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East European public intellectuals as academic sojourners: Analysing the deep stories in the life narratives of Ágnes Heller and Andrzej Walicki

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Abstract

Employing the tools of biographical sociology, this paper analyses the life narratives of two East European intellectuals: Hungarian-born Ágnes Heller and Polish-born Andrzej Walicki. Both scholars, whose trajectories display striking parallels, emigrated first to Australia and then to the United States, returning only in old age to their countries of origin. Their academic paths are interpreted through the concept of the 'deep story', understood as the emotional core of a worldview. Although Heller and Walicki left for different reasons, both were academic sojourners – individuals who longed for their homelands, never fully integrated into the university cultures of the receiving countries, and grappled with cultural contact and political entanglements beyond academia. This paper contributes to intellectual history by examining homegrown academic success, expulsion, attempts at 'homemaking' abroad, and eventual return, while also offering insight into humanities careers that remain deeply rooted in national cultures and embedded within broader intellectual traditions.

Keywords

public intellectuals, highly skilled migrants, deep story, biographical sociology, academic sojourners

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Introduction

This paper aims to compare the biographies of two public intellectuals from Eastern Europe to address the broader question of how migration under duress shapes the careers of foreign-born professors in the humanities. In doing so, the study considers three key dimensions: spatial attachment, participation in scholarly communities, and engagement with an intellectual legacy, which may entail political action.

This paper therefore shifts the focus from the general question of how highly skilled migrants differ from less educated groups to how the lived experiences of a very specific segment – philosophy professors – are shaped by their positions in both academic and political fields. Owing to their distinctive composition of capitals, such scholars often function as public intellectuals. Following Raymond Williams, they may be seen as 'direct producers in the sphere of ideology and culture', distinct from those whose intellectual work is primarily administrative or repetitive (Williams, 1985: 170).

Against this backdrop, the paper examines two figures: Ágnes Heller, a Hungarian émigré philosopher, and Andrzej Walicki, a Polish émigré historian and philosopher. Both migrated in a similar period, followed comparable trajectories – from Eastern Europe to Australia, then to the United States, and finally back home late in life – shared intellectual circles and even knew each other personally. Their life paths provide a valuable entry point into the social world of foreign-born public intellectuals, who – unlike many Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) professionals – 'mobilize their expertise in addressing public issues of societal or political significance' (Palmer, 2023: 33).

We suggest that both Heller's 'healthy phenomenological regard for the concrete detail' (Wolin, 1987: 296) and Walicki's interest in the intersection of Polish and Russian thought are intrinsically linked to their lived experiences. The interdisciplinary nature of their work – bridging philosophy and historical sociology – cannot be solely attributed to their institutional affiliations across departments; it also reflects a heightened reflexivity shaped by their mobility. In Heller's case, this is evident in a phenomenological orientation that is 'interested in fleshing out the essential structures of human life in its everydayness' (Wolin, 1987: 298). Similarly, Walicki's engagement with Romantic philosophy is intertwined with his analyses of contemporary political realities.

Methodologically, this study draws on biographical sociology and autobiographical accounts, a choice motivated by the limitations of large-scale quantitative analyses for capturing the personal migration experiences of intellectuals. This approach aligns with the Chicago School's postulate that research should remain attentive to the perspectives of migrants (Eilbaum, 2022), enabling us to revisit the classical, albeit less commonly employed, concept of 'sojourners' (Eilbaum, 2022; Siu, 1952) within the context of analysing the 'deep stories' (Hochschild, 2016) conveyed through their autobiographical narratives.

Theoretical framework

This paper compares two foreign-born academics who emigrated from Central and Eastern Europe to Australia, subsequently relocated to the United States and eventually returned to their home countries. The term 'exile', typically used to describe those who

were forced to leave their homeland, accurately characterises Ágnes Heller's situation; however, Walicki's circumstances are more ambiguous. He did not leave under direct political duress but amid growing ideological division, and he always retained the option of return. While members of the Budapest School (Köves, 1995; Palonen, 2018; Qilin, 2008) and many Polish intellectuals – including Leszek Kołakowski and several Jewish scholars such as Zygmunt Bauman (Beilharz, 2000; Palmer, 2023; Wagner, 2020) and Bronisław Baczko (Bucholc, 2017) – were effectively exiled, Walicki's experience cannot be categorically described as such, despite the fact that Martial Law later facilitated his relocation to Australia. His departure was indeed connected to the political climate, though this relationship is less straightforward, as will be discussed later. Thus, while Heller can be considered a political refugee in the strict sense (Wagner-Saffray, 2020), Walicki remains a migrant, even if his migration was influenced – though not definitely determined – by the prevailing political situation.

A less frequently used but analytically significant concept is Paul Siu's notion of the 'sojourner', developed within a markedly different ethnic and historical context.[1] Siu, a student of Ernest Burgess at the Chicago School, described the sojourner as an individual who 'clings to the cultural heritage of his own ethnic group and tends to live in isolation, hindering his assimilation' (Siu, 1952: 34), and who 'dreamed about America, but dreamed even more about returning home' (Siu, 1952: 35). For such migrants, America represented a transitional phase rather than a final destination – a job, not a career. Although the term was initially coined to describe Chinese laundry workers in Chicago, Siu posited that the concept also applies to other mobile professionals, including diplomats, missionaries, and academics abroad. Unlike Robert Park's 'marginal man', who is torn between two worlds, the sojourner is not in a state of transition but rather in a state of waiting to return. As Eilbaum (2022: 466) notes, 'Park's marginal man captured the life-long struggle to make a new home', whereas 'Siu's sojourner captured the lifelong struggle to go back'.

The attitudes of sojourners, as theorised by Siu, stand in contrast to two widely used but overly simplistic metaphors: the 'melting pot', which emphasises assimilation while also 'expanding national identity to be inclusive of different ethnicities and the values they bring with them' (Berray, 2019: 143), and the 'salad bowl', which 'preserves the unique identities of individuals that would otherwise be lost to assimilation' (Berray, 2019: 143). A key limitation of the melting pot metaphor is its disregard for the local contexts that shape interactions between groups (Berray, 2019: 145), a point that is illustrated clearly in the biographies of sojourners. Similarly, the salad bowl metaphor privileges the collective 'dish' over the individual 'ingredients', thereby diverting attention from migrants' biographical experiences towards a macro-level view of the host society. While these models may reflect the trajectories of many STEM academics (Latour and Woolgar, 1986; Schill, 2017; Wofford and Blaney, 2021), they are ill suited to humanities scholars, for whom attachment to home – and the experience of its loss or loosening – serves as a central biographical motif.

The second theoretical pillar pertains to the country of origin. Albert O. Hirschman's classic exit–voice theory (1970), developed by another European exile, provides a broadly applicable model for understanding individuals' responses to organisational or

institutional decline. Hirschman distinguished between exit (leaving) and voice (speaking up), with the latter involving direct appeals to those in power or broader public protest (Hirschman, 1970: 4). While exit reflects economic logic, voice constitutes political action (Hirschman, 1970: 15–16) – a distinction widely employed in migration studies (Harris, 2015; Hoffmann, 2010). For both Heller and Walicki, however, the choice of exit did not imply the relinquishment of voice. Rather, their biographies reveal the persistent challenge of effectively exercising voice from abroad – and, eventually, even after returning home.

To account for the homemaking process, we draw on Ágnes Heller's essay 'Where Are We at Home?' (1995). Heller distinguishes three forms of home experience: spatial, temporal, and the realm of the absolute spirit, rooted in Hegelian philosophy. These categories help us trace three layers of biographical experience. Heller illustrates spatial home through the example of an Italian who never leaves Campo de' Fiori and defines home as place attachment. Subsequently, after leaving Rome, she meets a cosmopolitan businesswoman who locates home simply 'where her cat was', thereby rejecting any fixed spatial definition. Reflecting on her own global mobility, Heller observes that discussing politics with a stranger on a jumbo jet, or Heidegger in any university seminar, requires no background explanation, no 'footnotes' (Heller, 1995: 6). From this, she concludes that the home provided by any universal discourse 'is located in time, not in place' (Heller, 1995: 6). However, Heller, influenced by European intellectual culture, posits a third form of home – situated 'up there' in the spheres of art, religion, and philosophy (Heller, 1995: 7) – the Hegelian realm of the absolute spirit. Although this domain builds cosmopolitan bridges across cultures, Heller emphasises that it remains distinctly European. Accordingly, in operationalising rootedness in this 'third home', we focus on one of the core duties of continental public intellectuals, who are uniquely positioned to voice political concerns and 'speak truth to power' (Fatsis, 2016).

Methodology

Following the tradition of biographical sociology (Miller and Schütze, 2011), this study employs a contrastive comparison of the life trajectories of Ágnes Heller and Andrzej Walicki using hermeneutically oriented close reading practices (Byron, 2021). While based primarily on autobiographical rather than archival materials, the analysis draws on Fritz Schütze's methodology, which emphasises a detailed examination of life courses from early experiences to the moment of narration.

The two cases were selected from a larger project (anonymised for review) due to their status as public intellectuals and the notable parallels in their biographies. Heller and Walicki were chosen because they (1) shared the same academic discipline (philosophy), (2) followed similar spatial trajectories (Eastern Europe–Australia–United States–Eastern Europe), (3) experienced the same historical period (Heller born in 1929, Walicki a year later), (4) were acquainted and exchanged ideas, (5) published autobiographies as established scholars – Heller in 1998 and Walicki in 2010, and (6) were inspired by Marxism while developing their own critical liberalism.

The primary sources include three major autobiographical works by Heller: *A Short History of My Philosophy* (2011, published in English), *New York Nostalgia* (2007, in

Hungarian), and *The Monkey on the Bicycle* (1999, in Hungarian; examined in German translation *Der Affe auf dem Fahrrad*). These are supplemented by essays, including those on migration (Heller, 1995). Walicki's *Ideas and People: An Attempt at an Autobiography* (2010, in Polish) combines intellectual history and personal memoir. Additional sources include his correspondence (Kozłowski and Walicki, 2007; Walicki, 2011, 2024) and archival materials.

This study is organised around two sub-questions concerning how migration has shaped the careers of East European 'academic sojourners'. The first concerns the key elements of the 'deep story' – the emotional core of a worldview that 'tells us how things feel' through symbols rather than facts (Hochschild, 2016: 135) – as present in émigré narratives, which are used here as a proxy for the emotional labour involved in becoming an international scholar. The second addresses their relationship to both origin and destination countries, analysing the forms of rootedness in Polish, Hungarian, and broader European cultures versus Australian or American contexts.

Findings

The first empirical section addresses place attachment (White, 2024: 211), aligning with Heller's concept of home. The second explores homemaking abroad and the journey to becoming an international scholar, focusing on the acquisition of cultural knowledge and the navigation of professional norms. The third section discusses the re-establishment of ties with Eastern Europe in the 1990s and later decades. The last section examines Heller's and Walicki's return as public intellectuals, highlighting their political engagement as a consequence of inhabiting what Heller terms the 'third home'.

Spatial attachments: isolation, windows to the world, and anchoring abroad

Although both narrators were socialised within the pre-socialist cultural canon, their adolescence unfolded during the post-Second World War Stalinist period, rendering their relationship to European culture particularly complex. Despite experiencing different forms of trauma at various stages of their early lives, their family backgrounds nonetheless positioned them – albeit for distinct reasons – towards academic careers.

Walicki – born to a father who was a university professor, and a highly educated mother, who rose from an assistant professor to leadership roles in pedagogical institutions, and himself descended from the Polish gentry, with strong intellectual traditions – was denied admission to philosophy and Polish studies due to his family background. With his father later becoming a political prisoner, Walicki was treated as a 'politically unreliable element'. He developed his interest in Russian philosophy after completing a degree in Russian studies – the only programme available to him at the time (Walicki, 2010: 32). Walicki's fascination was shaped not only by his studies but also by early exposure to pre-revolutionary Russian culture, transmitted by figures such as Sergei Hessen, a Russian émigré from the anti-Bolshevik ('White') tradition. Beyond this, Walicki also felt that his parents, who divorced when he was a young child, neglected him and had little time for him. Passages describing this sense of neglect are among the few sections of his correspondence

that remain unpublished (Walicki, 2024: 370). It was in early childhood that Walicki first experienced himself as an outsider – a sense of non-belonging that recurs throughout his autobiographical reflections and correspondence.

Heller was a descendant of the assimilated Austro-Hungarian Jewish intelligentsia. Her father was a man of wide-ranging passions and interests. He aspired to become a philosopher or a musician, but was compelled to pursue law, as his brother would only finance legal studies (Heller, 1999: 8). As Heller herself noted (Heller, 1999: 11), her father 'lived like a hippie': without steady employment, only moderately interested in earning money – a task taken over by her mother, who was professionally active until the age of 90, making hats – he worked on mathematical problems, wrote novels, and wandered about lost in thought. Heller admired her mother's work, but she felt that they inhabited entirely separate worlds. Because of this sense of mental distance, Heller was not sure whether her mother loved her at all. Yet they shared one of the most traumatic experiences imaginable – narrowly escaping a mass execution planned on the banks of the Danube in Budapest during the Holocaust (Heller, 1999: 62). Heller initially studied physics at university until she attended a lecture by György Lukács – one of Hungary's most prominent Marxist philosophers, affectionately referred to by members of the Budapest School as 'Uncle Gyuri', and Heller's intellectual mentor (Heller, 2007).

Both autobiographies contain numerous references to specific locations in Warsaw and Budapest, detailing experiences of Nazi occupation in Poland and fascist rule in Hungary, as well as the significant individuals who helped them form attachments to their birth cities and establish intellectual and emotional roots there. Aside from intellectual influences from abroad – delivered through books filtered by censorship and encounters with mentors in earlier years – the early lives of both Heller and Walicki were predominantly rooted in their home countries for two distinct reasons. First, although international travel was accessible to the economic elites of the time – an opportunity not necessarily available to their families despite the cultural capital they had inherited – both were still children when the Second World War broke out. Second, after the war, the Iron Curtain further restricted mobility. Heller's initial international encounters resemble those experienced by many East Europeans, as recounted in family stories:

> the greatest dream of my life had come true in 1960. I had traveled to Italy with my first husband. (With 100 dollars, received from my sister-in-law in America, the two of us stayed for three weeks). (Heller, 2011: 24)

It is worth emphasising that Heller's theory of modernity was profoundly shaped by her life experiences across different places and moments – from Budapest to Melbourne to New York and back. This philosophical responsiveness is one of the key strengths of her work, driven by the need to make sense of Nazism and Stalinism:

> I owe an examination of conscience to my deceased ones. I am indebted to the victims of this modern world. … Why have people been murdered and continue to be murdered? What has happened to modern man? How could such madness have arisen in this supposedly rational world?

> How and why did mass genocide occur? I have sought to answer these questions in my books and essays. In *Renaissance Man*, I tried to reach the deeper roots and analyze them. In Melbourne, I began to rethink my theory and wrote *A Theory of History*. This rethinking was necessary because Marxism offered no answers. I had to abandon Marx's framework, move beyond all '-isms,' and begin to formulate my own philosophy. The question was: how can I, Ágnes Heller, with all my historical and personal experiences, in the second half of the twentieth century, construct my own world in such a way as to understand why Auschwitz and the Gulag were possible? I had to leave Marxism behind to find new building blocks. I had to abandon historical optimism, the idea of salvation here on earth. How can one live in the absolute present without the idea of salvation? That was the question. That is why I wrote *A Theory of History*, but also *Dictatorship Over Needs*, our analysis of the Soviet system. Then came *A Philosophy of History in Fragments*, but also *Can Modernity Survive?* It's all about the same issues. I've addressed ethics in my books on 'justice,' 'general ethics,' 'moral philosophy,' and 'personal ethics.' I don't think there's anything more I can add. … Modernity won't bring anything worse than this. (Heller, 1999: 475–478)

In addition to numerous instances of harsh political oppression, Heller also reflects, with characteristic irony, on subtler forms of political control, such as the Hungarian socialist government's visa policies. In addition to the common Eastern Bloc practice of denying passports outright, Hungarian socialist authorities employed another strategy: issuing exit visas only after the intended event had already commenced. For instance, she received permission to attend the Korčula Summer School only after it had been underway for a week. Since the conference lasted two weeks, she was able to participate in the second week and deliver her talk on 'Value and History' (Heller, 2011: 23). This exceptional opportunity became a major turning point in Heller's life, as it enabled her to meet figures such as Lucien Goldmann, Jürgen Habermas, Herbert Marcuse, and Leszek Kołakowski – another thinker interested in phenomenology, with whom she fell in love while still married to her first husband, and with whom she even considered building a life (Heller, 1999: 165). These statements underscore a central element of Heller's deep narrative: the feeling of living in a cage, confined by the structures of a socialist state.

That Walicki was able to travel extensively from his mid-twenties is itself remarkable: his political views were unorthodox, his mentor Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz was a pre-war professor resistant to the new government, and his father had been imprisoned by the regime. Yet he travelled first to the USSR in 1956 and later to the West in 1960 – a trip that launched his international career. During this trip, he visited, among other locations, Oxford – where he met his lifelong friend Isaiah Berlin (Walicki, 2011) – as well as Harvard and Berkeley. In his autobiography, he notes that the year abroad in 1960 shaped his views on 'real socialism' and that by 1968, following the anti-Semitic purges, he had no illusions left to lose (Walicki, 2010: 423).

In the years following this formative trip, Walicki spent a full year at Oxford at Isaiah Berlin's invitation in 1966, visited the United States in 1967, and continued to travel extensively until 1981, when Martial Law in Poland caught him in Australia, marking the beginning of his 25-year emigration. Unlike Heller, Walicki was able to travel not only freely but also without any need to compromise with the Polish authorities. He

recalled a visit from the Security Service officers, whose requests he simply refused – an episode that, as he later noted, strengthened his belief that Poland was the most open country in the Eastern Bloc, a unique window to the world. Walicki thus became a migrant in small steps, having never been straightforwardly pushed out of his country:

> My experience stood in clear contradiction to the widespread view that going abroad had to involve some, even if only apparent, cooperation with the secret services. (Walicki, 2010: 84)

Heller, on the other hand, departed Hungary as a result of her direct encounters with socialist authorities and their supporters. She vividly recalled the fierce criticism she faced from orthodox Marxists, which set in motion her departure:

> Mária Makkai and Tamás Földvári published a vicious piece of writing in the then philosophy journal, *Magyar Filozófiai Szemle*. There, they critically tore my lecture notes into pieces, proving that my lectures were wholly anti-Marxist and that I was even worse than Kołakowski. In my eyes, the first half of their thesis was a lie, the second half a high praise. (Heller, 2011: 12)

This form of symbolic persecution finds an echo in Walicki's reflections on the Stalinist period (as opposed to post-1956 Poland) – both in theme and tone – as he noted with characteristic irony that being under attack placed him 'in very good company' (Walicki, 2010: 32). More typically, however, Walicki characterised this period as one of ideological persecution, stemming from his interest in non-Marxist literary theories and his critique of vulgar Marxism. This ordeal culminated in a mental breakdown and treatment involving 'insulin, showers, and electroshocks' in a closed psychiatric sanatorium (Walicki, 2010: 34). This contrasts with Heller, who, at the time, remained a committed Marxist and was shaping her future life strategy. As result of this traumatic experience, despite being a critical intellectual, Walicki never openly expressed his views on political matters. Instead, building on the practices from the Stalinist period, he adopted the figure of 'Ketman', as Czesław Miłosz (1955: 54) termed the adaptive-defensive stance of remaining silent about one's true convictions. The 'Ketman' metaphor seems to function not only as an effective descriptive device but also as an apt expression of the deeper narrative he constructs. Like Miłosz's Ketman, Walicki believed that this strategy elevated the practitioner 'to a permanent state of superiority over the man he deceives' (Miłosz, 1955: 55). In Walicki's case, this applied primarily to the socialist authorities, but also to segments of the democratic opposition.

For Heller, in contrast to Walicki, life under socialist rule constituted a trajectory of suffering – a loss of control over her own life (Riemann and Schütze, 1991) – with Stalinism representing only its first manifestation. She summarises this period by reflecting on Hungary under Stalinist rule (1948–1953).

> To be involved in philosophy other than the so-called dialectical and historical materialism of Lenin and Stalin was regarded as heresy in itself. Yet Lukács, although a confessed Marxist, was not permitted to teach Marx or Marxism, but only philosophy from before Marx. (Heller, 2011: 2)

However, the most striking differences emerged later. The year 1956, which brought political change to Poland with the so-called Polish October, had devastating consequences for Heller's academic career. In 1958, Heller was dismissed from the university due to her participation in the 1956 revolution. She reflects on this period as one of 'hopelessness' and 'a state of a kind of depression' (Heller, 2011: 14). During this time, oppression manifested in both overt and subtle forms. A clear example of the former was fierce censorship: the so-called Author's Rights Protection Agency, which controlled foreign publishing rights, blocked the English translation of Heller's book on Aristotle because it was not directly promoted by the Party. Once in Australia 25 years later, Heller decided against publishing the book in English altogether (Heller, 2011).

In contrast to Walicki, Heller felt politically uprooted in socialist Hungary of the 1960s, compelled to express her views yet finding it impossible to do so. The state structures were so oppressive that she and her second husband, Ferenc Fehér (Köves, 1995), could no longer function as intellectuals. Although exit (Hirschman, 1970) entailed considerable costs, they were willing to leave – a decision that rendered them political refugees:

> We lost our jobs, our passports were confiscated, we were bombed by informers, and followed by secret police agents on the street. I do not want to follow up on this story, for it belongs to my autobiography, and not to the history of my philosophy. What was relevant for the latter was the dramatic change in our contact and function. We could not participate in conferences or in international debates, or, at least, this became very difficult (or illegal).

During the period from 1965 to 1980, which Heller refers to as the 'years of dialogue', philosophy became 'blurred into' her engagement with worldly affairs. At that time, she explains:

> it was entirely impossible to speak sincerely about the matters of the world. One needed to play a sophisticated hide-and-seek game to express criticism or dissatisfaction, by using analogies or hidden comparisons. (Heller, 2011: 54)

These contrasting experiences of international travel, as well as perceived civil liberties and the possibility of reforming state socialism, influenced how Walicki and Heller discussed their decision to leave Eastern Europe. For Heller, who recognised the urgency of her departure, the choice of Australia was sudden. As she recounts in her autobiography (Heller, 1999), a new campaign against the intelligentsia began in the early 1970s. The Party appointed ideological reviewers tasked with identifying scholarly works deemed politically dangerous. The 'commissioned jurors' found counter-revolutionary content in Heller's works. Intellectuals who did not adhere to the Party line were presented with two options: either to resign voluntarily from their positions and withdraw from public life or face disciplinary proceedings (Heller, 1999: 369). Consequently, in the so-called philosophers' trial, the Hungarian Communist Party passed a special resolution prohibiting members of the Budapest School from teaching or conducting scholarly research. Heller lost her position at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and was

forbidden to publish (Heller, 1999: 369). The authorities did not stop at pushing Heller and Fehér into academic obscurity: their apartment was searched, and they were threatened with imprisonment. Under these circumstances, emigration became a necessity – the only means by which Heller could continue her intellectual work.

In Walicki's view, Poland during this period epitomised the relative openness of a socialist state. However, in the 1970s, another, somewhat surprising, push factor emerged: the radical democratic opposition and the moral pressure to support it. Walicki, a patriotic critic of the government, never made his peace with the radical opposition, believing that open conflict with the Party would lead nowhere. In fact, his later decision to remain in Australia in the early 1980s can be viewed as a symbolic escape from People's Poland – not only from the government but also from the opposition supported by most non-Marxist intellectuals. Despite maintaining a deeply anti-communist stance, Walicki condemned the contemporary political climate in his correspondence with Berlin, marked by what he calls 'Solidarity's aggressive rhetoric' and 'intolerance of intellectual independence' (Walicki, 2011: 27).

For Walicki, in contrast to Heller, the decision to leave was gradual. Reflecting on his dilemmas in the late 1970s, he noted that the political situation 'questioned the point of continuing my work in Poland', and he was prepared to accept a professorial position 'in the West', without framing it as political emigration (Walicki, 2010: 145). At that time, he had not yet made a decision, and considerations regarding where to reside persisted in his correspondence until his passing (Walicki, 2024). When he arrived in Australia in 1981 for a short-term stay, he ultimately chose to remain due to the political situation, reflecting:

> I want to continue my work, and at the moment I can do so without moral dilemmas heavier than I can bear – only abroad. (Walicki, 2010: 167)

Walicki was, therefore, uprooted, but not solely because of the actions of the Communist Party. Contrary to what one might expect, the most unbearable aspect was not the political oppression during Martial Law, but his unwillingness to support the Solidarity movement, with which he disagreed on many points and whose programme he considered illogical and self-contradictory (Walicki, 2010: 159). Walicki felt insecure when his moral views clashed with social pressure from the intelligentsia. For him, being ostracised for questioning the intellectual community's consensus was intolerable, prompting recurring moral reflections that reveal an intensifying trajectory of suffering (Riemann and Schütze, 1991):

> As early as 1954, I had promised myself that, under any circumstances, I would remain faithful to the priority of inner freedom and individual independence. Of course, it pained me when I heard that distancing oneself from the overt opposition was seen simply as opportunism, following the principle: 'keep quiet and don't make waves.' But I was even more outraged by suggestions that the assessment of my entire life's work would depend on whether I accepted the uncompromising arguments of the opposition and confirmed this with some symbolic gesture. (Walicki, 2010: 144)

What Walicki and Heller shared was that neither ever ruled out the possibility of returning to Eastern Europe, a point they emphasised on multiple occasions (see, e.g., Walicki, 2010: 169, 425). Heller and Fehér longed for Hungary at every stage of their emigration, as she openly states in her autobiography, 'Feri never felt comfortable in exile. I feel comfortable everywhere, but I missed Hungary terribly' (Heller, 1999: 450–451). She admits feeling at home only in Hungary, in Budapest – from early childhood until the end of her life. Emigration was not a choice for her, but a necessity in the face of job loss, a publishing ban, apartment searches, and other pressures (cf. Wagner-Saffray, 2020). If she wished to continue her scholarly work, she had to leave Hungary; yet she always longed for it, and whenever the opportunity arose, she would fly back to visit her mother and daughter (Heller, 1999: 451). Furthermore, unlike Walicki, Heller did not maintain contacts with intellectuals in Hungary, but rather with members of the Hungarian intellectual diaspora, as other members of the Budapest School shared her fate as émigrés. Heller and Fehér decided to emigrate from Poland to Australia shortly after György and Maria Márkus. Heller noted that, as a 'black sheep', she avoided contact with scholars in her homeland so as not to expose them to risk (Heller, 1999: 451). Walicki (2010: 425), never intended 'to break the bonds of the community' but rather sought to 'relax them in the most appropriate way'.

After the decision to migrate had been made, the sojourner's attitude of eventual return is clearly evident in both Heller's and Walicki's biographies. Simultaneously, the countries in which they resided abroad were always perceived from the perspective of a homeland, and their decisions to relocate further resulted from the opportunity structure available to them at the time. Heller explicitly stated in one of her papers that she had not wanted to leave Australia (Heller, 2007: 8), while Walicki went even further, explaining that he did everything he could to remain in Canberra at the Australian National University, where he felt welcome. Traces of early doubts, following his initial enthusiasm for the idea of working in America (Walicki, 2024: 123), can be found in his correspondence with Adam Bromke. In a letter dated 8 January 1986, Walicki confessed: 'I must admit – confidentially – that I have begun to hesitate, partly because of the greater peace in Australia, the lack of fanaticism, and so on' (Walicki, 1986).

Spatial attachment, previously discussed in relation to Heller's and Walicki's homeland – experienced in their private lives and academic socialisation, yet disrupted by political uprooting – is also evident in the ways they established spatial ties abroad. A recurring theme throughout Walicki's autobiography is his inclination to put down roots in each place he inhabited, most tangibly through acquiring real estate (Walicki, 2011: 142, 324). This was particularly feasible in Poland, where the hard currency he brought back from stays abroad gave him considerable purchasing power. Australia in the 1980s proved to be an ideal place for settling, as Walicki found himself in his element there. In this context, purchasing a house (even without a permanent academic position) could be seen as a desire to 'anchor' himself in the new country – to achieve socio-psychological stability and security, and to function effectively within a new environment (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2018).

Walicki appreciated both Australia and his contacts with the Polish diaspora, despite occasional unwelcoming attitudes towards him as a potential crypto-communist (Walicki, 2010: 192). At the same time, while awaiting confirmation of a professorial

position – his contract in Australia was extended due to the political situation in Poland under Martial Law – Walicki was offered a professorship at Notre Dame University in the United States, among several other offers he considered less attractive. He recalled this period as one of tension between the desire to remain in Australia and what he called the 'rationally justified American option' (Walicki, 2010: 194) – a move he considered professionally advantageous yet personally regrettable. Walicki described his experience in the United States as being in a 'big prison' (Walicki, 2010: 324) or on a 'desert' (Walicki, 2024: 264). While in Australia, he felt as though he co-owned the country; this sense of belonging was absent in the United States. Although he acquired a house there, he did not feel free, as he was unable to walk freely since everything was 'gated', as noted in his autobiography.

Settling in Australia was also a challenging biographical experience for Heller and her family. In her recollections of the 'Australian period', the prevailing sentiment is one of alienation; she struggled not only with the Australian variant of English but also with the cultural nuances (Heller, 1999: 394). For example, she was taken aback to discover that in Australia, unlike in Hungary, communists could form friendships with aristocrats (Heller, 1999: 395). Another significant challenge was locating a school for her son, Gyuri, who was not proficient in English at that time. The children of almost all of Ágnes and Feri's friends attended private schools, which were beyond their financial means. Consequently, they sought to enrol their son in a reputable public school; however, Gyuri failed the entrance exam due to his lack of English proficiency. The environment Heller encountered was not only foreign but also chauvinistic. She vividly recalls an incident when attempting to purchase furniture on credit: 'They asked us for proof of income. Here it is: Ágnes Heller, La Trobe University, annual income 26,000 dollars. "And your husband?" Feri: "I don't have a job." "But do you have one in sight?" "Yes, I am applying for a position in Canberra." Feri got the credit, not me' (Heller, 1999: 396). Gradually, however, Heller adapted to life in Australia and came to appreciate its advantages, including its natural beauty, leading her to confess: 'I loved Australia, but it did not replace my homeland' (Heller, 1999: 408).

For Heller and Walicki, their experiences of international mobility resulted in what migration scholars refer to as place dependence (Trąbka, 2019), as residing in democratic Australia afforded Heller a genuine opportunity to engage with her 'second home' by exchanging ideas within the international community of philosophers: 'It was from Melbourne that I got the opportunity to fly, in fact, to all parts of the world' (Heller, 2011). Walicki, while less explicit in his autotheoretical reflections on the new opportunities for travel that emerged before him, offers numerous examples of conferences and various forms of international networking – from North America to Western Europe, Poland, and Russia – that proved academically significant for him.

Perhaps the most striking contrast between Heller's and Walicki's forms of anchoring concerns their intimate partnerships. Heller established a long-lasting relationship with the philosopher Ferenc Fehér, which proved beneficial both personally and professionally – their academic careers developing in close tandem (Wagner, 2022). Having migrated together, her marriage remained stable throughout this period. She repeatedly emphasises Fehér's profound influence on both her life and work. Yet just as Heller began to feel at

home in Australia, Fehér had spent two years without employment. He remained at home writing books, but the situation of not earning an income became unbearable for him. Subsequently, Fehér received an offer for a semester-long visiting professorship at the New School for Social Research, while Iván Szelényi, another Hungarian émigré, invited Heller to Madison, Wisconsin, to lead a seminar. Shortly thereafter, Heller was offered the position of chair of the philosophy department at the New School for Social Research – founded as an alternative to the more conservative Columbia University – which she accepted:

> And so I came to America, to a completely foreign world … which, though geographically closer to Europe, was intellectually much more distant than Australia. America had created its own culture, and therefore it was foreign to us. (Heller, 1999: 420)

Walicki, on the other hand, paid the highest price for his mobility. Having been married three times,[2] he returned to Poland after many years entirely alone, despite having 'dreamed of settling in Warsaw together' with a partner (Walicki, 2010: 331). The sense of loneliness accompanies Walicki throughout the book, as migration led to at least two breakups – a figure that does not account for the strain placed on relationships with family and friends (Walicki, 2010: 334; see, Walicki, 2024):

> I could not, however, avoid feeling deep bitterness at the striking repetition of events: for the second time in my life, the choice of another country (in Marysia's case, a return to Poland) was destined to determine a separation from my life partner. (Walicki, 2010: 410)

His relocation to the United States was not driven by professional ambition. Rather, Walicki – like Heller – was unable to fully anchor himself in Australian academia, despite gradually developing place attachment through a multistage acculturation process that would later be repeated in the United States. This process encompassed place dependence – becoming instrumentally attached to the new environment and learning how things functioned (at La Trobe University in Heller's case, and the Australian National University in Walicki's) – as well as the formation of an emotional bond through accumulated memories (place identity) and, eventually, the recognition of the symbolic significance of a location where important, life-shaping events occurred (place inheritance) (Trąbka, 2019; White, 2024). Nevertheless, structural constraints compelled him to move again: the decisive factor behind his departure from Australia was the delayed renewal of his contract (Walicki, 2010: 236).

Second home: participation in the academic community abroad

In this section, we analyse the concept of 'second home' as theorised by Heller – described as a 'universal discourse' rooted in time, which enables individuals within it to communicate without the need for additional 'footnotes'. We emphasise the sense of community experienced in the professional lives of sojourners. Both Walicki and Heller adapted well to their new university environments in Australian and, subsequently,

the United States, having acquired the essential cultural knowledge and tacit skills necessary for functioning effectively as researchers and educators (Luxon and Peelo, 2009). However, this did not shield them entirely from experiencing culture shock, even if these did not ultimately impede their academic success.

To begin with, it is not accurate to assert that Heller was well integrated abroad from the outset. Given the sudden and forced nature of her departure, she was considerably less familiar with the English language and the English-speaking world than Walicki. Upon arriving in Australia, her primary concern was to continue her intellectual pursuits, which required mastering English. 'My English was bad', she candidly admitted (Heller, 2011: 53); however, she acknowledged that as her proficiency improved, the English-speaking world gradually became her home:

> As it turns out, ever since I began to write in English, I have also thought in English, I have taken notes in English, and I have dreamed in English.

This passage from Heller's intellectual autobiography complements her reflections on language mastery in her general autobiography. Although German – her father's mother tongue – functioned as her second native language (Heller, 1999: 21), it enabled her to correspond with figures such as Leszek Kołakowski (Heller, 1999: 166). Similarly, Walicki, who was highly fluent in both English and Russian, was not linguistically isolated. While maintaining ties to Eastern Europe and intellectual diasporas, both scholars actively cultivated connections with their host societies – first in Australia, and later in the United States.

Furthermore, in Australia, Heller, who had experienced a 20-year hiatus from teaching between 1957 and 1977) (Heller, 1999: 398), quickly realised that she was no longer in the familiar European 'second home'. Her students were bright and perceptive, yet she could not draw on her knowledge of European cultural contexts, as her students were unfamiliar with figures such as Tolstoy or Ibsen. Heller also recalls that, in the United States, she struggled to comprehend political correctness and the uncritical approach to democracy, which she perceived as merely the rule of the majority, considered to be inherently right (Heller, 1999: 442). Together with Fehér, she went so far as to observe that 'people in America were just as conformist as in dictatorships' (Heller, 1999: 440–441). They noted, for instance, that cosmetic surgery was so prevalent that a 90-year-old might appear 40, though the voice, they observed, remained mismatched with the face (Heller, 1999: 423). Walicki expressed similar concerns, noting his surprise that in America 'true' multiculturalism was essentially equated with racial diversity (Walicki, 2010: 241).

What makes both autobiographies remarkably similar is their critical stance towards certain Western leftist ideologies, despite the authors' enduring support for the welfare state and human equality. Heller, who had once been affiliated with the 'New Left', admits that this movement underwent 'several changes, and in a direction' she 'did not particularly like' (Heller, 2011: 55). By the late 1970s, her distance from it had increased, as some of its members began defending 'good János Kádár' and rejecting rather than supporting the Polish Solidarity movement – an attitude that Heller interpreted as an

endorsement of 'practised violence'. These recollections mirror Walicki's perspective: although he identified as a left-liberal, he was often extremely critical of Western left-wing elites. On the one hand, he noted their deep distrust of Polish émigrés, especially those who had suffered repression in the USSR (Walicki, 2010: 81). On the other, he objected to their simplified interpretation of Marxism, commonly viewed by Western leftists as a radicalisation of the liberal conception of freedom (Walicki, 2010: 347) – a stance that at times led to clashes with certain leftist circles (Walicki, 2010: 184).

While abroad, Heller and Walicki actively engaged with the international academic community while closely observing Eastern European politics. Walicki's letters to friends document these interests in detail (see, e.g., Walicki, 2024). Heller, in turn, recalled that upon arriving in Australia, her theoretical work immediately split into two strands: philosophy and political interventions – always pursued together with her husband, Ferenc Fehér (Heller, 2011: 56). Given this emotional attachment to their home country, the melting pot metaphor appears largely inadequate to describe their positions in Australia and the United States, while the salad bowl proves equally misleading. Heller and Walicki were clear about their emotional and intellectual bonds with their countries of origin, and only with this qualification could they be considered ingredients in the American 'salad bowl'. Although they were physically present in Australia and the United States, their minds remained divided between these worlds. These lived experiences – forming the core of the deep story – support the conclusion that both Walicki and Heller, as Emilia Palonen suggested in Heller's case, 'were also national in their work and self-perception, even when the national got entangled with the European, the global, or the international' (Palonen, 2018: 3). Similarly, Paweł Kozłowski, a professor of sociology and economics, and Walicki's friend, states that 'Walicki never really left Poland as he probably went abroad in order to look at it more clearly, from a distance' (Kozłowski and Walicki, 2007: 9).

Reconnecting with the second home: exit, voice, and symbolic erasure

The physical return to Eastern Europe later in life was closely linked with the reconnection to the intellectual circles that Walicki and Heller had left behind in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In the early 1990s, Heller and Fehér divided their time equally between New York and Budapest, akin to Andrzej Walicki, who confided to his cousin in correspondence that he planned to spend winters in Poland and the warmer months in his home in the United States (Walicki, 2024: 300–304).

However, the process of returning was complicated by a sense of symbolic exclusion from the scholarly community. While being in one's home country inherently allows participation in a universal discourse without the need for explanatory footnotes – as Heller theorised – academic sojourners abroad may feel excluded from that very community.

After spending the 1990s alternating between the United States and Poland, Walicki ultimately returned to Poland in 2006 (Walicki, 2024: 366), reasoning that Poland would provide a more natural setting in which to compose a synthesis of his reflections on Polish thought (Walicki, 2010: 361) – a notion that resonates with Heller's concept of a 'second

home' as a space where one can communicate 'without footnotes'. This sense of belonging to the second home is echoed in one of the final passages of Walicki's autobiography:

> On the other hand, writing this book can make any sense only if one assumes the existence of a broad yet relatively coherent national community, within which different generations and generational subgroups (that is, subgroups within a single generation) seek to know and understand one another. In the United States or Australia, what I have written here [in this autobiography] would be incomprehensible without extensive footnotes – and of no use to anyone. (Walicki, 2010: 425)

His decision to return was also influenced by the experience of living alone in the United States following the departure of his third wife to Australia, which triggered what he referred to as 'tides of depression' (Walicki, 2010: 420). In biographical terms, this period carries all the hallmarks of a trajectory of suffering – a sequence of contingent events characterised by 'constant breaks of expectations and a growing, irritating sense of losing control over one's life circumstances' (Riemann and Schütze, 1991: 337):

> And yet, despite this, my growing awareness that there was no return to Australia for me led me to come to terms with the inevitability of returning, sooner or later, to Poland. I justified this by invoking Brzozowski's idea that the soul of an individual lives only through their own nation. (Walicki, 2010: 325)

Whether or not solitude was his primary motivation, it is noteworthy that he was already a retired American citizen, which may have influenced his decision. He alludes to this when recounting that the Catholic University of Notre Dame did not fund the translation of his book – despite the book's focus on the Catholic Church – which he attributed to his emeritus status (Walicki, 2010: 403). This event – and the emotional work required to come to terms with it – forms part of Walicki's 'deep story' as a public intellectual displaced by history. Reflecting on that period, Walicki confessed that close friends had warned him – among them Jozef Tischer, a Catholic priest, semi-official chaplain of the Solidarity movement, and professor of philosophy, that the politically charged atmosphere of the 1990s would leave him without a place in this landscape. He shared this premonition himself, anticipating that he would feel 'alien and unnecessary', doomed to 'inevitable marginalisation' (Walicki, 2010: 361). What troubled Walicki was not so much the lack of recognition within academic circles – he was, after all, a distinguished and respected scholar – but rather the absence of personal fulfilment resulting from social isolation and solitude in his private life (Walicki, 2010: 414).

This anticipation proved accurate: Walicki was, at least in the eyes of certain intellectuals, effectively excluded from participation in the Polish academic world. For instance, when Ryszard Legutko – a philosopher and later a conservative Member of the European Parliament – remarked that there had been little serious discussion of communism in Poland, Walicki asked a mutual acquaintance why his own book on the subject had gone unmentioned. Legutko reportedly replied, 'Walicki is, after all, an emigrant' (Walicki, 2010: 357). This symbolically charged episode exemplifies the broader narrative of Walicki as 'a man whose past is taken from him' (Walicki, 2010: 364). Unlike

Heller, who notes in passing that Hungarian readers occasionally reacted differently towards her theses than American audiences – for example, her moral philosophy being dismissed in her homeland as 'a kind of boring moral preaching' (Heller, 2011: 82) – Walicki resented being effectively written out of the conversation because of his past choices: his criticism of the democratic opposition from a position that was equally distant from the socialist government and his decision to emigrate rather than stay on the 'right side'.

A common element of both his and Heller's deep story is the conviction that a migrant academic sojourner deserves both respect and to be heard. This is why Walicki was deeply disappointed by the lack of press coverage of the event held for his seventieth birthday without acknowledging that he was the first Polish intellectual to receive the International Balzan Prize – even from *Polityka* magazine, which had previously awarded him its own prize (Walicki, 2010: 377).

The emotional work involved in returning home marks the point at which Walicki's and Heller's deep stories begin to diverge. Although initially uncertain about the strength of their intellectual ties to Hungary during the transformative period around 1989, Heller and Fehér spent part of that year in Hungary, just as Walicki did in Poland. Before returning, they were unfamiliar with most of the new figures in public life and knew little of their histories, and therefore they approached the situation with caution (Heller, 1999: 452). Heller recalls: 'We wanted to test what it would be like if we returned permanently. After 17 years in exile, the gap between us and our homeland was still fresh, deep, and had to be filled in' (Heller, 1999: 452). When they were finally ready to return in 1994, shortly before Fehér's premature death, their experience differed from Walicki's: the couple was welcomed with acclaim, recognition, and honours. Heller and Fehér were rehabilitated by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, which offered compensation in the form of housing and salary for six months, and they were also awarded the Kossuth Prize (Heller, 1999: 454). They resumed giving lectures in Budapest, renewed professional contacts, and began writing political articles. This opened the door for them to reconnect with their 'third home' by fulfilling the long-overdue duty of a public intellectual.

Being a transnational public intellectual: speaking truth to power

All the autobiographical texts by Heller and Walicki examined here share not only their grounding in specific times and places but also their persistent reference to the third sense of home. The 'third home', 'territory of the absolute spirit', or realm of intellectual culture and arts (Heller, 1995), is likely where the intellectuals differ most from other highly skilled migrants. For professors of philosophy, an intimate relationship with high culture is not merely a private interest but a professional necessity and a fundamental aspect of their analysis. In this section, we do not focus on the specific ideas that preoccupied Heller and Walicki, which they discuss at length, but rather on a particular aspect of their connection to this European 'third home': the ethos of the public intellectual. For such an intellectual, taking a political stance to improve the world is a necessity grounded in both experience and expertise. Engagement in political matters and a sense of belonging to the world of ideas are, therefore, essential conditions for narrating one's life as coherent and

meaningful. Heller and Walicki both aspired to serve as the voice or conscience of their environment; however, they pursued markedly different strategies to achieve this. During their emigration, both authors remained publicly active, each in their own way: Walicki commented on contemporary Polish politics through articles and letters, while Heller engaged in philosophical reflection on current affairs, as exemplified by her work *Beyond Justice*, published in 1987.

> Yet, since I wrote this book prior to the East-European system change, I also found myself bound in duty to accompany the politically engaged decent people on their way in a dictatorship. (Heller, 2011: 86)

The systemic change in Hungary marked a pivotal moment for Heller, who stated: 'For the first time in my life, I felt myself a citizen in my own country.' In 1989, Heller returned to Hungary for the first time to visit her mother, her daughter (from her first marriage), and her grandchildren. This brief visit was primarily motivated by family reasons, though it was likely also driven by curiosity regarding the impending transformation. At that time, journalists followed her, requesting interviews. Even then, she sensed that everything had changed – not only the political system but also the cultural atmosphere (Heller, 1999: 451).

In contrast to Walicki, who experienced a persistent sense of marginalisation, Heller and Fehér began engaging with contemporary issues in the Hungarian press and participating in Hungarian affairs from the early 1990s – thus returning home intellectually as well (Heller, 1999: 464). Heller became increasingly active in what she termed her 'interventions', referring to her political engagement throughout her intellectual biography:

> Surely, it is not a secret that I am a philosopher, and I do not want to hide it. Obviously, being a philosopher, having seen much of the world, have experienced much, I enjoy a certain authority. But I never want to give the impression, even to those who like my ideas, that the only proper way to see and discuss an issue is in the way I see it. I am one among many voices. Many of my friends censure me because of this. Why am I appearing on the television? Why all this self-presentation? I never advise anyone else to do the same if they have no inclination. (Heller, 2011: 114)

Walicki, however, did not celebrate the systemic transformation of 1989, largely because he considered himself a lifelong citizen of Poland (unlike Heller, who had been persecuted by both fascist and socialist governments and, for instance, prior to the 1956 revolution, was unable to sing the national anthem as it evoked terrifying memories from the period when Hungary was governed by fascists (Heller, 1999: 71)). He viewed himself as fundamentally a free and relatively independent individual. Although some empirical evidence complicates this self-perception – for instance, when he requested his American-based cousin Marek Walicki to send him ham and oranges, or recalled standing in a queue for petrol for 10 hours (Walicki, 2024: 144–145) – Walicki repeatedly asserted that he neither felt oppressed nor marginalised after 1956, and that life in People's Poland was bearable. From 1989 to 2006, he deliberated extensively on whether to return to

Poland, weighing numerous considerations, including practical matters such as the quality of healthcare (Walicki, 2024: 326). Nevertheless, returning home after years abroad remained a liminal experience for him.

The difference with Heller was that Walicki was cognisant of the fact that his views were not widely accepted, and he was not greeted in Poland in the same manner that she experienced. This symbolic response led Walicki to refrain from commenting on political events. The key passage in which he recounts this decision carries a distinct emotional weight:

> Nevertheless, I decided to refrain from commenting on current political events. Writing this autobiography only strengthened my sense of belonging to a time that has already passed. (Walicki, 2010: 427)

Although Walicki regularly published essays in daily newspapers – on Polish history as well as the legal difficulties faced by returnees from abroad – and in specialist journals, he nonetheless experienced a profound sense of subjective marginalisation (Walicki, 2024: 392). This sense of isolation from public discourse only deepened his bitterness upon his returning, as Walicki, like Heller, and every other Eastern European public intellectual of that era, sought public attention and recognition. While Walicki was a prominent figure in international philosophy – a field that often praised him –he gradually encountered symbolic erasure in Poland, evidenced by his omission from newer editions of popular encyclopaedias (Walicki, 2010: 419).

The deep stories told by Walicki and Heller are interconnected through their shared conviction that they possess the authority to speak publicly, grounded in a dual justification: the effort and sacrifices inherent in the process of migration, and their scholarly reputation, which was earned not only within the Polish or Hungarian academic milieu prior to emigration – where both held distinguished positions, such as editorships of journals or heads of departments– but also on the international stage. However, their deep stories diverge when Walicki confronts a biographical challenge: he becomes convinced that he has not received adequate public recognition, leading him to question his very mandate to act as a public intellectual. From the perspective of biographical sociology, his emotional state can be explained through the logic of the trajectory of suffering, as a mere flight from a difficult life situation does not typically 'result in an escape from the trajectory dynamics because the person still clings to a trajectory-afflicted identity' (Riemann and Schütze, 1991: 351). In Heller's case, the successful completion of her public intellectual's career in exile transforms a narrative marked by trajectories of suffering – in early childhood and during her years abroad – into an accomplished life project.

Conclusion

This paper contributes to global intellectual history by examining the deep stories embedded in the biographies of scholars who experienced academic success, expulsion, efforts at 'homemaking' abroad (on three distinct levels), and eventual return, thereby shedding

light on humanities careers that remain closely tied to national cultures and intellectual traditions.

From a sociology of emotions perspective, this biographical analysis – addressing the first research sub-question – suggests that, despite strikingly similar trajectories representing the pattern of an émigré scholar, significant divergences emerge within the broader narrative.

Both autobiographies begin with the assertion that childhood experiences shaped the authors' intellectual trajectories. A turbulent childhood accordingly constitutes the first layer of their deep stories. For Heller, the Holocaust engendered a lifelong focus on ethics and history. For Walicki, a profound attachment to Polish culture and an openness to Russian influences emerged from family memories of exile and early encounters with Russian intellectuals, which subsequently influenced his research and political interests. The impact of Heller's biographical experiences is undeniably significant – perhaps most evident in her theory of modernity, where contingency occupies a central role. As Peter Beilharz (2003: 109–110) observes, 'Heller's own encounter with modernity, or modernities, has been extraordinary, and yet common – from Budapest to Auschwitz, to the Hungarian version of communism, through exile in Australia, hope in America, and the entirely unexpected return to Budapest after the fall of communism.'

A second shared theme is career formation under state socialism, characterised by a mixture of achievement and constraint. Although Heller, following an initial fascination with communist ideology and Marxist philosophy, ultimately perceived socialism as a confining structure, Walicki viewed it as an obstacle course; both narratives, however, highlight their early scholarly successes. Furthermore, both accounts include narratives of forced or constrained migration. For Heller, political repression was explicit, whereas for Walicki, shifting political tides subtly edged him out of the country. Another element is pride in international recognition, articulated through successful publications and admiration from prominent colleagues; however, for Walicki, these successes came at a higher personal cost.

A recurring motif in both deep stories is the suspension between worlds: the old country remains a 'second home', while the new one necessitates constant adjustment and often brings loneliness. The eventual return home signifies the symbolic culmination of this migrant-intellectual trajectory. Heller rebuilt all 'three homes' and completed her life project, whereas Walicki – despite professional esteem – felt deprived of the recognition he deserved, finding solace ultimately in his private life, having established a home in Warsaw and married his fourth wife upon his return (Walicki, 2024: 384). His second and third homes remained emotionally distant, particularly if the 'third' home is understood as a form of political engagement rooted in the intelligentsia's habitus rather than as a broader space for interaction with ideas – the latter marking the more successful aspect of his career. This distinction is evident in his autobiography, where 'ideas and people' are not equally represented, with a clear emphasis on the former, as noted by Marek Walicki (2024: 382).

In addressing the second research sub-question, this paper contributes to the sociology of global academic mobility. Neither Heller nor Walicki conform to the melting pot or salad bowl models, which depict emigrants as passive elements within the receiving society

(Berray, 2019). Rather, akin to Siu's sojourners, both directed their biographical action plans towards their country of origin, whose affairs continued to shape their lives. They were not Park's 'marginal men' but intellectuals maintaining multiple, partially disconnected homes. Their experiences illustrate that spatial integration abroad does not guarantee full temporal or cultural participation in the host society's academic community.

Finally, the biographies – deeply rooted in Eastern European intellectual traditions (Palonen, 2018) – demonstrate how having three distinct homes (Heller, 1995) renders the migration and homemaking processes of humanities scholars unique. Ethnicity remains biographically significant even for highly mobile academics who embody the older ethos of the public intellectual (Fatsis, 2016), committed to truth-telling through mass media rather than the many-to-many communication platforms of the present day. Migration amplified the risk of detachment from national debates: although Heller returned with full public authority, Walicki did not share the same fate.

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Notes

1. The analogy is, of course, imperfect: unlike Siu's laundrymen, these 'academic sojourners' operated within international academic communities and interacted daily with American students. They were neither mass migrants motivated by the dream of emigration nor did they wish to leave home, yet both saw America as the most viable option among limited alternatives.
2. Walicki met his fourth wife when he settled back in Poland (Walicki, 2024: 383), as she – a university professor herself – served as editor of the autobiography cited extensively in this study (Walicki, 2010).

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