. It is important, that this very perspective dominated the discourse devoted to Polishness, which developed in the periodical. How can national identity be preserved in a foreign space, among other nations, in the environment of non-Polish language and culture? And – resulting from the observation of the changes taking place within the Polish diaspora – another question followed: how can Polishness

¹ B.N., "Roztańczona młodzież i porachunki," *Życie Akademickie* 1951, No. 15 (23), p. 2.

² Those issues reappear constantly in the reflection concerning emigration – see: e.g. K. Jaworska, "Powinności Polaka na obczyźnie wobec Macierzy i kraju osiedlenia," in: *Polacy w kulturze świata. Polacy twórcy w kraju zamieszkania*, edited by A. Wilkoń, Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie "Wspólnota Polska", 2000, p. 19–22; T. Łepkowski, *Uparte trwanie polskości. Nostalgie. Trwanie. Nadzieje. Wartości*, Londyn-Warszawa: Aneks, Wolne Pismo Most, 1989; K. Łastawski, "Polska tożsamość narodowa (zasadnicze problemy)," in: *W służbie Polsce i emigracji*, edited by L. Nowak and M. Szczerbiński, Gorzów Wielkopolski: IKF, 2002.

³ Not everyone accepted that approach. As Andrzej Wnęk noted, there was a conviction among the students which took the form of a question: "Who can defend our cause better than educated young people? And aren't we here to defend something?" see: An[drzej] Wn[ę]k, "Radosna przechadzka po Londynie. Zbiórka na pomoc akademikom," *Życie Akademickie* 1951, No. 14 (22), p. 1 [emphasis added by – R.M.].

⁴ F. Buczkowski, "Kiedy człowiek jest wolny," *Życie Akademickie* 1952, No. 1 (35), p. 2.

be transferred onto the young generation? Salvage and transfer – those were the two aims that the Polish youth studying in England had, regarding the complexity of the phenomena constituting “Polishness.”

The extent to which that way of perceiving the issue discussed here was dominant is illustrated by the articles which appeared in the first years of the existence of *Życie Akademickie*. Those articles emphasised the forms of activity which would serve to infuse the young generation as well as those, whose bonds to their nation had weakened and started to break, dissolving their Polishness. On the one hand, Stanisław Kubicz describing the activity of students being active in the educational sphere, praising its organised variations, added:

There was also a sporadic activity of individuals. One worked for a Polish farmer, another one found himself in a Polish family, invited for vacations, all of them gave many a favour, attaching children or even adults to Polishness. [...] Here a discussion, there a friendly chat and the frail spirit of self-defence was growing in strength.⁵

On the other hand, it was the preservation of the Polish spirit that was to be the aim of various student organisations, first and foremost of the Association of Polish Students Abroad:

Nowadays, when the students are under pressure of the foreign environment, when no possibility of returning to the Country can be seen in the direct future, when they have to think about acclimatisation, the central organisation, and its branches even more so, should create such an atmosphere among the students, which would help in accommodation to the new conditions, and with its charm could gather, attach and educate students, or maybe even replace to some degree their family home. It concerns, first of all, the youngest, who while still being children, found themselves outside the Country, who have not seen the real Polish life and who, if they do not soak in Polishness now, having graduated, having got outside the orbit of their colleagues' influence, when they find themselves face to face with life in a foreign environment, can be easily absorbed by it, can easily get lost in it. [...]

A student organisation, if it is to fulfil its task, should implement in its members awareness of the fact that when they leave it, they are still part of a larger community, whose name is the Polish Nation, and are not only individuals, who completed their studies and can now on devote themselves to constructing their own welfare. There is a natural law, according to which an individual belongs to a family, a tribe, a nation. [...] It will depend on the strength and feeling of belonging whether [...] future generations, maybe not even speaking Polish at all, will be aware of the source they come from, if in the societies they find themselves in they will become some sort of Welsh or Scottish people, or will soak without a trace into the community that will surround them, or if they will exert pressure, when necessary, [...] if there will be, at the bottom of their souls, a slight memory of their fathers' homeland.⁶

Hence, the students were concerned with bringing to the readers' attention the importance and significance of national affiliation. Activity in that area was to be expedient, rational and targeted. In that perspective, activities aimed at the defence of Polishness – contrary to the views of

⁵ S. Kubicz, “Pokłosie pracy nauczycielskiej polskiego akademika,” *Życie Akademickie* 1951, No. 15 (23), p. 3. The text was reporting the situation of Polish students-emigrants, studying in France.

⁶ A. Sierz, “W obliczu jutra,” *Życie Akademickie* 1952, No. 10 (33), p. 1.

Buczowski, who perceived Polishness in emotional categories – might bring forth positive effects, if it was well organised and conducted:

This year our organisation faces new tasks, maybe much harder than those we have got used to solving. First of all, the number of students is sharply decreasing, both on the Continent and in England.⁷ A large percentage of our Colleagues graduated and started to work in their professions. [...]

It turned out that organisational bonds from the students' times are too weak and after graduation the Colleagues lose touch with our organisation, what is more, they do not establish new contacts with other Polish organisations abroad.⁸

Was belonging to a Polish organisation a guarantee of sticking to Polishness? It seems doubtful – the more so, because, as one of the readers wrote, "quite frequently members of the older generation, in which the worst features of our national character revealed themselves (putting on airs in front of the compatriots, and displaying complaisance among foreigners) discouraged the young ones from joining those organisations":

[...] in the majority we are a bunch of half-idiot servilists, who are impressed by breaking one's back in front of foreigners.

For a countryman – one's face is of marble; spine is of concrete, while for a foreigner the same physiognomy turns into a pickle, and the back of his excellency émigré – into a willow twig...⁹

Where does such a – as a matter of fact self-destructive – attitude come from? Maybe its genesis and can be found in one of the sociological phenomena of emigration – downward mobility, which leads to frustration, inferiority complex which brings about such forms of behaviour as described above. However, accepting such an explanation did not suit the young, and did not excuse them in the eyes of the older generation. Zygmunt Ławrynowicz was writing about it, stating that

[...] the downward mobility of Polish emigrants is one big misunderstanding.

A certain misconception can be observed here. Each organised group of emigrants, which opposes assimilation and does not give up their national and socio-cultural values, is doomed to isolation within the local society. [...] Mrs. X coming from the upper classes of Polish society may not feel connected with appropriate English spheres and may not have access to the London high society, but does that mean that Mrs. X has been declassified? Of course not. Mrs. X does not have an internal connection with a respective English sphere, but not due to declassing, but as a result of linguistic, religious and cultural differences which divide those two societies.¹⁰ As we can see, there is only the problem of isolation here. And

⁷ Witold Tułasiewicz observed the thinning of the ranks a year later, when summarising ten years of the student work in Great Britain, and stressed that the organisation in 1953 included slightly over two thousand members, although "in the last two years attempts were made to solve the problem by including into the organisation secondary school graduates, or extending the period of belonging to 4 years following completion of studies." in: W. Tułasiewicz, "Dziesięciolecie," *Życie Akademickie* 1953, No. 10 (33), p. 1.

⁸ L. Angerer, "Uwagi na Zjazd Delegatów," *Życie Akademickie* 1952, No. 10 (33), p. 2.

⁹ B. Siedlecki, "Smutno mi Boże..." *Życie Akademickie* 1954, No. 2–3 (47–48), p. 8. All the quotations from the Polish sources have been translated by Elżbieta Rokosz.

¹⁰ Tadeusz Massalski argued with those theses in "A letter to the editor" (*Życie Akademickie* 1952, No. 9/32, p. 4).

we have to remember that this isolation does not result from violence, as it was in the case of Jews during the past war, but it is voluntary. We do not want to give up our national and socio-cultural values, so we are doomed to remain isolated.

And then he continues with his statements which most certainly could have been a thorn in the side of many a reader, especially those of the older generation:

All the consequences of such a stand have to be borne without a question. [...]

The émigré society does not consist of the intelligentsia only; they constitute a fraction of the whole. The frequent complaints about declassing seem strange, then, especially those coming from the people who before the war did not belong to the upper classes. That complaining is either the result of confusing declassing with isolation or just megalomania. It can be explained not by the feeling of declassing, but estrangement or just excessive false ambitions.¹¹

By stigmatizing Polish megalomania, Ławrynowicz indicated that frequently among emigrants, upward mobility could be observed, evidence for which was “the fact of the existence of a few thousand young people studying at colleges.” Those young people – discouraged by the representatives of the older generation from participating actively in the life of émigré organisations, and submerged in the current of life of the country of settlement – automatically, in a way, distanced themselves from the Polish matters. It does not mean that they were completely indifferent to them, contrary to the opinions of the older exiled generation. Just the opposite – they felt affiliated to the whole of the emigration in its political dimension:

We are connected by a common stand towards certain political facts. We do not have to be reminded why we have stayed in the West and why we constitute what some call teasingly *emigrejtaniada*. All of us, no matter what sex, age or political affiliation, are anti-communist.¹²

However, that was not a sufficient basis for the young people – they did not agree to build their lives on the fragile foundation of negating communism. They were searching for advantages of the programme mentioned earlier, something that could give them at least a partial feeling of stability in the uncertain and “transitory” condition of exile:

It is, however, so, that a man cannot “live” by a negative attitude only. He needs something that plays a positive role in his life and gives it some value. [...] A man cannot be mentally living out of a suitcase all the time. He has to settle somewhere, start a normal life. [...] He cannot go country-hopping.

Naturally, young people realised that concentrating on the mentioned “normal life”¹³ resulted in frequent negligence of the work for independence

¹¹ Z. Ławrynowicz, “Deklasacja społeczna na emigracji,” *Życie Akademickie* 1952, No. 6–7 (29–30), p. 6.

¹² “Ankieta,” *Życie Akademickie* 1954, No. 2–3 (47–48), p. 2.

¹³ What is interesting, when the problem of Polishness is described in the student periodical, in the way automatically the term “denationalisation” appears, with the category of assimilation almost entirely omitted. Besides Ławrynowicz, mentioned above, it was Aleksander Sierz who referred it as well, when in his text “W obliczu jutra” he stressed that

and – in consequence – led to being accused of becoming “anglicized” and “denationalised.”¹⁴ Those accusations – in the editorial board’s opinion – were unjust because – as they stressed – the young people were simply different:

The fact that we approach the heritage problems differently and that our patriotism is usually different than the patriotism of the older generation is inevitable. We are not so much interested in why it is so, but rather in the fact that we are “different” and that we will be looking for positive aspects in our life, “different” than “the old” would like us to.

Cutting themselves off from the options preferred by the older generation, the younger generation was searching for different ways of preserving Polishness. It does not mean that absolutely everything that the young identified with their fathers’ or grandfathers’ generation, was in their eyes completely worthless. On the contrary – they believed that it was possible to find things to cherish among the values that the earlier generations had sworn by. They only had to be skilfully indicated and revealed. And for that reason, an attempt was made to enter into dialogue with the older generation, by conducting the first of three surveys concerning their heritage, which the older generations believed they should pass onto the next generation, the heritage which should become a landmark and an identification point in the new reality.¹⁵ It was stressed that they meant lasting and inalienable values, not “Sunday general muster to Brompton Oratory and evening pilgrimages to *emigrejtan* cafes.” The young, pondering upon their own situation, asked themselves and the survey a few questions:

[...] What should that Polishness be like??

“all assimilations and acceptance of foreign citizenship do not release a man from the bonds of his origin” (A. Sierz, “W obliczu jutra,” *Życie Akademickie* 1952, No. 10 (33), p. 1.) That remark is important because the term assimilation seems not to be negatively semantically loaded, which obviously is not true about “denationalization.” Dominance of the latter is an additional piece of information about the way of thinking of the young emigrants and the perception of the problem discussed here.

¹⁴ Even they, in their rational approach to what they called normal life, drew the limit to the phenomena they considered worrying. In Issue 2 (36) of 1953 we can find a poem by Walery J. Fronczak, coming from the first volume of *Antologia Poezji Polsko-Amerykańskiej* from 1937 – *Zmiana nazwiska* (W.J. Fronczak, “Zmiana nazwiska,” *Życie Akademickie* 1953, No 2 (36), p. 2), in which the speaker, having changed his last name from Zieliński to Green (“With a foreign name – he said – / I will live to see better days”), is rejected both by his countrymen-emigrants and by the locals:

The foreign have not accepted him / Obcy go nie przyjęli,
Because so wretched was the deed he committed / Bo nędzny spełnił czyn.

To his own, he would not return / Do swoich nie chciał wrócić,
Because he has no courage for it / Bo mu odwagi brak.
He loiters along the street / łązi dziś po ulicy,
Like a deserted bird / jak opuszczony ptak.

¹⁵ “Ankieta,” *Życie Akademickie* 1954, No. 2–3 (47–48), p. 2. It should be added that the subject of the survey was not clearly formulated – it was a list of a few questions focusing on the issue.

The question is, how to balance, how to bypass Scylla of an emigration ghetto and Charybdis of actual denationalization. What should young Poles accept as the heritage for their further road in foreign countries?

Czesław Miłosz¹⁶ and Witold Gombrowicz¹⁷ were the first to answer, reducing the problem (to a large extent) to the literary issues only. The former encouraged the young to write in the language which seemed more appropriate in a given situation. Indicating examples of representatives of other emigrations, he argued that “the language barrier is not intransgressible,” while the real problem lies in the mental sphere, and can be formulated as follows: “are you strong enough to impose your vision on foreigners?”¹⁸ For Miłosz the only exception from that rule was poetry, which should be – in his opinion – created in the mother tongue.

Gombrowicz perceived the problem a bit differently, and suggested that young people should “try to give some blood to Polish literature” by rejecting meekness and modesty:

Stop being good boys. Be conceited, arrogant and unpleasant. A significant dose of anarchy and absolute disrespect is needed. Be also delicate, narcissistic, oversensitive, egocentric and selfish. [...] Besides that – fabulousness, irresponsibility, do not fear stupidity and clowning. Remember that dirt, disease, sin, anarchy are your food.¹⁹

Additionally, referring to the very idea of the survey, Miłosz considered the question asked as “putting the case wrongly.” Indicating the road the young people should take, he encouraged them to take the attitude of “duality,” which should consist in “gaining the strongest possible connection with whatever is happening in the country in which they live,” without forgetting about their homeland and nationality. At the same time, he advised them to reject their inferiority complex of Western society, and also to take certain caution in approaching migrant political formations, because

Homeland and nationality are something much deeper than the bad habits and the way of thinking of the small groups of professional politicians, cast to the West by the events of the years 1939-1945. [...] We should not identify our attachment to nationality with the imperative of paying tribute to such environments. It is better not to be in touch with them at all than to stay in touch, be disgusted with yourself and feel that you go below your requirements.

¹⁶ Cz. Miłosz, “Odpowiedź na ankietę,” *Życie Akademickie* 1954, No. 2–3 (47–48), p. 2. In Miłosz’s answer the key question, around which the survey was centred, took the following form: “Should we stick to the banners, together with all the symbols of legalism and lose the connection with reality more and more, or should we forget about everything that we consider as homeland and nationality?”

¹⁷ W. Gombrowicz, “Przedśmiertna rada W. Gombrowicza,” *Życie Akademickie* 1954, No. 2–3 (47–48), p. 2.

¹⁸ See: “Wprowadzenie do tematu: literatura i emigracja,” in: *Pisarz na obczyźnie*, edited by T. Bujnicki and W. Wyskiel, Wrocław-Kraków: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1985, p. 41.

¹⁹ As Paweł Kądziała noticed, “the journalists of *Merkuriusz Polski*, in its most interesting period, i.e. the years 1955-1958, stayed faithful to that message,” P. Kądziała, “O publicystyce londyńskich ‘Kontynentów’,” in: *Mysł polityczna na wygnaniu. Publicyści i politycy polskiej emigracji powojennej*, edited by A. Friszke, Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 1995, p. 195–196.

The third person speaking about that issue²⁰ was Melchior Wańkiewicz, who observed that the basic duty of the young is to aim at full humanity, "by developing the inborn gifts, which a man possesses."²¹ Naturally – as he continued – that process was connected with effort and sacrifices, and was also dependent on a natural predisposition, which meant "the intensity of Polishness in an individual," depending on "the age at which one left Poland" as well as on "intensity of Polishness during the first years of one's youth." Depending on how those factors were constituted, resignation from Polishness was – according to Wańkiewicz – either basically impossible or happened painlessly and unnoticed. No prohibitions or external orders could change anything in that respect. At the end of his considerations, he concluded that "Polishness" could not be fully defined and could not be described through simple rules or formulas:

It seems to me [...], that Polishness is a dreadfully difficult thing to discard. I do not have the feeling of chooseness, I do not think that we are anything better. However, I have noticed that the issue does not depend only on the cultural growth which has already taken place in Poland. Time after time I notice a discovery of Polishness. If even for me that Polishness is not a mystical revelation, I am tempted to look for some distortion by a side product: love for a Polish girl or boy, fashion, a grimace, some wanting, disputes with the locals. But still, I notice numerous incidents in which none of those reagents functions: Polishness is stuck in such a soul, ingrowths get wider, it cannot be extracted otherwise than with bleeding and life functions impaired.²²

The next voice in the discussion was that of Ferdynand Goetel,²³ who agreeing with Miłosz that the question in the survey was wrongly formulated, turned people's attention to the consequences of living abroad and from this he drew conclusions about the possibility of remaining committed to Polishness. He pointed out that "in the face of the new, exiled reality" quite frequently the attitude taken came from the conviction that "by meeting others, getting closer to them and staying Polish, we allow them to get acquainted with the essence of who Poles are and what Poland is." At the same time, he was trying to prove that in post-Yalta Europe "our seemingly lightsome and obvious role among foreigners is an illusion and an objective more pathetic than sticking to the patriotic symbols."

If somebody thinks – he continued – that while staying Polish, he will "grow accustomed to" one or another foreign environment [...] he should not forget that [...] he is creating a ghetto suspended in a vacuum.

²⁰ For Miłosz's and Gombrowicz's opinions, see: P. Kądziela, op. cit., p. 195; B. Taborski, "Młodsza literatura emigracji w perspektywie ćwierćwiecza," *Pamiętnik Literacki* (Londyn) 1983, Vol. 6, p. 86–87.

²¹ M. Wańkiewicz, "Odpowiedź na ankietę," *Życie Akademickie* 1954, No. 4 (49), p. 2.

²² A similar view was expressed by Halina Brodzińska, who commenting the course of a discussion evening "Democracy and the modern life" (H. Brodzińska, "Zjazd demokratów," *Kontynenty* 1962, No. 42, p. 20), stated in the conclusions: "a Pole will always be a Pole; even so-called youth, that is people brought up to a large extent on the English soil, show stronger spiritual affinity with the young people from the country of origin, than from the country of settlement."

²³ F. Goetel, "A letter to the Editors," *Życie Akademickie* 1954, No. 4 (49), p. 6.

That ghetto will be an English-Polish “party,” with its casual blabbering; that ghetto is a discussion room where problems of Eastern Europe are discussed [...] that ghetto is constituted by the conversations of individuals about the rules nobody respects. Intellectual rapprochement, seemingly the most laudable task of ours in exile, has to revolve and it does revolve around the circle of the phenomenon called cosmopolitanism.

The next person to respond to the invitation of the young was Jędrzej Giertych, who began with turning their attention to the fact that “each generation faces some difficulties and has to be able to overcome them,”²⁴ and added that maintaining the right proportions when evaluating the situation and condition of the young generation of emigrants had to lead to the conclusion that on the one hand they struggled with numerous difficulties, but on the other “in some of its aspects their life [wa]s easier” (he meant their access to the cultural assets as well as their freedom and opportunity to get educated and work). Declaring himself as a supporter of a balanced attitude towards the situation that young Polish exiles found themselves in, the author finished his expose with a few practical remarks, aimed at setting the path for those, who still “want to be Polish”:

1) Do not lose touch with Polish culture, read in Polish as much as you can [...] Seek contact with educated and ideational Poles [...] visit a good Polish theatre and go to Polish concerts [...] Take part in Polish social life.

2) If you have such predispositions, choose the humanities as your area of study. [...]

3) Be fundamental Catholics. [...]

4) When getting married – remember that your family has to be Catholic and Polish. Marry Polish Catholic girls. [...] With you children speak Polish only. Avoid accepting foreign citizenship.

Giertych’s proposal was the most concrete out of those presented so far (if we exclude Miłosz’s and Gombrowicz’s instructions concerning literature). What is characteristic, though, is the fact that such an expressively formulated program was presented not by a representative of the students, but of the older generation. Is it not worth noting, that up to that moment the younger generation had not gone beyond the general postulates of making the young stick to Polishness and of putting that task into practice through (also not clearly defined) activities of the organisations in exile?²⁵ What is interesting is that, not having their own detailed program, they argued with

²⁴ J. Giertych, “Odpowiedź na ankietę,” *Życie Akademickie* 1954, No. 5 (50), p. 2.

²⁵ The only exception was the text of H. Cerowski, who stressed the fact that “While living in the society that is foreign to us, we are exposed to the danger of losing our Polish speech and the feeling of belonging to the Polish nation. The young generation is particularly exposed to the danger of losing the Polish language, or we should rather say the youngest generation, born in exile.” As an antidote to those problems he indicated, among others, reading Polish periodicals (in this case mainly *Życie*) and books (among them also *Między dwoma wojnami* by Giertych, who had just presented a very concrete program of his – it should be added here that an advertisement of that book appeared in *Życie Akademickie* No. 14 (22) of June 3, 1951); H. Cerowski, “List-apel,” *Życie Akademickie* 1950, No. 9 [17], p. 6; see, e.g. A. Grabińska, “Czuwaj – harcerki w Londynie – czuwaj,” *Życie Akademickie* 1952, No. 1 (35), p. 7.

that presented by Giertych, not giving any alternatives, but only pointing to the fact that his proposal excluded some people from the Polish community:

Most Poles have been Catholics for generations and will probably be so in the future. However, Mr. Giertych should remember, that there is a significant number of them belonging to other religious denominations or to no at all. If Mr. Giertych had written "Christian," not "Catholic," the case would be less dramatic, but what would he do with Jews and atheists, who still have the right to be considered as good Poles?²⁶

Naturally, the matter of "denationalisation" did not come to an end at that point. The writers publishing in the periodical pointed to subsequent problems which the Polish youth had to face while trying to stick to Polishness. The mentioned by Miłosz and Cerowski question of maintaining a live contact with the Polish language was one of them. Also Antoni Czułowski stressed that, writing:

None at all can deny that our first duty while living among foreigners is to struggle to make the generation not knowing the home country at all, or knowing it only through the vague memories of the first years of their childhood, stick to the Polish speech and Polish culture.²⁷

That issue was also raised by Wanda Piller in her letter sent to the editors, giving in it the reasons why – in her opinion – the young generation of emigrants was losing connection with their homeland.²⁸ The reason for such a situation was, among others, a lack of periodicals in Polish, which could be aimed at the young. Appreciating *Życie Akademickie* and *Droga*, the periodical published by KOW Veritas and aimed at Catholic working youth, she stressed that reading the two monthly periodicals took her about an hour. Hence, she added, she frequently reached for publications in English, which resulted in weakening her connection with the Polish language.

Piller's opinions were argued against by A. Wyszynski,²⁹ who believed that new periodicals in Polish, targeting young readers, would not have a chance to survive,³⁰ because Polish youth did not feel an urge to read such periodicals. At the same time he claimed that the problem was not in the lack of a periodical for young people, but the aversion of young Polish people in becoming acquainted with Polish periodicals in general. And in that and not in reaching for periodicals in English, he saw the reasons for which the Polish youth could get denationalized.³¹

²⁶ A. Czerniawski, "A letter to the editor," *Życie Akademickie* 1954, No. 6 (51), p. 6.

²⁷ A. Czułowski, "Wczoraj i dziś Polskiej Macierzy Szkolnej," *Merkuriusz Polski Nowy ale Dawnemu Wielce Podobny i Życie Akademickie* 1955, No. 7/8 (63/64), p. 17. See also the remarks on the difficulties of teaching Polish described by one of Polish teachers: M.D., "You are – 'Proszę Pani!'," *Życie Akademickie* 1954, No. 12 (46), p. 4.

²⁸ W. Piller, "O pismo dla młodzieży" (A letter to the editor), *Życie Akademickie* 1954, No. 7–8 (52–53), p. 8.

²⁹ A. Wyszynski, "A letter to the Editors," *Życie Akademickie* 1954, No. 11 (56), p. 6.

³⁰ He gave as an example the collapse of the periodical titled *Młodzież*, published from March 1953 to January–February 1954 in London by the Club of Former Students of the Corps of Cadets.

³¹ The editors joined the discussion, providing their commentary to Wyszynski's letter and stressing, that in their opinion *Młodzież* was edited at a very mediocre level (Wyszynski

T. (?) Żółtowska,³² living in Buenos Aires, observed different types of problems. Belonging “to that generation who remembers Poland – ‘our Homeland’ – and the smell of thyme vaguely,” reported the confrontation, in her consciousness, of what was Polish and what was Argentinian. Growing up in the climate of rumba, samba, and tango “once during a ball at a Polish summer camp, for the first time in her life [she] was observing with awe how polonaise and mazurka are danced.” Eating grilled mutton to the sound of the guitars playing “portenos,” serving *przepalanka*³³ to the guests and listening to the gossip of the Polish diaspora, reading the Polish classics among “dilapidated cottages and massive American buildings,” sweating in the tropical climate and resting in comfortable living rooms where a lot was being said “about London, about Anders and about Mackiewicz, about neighbouring relations in the antebellum Poznań region, which our ‘Wólkas’ bordered,” observing the homeless in Rio de Janeiro, who “live on the bananas which stallholders throw out in the afternoon at the marketplace,” herself taking advantage at that time, of the hospitality of “an old-Polish home and [...] excellent Polish cuisine,” Żółtowska comes to the conclusion that after a few years’ stay in South America “my Polishness in the ‘coexistence’ has become ‘criolla.’” The following situation was for her the climax of the intermingling of Polishness and exoticism:

I turned to Barao and I lost my breath. In front of me, there was a black, hysterical crowd with brooms in their hands, haring off, laughing and dancing, in turns. The only white man, who was carried on people’s shoulders, was holding in his hands a poster with the following content [in Polish]: “Beware fools, if you do not elect X-siński for the senator, we will make you dance the way you never have.”³⁴

During the 9th General Meeting of the Delegates of the Association of Polish Students and Graduates in Exile (ZSAPU), Jerzy Kulczycki, the out-

considered it as “very good in almost every respect”), while “a periodical, especially a good one, is created by a group of thinking people, propriety and knowledge of the writers, and a bit of that divine spark, without which the most beautiful intentions fade into a stiff-necked graphomania,” Eds., [“Redakcja nie podziela...”], *Życie Akademickie* 1954, No. 11 (56), p. 6.

³² T. Żółtowska, “Urok egzotyki,” *Merkuriusz Polski Nowy ale Dawnemu Wielce Podobny i Życie Akademickie* 1956, No. 1 (69), p. 6–7. It was probably Ewelina, and the initial provided is most likely a printing error.

³³ *Przepalanka* is a type of vodka made of spirits and caramelised sugar. (Translator’s note)

³⁴ Naturally, not everywhere Poles had similar problems. It is confirmed by the letter sent to the editors in 1960 by a former member of the “Kontynenty” group, Ewa Dietrich, who had moved to Canada (E. Dietrich, “List z Kanady,” *Kontynenty – Nowy Merkuriusz* 1960, No. 13, p. 20). Writing about the specificity of Canadian culture, or rather about Canadian cultural policy, in which one could notice great care taken about preservation of cultural distinctiveness of all coexisting nationalities, showed the reality of Polish Londogro: “How could I possibly return to London, to England, where all the problems have been already solved and for one hundred years people have been trying to get their heads around creating new, artificial problems, to preserve the taste of struggle. When one politician takes a well-formed child out of an incubator, there is immediately a cry that here there is a new saviour of humanity and humanity will have something to worry about again. And Polish London? From a distance, it looks really sad.”

going president, spoke of other reasons for which it was so difficult for the Polish youth to preserve their Polishness.³⁵ Writing about the conditions in which the émigré youth grew up and formed their attitude towards their fatherland, he contrasted the deep-seated emotional attitude towards Polish matters (with an idealised picture of history, first of all) with "the cold and dry objective truth or subjective propaganda, but always supported by rational arguments." The result of the collision of those two pictures of reality in the young people's consciousness was a disappointment. Young people felt cheated by their countrymen and – as a consequence – they grew distant from Polishness or went their own way, in their urge to "free themselves from all the prejudices and myths."

Kulczycki, not negating the fact that part of the Polish youth was getting denationalised (and not only due to the disappointment growing out of the confrontation of the national ideals with other proposals, but rather out of typically selfish motives), proved that such processes were to a large extent natural (taking place in every nation), and so conspicuous only because of the émigré perspective. He also added that the percentage of those people who underwent those processes was not alarming, while the complaints that could be heard were frequently the result of a misunderstanding, in which anybody who possessed independent views which could not be squeezed into the well-worn Polish way of thinking, was perceived as a dissenter who deviated from Polishness.³⁶

In May 1958 the editorial board of *Merkuriusz* prepared another survey on denationalization of young Poles living in exile.³⁷ However, this time the target demographic addressees were not the older generation of refugees, but the young, who were asked to share their views on how living abroad had influenced their personalities, worldview, attitude to religion, selection of profession, interests, etc. The first answers appeared in the vacation issue.³⁸ The respondents were: Andrzej Malkiewicz, Karol Szwarz, Tadeusz Wyrwa, Wiktor Poznański, Wojciech Gniatczyński and Roman Grodzki. They indicated a dissimilarity between emigration conditions and those at home, talked about the deepening feeling of "ideological and mental estrangement," turning attention at the same time to the distance observable between the assumptions of the representatives of western leftist thought and the experience of Polish refugees, and enumerated things which they

³⁵ "Wyjątki ze sprawozdań delegatów na XI Walny Zjazd Z.S.A.P.U.," *Merkuriusz Polski Nowy ale Dawnemu Wielce Podobny i Życie Akademickie* 1956, No. 11 (79), p. 11.

³⁶ At the same time, in the same issue there was a voice which called for supporting initiatives directed at the maintenance of the connection of the young generation with the Polish language and Polish subject matter (even by obligatory participation in summer courses organised by the Council of Free Europe); see: A.W., "Chateau de Pourtalés," *Merkuriusz Polski Nowy ale Dawnemu Wielce Podobny i Życie Akademickie* 1956, No. 11 (79), p. 15–16.

³⁷ "Ankieta *Merkuriusza*," *Merkuriusz Polski – Życie Akademickie* 1958, No. 5 (97), p. 3.

³⁸ "Ankieta *Merkuriusza*," *Merkuriusz Polski – Życie Akademickie* 1958, No. 7/8 (99/100), p. 2–7.

owed to their contacts with the British – among others, loyalty towards the country and the ability to take advantage of democracy.

Andrzej Malkiewicz, the first one to speak, induced emotional elements into his post. Reading it, you could get an impression that he believed in only one, definite system of values, in which all that was Polish, was valuable, and what was foreign, was flat and of little value. In that attitude, he moved as far as actual mythologisation of the elements of national consciousness and culture, which he juxtaposed to the British ones. He wrote, e.g.:

Polish culture was formed in a society that was mainly agrarian, where even cities were aware of the nearness of villages. The big-city British civilisation, greyness of industrial regions and mindless entertainment of the masses living there, frequently give an impression of something freakish, where only the British gift for building human relations saves the situation.

It does not mean that Malkiewicz could not see positive features in the British. Just the opposite, he mentioned “objectivism in analysing their own nation as well as foreign ones” and “social conscience in everyday matters,” “common sense, law and order, and continuation of traditions,” and finally, “putting professionalism ahead of improvisation, maturity of the society governed by law, self-discipline and feeling of justice.” He concluded:

“Travelling broadens your mind” – so does emigration. The directly acquired knowledge about Great Britain, and wider opening one’s eyes to the rest of the world thanks to that country’s mediation, modified to a large extent nationalism of a Polish emigrant from 1945. It has not led him to breaking up with Polishness or to an inferiority complex. [...] An exile was not finding and was not looking for a new mother; over time he started to perceive the hospitable island as a wise and reliable aunt, who requires respect.

Szwarc, unlike Malkiewicz, despite having left Poland at a very similar age of eighteen years,³⁹ declared that he “feels Polish only by origin.”

I am aware – he continued – that I am significantly different from Poles of the older generation – my “strong, short and ready” Polishness has been long defeated and has become something unclear and undefined, like everything that is abandoned and international. [...] My emotional ties with everything that is Polish are still quite strong, but I realise that it does not entitle me to the name of a “live” Pole. [...] It seems to me, that the influence of the English culture expanded my worldview, but hindered the forming of an integrated personality.

Another young emigrant, who had left Poland at the age similar to Szwarc’s, saw the situation differently. Wojciech Gniatczyński wrote:

One thing is certain: living in the West has not formed in me any inferiority complex, although I have revalued those notions, which teachers were trying to inculcate in me in Poland. For example, in the field of literature: having become acquainted with English literature, I have come to the conclusion that there is nothing to be ashamed of as far as Polish poetry and drama are concerned, but the Polish novel would not exist, except for, maybe, three or four books. Polish prose is basically a virgin forest, a white spot on the map. Besides, I have ascertained beyond any doubt that the Polish cause is not in the West considered as the axis of the world politics...

³⁹ Malkiewicz left Poland having completed “high school in clandestine classes during the German occupation.”

Other voices in that matter appeared in the September and October issues. An anonymous author,⁴⁰ whose opinion was published in the former, stated that her staying in the West let her develop a greater sense of duty and conscientiousness, which differentiated the English from her countrymen (a similar opinion was expressed about Swedes by Aleksander Łuczak, who at the same time appealed for the preservation of the Polish romantic spirit⁴¹). She added that she had lost the polocentric point of view, indicated the multiplicity of cultural opportunities which emigration gave, and finally she turned the readers' attention to a larger understanding of what authentic religiousness was, characteristic for inhabitants of Europe and America.⁴² It is obvious that she perceived all those elements positively, without negating the actual achievements of the home country (especially those coming from the inter-war period). Henryk Sawistowski and Aleksander Łuczak, completing this picture, added that their stay in the West accustomed them to living in a normal, free, law-abiding, stable country, while for Jan Andrzej Olszewski it became an opportunity for forming a distanced view of the Polish cause and realising (similarly to the way Gniatczyński did), that in the consciousness of the western societies it did not exist. Among those opinions – as well as among the earlier ones – there were also those which suggested choosing one of the two options: "I will never stop being a Pole" and "I have become English":

I do not suffer from the dualism of homelands. I am interested in the country I live in at present, but I will never break up with my home country and with everything that is Polish. I do not want to be either with those, who have not moved a step forward in their life since 1939 (for me that "dream about a sword" is over) or with those who have been taken in by a car, a fridge or a TV set. I have been and I will be with the Polish Nation and I keep my relationship with it alive.⁴³

It seems to me that I feel more English than Polish. [...] I think it is pointless and impractical for the Polish government and president to exist in exile. Poles should get used to the present political system in Poland. It might turn out for Poland better than the previous one.⁴⁴

Further voices – of Tadeusz Wyrwa and Wiktor Poznański – followed different tracks. Wyrwa declared that his stay in exile served "toughening of character" and although it did not change his attitude to religion, it did modify the way he perceived the clergy. Poznański, on the other hand, claimed that contacts with the locals did not influence the worldview of emigrants (adding that he himself did not want to "have anything in com-

⁴⁰ "Dalsze odpowiedzi na ankietę 'Merkuriusza,'" *Merkuriusz Polski – Życie Akademickie* 1958, No. 9 (101), p. 11–12.

⁴¹ "Odpowiedzi na ankietę," *Merkuriusz Polski – Życie Akademickie* 1958, No. 10 (102), p. 5.

⁴² Łuczak, on the other hand, noticed that Swedes show much more religious tolerance. See also Henryk Sawistowski's opinion ("Odpowiedzi...", p. 6).

⁴³ "Odpowiedzi...", p. 7.

⁴⁴ "Odpowiedzi...", p. 6. See also the discussion of the survey: A. Szynalski, "Ankieta Merkuriusza widziana z nad Wisły," *Merkuriusz Polski – Życie Akademickie* 1958, No. 11 (103), p. 2–3.

mon with the decomposing clique of Polish ‘legalists’ in exile” and he did not consider himself a political refugee, because he had left his country being too young to have been “influenced by it in a noticeable way”), he himself was a declared atheist, and the only change he could observe in him was his increased interest in the problems of Poland. In pointing out advantages, Poznański followed Malkiewicz’s example. He wrote:

I have fallen in love with England, its parliamentary system, order, social justice, respect for individuals and their views. That variety in unity suits me and I think I will stay here.

As we can see, young emigrants were far from ascribing only bad influence to the country of settlement and expressing boundless admiration for anything that was Polish, although regarding that latter area, some of them showed a tendency to mythologise the lost fatherland and identify it symbolically with Paradise lost.⁴⁵ What is important is that, both surveys – separated by only four years – were directed at the representatives of different refugee environments, and proved that neither the young, nor the old (at least those, who decided to express their opinions in the London periodical) perceived emigration as a condition unambiguously tragic. Just the opposite – out of all the quoted opinions it appears irrefutably that emigration could broaden one’s mind the way that travel in proverbs can, while properly managing one’s own potential (including Polishness), combined with an ability to take opportunities, which settling down in Great Britain and other western countries gave, might bring many interesting and practical effects.

In the last year of the periodical’s existence, seven years after conducting the survey aimed at students and young people, *Kontynenty* initiated the third discussion devoted to the issue of denationalisation of the émigré youth.⁴⁶ That time the focus was not on the representatives of political emigration *sensu stricto*, but on the next generation of refugees – the young people, who were born in exile. They were asked to share with the readers their views on the difficulties which Poles living in Great Britain had to face while bringing up children in the spirit of Polishness. First of all, “a vision of some sort of ‘a country in exile’” was rejected and it was ascertained that in its place “there can only be homeland – in a sense of belonging to Polish customs, feeling attached to Poland, interested in it, expressing willingness to help it, wherever possible.” The following questions were asked:

But how can such a homeland of custom, language, attachment survive – in England, France, Australia, Canada, in the United States? [...] We are concerned about young people educated at foreign schools and about children, who are getting educated at foreign educational centres. What will be their attitude to the notion of Homeland? [...] we believe that the matter should be illuminated sincerely and without hypocrisy, without patriotic clichés, which still circulate in the émigré circles.

Paying attention to the rate at which the processes of denationalization was taking place among the Polish youth, the question was posed whether

⁴⁵ For such a standpoint, see, among others, W. Wyskiel, op. cit., p. 7–51.

⁴⁶ “O tzw. wynaradawianiu się – prawda czy obłuda?” *Kontynenty* 1965, No. 76, p. 1.

the introduced forms of countermeasures – Polish schools, courses, camps (also visiting Poland) served the purpose and helped the Polish youth stick to Polishness. It was added that:

It seems that the old notion of so-called denationalisation is not of value today: in the face of western Europe unifying itself, the growing interdependence of countries, with the term interdependence used in place of former independence, the task of bringing up a new Pole is different. He should first of all be a European: Europe should be his homeland, but that does not exclude his feeling of belonging to Polish customs and Polish culture. The more educated young Poles are there in the countries of the world, thinking in European categories and remembering always to help their remote fatherland – the better for Poland. [the author's emphasis]

After indication of such a wide scope of problems, the subsequent issues of the periodical included opinions expressed by young people who wanted to share their standpoint in this respect⁴⁷ as well as by their parents;⁴⁸ opinions – it should be added – to a large extent diversified. Many of them were coloured by sentiment and longing for the country lost or completely unknown, which appeared to them in bright, warm colours, frequently taking up a completely idealised form.⁴⁹ Others contained words of critique addressed to those people and institutions that tried to impose Polishness by force on the Polish youth in exile, reaching for measures ("patriotic clichés, songs and poems, spoiling the time free from school"), which could only "deter them from Polishness":

Isn't it time to stop boasting among children about "the bleeding, open wounds," "the country without Quisling," "the glory of the Polish arms" and "an honourable death" – those slogans, whose empty pathos is unbearable nowadays? [...] That non-intelligent patriotism reveals itself in exaltation and distortion of the truth.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ F. Śmieja, "Pałac Kultury i Jasna Góra," *Kontynenty* 1965, No. 78, p. 1–3; "Czy dzieci polskie wynaradawiają się? (VII)," *Kontynenty* 1965, No. 83, p. 6–7 (one more opinion expressed in English); "Czy dzieci polskie wynaradawiają się? (VIII)," *Kontynenty* 1965, No. 84, p. 11; "Czy dzieci polskie wynaradawiają się? (IX)," *Kontynenty* 1966, No. 85–86, p. 10.

⁴⁸ "Czy dzieci polskie wynaradawiają się? (II). Rodzice piszą," *Kontynenty* 1965, No. 79–80, p. 4–7; "Czy dzieci polskie wynaradawiają się? (III)," *Kontynenty* 1965, No. 81, p. 1–4; "Czy dzieci polskie wynaradawiają się? (IV)," *Kontynenty* 1965, No. 82, p. 5–7.

One of the fathers taking part in the discussion wondered what denationalisation, in fact, was: "Should we consider as a criterion of denationalisation – as some maximalists, especially those childless ones, want to – the phenomenon common in England that Polish children speak to each other in English? Or is a proof of denationalisation the fact that our teenagers cannot be seen at the celebrations 'in honour of'? [...] should the ridiculing of national drolleries, which in exile increase, be considered as denationalization, or maybe just it appears more conspicuous against the foreign background? Can our children be critical about the charge at Rokitna or 'charges with a lance against German tanks'?", "Czy dzieci polskie wynaradawiają się? (III)," *Kontynenty* 1965, No. 81, p. 4.

⁴⁹ Florian Śmieja warned participants of the discussion against the danger of presenting an idealised vision of the country; see: F. Śmieja, "Pałac Kultury i Jasna Góra," *Kontynenty* 1965, No. 78, p. 1.

⁵⁰ "Czy dzieci polskie wynaradawiają się? (II). Rodzice piszą," *Kontynenty* 1965, No. 79–80, p. 4 – an opinion of Mother I. See: "Czy dzieci polskie wynaradawiają się (III)," *Kontynenty* 1965, No. 81, p. 2–3 – an opinion of Father I and Father II and "Czy dzieci polskie

What should be done, then? One of the mothers put it straightforwardly: “The only thing parents are obliged to do is to give their children options to choose from, because denationalisation – just as the attitude to religion – is only the matter of their decision.”⁵¹ One of the fathers suggested parents should take an active role in the English community, because their children were interested in this, much more than in Polish matters, in “the way their parents, having decided to live outside Poland, to get along in the English environment, and to judge them by it,” and together with them – their Polishness.⁵² If parents had an inferiority complex – spoke broken English, glorified everything that was Polish, despised the locals, ignored the local forms and customs, or on the contrary: proved “the superiority of the English culture,” did not want to burden their children with the baggage of Polishness – then there was no way those children could be made to hold on to Polishness.⁵³

The surveys conducted by the London monthly concerning denationalisation proved that the process glided more smoothly from generation to generation and – if we can say so – more naturally. While for the first group of interviewees, writers and people from the older generation, Polishness was valuable and hence worth the effort of saving, the younger generation and that which was born after the war and took part in the discussion a few years later, had a far more distant approach to the problem, leaning towards loosening of their ties with the Polish nation, if not completely, then partially.⁵⁴

Naturally, the journalists of *Życie Akademickie*, *Merkuriusz* and *Kontynenty* never approved of that process and never considered that to be the model of behaviour, but they were far from tearing their hair out over it. They rather tried to direct the discussion onto the track of factual considerations, aimed at an indication of counter-measures, which would make the process of the Polish youth’s withdrawal from Polishness impossible, or at least slow it down. Looking for some ways out, they turned towards culture, which Bogdan Czaykowski was writing about as early as in 1956:

That field possesses immense possibilities and should be the most important point in the further work of the Association. The most important one, since an interesting programme of cultural work of the Association not only can be the most effective way to prevent the youth’s

wynaradawiają się (IX),” *Kontynenty* 1966, No. 85-86, p. 10 – an opinion of Girl II. At the same time, as it appears from the opinion of Boy I (“Czy dzieci polskie wynaradawiają się (VII),” *Kontynenty* 1965, No. 83, p. 6), such activities did not have to bring negative effects – on the contrary, they could contribute to bringing up a child in the spirit of Polishness.

⁵¹ “Czy dzieci polskie wynaradawiają się? (II). Rodzice piszą,” *Kontynenty* 1965, No. 79-80, p. 6 – an opinion of Mother II.

⁵² “Czy dzieci polskie wynaradawiają się (III),” *Kontynenty* 1965, No. 81, p. 3 – an opinion of Father I.

⁵³ “Czy dzieci polskie wynaradawiają się (III),” *Kontynenty* 1965, No. 81, p. 4 – an opinion of Father II, “Czy dzieci polskie wynaradawiają się (IV),” *Kontynenty* 1965, No. 82, p. 7 – an opinion of Father III.

⁵⁴ It should be added that while in the generation that matured before World War II the described here phenomenon was perceived in the categories of betrayal of the home country, the youngest ones were not capable of seeing the problem from such a perspective.

denationalization, but is also valuable itself, especially if we take into consideration the fact that most of the young émigrés have completed or continue technical studies. Organisation of lectures does not exhaust the options. Of course, lectures, too. But why not also exhibitions of painting, sculpture, photography, or architecture of the young? [...] Couldn't we organise clubs of young historians, literature students, film or music lovers, etc., etc.?⁵⁵

Also in the later years – when the periodical broke up its cooperation with ZSAPU – that idea was not forgotten. To illustrate that, it is sufficient to recall one of the texts published by the end of 1960, which included the following information:

Our great ambition is to help the development of the Polish intellectual movement, especially among the young generation of emigrants, who gained their education in the West. For ourselves, we have one more great ambition: not to succumb to demagoguery, wherever it comes from, not to give in to set patterns and develop the attitude of free people [...]"⁵⁶

Florian Śmieja expressed his opinion in a similar vein in February of the following year:

At present the most urgent task of ours is to maintain the intellectual ferment, to cultivate all manifestations of intellectual life among our peers, help them in referring to the native culture, find the lost ones and notice their output among the foreign.⁵⁷

Hence, the main attraction for the young was cultural activity – it was assigned the most powerful effectiveness, the greatest hopes were placed in it. The periodical, inscribing itself, as far as it was possible, into that program, was trying to put into practice the postulates it had announced, making it possible for – among others – the Polish youth in exile to maintain a living bond with the Polish nation and typically Polish matters. One of the most interesting examples of such an action aimed at maintaining the bond was in 1956 attaching to *Merkuriusz* an art supplement, in which Marian Kratochwil's *Szkicownik Kresowy* [Eastern Borderlands Sketchbook] was reproduced. Beginning its publication, the editorial board stated the following:

The older generation of émigrés frequently accuses the younger one of a lack of interest in all that we have left behind in time and space: the lakes of Vilnius, the Sandomierz region orchards, the mud of Polesie, or the wheat of Podole. *Merkuriusz* seemingly can provide material for such complaints. Indeed, we do not print in it any "memoirs from the country of childhood." [...] Beginning to publish the art supplement [...] we would like to express our attachment to the Eastern Borderlands in a way that would be differently, but useful [...] The Sketchbook is an answer to those, who think that the young generation forgets about the Eastern Borderlands.⁵⁸ They remember and want to express that memory in a way – as it seems to us – more sustainable than the smoke of futile resolutions and declarations.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ B. Czajkowski, "Przed XI Walnym Zjazdem ZSAPU," *Merkuriusz Polski Nowy ale Dawnemu Wielce Podobny i Życie Akademickie* 1956, No. 8/9 (76/77), p. 17–18.

⁵⁶ "Płochliwa życzliwość" [in the *Notes* column], *Kontynenty – Nowy Merkuriusz* 1960, No. 21–22, p. 20.

⁵⁷ F. Śmieja, "W trosce o młodą inteligencję," *Kontynenty – Nowy Merkuriusz* 1961, No. 26, p. 2–3.

⁵⁸ See. X., "Przechadzki po polskim Londynie," *Życie Akademickie* 1951, No. 11 (19), p. 6.

⁵⁹ See also Editorial Board, ["Drogi Czytelniku..."], *Merkuriusz Polski Nowy ale Dawnemu Wielce Podobny i Życie Akademickie* 1956, No. 4 (72), p. 1.

The reproductions continued to appear in the periodical for half a year, and subsequently *Szkicownik* got published in a book form,⁶⁰ which did not mean that such forms of cultural activity, whose aim was to get the youngest refugee generation acquainted with the achievements of their own nation, were entirely abandoned.

* * *

As it has been mentioned earlier, the discourse on the issue of denationalisation of the young generation dominated debates over Polishness found in the London periodical. It does not mean that the discussions were limited to that aspect of the problem only. Just the opposite – they went in at least two other directions: the category of patriotism and Polish national vices.

In April 1964 in *Kontynenty* a record of a discussion devoted to the former of the issues appeared.⁶¹ The participants were: Maria Badowicz, Halina Brodzińska, Bohdan Brodziński, Anna Frenkiel, Stanisław Frenkiel, Florian Śmieja, Bolesław Sulik and Karol Szwarc. The debaters were trying – which should be stressed – to define the term itself. Maria Badowicz, who mentioned that patriotism was not synonymous with nationalism, said that it was rather “a feeling of belonging and a certain loyalty to the national group, broadly understood as a culture group.” That belonging was not supposed to mean a passive attitude – on the contrary, a patriot “fights with what he considers as wrong in his group and his nation, and tries to propagate, what he considers as good.” For Stanisław Frenkiel patriotism “is being ready to subordinate one’s own interest to that of a larger group.” Halina Brodzińska shared that view, Bohdan Brodziński added that the matter of patriotism could not be considered separately from the love felt not only for “a group of people, but for a whole number of elements connected with a given country, such as the landscape, customs, culture, etc.”

Brodziński added that patriotism could be considered in two variations – passive and aggressive. The latter can be encountered in a situation when a patriot was trying to struggle with his own inferiority complex and prove to other nations that he was equal to them, or even superior. In such a situation, however – as he proved – it was no longer patriotism, but a “compensation reaction.” Anna Frenkiel added that between the passive and aggressive variants there were multiple intermediate shades of patriotism, which could not be unequivocally classified and evaluated. “Aggressiveness – she said – not always means hostility. Aggression is simply an active

⁶⁰ M. Kratochwil, *Szkicownik kresowy*, ed. M. Paszkiewicz, London: Zrzeszenie Studentów i Absolwentów Polskich na Uchodźstwie, 1958.

⁶¹ “Dyskusja o patriotyzmie,” *Kontynenty* 1964, No. 64, pp. 20–24. It is worth remembering that it was Andrzej Malkiewicz who was interested in that issue as well, but unlike the disputers mentioned below, he situated “patriotism” basically only at the level of views and political actions.

standpoint [...]” At the same time, however – she stressed – patriotism had to be controlled because otherwise it could “release in a man a number of inappropriate reactions.”

Another approach was represented by Florian Śmieja, who was wondering if at the moment when Europe was uniting and borders were gradually disappearing, the situation would not force European nations to redefine the term “patriotism.” He noticed that its understanding so far was strictly connected with the borders and the territory of the country (physical elements), while at present it moved towards “the defence of spiritual elements” (language, culture). Stanisław Frenkiel agreed with those remarks and stated that in the 20th century individual states were losing their significance, but the importance of culture was increasing, and its defence in the case of danger, and grounding it and continuing in peaceful conditions constitute the “proper moral patriotism.” Brodziński, on the other hand, did not agree with that concept entirely, believing that “the factor which actually creates the psychological climate of patriotism is the threat of some external danger.”

Another definition of the notion in question was provided by Anna Frenkiel, who claimed that “[p]atriotism is a collective emotion. [...] it is a spontaneous feeling, and such, which we are a bit ashamed of because we are lost in it as individuals.” Badowicz and Brodziński argued with that, believing that “we should not agree to any superiority of loyalty relations with the fatherland.” Also Frenkiel protested against the perception of patriotism only in the context of emotions; for him a patriotic attitude was also connected with readiness to act.

The disagreement as far as the definition of patriotism is concerned did not, of course, prevent further discussion. However, the periodical was closed before the discussion over that could reappear. Nevertheless, the issue of Polish national vices kept appearing in the periodical from time to time.⁶² Rarely whole articles were devoted to them,⁶³ usually they were commented on at the margins of the texts devoted to other issues. One of Andrzej Wnęk’s articles can be used as an example, in which he was considering the tasks and aims of emigrants and indicating the necessity to take up constructive criticism, and in that context, he mentioned the hostility with which it was usually encountered:

It is an awkward intermingling of magnanimity, being soft-hearted with no firmness and consistency in evaluation of political events (it is the other way round in the evaluation of social phenomena and private life) together with the deeply rooted romantic faith in mirages and eastern-style subservient admiration of the “leaders” of the nation – these are,

⁶² See the referred to earlier Ławrynowicz’s text concerning the social degradation taking place in exile or B. Siedlecki’s text discussing the way clients are treated in Polish émigré institutions.

⁶³ It does not mean that such situations did not take place; see, e.g. Świętosław Nawakowski [Stalowy Kolega], “Kochane Koleżanki, Kochani Koledzy!,” *Życie Akademickie* 1951, No. 14 (22), p. 3; Ewa Gieratowa, “O listopisaniu zapiski emigracyjnej,” *Kontynenty* 1962, No. 45.

to cut it short, the phenomena responsible for the national reluctance, detestation of honest criticism, of a deep analysis of the eternal tragedy of the Polish state.

The “official” history of Poland has always been written through huge rose-tinted spectacles. Although it has nothing to do with the facts, contemporary history is being written in the same, constantly whitewashed form. The commonly existing tendency, usually imposed by those in power, forbids not only “demythologizing” of the distant past, but it also negates the rights to an evaluation of the contemporary facts that would be different from those officially accepted. The heralds of the Polish cause, soaked with demagoguery, order either “positive criticism” or silence according to the principle that “it is better to be silent than have nothing ‘positive’ to say.”⁶⁴

As we can easily guess, that text was addressed mainly to the representatives of the older generation. It does not mean that the students did not see their own vices. Gustaw Radwański⁶⁵ accused the émigré youth of “having no internal discipline,”⁶⁶ shortcomings in education, ghettoization, excessive interest in erotic relationships, poor intellectual, cultural and social life, not sufficient knowledge about and interest in Poland, excessive saturation with émigré fears and phobias, etc. The list was extended by Bohdan Watrasiewicz,⁶⁷ who pointed out that Polish students living in England were additionally disadvantaged because when they showed an urge to study, they were ridiculed by their friends, they lacked aspiration and also Polish teachers were not too conscientious.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ A. Wnęk, “W obronie emigracji politycznej,” *Merkuriusz Polski – Życie Akademickie* 1958, No. 1/2 (93/94), p. 16.

⁶⁵ G. Radwański, “Patrzac z boku,” *Merkuriusz Polski – Życie Akademickie* 1958, No. 3 (95), p. 14–16.

⁶⁶ Radwański described it as: “Sleeping till noon, skipping lectures and examinations, inability to force oneself to study, frequently playing cards all night long – these are the phenomena unobserved among English schools students, while well known among their friends from Polish schools.”

⁶⁷ B. Watrasiewicz, “Post-Mortem,” *Merkuriusz Polski – Życie Akademickie* 1958, No. 5 (97), p. 15–16.

⁶⁸ B. Indyk, the secretary of the Club of the Graduates of Polish Schools in Great Britain argued with these articles (B. Indyk, “De profundis,” *Merkuriusz Polski – Życie Akademickie* 1958, No. 9 (101), p. 15–16), listing numerous achievements of the graduates of Polish émigré schools and also completed the two articles with a lot of information, which they were lacking, and whose absence made the texts – which, however, to some extent were true – (according to Indyk) an expression of a one-sided observation of the phenomena described, losing proportion, moderation and good manners. Responding to those allegations, Gustaw Radwański (G. Radwański, “Nil desperandum!,” *Merkuriusz Polski – Życie Akademickie* 1958, No. 11 (103), pp. 20–21) stressed that his article was written on the basis of the data collected during his observations of a hundred of young Poles gathered in London, hence his remarks could not refer to all young emigrants staying in Great Britain. He also added that the aim of his article was not to attack the Polish education system, but to turn the readers’ attention to the existing problems, while Indyk’s article was an expression of ill will and misunderstanding of the author’s intentions. It should be noted that in the same issue a letter of one of the readers was published, whose author defended Radwański. See: E. Lipiński, “A letter to the Editors,” *Merkuriusz Polski – Życie Akademickie* 1958, No. 11 (103), p. 22. See additionally B. Watrasiewicz, “A letter to the Editors,” *Merkuriusz Polski – Życie Akademickie* 1958, nr 10 (102), p. 16.

Also Bohdan Brodziński participated in the discussion on the Polish character. He did that as a commentary to his text discussing the history and functioning of the Polish YMCA.⁶⁹ He pointed out that it was the only emigrant social organisation in whose history we could not find any scandal (of defrauding some funds, etc.), and the only one which "serves the society, not its presidents." Brodziński stated that it was not a common phenomenon, and explained its existence by the YMCA's dependence on the international management. Indicating its specificity he described also quite a surprising reaction of émigré environments to one's membership in the organisation.⁷⁰ He also mentioned weaknesses of the Polish YMCA – he claimed that its programme was rather bland, the reason for which he found in, among others, the fact that the organisation was constantly "manoeuvring between the conflicted groups," and avoided "everything that could offend the more important fractions, before every initiative it sound[ed] out the Council of Three, and the Castle, not to mention the *Dziennik*."

Describing the specificity of the YMCA Brodziński pondered upon the reasons for that phenomenon:

The fact that the Polish YMCA has not declined the way other Polish organisations have, or like the English YMCA, results from a simple fact, but completely not understood by emigrants. Polish emigrants – those with English passports as well as with those of the regime and those without passports as well, born in Poland or England, or South Rhodesia, speaking English only or bilingual – they are part of British society. That superior organisation takes care of their education, television programme and garbage disposal, and collects taxes from them. Within the framework of that organisation they work and fulfil all their normal life functions. Polishness is a hobby for them. Here lies the criterion of differentiation, giving hints to the potential Polish activists at the grass roots. All the actions organised by Polish subcultures, divers, and liberals, failed and will fail. You cannot divide a relatively small group and expect that the created sub-groups will become organisations capable of independent development.

He also stressed the significance of the YMCA for spreading Polishness – with no Polish Club or Youth Club⁷¹ it was the only organisation that was left:

Its strength is Polishness. Life is brought into that organisation by a group of young people dancing Polish dances. Those youngsters speak Polish or not, but for the time being they show interest in the exotic country of their ancestors.⁷²

⁶⁹ B. Brodziński, "Uwagi niepraktyczne," *Kontynenty* 1964, No. 61–62, p. 2–5.

⁷⁰ "Last year eleven boys were expelled from the scouting organisation for taking part in YMCA camps."

⁷¹ The idea to create both, or at least one of those institutions appeared regularly for years in the students' press.

⁷² Sometimes, which Brodziński is not writing directly about, that interest was exhausted at this point – in the London periodical there were sometimes texts which expressed gladness that, e.g. a dancing party was successful, organisation of which was considered as a sign of interest young people showed in the Polish cause. See, e.g. a report on the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the International Students' Club in Munich (June 1956) – A student from Munich, "Korespondencja z Monachium," *Merkuriusz Polski Nowy ale Dawnemu Wielce Podobny i Życie Akademickie* 1956, No. 8/9 (76/77), p. 20–21.

The problem, however, is that the YMCA in trying to satisfy the expectations and ambitions of all, satisfied nobody's; trying to satisfy different needs, it did not satisfy the most important one – of Polishness. It was that need which – according to Brodziński – should have become the program which would have the power to attract not only young people.⁷³ A well-organised institution could have become invaluable. The problem, however, is that

People who live on Polishness are an obstacle. It sounds like one more paradox, but again it is an easily verifiable fact. People living on Polishness, so-called leaders, kill any interest in Polishness. It is fully justified psychologically: a man living on Polishness is fed up with it and bored, he is looking for an escape into other hobbies. That atmosphere radiates onto his environment. In Polish schools, children of the employees of Free Europe or members of Two Councils were represented to the minimal degree. Among the children the percentage of those who cannot speak Polish is astonishing.⁷⁴

* * *

The texts referred to above, focusing on the issues connected with the notions of patriotism, national vices and, first of all, denationalisation of the young generation of emigrants, share one, significant shortcoming. It is the lack of the definition of “Polishness,” around which the topics discussed focus. The quoted texts show, that young journalists, while formulating the general postulate of sticking to Polishness, did not want (could not? were not able to?) answer the question what actually constituted that very Polishness, what elements co-created it, which spheres it touched. While in the case of patriotism some attempts to define it had been taken by them, naming national vices and pointing out the problem of denationalization of subsequent exiled generations seemed not to be a major problem, the category of Polishness was not described by them, not even partially. The subsequent issues of the periodical – a Polish one and focused on Polish matters – did not bring in that respect, any agreements. Even Bolesław Sulik's⁷⁵ speech, being an appeal for a proper definition of the concepts of “independence” and “*polonijność*,”⁷⁶ which – in his opinion – were frequently overused in emigrant disputes,⁷⁷ did not change the status quo.

⁷³ “The program is designed for people who consider Polishness as a hobby, not a white horse. An effective program would have to break drastically with the existing conventions from the period of ‘the émigré state.’”

⁷⁴ Interestingly enough, Brodziński considered as equally harmful the extension of the Polish church in London – he was wondering if buying subsequent churches made any sense (“It does not seem reasonable to buy numerous buildings, a few thousand pounds each, to use them for one hour a week”), if it was logical (“Even the very ‘usage’ of those places is unclear. Is it really necessary to pray in a Polish church? Do we actually talk to God in any specific language?”), and finally if it would help the Polish cause – in his opinion buying new churches “marks the beginning [...] of an era of parochialism, after which there will be nothing left.”

⁷⁵ B. Sulik, “Słowa... słowa,” *Kontynenty – Nowy Merkuriusz* 1960, No. 18/19, p. 3–4.

⁷⁶ “*Polonijność*” is an abstract noun formed from the word “Polonia,” the term used in Polish with reference to the Polish diaspora. (Translator's note)

⁷⁷ Diagnosing the problem, the author indicated the way out of the situation – agreeing on common definitions, which would bring back to those words their natural, primary sense (“will desecralize” independence and appreciate “*polonijność*”).

It should be concluded, then, that "Polishness" was for the young people publishing the periodical in London in the 1950s and 1960s something indefinable, or – maybe more – not requiring a definition. The status of this word and the category behind it was comparable in that perspective to many others, marking the circle of emigrant imponderabilia, such as homeland, independence or freedom. We could say that the authors taking turns to participate in the discussion and not referring to that definition, assumed that all the readers of their texts understood under the term Polishness (similarly to others mentioned herein) a more or less similar set of phenomena, and possible minor differences could not disturb the course of the discussion or introduce significant discords. Hence, the discussion around that issue focused on defining not "what," but "how" to protect, save and preserve it, and how to pass it onto the next generations.

Maybe in that undefinable category of "Polishness," appearing so frequently in the discussions published in the London periodical, there is the source of a shortcoming, or in fact a lack of a program, which could serve the purpose of passing that national quality onto the next generations. The fact that they limited themselves to the slogans encouraging the readers to increase their efforts aimed at slowing down the processes of denationalization, without pointing out any specific solutions (except for intensification of work within the cultural sphere), which could be introduced through institutional or private activity, resulted in those appeals becoming the only evidence of the young people's interest in that issue.

Or maybe, as Wojciech Wyskiel⁷⁸ was writing, the transformations taking place within the ways of perceiving the cultural spaces of the nations remaining under the influence of the Mediterranean culture made those young, educated emigrants, knowing foreign languages, feel not so much lost in the western countries, as it initially seemed. Being "outside Poland," they were in fact still "at home," because they remained in the circle of the culture they grew up in. Maybe in that way we can explain the declaration made by Andrzej Busza in 1960:

Poland for us is an abstraction. Actually, both present Poland, and that antebellum one seem equally unreal. We are left with the narrow emigrant world, in which we suffocate, and England, where we have not rooted ourselves. Besides, most of us spent our childhood travelling from one country to another. We have encountered different races and nations, different mentalities, different cultures, different landscapes. We feel more connected to the human community than understand the urge for Polish distinctiveness. Hence, we generalise our experience and problems. General human problems are the most significant to us.

Instead of constant probing of the Polish soul, we are interested in metaphysics, psychology, morality, in the broad, Conradian understanding of the term. We would like to find some sense in the chaos that surrounds us. We are searching for positive values in the confusion of criteria and evaluations. We would like to take a standpoint and find a concrete way of dealing with the world, over which a universal cataclysm is hanging. Maybe for

⁷⁸ W. Wyskiel, *op. cit.*

some people, our works give an impression of being deprived of ideology, but in fact we are engaged – deeply – but in the broad, generally human, sense.

Poland and Polishness are in the background.⁷⁹

However, even when pushed into that background, it did not remain without significance. Confirmed or negated, cultivated or revalued, accepted or rejected, it was constantly present, continuously engaging and intriguing, forcing young emigrants to confirm, again and again, or to expand (sometimes to introduce minor modifications or shifts) the standpoint taken.⁸⁰ Hence, a few years before Busza's declaration, the editorial board expressing their opinion on the matter, declared: "Being Poles, whose tasks are abroad, we would like to maintain a live connection with the nation,"⁸¹ and a year later they added: "Some of the writers in our Country, claim that Poland lies upon the Vistula river. Emigrants answer that it lies in one's heart. We think that Poland is located in Europe and that our main task is to make it remain there."⁸²

Translated by Elżbieta Rokosz

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⁷⁹ "Różnice między pokoleniami w literaturze na emigracji," *Kontynenty – Nowy Merkuriusz* 1960, No. 18/19, p. 10.

⁸⁰ Although the views of the young described above were far from exhausting the subject and did not unambiguously define their attitude to the complex of the phenomena constituting Polishness, it was difficult for them to agree completely with J. Sikora's opinion, who, noticing that: "[t]he 'Kontynenty' group analysed the problems of so-called Polishness mainly from the cultural, mental, and national character side. And they were to a significant degree right," added: "[h]owever, both in their essays and in poetry they could not thoroughly enough describe and revise 'Polishness'. That description was too superficial, not insightful enough. Besides, they were too one-sidedly, with passion, criticising the past and the native traditions, not taking into consideration their good side. They wanted to be so 'cosmopolitan' [?!] and 'modern' [?!]"; J. Sikora, "Londyńska grupa literacka „Merkuriusza” i „Kontynentów” wobec stereotypów polskości," in: *Siedem granic, osiem kultur i Europa*, ed. B. Gołębiowski, Łomża: "Stopka", 2001, p. 239. See also: P. Kądziela, "O publicystyce londyńskich 'Kontynentów'," in: *Myśl polityczna na wygnaniu. Publicyści i politycy polskiej emigracji powojennej*, edited by A. Friszke, Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 1995, p. 197.

⁸¹ Editorial Board, "Od Redakcji," *Merkuriusz Polski – Życie Akademickie* 1957, No. 1/2 (81/82), p. 1.

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