

## Migration and Culture

Marek H. Dominiczak\*

Both science and the arts provide a particular perspective on one of the significant facets of human history: migration of people. From time immemorial, artists traveled around to find a creative environment, sponsors, and commissions. A critical mass formed in the cities that did provide artistic exposure: it was Florence and Venice in the Renaissance, then Paris, and now New York, to name only a few. Analogically, migration of talented and ambitious investigators to the best centers of research has been a longstanding feature of science. Scholars commonly traveled around European universities, like William Harvey (1578–1657), a native of Folkestone England, who studied in Padua before moving to London. Arts and science communities never really felt confined to the concept of anthropologically defined locations, embodied by the nation-states that emerged in the early 19th century (1).

In addition to such “habitual” movements, there are times, sparked by political crises, wars, and ensuing poverty, which create larger waves of migration. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the Byzantine scholars migrated to Italy bringing with them the Greek tradition and culture, which subsequently played a key role in shaping the culture of the Renaissance. Later, when the network of the Renaissance city-states started to disintegrate, many Italian artists migrated to France, contributing to the decor of the Palace of Fontainebleau built by King Francis I. Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) moved to France after the French captured Milan in 1515.

An extreme case of cultural migration is the exodus of intellectuals from Germany after the Nazis came to power in 1933, and later from the occupied European countries (2). In the 1930s Jewish scholars were dismissed from German universities. In the arts, one of the defining points was the *Degenerate Art* exhibition staged by the Nazis in Munich in 1937. As the persecutions intensified, German, French, and many Eastern Europeans escaped, sometimes in dramatic circumstances, to Britain and the US.

In science, the prominent group was the leading nuclear physicists: Albert Einstein emigrated to the US in 1932. Enrico Fermi left Italy in 1938. For some people emigration to the US was a second transition: the artist Marc Chagall went from Russia to Paris in 1923 and then to the US in 1941. The German painter Max Beckmann went to Paris and Amsterdam, before traveling to the US. Some Americans who domiciled in Europe, such as Lyonel Feininger (1871–1956), returned to the US.

Feininger was born in New York and went to Germany at the age of 16. He was an internationally accomplished cartoonist before starting to paint. He became one of the Expressionists and was also influenced by cubism (3). The German landscape and architecture became his motifs. He had been one of the first artists appointed to teach at the Bauhaus in Dessau, and he moved back to the US when his work was declared “degenerate.” There he created uniquely delicate drawings and paintings of Manhattan (Fig. 1), although he did continue to use, somewhat nostalgically, his previous favorite motifs. His major retrospective was at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 2011 (4).

Wartime emigration had an enormous effect on the American culture. The contribution of foreign scientists to nuclear physics is well known. Émigré architects, particularly the ones associated with the Bauhaus, made a major contribution to American architecture: Walter Gropius went to Harvard, Josef Albers lectured at Yale, and Mies van den Rohe joined the Armour Institute of Technology (later the Illinois Institute of Technology) in Chicago (5). In the visual arts, French Surrealist art (which, incidentally, was not particularly well received at the beginning) soon permeated American popular culture. Exiles from Germany such as Erwin Panofsky, dismissed from the University of Hamburg in 1933, dynamized American art history (6).

Although the cultural effects of emigration are relatively easy to assess, the effect of displacement on the exile’s personality is more complex to define. Sennett’s insightful essay analyzes the nature of “foreignness” (1). The émigrés are often assessed exclusively on how they assimilate and whether they are professionally successful. But then, an emigrant needs not only to safeguard her survival but also to deal with disconnection with home and often a massive cultural adaptation. This may result in cultural criticism of the host country, not quite appreciated by the locals, but sometimes initiating a broader cultural transformation.

Department of Biochemistry, College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK.

\* Address correspondence to the author at: Gartnavel General Hospital, 1053 Great Western Rd., Glasgow G12 0YN, Scotland, UK. Fax +44-141-211-3452; e-mail marek.dominiczak@gla.ac.uk.

Received May 14, 2015; accepted May 26, 2015.

© 2015 American Association for Clinical Chemistry



**Fig. 1. Lyonel Feininger (1871-1956).**

*Mid-Manhattan*, 1952 (gouache, watercolor, pen, and black ink on paper)/Private Collection/Photo ©Christie's Images/Bridgeman Images and ©2015 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

Another side of emigration is the intrinsic prejudice prevalent in the host country. Xenophobia is one of the primeval emotions and is centuries old. A xenophobe fears the foreign and wants to bar foreigners from entering her space. In recent times, for instance, one sees a worrying trend of subtle linguistic denigration of immigrants. The term “emigrant,” particularly in the context of US history, carries positive connotations of courage, pioneer spirit, and adventure. Calling people “refugees” or “displaced” implies empathy. On the other hand, the

recently adopted European media term “migrants” implies negativity and plays to xenophobic agendas.

It is only recently that potential benefits of emigration to the countries of departure started to be considered. Thus in science the diaspora networks emerge that aim to stimulate collaborations between emigrant researchers and institutions in their native countries (7, 8).

Whether one takes the examples from science or from the arts, they say simply one thing: migration is integral to civilizations. Also, they highlight how migrating scientists and artists create a buffer which allows culture to withstand upheavals and major catastrophes, and to preserve continuity.

**Author Contributions:** All authors confirmed they have contributed to the intellectual content of this paper and have met the following 3 requirements: (a) significant contributions to the conception and design, acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data; (b) drafting or revising the article for intellectual content; and (c) final approval of the published article.

**Authors' Disclosures or Potential Conflicts of Interest:** No authors declared any potential conflicts of interest.

**Acknowledgments:** My thanks to Jacky Gardiner for her excellent secretarial assistance.

## References

1. Sennett R. The foreigner. Two essays on exile. London; Notting Hill Editions: 2011. p 45-96.
2. Barron S. Exiles + émigrés: the flight of European artists from Hitler. Eckmann S, coauthor and/or contributor. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; New York: H.N. Abrams; 1997.
3. Faas M. Lyonel Feininger. In: Fiedler J, Feierabend P, editors. Bauhaus. Cologne: Könemann; 1999. p 268-76.
4. Lyonel Feininger: At the edge of the world. June 30–Oct 16, 2011. <http://whitney.org/Exhibitions/LyonelFeininger> (Accessed May 2015).
5. Fiedler J, Feierabend P, editors. Bauhaus. Cologne: Könemann; 1999.
6. Barron S. Art history and exile: Richard Krautheimer and Edwin Panofsky. In: Barron S. Exiles + émigrés: the flight of European artists from Hitler. Eckmann S, coauthor and/or contributor. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; New York: H.N. Abrams; 1997.
7. Meyer JB, Brown M. Scientific diasporas: a new approach to the brain drain. Prepared for the World Conference on Science UNESCO-ICSU Budapest, Hungary, 26 June-1 July 1999. <http://www.unesco.org/most/meyer.htm> (Accessed May 2015).
8. Zylizic M. Recollections. How I became a biochemist. IUMB Life 2008;60:245-8.

DOI: 10.1373/clinchem.2014.236984