

Michał Waszyński's *Wielka droga*: A Polish Stateless Film

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Abstract

The paper explores the production, distribution and reception of Michał Waszyński's film *Wielka droga* [The Great Way], as well as the activities of the Film Section of the Polish II Corps of the Polish Armed Forces in the West. Drawing on a contextual analysis of source materials gathered during archival research, the paper reconstructs the political, diplomatic and social background of the film's reception in postwar Italy. The presented research findings cast new light on such issues as filmmaking during the time of war and Poland's undetermined geopolitical status; the film's entanglement with wartime and postwar diplomacy; the shaping of narratives concerning the Second World War; the emergence of Italian film policies in the late 1940s. All these problems led to the exclusion of Waszyński's film from official distribution and its resulting absence from publications devoted to the history of cinema.

The paper draws on extensive archival research conducted in Archivio Centrale dello Stato in Rome, Archivio Revisione Cinematografica della Direzione Generale del Cinema at the Italian Ministry of Culture and Tourism (Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo) in Rome, Archivio Cesare Zavattini at Biblioteca Panizzi in Reggio Emilia, the archives of the Polish II Corps of the Polish Armed Forces in the West and of the Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade (SBSK) at the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London, and the Archives of the "Kultura" Literary Institute in Le Mesnil-le-Roi. I would like to express my gratitude to the employees of these institutions for their kind support during my research. The paper was written as part of the "Philosovietism in Post-Fascist Italian Film Culture" project, which is funded by the National Science Centre under decision no. UMO-2019/32/C/HS2/00536.

Michał Waszyński's prewar films are relatively well-researched and well-established in the history of Polish cinema, albeit still to an insufficient degree.¹ Recent studies devoted to Waszyński's merits overseas uncovered the brilliant career he made in the 1950s and 1960s as a producer and co-creator of Hollywood hits made in Italy and Spain, including *Roman Holiday* (Wyler, 1953), *El Cid* (Mann, 1961) and *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (Mann, 1964).² However, Waszyński's activities during the Second World War and in the wake of the conflict remain largely obscure and understudied, though it was an extremely interesting and symptomatic period of his career. At the time, Waszyński headed the Film Section of the Propaganda and Culture Department of the Polish II Corps,³ where he oversaw the production of war newsreels, made several documentaries and shorts and directed three full-length feature films: *Wielka droga* (*The Great Way*) (Waszyński, 1946), *Lo sconosciuto di San Marino* (*The Unknown Man of San Marino*)⁴ (Waszyński, 1947a) and *Fiamme sul mare* (*Fire Over the Sea*)⁵ (Waszyński, 1947b). The contents, mode of production and subsequent fates of these films reveal numerous problems and issues related to the narratives on the Second World War, tensions resulting from the postwar order and the gradual emergence of the Cold War. Waszyński's films from the 1940s were doomed to severely limited reception in the Polish People's Republic due to social, geopolitical and diplomatic reasons. His films, made both during the war and under the unfavorable socio-political circumstances in postwar Italy, remained largely outside the history of cinema. They could not be appreciated in Soviet-dominated Poland, which

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- 1 Apart from general studies devoted to the history of Polish cinema, from which Waszyński's life and work could hardly be omitted, there are several publications that explore selected aspects of his prewar oeuvre, such as a book by Agnieszka Żuk (2015), focusing on the film *The Dybbuk* (Waszyński, 1937) and an article by Natasza Korczarowska-Różycka (2015). Given the diversity and multicontextuality of Waszyński's work, it is surprising that a monograph of this director has not yet been attempted.
 - 2 This part of Waszyński's life was reconstructed chiefly in popular works, mostly in Samuel Blumenfeld's book (2006) and in the documentary *The Prince and the Dybbuk* (Niewiera & Rosołowski, 2018).
 - 3 Waszyński was thus referred to in a letter from the head of the department, Cavalry Captain Józef Czapski, dated June 1944, typescript in the collections of the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London, see PISM, A.XI.9/5, file no. 10, Culture and Press Department. With the end of 1945, the Film Section was transferred to the Department for the Wellbeing of Soldiers. It is worth emphasizing here that Waszyński served with the army for as long as until 23 May 1947 (the date of his release from service is given on the basis of a scan of his military service book held at PISM, A.XII.27/67, personal file of Corporal Michał Waszyński).
 - 4 This film was produced in Italy and, since it never entered distribution in Poland, it does not have an official Polish title. Nevertheless, a Polish version of the title was provided in documentation concerning co-financing of the film's production by the Polish II Corps, see PISM, A.XI.7.
 - 5 Unless specified otherwise, translations are provided by the translator on the basis of the author's own translation.

sought to purge the narrative on the Second World War of all negative references to the Soviet Union, of which numerous instances were present in *Wielka droga*. A contextual and source-based analysis of the distribution of *Wielka droga* in Italy shows that such a film could not be presented without restriction also in this country.

An analysis of the contents, distribution and reception of *Wielka droga* uncovers the workings of cultural and political mechanisms that are interesting for several reasons. Most importantly, it shows how Polish films were made outside the Polish Republic both during the war and in the subsequent period, when Poland's geopolitical status was changed and its government ceased to be sovereign. The fate of Waszyński's film prove the importance of state resources in the process of film distribution, highlighting the disadvantageous situation of stateless films produced in foreign countries. An important background element here was a diplomatic conflict between the Polish émigré circles, the Italian government and other state authorities, and the Moscow-dependent diplomacy of the Lublin Poland.⁶

The case of Waszyński's film is an example of a serious gap in research on the history of Polish cinema.⁷ At the same time, all findings concerning *Wielka droga* would supplement research on the history of Italian cinema, from which it is either absent or described in an incomplete or inaccurate manner.⁸ What is more, Italian film studies would benefit from devoting more attention to *Wielka droga*, as it could serve as an interesting

6 Throughout the article, I use the term "Lublin Poland," which comes from political science and the history of diplomacy. It refers to a period during which Moscow's *de facto* supremacy over Polish authorities was being established in the years 1944–1947, i.e., a period between the Red Army's entry into the territory of present-day Poland and the proclamation of the Manifesto of the Polish Committee of National Liberation, and the rigged elections that set the seal on communists' ascension to power (Materski, 2007).

7 The only serious research on film production in the context of the Second World War was taken up, though marginally, in the invaluable works of Stanisław Ozimek and Władysław Jewsiewicki from the 1970s (Jewsiewicki, 1972; Ozimek, 1974). These, however, were written in the Polish People's Republic, which means that they had to omit many important problems of political and historical nature. Contemporary studies are very disappointing in this regard, as they do not present any additional source research, limiting themselves to summarizing the abovementioned works (e.g. Pastuszka, 2009). It is worth noting that foreign research on film production in the times of war and the cooperation between the military and the film industry during the Second World War has yielded compelling results, to be found among others in the works of Alice Lovejoy (2019).

8 In the monumental *Storia del cinema italiano*, only enigmatic and short mentions can be found concerning Waszyński's films (Cosulich, 2003). Other works devoted to the history of Italian cinema are silent on his films, with the exception of *Dizionario del cinema italiano*, which provides the most important, though unfortunately partially inaccurate information on the production and distribution of Waszyński's films (Chiti & Poppi, 1998).

contribution to a reappraisal of the dominant categories of description with regard to the Italian cultural policies of the late 1940s.

In conclusion, the case of *Wielka droga* reveals a broader social issue, as it testifies to the problem of hegemony and serves as an example of that which is eliminated and removed from the public sphere. In other words, to use a term coined by Marco Ferro, it becomes “a veritable counter-analysis of society” (Ferro, 2008) on the brink of the Cold War. While presenting a detailed analysis of the context of *Wielka droga*'s production and distribution, I will actually seek to capture a broader social problem connected with setting boundaries for what is acceptable in public discourse (Biltereyst & Vande Winkel, 2013, p. 3), as well as to reveal conflicting narratives concerning the role of the Soviet Union and the Polish Armed Forces in the Second World War.

The Problem of Poland

In an article published in “The Spectator” on 12 May 1944 (the day the Polish II Corps began an assault on German positions at the Monte Cassino abbey), Zygmunt Lityński, a Polish journalist and diplomat, explained to the British the peculiar situation of Polish soldiers. He asserted, with surprising confidence, that “each of these soldiers has a story to tell that is beyond Hollywood’s grasp” (Lityński, 1944, p. 6). He meant not only the fascinating fates and adventures of General Władysław Anders’ army, which was built from scratch in field conditions and later made its way through Siberia, Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa to the Italian front. Lityński emphasized first and foremost the soldiers’ dire situation, their tragic fate and rather bleak prospects:

No hypocrisy, no political realism, can hide the fact that on the seventeenth day of her life-and-death struggle against all the might of Nazi Germany Poland was stabbed in the back by Soviet Russia, and that in consequence of this act of aggression the Russians occupied one-half of their neighbor’s territory, and then, with the aim of erasing everything Polish from this territory, deported about two million Poles to Siberia to work and perish there. Nothing can hide the fact that the Polish divisions today fighting in Italy on the Sangro – against the same enemy that Soviet divisions are fighting on the Seret – were recruited in the autumn and winter of 1941, not from any Polish “emigrants” in Russia, for there were none, but from precisely these Poles who had been dragged off by the Russians to Ivdyal, Archangel, Pechora or Vercholansk, Kazakhstan or the Mongolian border (Lityński, 1944, p. 6).

Like many other writers, diplomats and artists, Lityński sought to promote a narrative about the Second World War that for years has been marginalized in Western popular culture. They wanted to sensitize the public to the negative role of the Soviet Union, particularly with reference to Polish wartime fates. Since “if we want to win, it is not enough to face German tanks. Above all, we must face the truth” (Lityński, 1944, p. 6) – as Lityński wrote, suggesting that the Polish national interest was being sacrificed for the sake of maintaining good relations with the USSR.

Ultimately, it was this problematic relationship with the Soviet Union that was undoubtedly “beyond the dreams of Hollywood.” When Lityński was writing his article, Hollywood’s greatest hits included such propaganda films as *Mission to Moscow* (Curtiz, 1943), *The North Star* (Milestone, 1943) or *Song of Russia* (Ratoff & Benedek, 1944), which glorified the heroism and sacrifice of the Soviet Union and Joseph Stalin (in the first of these films) in their fight for a good cause. The communist infiltration of Hollywood, sometimes even taking the form of a direct implementation of the Soviet political agenda, is a fact not widely known, though meticulously analyzed by numerous scholars (e.g. Small, 1974; Radosh & Radosh, 2005). It was the research of Mieczysław Biskupski in particular that revealed the impact of Hollywood’s political agenda on building a systematically negative image of Poland in the context of the Second World War. A broad analysis of film production in the years 1939–1945 led the American researcher to put forward a bold thesis that Hollywood was waging a war against Poland during the Second World War (Biskupski, 2010).⁹ A victim of Soviet aggression, Poland simultaneously fell victim to the Allies’ narrative hegemony. The surprisingly scarce presence of Polish subplots in war films was limited, at best, to slapstick, as in Lubitsch’s famous *To Be or Not to Be* (1942), or to grotesque, like in the film *In Our Time* (Sherman, 1944).

It is difficult to say to what extent the Polish opinion makers were aware that Polish themes were virtually absent from the most important and most influential medium of the era. Nevertheless, the press eagerly awaited Polish films that would present the Polish perspective on military action during the Second World War.¹⁰ The feature film *Wielka droga* was conceived as an answer to these expectations. Interestingly, taking into account the fates and the peculiar situation of the Polish II Corps, the film can be seen as an illustration of Lityński’s article.

9 In a strictly diplomatic context, the problem of difficult relations between Poland and the US is discussed in the work of Richard C. Lukas (1982).

10 In the Polish émigré press published in Italy and Great Britain, many articles raised the need to produce a Polish film narrative concerning the Second World War, see e.g. articles of Franciszek Babirecki in “Dziennik Polski” (Babirecki, 1943a; 1943b) and notes from “Orzeł Biały” (Nasza kronika, 1942).

The film centers around the story of a Polish II Corps infantryman, Adam Krajewski (played by Albin Ossowski), whose fates synthesize the most symptomatic experiences of General Władysław Anders' soldiers during the Second World War.¹¹ The film opens with a remarkable recreation of a night assault on the Monte Cassino abbey, in which documentary photos from the battle were successfully combined with studio shots through the use of dynamic editing. In the midst of the battle, the protagonist gets wounded. He is taken to a field hospital, where he undergoes eye surgery and is then transported to a stationary hospital for recuperation. Confused due to loss of vision, he takes the nurse Jadwiga (played by Jadwiga Andrzejewska) for his fiancée. The nurse, seeking to alleviate his suffering and acting on the advice of the doctor (Józef Winawer, who pursued his career in Italy as "Giuseppe Varni"), decides to play along to speed the patient's recovery. She avails herself of the soldier's diary to reconstruct his previous fate, which is presented in the form of metadiegetic retrospective.

The first entries come from the summer of 1939. Adam, a student at the Lwów University of Technology, is dating Irena (Irena Bogdańska¹²), a stage artist who makes a successful debut at the Lwów opera. Their idyllic existence is disrupted by news of the outbreak of the war. Here the film features documentary footage concerning the Defensive War of 1939. "17 September, a new stab in the back – a Red deluge from the east, but we cannot succumb, we need to continue our fight in the underground," reads the nurse, thus introducing the theme of the anti-Soviet activities of the protagonists. A happy and pleasant Lwów turns overnight into a gloomy city terrorized by the NKVD and the Red Army. The betrothed fall into the hands of the NKVD and are deported to gulag camps. The sublime and cheerful Soviet songs are sarcastically contrasted with images of the prisoners carrying out forced labor. The tragic and wretched condition of the expellees is elevated through solemn patriotic and religious feeling (on several levels of meaning, the Christmas episode clearly references Romantic associations and imagery). After the prisoners learn that the Polish Armed Forces in the East are being formed, documentary footage is introduced to show the signing of the Sikorski–Mayski Agreement, during which both Stalin and Anders were present. Irena and Adam are finally reunited in Buzuluk, the army's rallying point. They join the troops

11 I restrict myself to a brief and succinct description of the plot. A more detailed, though not comprehensive, textological analysis of the film can be found in an article by Anna Miller-Klejsa (2014).

12 Later the wife of Władysław Anders, who took his surname and became known as Irena Anders.

and march through Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa, ultimately reaching Italy and Monte Cassino. Throughout this part of the film, documentary footage is interspersed with the story of the protagonists. The diary ends before the battle, thus closing the retrospective and returning to the main plot.

Reading the diary and observing Adam's recovery, the nurse finds herself gradually falling for her patient. She anxiously awaits the moment he would regain sight and discover that the woman pretending to be his beautiful fiancée is in truth an average-looking nurse. This is interrupted by the unexpected arrival of the fiancée. Unbeknownst to the patient, she takes the nurse's place at Adam's bedside and accompanies him when bandages are removed from his eyes. Jadwiga's disappointment in love is subtly portrayed here; she is an unacknowledged heroine who sacrifices her feelings in service to others. The film draws a parallel between the nurse's sacrifice and a soldier's dedication to a higher common cause.

Next the plot focuses on the Polish II Corps liberating subsequent regions and towns in northern Italy. The story is again inter-cut with documentary footage – the famous shots of the Polish II Corps parading in the streets of liberated Bologna and photographs of Italian crowds cheering the victorious army. After the end of the war, the couple marries in the ruins of a church, which is an explicit reference to neo-realistic esthetics. The closing scene takes place in the newly-weds' apartment in Bologna. Adam is bending over his drawing board, when Irena, occupied with cleaning, asks him about the helmet and rifle hanging on the wall: "Who needs that now?" Adam enfolds his wife in a warm embrace and answers reflectively, "You see, we've come a long way, but we haven't yet reached free Poland, and we might need that to reach it." Here, he echoes the earlier words of General Anders: "There is a long and difficult way to Poland ahead of us. [...] We will get there, though not all." The pathos of the final scene, reinforced with a dramatic crescendo, emphasizes the geopolitical aspect of the film. The "great way" depicted in the film refers to the Polish soldiers' journey from Soviet betrayal, persecution, deportation, humiliation and the hardships of war, through complete and devoted commitment to victorious struggle against the Germans, towards an as-yet unachieved goal – the liberation of Poland from Soviet power.

Waszyński's film not only told a story, but also projected its meaning onto future action. It can be viewed, therefore, as a cinematic equivalent to Anders' book *Bez ostatniego rozdziału* (Anders, 2018), which was written at the same time. The text depicts the activities of the Polish II Corps, but simultaneously questions the Yalta order, thus constituting a bold political gesture. The very title – "without the last chapter" – suggests that the story is incomplete and that the described fates and events quite naturally entail further action. The same implication is inherent in Anders' order of 29 May 1946, when British decisions meant he had to move the Polish II Corps to Great Britain and subject it to gradual demobilization:

We will go from Italy to the British lands and then, down who knows which path, to Poland – such Poland as we fought for, a genuine one, which no Polish heart can imagine without Lwów and Wilno. We will never deviate from this path, because this is our destiny (Anders, 2018, p. 435).

The last chapter invoked in the title of Anders' book and the final destination of *Wielka droga* is the primary goal of the Polish Armed Forces – a sovereign Polish Republic, liberated from both German and Soviet occupation.

This propaganda goal of the Film Section of the Polish II Corps, in equal measure ambitious and fundamental, was to assume vast proportions.¹³ Initially, the film was not aimed exclusively at Polish-speaking audiences, and various language versions were to help advance the Polish cause in the international arena. Documents held in Italian archives testify to sweeping distribution plans. Two language versions are presently known: the Polish and the Italian.¹⁴ The film documentation indicates that there was also an English version, but it has never been discovered. Nevertheless, only the Italian version – whose distribution was very limited and hardly effective – ever received a theatrical release.¹⁵ Its fate clearly demonstrates that in the late 1940s, a film with such a storyline and political message was doomed to obscurity even in a Western country which, at least declaratively, was hostile to the Soviet regime.

Film production

Since the works devoted to *Wielka droga* often cite information from unknown sources, it seems beneficial to collate current knowledge on the basis of archival source material. The documentation concerning the production and subsequent fates of the film is fragmentary and scattered in various archives. In the archives of the Polish II Corps, held at the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London, there is neither a separate file devoted to the film's production nor a detailed record of the Film Section's activities. Snippets of information on the film's financing and

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- ¹³ It is worth putting this production in a broader context of distribution and propaganda strategies of the Polish II Corps. An example here can be the 1944 documentary *Monte Cassino* (Waszyński, 1944), which was prepared in the English, French, Italian and Arab language versions.
- ¹⁴ The latter was discovered several years ago in the collections of Museo Nazionale della Scienza e della Tecnologia Leonardo da Vinci in Milan. I would like to extend my thanks to Dr. Simona Casonato from the museum for her help in my research.
- ¹⁵ The first official theatrical screening of the Polish version of *Wielka droga* took place in 2013; in 1990, the film was shown on television (Miller-Klejsa, 2014, p. 17).

communication with Waszyński as the head of the section can be discovered in different files. It can be inferred that until the end of 1946, the Polish II Corps allocated 23 million lire for the production and distribution of *Wielka droga* and *Lo sconosciuto di San Marino*.¹⁶ It can also be indirectly concluded that the Polish II Corps started working on feature films no earlier than on 18 October 1945 (when the Film Section was transferred from the Culture and Press Department to the Department for the Wellbeing of Soldiers) at the beginning of 1946.¹⁷ This is corroborated by the accounts of the film's actors, Albin Ossowski and Irena Andres, who recalled that the film was shot in the summer of 1946, when regular film production was suspended (Dłużewska, 2012).

Nevertheless, some information contained in the documents indicates that the work had commenced at an earlier date. In a duplicate of a letter dated 16 March 1945, the head of the Culture and Press Department requested the Cinecittà studio in Italy for a loan of an Arriflex camera for the period of seven days. In a statement dated 16 May 1945, the same head confirmed that the Tecnostampa V. Genesi Laboratory "is occupied with developing and copying photographic films for the Polish II Corps."¹⁸ In a letter to the British Ministry of Information dated 21 September 1944, it was mentioned that Waszyński had commenced work on "a full-length feature film devoted to the last Allied campaign in Italy," and a request was made for film materials produced by British and American studios.¹⁹ In a letter from the head of the Culture and Press Department to the head of the Film Section (Waszyński was not addressed by name), dated 20 November 1945, the former asked about progress on "a deal with Titanus"²⁰ and asserted that "the film about the fates of the Polish II Corps

16 20 million were allotted for production, while 3 million for distribution – since the Italian version of *Wielka droga* had not yet been made at the time, and *Lo sconosciuto di San Marino* was finished at the end of 1947, the amount must have been devoted to the Polish version of *Wielka droga*. 20 million lire was a substantial sum; for comparison, Roberto Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* (1945) cost a little over a half of that sum – 11 million lire.

17 PISM, A.XI.7, Reports from the Department for the Wellbeing of Soldiers for 1946.

18 PISM, A.XI.9/7, A. Bądryński, Letter dated 16 May 1945.

It should be emphasized here that Tecnostampa V. Genesi was the leading film laboratory of the time, fulfilling orders for the most important Italian feature films. It is worth noting that Genesi also produced *Lo sconosciuto di San Marino*, see the application of G. Genesi dated 7 February 1958, in: DGC, 3601, File of the film *Lo sconosciuto di San Marino*.

19 PISM, A.XI.9/6, Letter from Kazimierz Wiśniowski to Jerry Taylor, Film Distribution, British Ministry of Information, 21 September 1944, typescript.

20 A major Italian film production company, which was active during the Fascist period and suspended its activities until 1948 following Allied occupation. Importantly, however, in the early 1940s Titanus produced several films of the so-called White Russian émigrés who did not hide their critical attitude towards the Soviet regime. It was perhaps for this reason that the company was approached with regard to a full-length feature film financed by the Polish II Corps. References to the film being made in the Titanus studios can be found in some documents held at the ACS.

is an extremely urgent and important matter.”²¹ Among various suggestions as to the possible plot, he suggested: “do not forget to include the history of the Carpathian Brigade prior to its merger with the Polish Armed Forces in the East.” This fragment points to an earlier unfinished film, *Kierunek Wolna i Niepodległa Polska*, which was abandoned in mysterious circumstances. From 1940 to the end of 1942, before it joined the Polish Armed Forces in the East under the command of Anders, the Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade was making a medium-length film directed by Józef Leytes.²² In 1943, however, the concept gradually expanded into a full-length film, with its cost soaring to 1,190,759 pounds. In a *pro memoria* dated 12 September 1943 (after the Brigade had passed under Anders’ command) it was noted:

A lot has been done to thwart the attempts to reconstruct the fates of the Independent Carpathian Rifle Brigade [...]. But since it has gained publicity – all with the involvement of Ministers Kot and Stańczyk – it is now difficult to hush up the whole affair. Dir. Leytes was removed [...] and Dir. Waszyński was put in charge (for which he, using various methods, has long been striving).²³

Ultimately, *Kierunek Wolna i Niepodległa Polska* was never made. Perhaps this abandoned project should be seen as the starting point for *Wielka droga*? Such a hypothesis, however, abounds with question marks, primarily concerning the enigmatic role of Prof. Stanisław Kot, the then Minister of Information and later ambassador of the Lublin government to Rome, who fought the influence of Anders’ circle in Italy after the war, and whose open hostility towards Anders was well known at the time (Materski, 2007, p. 279). The film as a battlefield between the diplomacies of antagonistic forces (the Lublin government and the Polish II Corps) remains an unexplored trope at the crossroads of the history of diplomacy, geopolitics, international relations, and history of cinema as seen from

21 PISM, A.XI.9/7, Letter from Antoni Bądryński to the Head of the Film Section (Michał Waszyński), 20 November 1945.

22 I am recounting the twists and turns of the film’s production based on documentation from the file of the Independent Carpathian Brigade and the file of the Polish II Corps (miscellanea), which are held in the collections of the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London, see PISM, A.XI.38/10, Jozef [sic!] Leytes, letter to the Information and Education Department of the Command of the Polish Army in the East dated 14 April 1943, and *Pro memoria* dated 12 September 1943, typescript.

23 Ibid. I heard about the conflict between Waszyński and Leytes from Andrzej Krakowski, whose father, Józef Krakowski, was a friend of both directors. The reason for the antagonism between the two directors was unknown to Andrzej Krakowski; perhaps it had something to do with the making of this film. Transcript of the conversation is held in the author’s private archives.

a transnational perspective. It is also from this point of view that the Italian fates of Waszyński's film should be analyzed.

La grande strada

Towards the end of 1946, Waszyński's film was taken over by the Italian studio Sirena Film²⁴ and remade for distribution in Italian cinemas. Contrary to what might be expected, this involved more than simply dubbing; numerous significant changes were introduced to the plot, altering the film's political and historical message. What is more, for a film to enter cinemas without its producers bearing exorbitant costs imposed on foreign productions (which could be afforded chiefly by big-budget Hollywood films), the film had to go through a complex procedure to obtain a certificate confirming that it was produced in Italy. In accordance with vague and discretionary criteria, the producer had to demonstrate that it was a domestic, not a foreign, film. In the case of *La grande strada*, the procedure proved to be a very effective form of institutional censorship and pressure from Italian politicians (among others, involved in the assessment was Giulio Andreotti, the undersecretary of state responsible for cinema). A comparison of both versions of the film is thus likely to reveal areas of political interest for Italian decision-makers of the time.

As far as the general message of the film is concerned, it must be noted that due to changes to the plot and shifts of emphasis, an epic about the wartime fates of the Polish army was transformed into a melodramatic love story. Contemporary descriptions place the love triangle between Adam, the nurse and the fiancée at the center of the plot, to which the fates of the Polish army is just the background;²⁵ this is confirmed by the extant version. As a result, the structure of the original – where the stories of the protagonists provided a springboard for an epic tale about the tragic fates and heroic valor of the Polish nation – was reversed. This fundamental change was brought about by numerous minor, though significant, modifications to the plot.

Most importantly, the geopolitical message of the film was completely erased. The Polish version is organized around the subtly accented leitmotif of Lwów. The city situated in the Polish Eastern Borderlands is both the point of departure and destination for the protagonists;

24 A small Italian studio (or, as the siren logo might indicate, a camouflaged Polish studio registered in Italy as a domestic studio); unfortunately, I was unable to find more information pertaining to its operations. It should be mentioned here that in 1947, the studio produced Waszyński's next film, *Fiamme sul mare*.

25 The film's description in the censorship files, see DGC, 2694, File of the film *La grande strada*, Minutes of the meeting of the censorship commission on 7 August 1947.

Lwów is portrayed through its iconic landmarks, including the opera house, the market square and the monument to Adam Mickiewicz. Longing for the city is expressed not only in the dialogue (“our Polish Lwów”), but also in the intradiegetic song *Tylko we Lwowie!*,²⁶ which appears in the most important scenes. “Lwów” also appears in various shots (posters, unit names).

Taking into account that the status of the Polish Eastern Borderlands, particularly of Wilno and Lwów, was a hot political topic of the time, it is hardly surprising that the controversy was removed from the Italian version of the film. Lwów was replaced with Lublin. This served to neutralize the film’s geopolitical message, but could also be seen as an indirect legitimization of the so-called Lublin government and the Manifesto of the Polish Committee of National Liberation. What is more, this modification made it possible to omit all reference to the Soviet invasion of 17 September, which is absent from the Italian version. The protagonists are portrayed as resistance members in the German occupation zone. A new scene of arrest had to be shot for the Italian version: the NKVD men were replaced with German-speaking Gestapo men. The protagonists were then sent to a concentration camp. In circumstances unaccounted for in the diegesis, the two characters find themselves in Russia, where – thanks to Stalin’s friendly move – the Polish Army in the East is being formed. Naturally, some dialogue from the Polish version had to be removed, such as “the Soviet government made it clear that we were not welcome and refused to further supply our army. We left the country without regret,” as well as all ironic and critical remarks. The subplot concerning the journey through Central Asia and the Middle East, not being controversial, was left virtually unscathed, but more changes were introduced in the latter parts of the film. The sequences portraying the liberation of northern Italy, the crowds of Italians cheering for the Polish II Corps in Bologna, as well as the beautiful wedding in the ruins of an Italian town were all removed. The film ends with the heartbroken and miserable nurse watching the couple leave the hospital. Consequently, the most controversial closing lines about armed struggle for free Poland had to be removed. Another important detail worth noting is that General Anders is virtually absent from the Italian version. While he had several speaking scenes in the original, as a result of the changes his presence was reduced to a few unimportant silent documentary scenes.

²⁶ It is worth noting that Waszyński’s prewar films often focused on Lwów; he created a famous duet of local “batiars” (tramps) Szczepko i Tońko. The well-known song *Tylko we Lwowie* comes from Waszyński’s film. What is more, his unfinished, last (and lost) prewar film – *Serce batiara* – was, as the very title suggests, Lwów-centered. Lwów, however, was an important theme not only for Waszyński; much of the intelligentsia within the Polish II Corps had close ties with the city.

Nevertheless, the politically truncated and revised version of the film was still difficult for Italian policymakers to accept. Among materials held at the Archivio Revisione Cinematografica della Direzione Generale del Cinema, there are documents concerning both the phase of preventive censorship²⁷ and the viewing of the final version. The script and dialogue list were submitted on 6 August 1947; the appended description of the film demonstrates that the plot had already been changed to fit the melodramatic frame. It was probably at this stage of the film's production that a requirement was imposed to eliminate all critical references to the Soviet Union. It was also noted that there existed an English version of the film, for which permission was granted to take it abroad, and at the same time the film was referred for certification as an Italian production. Interestingly, only Waszyński figures in these documents as the film's director.

On as early as 7 February 1948, the film was submitted for final censorship. However, Waszyński was replaced in the documents with Vittorio Cottafavi, a beginning Italian director, while leading Polish actors were omitted to the benefit of supporting Italian actors. The remaining members of the team were also replaced with Italians; there was not a single Polish-sounding name in the submitted documents. The reason for this can be gleaned from source materials held at the Archivio Centrale dello Stato, which contain traces of a long battle between the producer and the officials to recognize the film as an Italian production. This was staunchly denied first by Vincenzo Calvino, and later by Giulio Andreotti. Interestingly, another leading Christian Democrat, Alberto Canaletti-Gaudenti, also became engaged in the debate.²⁸ In two personal letters to censorship director Vincenzo Calvino, dated 18 September and 14 November 1947, he lobbied for the film, suggesting that it was made by his son Filippo.²⁹ In the second letter, seeing that the issue was then being decided, he entrusted "the further fate of the film to your personal involvement."³⁰ All of this, however, was to no avail. The final decision to decline the certificate of a domestic film to this production was signed by Andreotti. In a letter dated 10 March 1948, in a dry, bureaucratic tone

27 The script and dialogue list were deliberately submitted for censorship before the filming began in order to avoid both unnecessary expenses at this stage of the film's production and additional procedures during the viewing phase (Gaudenzi, 2014).

28 An Italian count and university professor, one of the founders of Christian Democracy in Italy. At the time he served as the President of the Italian National Institute of Statistics.

29 As a matter of fact, his son was engaged in Waszyński's later productions; he is named as co-screenwriter for *Lo sconosciuto di San Marino* and *Fiamme sul mare*. His entire film career, however, was probably limited to his cooperation with Waszyński. Interestingly, in the recently-published memoirs of Lily Koppel, Filippo Canaletti-Gaudenti is portrayed as a playboy, a gallant aristocrat, amateur pilot, a dilettante student and poet and Rome's socialite (Koppel, 2008).

30 ACS, b. 7 CF0658, File of the film *La grande strada*, Letter from Alberto Canaletti-Gaudenti to Vincenzo Calvino, 14 November 1947.

and citing relevant provisions of law, Andreotti refused to recognize the film as an Italian production. To substantiate his decision, he introduced a contentious division into films made in Italy (*origine italiana*) – since he could not, and did not, question the fact that much of the production and all of the post-production work took place in Italy – and films of Italian nationality (*nazionalità italiana*), which he refused to recognize without giving any reasons, thus relegating the film to niche distribution.³¹

The issue of recognizing the film as an Italian production dragged into the 1950s, when the policy towards communism and the Soviet regime became increasingly defined by the dynamics of the Cold War. Nevertheless, this factor did not help the film.³² In a memorandum dated 12 November 1950, the anticommunist character of the film was acknowledged, and it was also noted that the film “is treated in an incomprehensible manner,” as “it is today more than ever that it should receive support. The film portrays part of the Polish odyssey in the context of the Bolshevik invasion, which makes it particularly relevant.” Yet, as the author observes,

the film is in a peculiar position [...]. Even though it was made in Italy, it is denied governmental support. It does not even feature on the list of obligatory screenings; as a result, it is treated as an imported film, but at the same time is subject to limitations and restrictions imposed on Italy's export films.³³

Eventually, the film's limited distribution began as late as in 1952. In the history of Italian cinema, however, the film remains “virtually unknown, shown in secret, seen by few” (Chiti & Poppi, 1998, p. 179).

Socio-political context

As regards the problem raised in the memorandum, it has to be placed in a broader socio-political context of Italy on the brink of the Cold War. It was a specific period, during which various geopolitical influences were indirectly shaping Italy's internal policies. Until 1947, the government

³¹ Ibid., Letter of the *Undersecretary* to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Giulio Andreotti, dated 10 March 1948.

³² The peculiar ways of Italian film censorship are worth mentioning here. A prominent example is Giorgio Amendola's *I peggiori anni della nostra vita* (Amendola, 1950), which satirical portrayal of Stalin caused the censors to intervene for fear of possible “deterioration of diplomatic relations.” For more about censoring anti-Soviet motifs in Italian cinema, see Józwiak, 2023c.

³³ ACS, b. 7 CF0658, File of the film *La grande strada*, Memorandum dated 12 November 1950.

included representatives of the Italian Communist Party, whose leader, Palmiro Togliatti (who at the time held the important office of Minister of Justice), was a prominent member of the Comintern and showed unwavering support for Stalin's policies. Despite appearances, Italian Christian Democrats did not strongly oppose maintaining consensus with the Soviets. On the contrary, the party pursued a self-serving policy with regard to Eastern Europe, epitomized in the concept of *equidistanza* (impartiality) (Pasztor & Jarosz, 2018, p. 83), as evidenced among others by the very prompt establishment of diplomatic and trade relations with the new communist authorities in Poland.³⁴

The diplomatic contacts between Italy and the Lublin government seem to have been of some consequence for Waszyński's film, and they thus merit an analysis. Both the accounts of the Italian ambassador Eugenio Reale and the reports of the Lublin diplomats, including the aforementioned Ambassador Stanisław Kot, reveal two complementary issues that determined relations between Poland and Italy at the time when the fates of Waszyński's film were being decided. On the one hand, the Italian government was intent on signing a trade agreement with Poland and securing, as soon as possible, coal supplies to the country. The Lublin diplomacy was well aware of this bargaining chip: "the need for Polish coal is so great that Italians are ready to further limit internal consumption in order to obtain the necessary funds to pay Poles for their coal" – reads the report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from September 1945 (as cited in: Pasztor & Jarosz, 2018, p. 101). On the other hand, fighting the influence of Anders and his political circle was a top priority for the Lublin diplomacy. Anders was a considerable problem for the new government, as he openly questioned its legitimacy and pursued his own geopolitical agenda with regard to postwar order in Eastern and Central Europe, while at the same time he had a sizeable military force at his command and an international mandate resulting from his ties with the legitimate Polish government-in-exile. As the Trieste dispute³⁵ escalated and another

34 Diplomatic relations between the Lublin government and Rome were *de facto* established as early as in April 1945 with the reciprocal Agreement on the protection of and assistance for Italian citizens in the territory of Poland and Polish citizens in the territory of Italy. Significantly, Italian diplomatic efforts were not official, as they were contrary to the guiding principles of the British diplomacy. The Lublin government was officially recognized by Italy on 10 July 1945. In November of the same year, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs and leader of Christian Democrats, Alcide De Gasperi, expressed "special gratitude to the Polish government" for concluding the above-mentioned agreement (Materski, 2007, pp. 54–55, 278).

35 The diplomatic crisis between Italy and Yugoslavia in the years 1945–1946 concerned the status of the Trieste region. The troops of the Polish II Corps, which were stationing there, were ready to commence military action against Yugoslavia. At the same time, the command was getting prepared for another world war between Western Allies and the Soviet Union, which was to begin with the Trieste conflict (Żak, 2014, p. 291).

armed conflict loomed, the importance of Anders' position could hardly be overestimated. Having excellent relations with Allied commanders and standing at the head of a 100,000-strong army in combat readiness – which had gained considerable trust of the Italian public and played an undeniable role in defeating Germany – Anders raised significant military and symbolic capital. The Italian fates of the Polish II Corps demonstrate, however, how quickly this capital was squandered.

Especially revealing in this regard is an analysis of articles published in the “L'Unità” daily newspaper, a press organ of the Italian Communist Party (the biggest political party in Italy at the time), which became engaged, in an unprecedented manner, in the delegitimizing campaign against Anders and Polish troops stationing in Italy. Such articles as *Anders' mobs, post-mortem agents of Nazism* (Le bande di Anders, 1946) were regularly published. Anders was repeatedly labeled a “fascist,” and his very presence was portrayed as a “menace to the independence of Italy” (Secondo Bevin i soldati di Anders..., 1946). Interestingly, one of these articles suggested a direct link between Anders' case and coal supplies from Poland: on 20 March 1946, a front-page article *60,000 tons of coal per month will arrive from Poland* was supplemented with a sub-title reading *Relations between Polish bandits and General Anders*. The article concerned a statement made by the Italian ambassador in Warsaw, and the author revealed that both problems constituted an important element of diplomatic relations between the countries.³⁶ In this article, similarly to many others, Anders was assigned responsibility for sabotage activities carried out by the anti-communist underground movement in Poland.

Some headlines of the Italian communist press were blatantly xenophobic, such as *Out with Anders' criminals! or Polish fascists*. Ethnic tensions in postwar Italy were also analyzed in foreign press. Elisabeth Wiskemann wrote in “The Spectator” that “one of the greatest obstacles to the free development of Italy is the afflux to her territory of refugees and expatriated citizens from East European countries.” One of the key problems broached in the article was the presence of the Polish II Corps and their unflinching anti-Russian attitudes (Wiskemann, 1946, pp. 6–7). Such enunciations were readily taken up by the communist press, as they lent objectivity to the criticism leveled at the presence of the Polish II Corps in Italy.

Another important socio-cultural factor that influenced the reception of Waszyński's film and the image of the Polish II Corps was the dispute concerning the narratives about the Battle of Monte Cassino. While the communist press sought to discredit Anders' army, Italian

³⁶ Interview with the Italian Ambassador in Warsaw Eugenio Reale (60 milla tonellate di carbone..., 1946).

right-wing circles and those associated with the Catholic Church focused on emphasizing that the battle entailed a senseless waste of civilian lives and damage to the cultural heritage. Such discourse found expression in a high-profile film *Montecassino* (Gemmiti, 1946), which was coproduced by Pastor Film, a Catholic producer with ties to the Vatican. The film presented the battle from a different perspective than *Wielka droga*, as its main protagonists – and mostly positive characters – include Wehrmacht soldiers defending their positions at Monte Cassino. In the film, they are the ones who protect the invaluable cultural heritage of the abbey, opposing the aggressive and irrational actions of the Allies. The previously mentioned Vincenzo Calvino, who displayed such an uncompromising attitude towards *Wielka droga*, described the Italian film devoted to the Battle of Monte Cassino in his censorship review as a high-minded “declaration of war on war itself and an appeal to all nations for mutual understanding and affection.”³⁷ Presented with great fanfare at the Venice Film Festival in 1946 and strongly promoted by the most important right-wing film magazine, “La rivista del cinematografo”, *Montecassino* most likely played a significant role in shaping Italian perceptions of the battle. Nevertheless, the relativization of the Second World War in Italian cinema, achieved through favoring the recent fellow Axis power and stirring up negative feelings towards the Allies – all at the expense of the narrative presented in Waszyński’s film – remains thought-provoking and ethically questionable. Juxtaposed with the fates of *Wielka droga*, *Montecassino* clearly demonstrates that from today’s perspective, the criteria used to mould the image of the Second World War in Italian cinema were far from obvious and rather surprising.

Reception of Waszyński’s films in Italy

Unfortunately, the circumstances surrounding the Italian distribution of *Wielka droga* remain unknown. Some sources point to August 1949, while others indicate a later date – 1952. Thus far, I have not discovered any discussion of the film in the Italian press, except for a brief mention in the “Intermezzo” magazine from 1952 (Chiti & Poppi, 1998, p. 179). It can be reasonably assumed that the film had hardly any distribution. In this context, it seems advisable to examine the reception of other films made by Waszyński at that time.

Lo sconosciuto di San Marino, coproduced by the Polish II Corps, was a daring film made in cooperation with the chief proponents of neorealism. The film was written by a leading screenwriter of the era, Cesare

37 ACS, b. 2 CF0157, File of the film *Montecassino*.

Zavattini, and tastefully photographed by Arturo Gallea; the lead roles were played by the most famous neorealist actors, Vittorio De Sica and Anna Magnani, and by stars of the “white telephone” genre, Antonio Gandusio and Irma Gramatica. Polish actresses who played the leads in *Wielka droga* – Jadwiga Andrzejewska and Irena Bogdańska, as well other actors from theatrical productions of the Polish II Corps also appeared in the film. *Lo sconosciuto di San Marino* tells a moving story about the various fates of refugees towards the end of the Second World War from the perspective of the small republic of San Marino. A separate subplot is devoted to the tragic history of the Warsaw Uprising and the wanderings of Poles losing hope of ever returning to a free homeland. Taken as a whole, the film explores the complex situation towards the end of the Second World War; the fates of the victims, persecutors and bystanders involved in the tragic wartime events become intertwined in a simple yet subversive story.³⁸ This poignant film skillfully portrayed key themes of the immediate postwar era: the trauma and the experience of loss and suffering, complicity and guilt, at the same time showing that these problems were present even in the small community of the republic of San Marino, far removed from the big events.

The film had all the qualities to earn an important place in the canon of cinematic representations of the Second World War. Unfortunately, a vigorous negative press campaign was launched, and the unprecedented joining of forces by communist and Catholic titles caused the film to tank with “devastating financial results.”³⁹ The reviewers described it as “an outrage to Italian cinematography,” “an expression of a loony clerical tendency” or “an imprint of a puerile clerical propaganda, devoid of any tact.” An acclaimed Italian film expert, then a critic with a communist daily newspaper, Lorenzo Quaglietti, protested against “such a terrible insult to Italian cinematography,” heaping criticism on the film’s “vulgarity” combined with “tactlessness, inconclusiveness and stupidity.”⁴⁰ These opinions were cited by the head of the right-wing Catholic Action, who together with Bishop Albino Galletto took the steps to force a reappraisal of the film by Italian censors and its subsequent withdrawal from distribution.⁴¹

38 A more detailed analysis of the film can be found in an article *What Are We Fighting For? Michal Waszynski's Italian-Polish films on the Second World War* (Józwiak, 2023a).

39 As the film’s producer, Giulio Genesi, recalled in 1958; see DGC, 3601, File of the film *Lo sconosciuto di San Marino*, Application from G. Genesi dated 7 February 1958.

40 A review of the film’s press reception is based on the documents held at the Archivio Cesare Zavattini in the Panizzi Library in Reggio Emilia.

41 Such suggestions can be found in the official documents of an Italian center for morality monitoring, but I was unable to determine on the basis of available materials whether the Catholic activists succeeded in halting the film’s distribution, see ISACEM, 1212, b.16, *Relazione del Segretario Generale per la moralita* dated 31 January 1948 (a scan of the document is available in the database at <https://sites.unimi.it/cattoliciecinema>).

Waszyński's third Italian film and his last directing effort proved that the label of soldier with General Anders' Polish II Corps effectively prevented pursuing a film career in Italy. In *Fiamme sul mare*, Waszyński did not make any explicit reference to either Polish matters or the Second World War, and only the subtle metaphors could suggest association with the Polish fates. Nevertheless, the film was barely distributed and consequently disappeared from the Italian film canon. The financial results and viewership were much lower than in the case of *Lo sconosciuto di San Marino*.⁴² The reception of this film, however, had a happy ending. Last year, the prestigious DVD edition *Perduti nel buio* (*Lost in the Dark*) featured this forgotten masterpiece of Italian cinema, thus rescuing it from oblivion.⁴³

Sovietophilia in the world of film

Wielka droga and Waszyński's two other Italian films are part of an unknown and hidden history of cinema. That they are unknown and hidden, however, results from something bigger – the ignorance of, or rather unwillingness to discover the mechanisms for concealing, a broader phenomenon of which they are part. It is therefore impossible to consider these films in separation from the socio-political context which consigned them to oblivion.

Waszyński's films represent an ambitious vision aimed at creating a Polish-centric narrative on the Second World War from outside Poland, in defiance of geopolitics and agreements between great powers. The fate of these films proved the impracticality of such ventures, the impossibility of introducing a narrative different from the dominant one, even if they do not seem to be in conflict. Of course, the lack of conflict is more apparent than real, as all diplomatic relations are the continuation of war by other means in peacetime. For postwar Italy, the Soviet bloc was a far more important diplomatic partner than the Allied units of the Polish Armed Forces and the Polish government-in-exile. The daunting principle of *realpolitik* brought about the failure of the political vision promoted by the leader of the Polish II Corps and of his attempt at reversing the Yalta order in Eastern Europe, to which Waszyński's films gave expression. Even

⁴² The data from *Dizionario del cinema italiano* show that *Fiamme sul mare* earned 35 million lire – a half of what Waszyński's earlier film had earned, as the previous figure was put at 71 million lire (Chiti & Poppi, 1998, p. 155 and 325).

⁴³ I discuss the film in greater detail in the "Reviews" section of "Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies" (Józwiak, 2023b). Sadly, the brochure included with the DVD of *Fiamme sul mare* misstates the facts concerning Waszyński's fate in the context of the Second World War and the Soviet Union. The issue of the political message of his postwar films is also not discussed.

though the postwar Italian government opposed Soviet influence in its official rhetoric, plainly sided with the United States in the emerging Cold War and openly confronted the Soviet bloc in the Trieste dispute, maintaining good diplomatic relations with Stalin's regime vastly outweighed the interests of Anders' circle and presenting the truth about the Second World War.⁴⁴ Anders was well aware that "Russia demanded that Poland be sacrificed as the price of further cooperation" and that the West submissively accepted these terms (Anders, 2018, p. 450). Maria Pasztor wrote about this in the context of the history of diplomacy and Polish-Italian relations, noting that "to win Stalin over [...] was very important to the Italian diplomats," which, in turn, negatively affected relations with the Polish government-in-exile (Pasztor, 2015, p. 86). Consequently, the Soviet aggression against Poland in 1939, the Katyń Massacre and the misery of Siberian exiles were strictly taboo in Italian cinema, as evidenced also by the fates of such Italian films as Mario Costa's *Prigionieri del male* (1955) and Giovanni Guareschi's *La Rabbia* (1963). These instances form part of a broader problem concerning the mechanisms of portraying the Soviet regime in Italian cinema, which can be described as Sovietophilia in post-Fascist Italian film culture. In light of the above examples, it turns out that the key category of description with regard to the postwar Italian film culture – the policy of containment aimed at preventing the spreading of Soviet influence and communist ideology⁴⁵ – is not applicable in all cases.

It is important, however, to appreciate the challenge to the Soviet system presented by Waszyński's film. A decided fight for Poland's sovereignty, especially in light of the Allies and Italy's policies and diplomacy, seemed to be beyond the capabilities of the pro-independence and anti-communist circles consolidated around Anders. At a time when the entire Hollywood, Cinecittà – not to mention the Soviet film industry – protected the good name of the Soviet Union and its leader, Waszyński and his team dared not only to show the unpleasant truth about Stalin's regime, but also to suggest the fight for Poland against the USSR. Such a political stance doomed the film to obscurity through official distribution channels. At the same time, *Wielka droga* became part of a grassroots anti-communist dissident culture, which was emerging in the circles of Polish émigrés who never abandoned the idea of sovereign Poland. As we

44 It has to be noted, however, that both in the public debate and their diplomatic efforts the Italian government and right-wing circles did not always avoid confrontation with Stalin's regime, as was the case with accusations against the Soviet Union of illegally holding Italian prisoners of war and using them for slave labor. This only demonstrates, however, how self-serving the Italian diplomacy was when it came to Stalin's policies (Focardi, 2005, p. 22).

45 In the most important studies devoted to Italian film culture of the Cold War era, the key categories in the political context include "removing Soviet influence" and "anti-communism" (e.g. Treveri-Gennari, 2009; Gundle, 2000).

know from accounts of witnesses, the film was an integral element of émigré life, and its screenings accompanied important memorial and veterans' ceremonies. Its political and culture-making influence was arguably different from that of, for example, literature written by representatives of the Parisian "Kultura" or journalism broadcast by Radio Free Europe. Nevertheless, it belonged to the same milieu.⁴⁶ It seems reasonable, therefore, to consider this film as one of the many cultural phenomena of the Cold War era that contributed to the dissident and anti-regime culture which, eventually, played a part in ending the Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe. It can be said that the goal suggested in the last scene of *Wielka droga*, although long in coming, was finally achieved with the overthrow of communism.

(transl. by Aleksandra Arumińska)

⁴⁶ It is worth noting that the communities of both Parisian "Kultura" and the Polish team of Radio Free Europe came from Anders' circle or were outright continuations of the Culture and Press Department of the Polish II Corps. Józef Czapski, later the host of the "Kultura" house in Maisons-Laffitte, was Waszyński's immediate superior in the Polish II Corps.



1. The film crew working on *Wielka droga* during shooting at a film studio in Rome (Palatina?) in 1946. The man wearing a beret and sitting in the front row is Gen. Władysław Anders. To his left is the film director, Michał Waszyński.
Photo. Felicjan Maliniak, Anna Maria Anders' collection, courtesy of the National Film Archive - Audiovisual Institute



2. Gen. Władysław Anders playing himself in *Wielka droga* - a frame from the film
Courtesy of the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London



3. An SS man whose memories of events from Warsaw (perhaps a reference to the Warsaw Uprising?) are coming back, a frame from the film *Lo Sconosciuto di San Marino*
copyright unknown



4. Anna Magnani and Michał Waszyński on the set of
Lo Sconosciuto di San Marino, 1947

Photo. author unknown, Karol Józwiak's collection

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