

Representations of Polish Migrants in British Media from the Perspective of “Moral Panic” Theory

Alicja Portas

University of Opole

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to present the prevalent media representations of the Polish immigrants to the UK. Since the EU Accession on May 8, 2004, conservative British media adopted a relatively negative attitude towards the new European migrants, in particular the Poles. This study aims to verify and nuance this assumption. It reviews the theories applicable to anti-Polish moral panic, stereotyped portrayals of Eastern Europeans and the social impacts of media narratives. The first case study offers an analysis of the documentary *The Poles are Coming!* directed by Tim Samuels in order to explore stereotypes and devices of (mis)representation employed. The second case study traces the evolution of representations of Poles in Britain in selected texts from the British newspaper *The Guardian*. A content analysis is combined with a discourse analysis of the articles to investigate to what extent negative framing and labelling are employed in the British media coverage of the migrants.

Key words: Stereotypes, moral panic, Polish migrant, UK, British media, representation

1. Introduction

It was not until May 2004 that the United Kingdom experienced a large inflow of migrants from Central and Eastern Europe, the majority of whom were Poles (Fitzgerald and Smoczynski 2015). According to the British Office of National Statistics, since 2007 Poles have been the biggest migrant group from the EU, with estimated 788 thousand residents in 2016 (Office of National Statistics 2017).

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During that time the most widely circulated conservative press narratives constructed a prejudiced representation of Poles and fomented negative attitudes towards Eastern European migrants often portraying them as a burden to society and unfit for functioning among the British (Chovanec and Molek-Kozakowska 2017). Needless to say, at that time some anti-Polish stereotypes were formed, with single incidents involving Poles feeding powerful slogans and images. This functioned as a dialectical move which represented Polish labour migrants as a threat to the individual rights of British citizens in the context managing their employment insecurities (Fitzgerald and Smoczynski 2015). The stereotype of a Pole with low education, poor English-language skills, difficulty in assimilating, and unsophisticated manners proving their low cultural capital was disseminated, even if it was only partly true,⁶ and Poles stood out to the British among other Eastern Europeans. This contributed to Pole's social stigmatization and served the moral panic ideology that reproduced the harshest stereotypes of Polish migrants as job-stealers and benefit-tourists (Spiegelman 2013).

Although migration has been historically an ever-existing phenomenon in Britain, with migrants' motivations commonly alike, the BBC documentary *The Poles are Coming!* directed by Tim Samuels was aimed at elucidating the A8 wave of immigration and its consequences to various groups involved. It portrays the consequences of the large influx of Poles to such provincial towns as Peterborough and the fates of individual migrant families. However, this study demonstrates that the light it sheds on the issue is different from the accepted media narrations at the time, as the infotainment approach employed may seek out to nuance the image of migration.

Equally important is the role of the press, since it has the potential to guide people's judgments and opinions on many social issues (Wilk 2017) and this study will explore whether "othering" and negative stereotypes have been reproduced in progressive and liberal outlets. According to Fomina and Frelak (2008), the representations of Polish migrants have impacted the economic, cultural and political views offered in the British press, whose criticisms were not entirely directed against Poles but, as appears in most cases, against the British government. One could claim that these possibly influenced the results

⁶ The complex relation between the economy and immigration is discussed in many studies, including this recent report from London School of Economics: <https://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/brexit05.pdf>.

of the Brexit referendum, which is treated as a critical moment that can be used to decide how to organize data for the analysis of press articles in the present study.

Some of the key analytic categories and conceptual frameworks adopted in this project are “stereotype,” “moral panic,” and “media narrative.” “Stereotyping” is understood as forging an overgeneralized and fixed idea regarding other ethnic groups, which does not correspond to factual data (Stangor 2000). The term “moral panic” was first introduced by Stanley Cohen in his book *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972). The term expresses the idea that certain representations of current events by the media may lead to the development of biased opinions within the society, including fears regarding the matter of concern and societal prejudice. The term “media narrative” is understood as the media creating and propagating their own storyline through which subsequent events are filtered and interpreted (Richardson 2007). These concepts are used to account for the setup of (relatively stable) media representations of migrants, including Poles, against which new claims and statements are being made.

Given these points, this article analyses a sample of twelve newspaper articles published on the webpage of *The Guardian* ranging on a time scale of pre- and post-Brexit referendum (see Appendix 1). As Fomina and Frelak (2008) note, *The Guardian* has socio-democratic and liberal credentials and, although it has a limited circulation of 132,793 copies per day (Audit Bureau of Circulations 2019), it is considered a quality newspaper and an influential daily that is popular amongst the intellectual elite. A content analysis is carried out to trace the extent to which there have been changes in the content of articles regarding the Polish and Eastern European migrants in the time range. To investigate further and to compare the findings, a narrative analysis is undertaken to establish if there is a common, pre-arranged storyline in the articles that is aligned with the reoccurring stereotypes in which Polish migrants in the UK continue to be represented in the British media.

2. Moral Panic in the UK after A8

Known within the European Union as A8 (EU enlargement by the following new member states: Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary), the accession of eight Central and Eastern European

countries was finalised on May 1, 2004. Given its flexible labour market rules, the United Kingdom experienced a large inflow of migrants from A8 countries of whom the majority were Poles (Fitzgerald and Smoczynski 2015). With a steady growth of Polish migrants, the UK had implemented a “limited registration scheme” for the migrant labourers, which showed that the predominant number of A8 migrants were Poles (66 per cent) who registered as employed in low paid jobs (Office of National Statistics 2017). Yet the numbers of those who did not register in the scheme or were self-employed are unknown and it was only estimated that the figures were equivalently high. As is visible in Figure 1, the percentage of EU members being in employment is relatively higher than inborn British citizens.

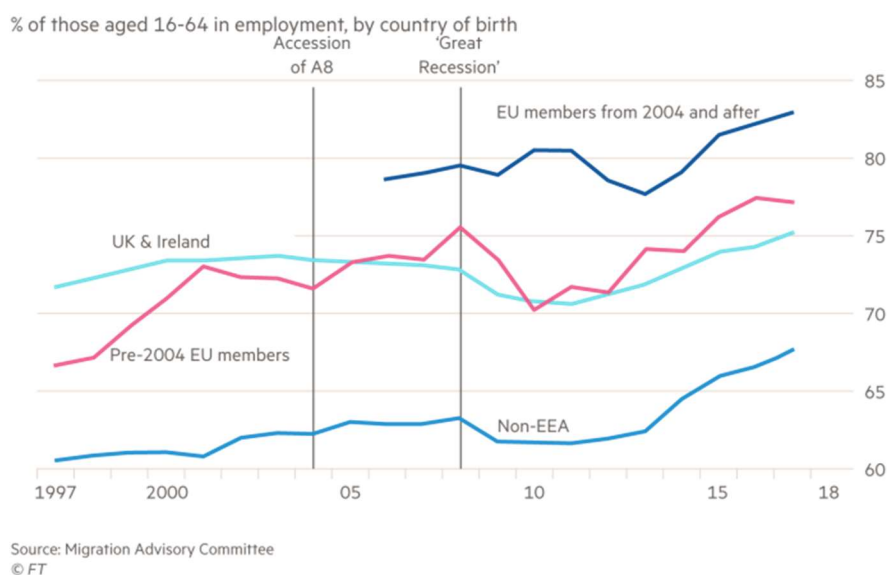


Figure 3: Employment in the UK by percentage of those aged 16-64, by country of birth. Migration Advisory Committee online.

The unexpectedly high numbers were thought of as abnormal and of influence to the labour market, which also exposed British organisations' lack of preparation and readiness to cope with economic migrants from Poland. Crisis management was the first action undertaken in response to the case. For example, trade unions faced many new demands while encountering Polish labourers, for example to help negotiate between groups of employees and potential employers. Trade

unions attempted to supply the Polish workers with information in Polish; however, this was not sufficient because the unions were constrained by the shortage of resources to fit “the needs of newly emerging communities” (Chan, Fitzgerald and Smoczynski 2013, 154). These critical events had very quickly been addressed by the British National Party and UK Independence Party which repeatedly demanded that the British Government at the time ‘restore proper control’ over housing policy and immigration. The crisis enabled Eurosceptic parties to build political capital and to stir further controversy around migration, particularly from Eastern Europe. This was a breeding ground for anxieties and insecurities in the domestic labour force, which gave rise to moral panic.

With British media exploiting the controversy around this new huge wave of migration, certain anti-Polish moral panic was fomented. For example, pictures in British tabloids functioned as a dialectical move which represented the Polish labour migrant, or rather the stereotype thereof, as an economic and social threat, for example as job-stealers or as benefit tourists (Fitzgerald and Smoczynski 2015). They were many and thus less integrated into the British society, which, as a result, contributed to their social marginalisation and served the moral panic ideology that added to the stereotypical images of Polish migrants. The moral panic arose from the assumption that the Polish labourers had such a significant impact on the job market that they impacted job opportunities for British citizens and exploited the job market to the point where British workers had little influence on their pre-existing employment instability (Fitzgerald and Smoczynski 2015).

The British public, even if it does not have any contact with the issue of immigration, draws their information from the mass media, which are the primary source of news on societal problems and deviance (Cohen 2002). In his explanation of media panic, Cohen states:

The media appear in any or all of three roles in moral panic dramas: (i) Setting the agenda – selecting those deviant or socially problematic events deemed as newsworthy, then using finer filters to select which of these events are candidates for moral panic; (ii) Transmitting the images – transmitting the claims of claim-makers, by sharpening up or dumbing down the rhetoric of moral panics; or (iii) Breaking the silence, making the claim (29–30).

As Cohen (2002) states, media can take on a role that results in generating and fuelling moral panics. To begin with, an agenda has to be set, which means that an occurring problem, situation or social complications are considered to be newsworthy and selective filters are applied to single out cases that fit the moral panic scenario. Correspondingly, media outlets then produce an allegation towards the case of concern and transmit it to the public. With this understanding of media's application of filters through which they transmit the current events, the moral panic functions "to reassert the dominance of an established value system, provide ontological security at a time of social anxiety, and target those who are considered folk-devils as an external threat" (Chan et al. 2013, 151).

On the condition that media capitalise on this fear, the moral panic, and the negative stereotypes of the other, will be inevitably implemented in the prevalent, agenda-setting narratives. However, it is important to realise that over the years the British government has legitimised public antipathy towards Eastern Europeans and adopted a way of public expression that aligns with that of the press. Moreover, pre-established societal assumptions that relatively high "numbers of welfare claims were bogus or fraudulent" were given the official approval of the British government with their official confirmation of requirement of institutional practices, laws and administrative procedures that would regulate such cases (Cohen 2002, 21).

3. Stereotyping of Polish Migrants

Fitzgerald and Smoczynski (2015) even contend that it was mass media's contribution that had driven the circulation of subjective negative representations of a Polish migrant labourer fuelled by "moral panic ideology [...] in the form of tabloid rumours, urban legends, and political agitation" (Chan et al. 2013, 152). Moreover, Conboy (2006) observes that the press and media not only influence the rapid growth of significance of the issue of migration but also shape the public attitudes and opinions in the UK towards it by the manner of negative framing.

With the British press narratives and othering of A8 migrants (Chovanec and Molek-Kozakowska 2017), a common stereotype regarding Polish workers had been formed, targeting them as a threat to employment opportunities and security of native citizens. However, a folk-devil classification of Poles as job-

stealers was contradictory to the fact that they are, as any EU citizens, eligible by law to enter the British job market. This narrative had called for what Fitzgerald and Smoczynski (2015, 348) call a “multi-mediated effort”, which, by applying the folk-devil concept, exaggerated their “otherness.” Thus, the negative targeting of “job-stealing” Poles was not concealed the lack of organisational structures within a late capitalist society that ought to deal with such events, but also a provided a “narrative justification of the failure of individual responsibility for managing employment insecurities” (Fitzgerald and Smoczynski 2015, 348).

While the British newspapers were dedicating a considerable amount of negative coverage to the arrival of A8 migrants, Bulgaria’s and Romania’s entry into the European Union (A2) was guaranteed in 2007. Still, Poland remained the largest of the ten new EU members, and special attention was devoted to it (Fomina and Frelak 2008, 13). Henceforth, the moral panic, which was mainly driven by the concerns of “flood of migrants” within the media, also had an impact on the British government by affecting its decisions towards certain social policies. In late 2006 the government promised restrictions of the A2 countries labour migration and in 2013 David Cameron, the British Prime Minister at the time, campaigned with an initiative to cut certain types of social benefits, including child benefit, to job-seeking migrants arriving from Eastern Europe.

Anti-Polish migrant moral panic was to rise soon after the financial crisis in 2008. British authorities, with Prime Minister David Cameron at the forefront, used the depiction of Polish migrants as “abusers of the welfare state” (Fitzgerald and Smoczynski 2015, 344). Rzepnikowska (2019, 5) pointed at Cameron’s BBC One interview for *Andrew Marr Show* from January 2014 in which she observed him singling out “Polish migrants in the discourse about welfare benefits abuse.” In November 2014 the Prime Minister delivered his speech in Staffordshire⁷ in which he brought up figures related to migrants that could not be verified in the UK’s official statistics (Ehata and Seeleib-Kaiser 2017).

The attractiveness of British welfare benefits and services being the main reason behind EU migration was another prevailing mould into which the UK political discourse was shaped (Rzepnikowska 2019; Ehata and Seeleib-Kaiser

⁷ Cameron, D. (2014) JCB Staffordshire: Prime Minister’s speech. Delivered at JCB Staffordshire, 28 November 2014. Transcript of the speech as delivered. Available at: <http://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/jcb-staffordshire-prime-ministers-speech>. Accessed May 7, 2019.

2017). The moral panic resulted in the advancement of political tensions and the concurrent spreading of negative perceptions of uncontrolled European immigration. What also followed in 2014 was the UK Independence Party's (UKIP) controversial campaign narrative in which infamous posters with "26 million people in Europe are looking for work, and whose jobs are they after?" slogan were distributed (Rzepnikowska 2019, 5). The media took on a predominant negative treatment of particularly Polish migrants "to the extent of being alarmist, seeking to stir popular sentiment into something of a panic surrounding the economic impact [...] of these new arrivals" (Spigelman 2013, 98; see also Simionescu 2018).

However, statistics contradict a common misconception throughout the British political and news arena that the benefits and welfare services are the principal magnet for EU migrants who are only interested in acquiring them without making an effort in the labour market. The reason above all others for EU citizens to move is work. For example, locally, the trade unions recognised the worth in Polish labourers' potential skills and their ability to fill the manual workforce gap in British public services, construction occupations, transport sectors or hospitality as well as their willingness to work in low-paying jobs (Fitzgerald and Smoczynski 2015). Yet with the presence of Poles in the UK becoming more noticeable in numbers and constituting "a larger and potentially more problematized group, they have become more prominent in a racialized visual schema" (Rzepnikowska 2019, 4).

In 2016 Ehata and Seeleib-Kaiser conducted a research project among a narrow group of EU migrants who resided in Manchester and Oxfordshire. The interviews had been taken prior to the referendum on Britain's exit from the EU. Participants pointed out that they "did not investigate rights to welfare benefits" (4) and "did not come to the UK expressly to access welfare rights" (8) as their only aim was to work and many had not had the idea whether they are determined for a long-term stay. Most of the interviewees firmly discarded the stereotype of benefit tourists that had been attached to incoming EU migrants and declared their contribution to the labour market and their "cultural conditioning of self-reliance" (4). On the other hand, some of the participants stated that they had lacked the time to further investigate possible entitlements, as they had as short time as three weeks of notice before a job offer to move to UK (Ehata and Seeleib-Kaiser 2017).

In conclusion, over the years 2004-2016 the British discourse concerning migrant Poles arriving to UK became adverse and unfavourable of their position

as labourers particularly after the economic crisis of 2008 (Rzepnikowska 2019). As Rzepnikowska (2019, 6) notes, at the very beginning of Polish UK arrivals, the new migrants were “perceived as a ‘desirable’ migrant group and labelled as ‘invisible’ due to their whiteness.” However, subsequently after the 2008 economic crisis and leading up to the Brexit referendum, the viewpoint has tilted towards the negative perception of Eastern Europeans that take work opportunities and placements from the nationals and capitalise on British welfare and social services. Prior to the EU referendum, the media devoted three times more coverage to immigration, its effects on British economy and welfare state. The Eastern European migrant had thus acquired media’s depiction of “an economic threat responsible for society’s malaise: job shortages, unemployment and the strain on social services” (Rzepnikowska 2019, 6). Significantly, the most targeted minority by these negative media narratives were the Polish.

3.1. Case Study One: A Narrative Analysis of *The Poles are Coming!*

BBC’s documentary *The Poles are Coming!* directed in 2008 by an award winning English journalist Timothy Samuels (who comes from an immigrant family himself) portrays the very beginnings and the impact of the large migration influx of Poles into the UK. However, the light it sheds on the issue is relatively different from the existing, mostly negative, media narratives at the time. The infotainment convention, in which the whole documentary is kept, may not only be questioning the image of migration’s negative influence, but also exposing some of the stereotypes on which the British moral panic towards the Eastern Europeans was grounded.

The documentary’s pre-opening sequence delivers some scenes of a Polish shop, a poster of a Polish club event for Poles, Polish food items in a shop and a man sitting outdoors with “Polska” (Poland) on the back of his jumper. The scenes are accompanied by British trumpet music, while Tim Samuels narrates “You don’t have to go far these days to find a little slice of Poland or Eastern Europe in your town” (00.02). As the orchestral music takes on a dramatic note and Samuels narrates “but for some in Peterborough it’s all too much” (00.09), the scenes develop to a contrasting image of crowded General Practice doctor clinic and school, an upset British man who describes the area as “completely and utterly swamped” (00.14) and the town’s councillor who states that they have had enough of it [immigration] (00.22).

This sequence ends with a frame showing a firefighter training taken only by a single woman, while Samuels asks “Back in Poland, are there any man left?” (00.26). Through this introduction, it is possible to conclude that a large number of Eastern Europeans, particularly Polish migrants, are a burden on the local communities in the UK, while the overdramatised ending question implies that nearly all Polish males have migrated out of their country.



Figure 4: Title sequence, *BBC documentary The Poles are Coming!*

After the title sequence, an archive video from Ellis Island is shown with the narrator making the comparison between Ellis Island in the previous century and Victoria Coach Station in this one. On the screen a coach reaches the station, where Samuels engages a few Polish who are getting off. As he greets them, the Poles seem to misunderstand “Welcome to England,” and reply “No, from Poland.” Another man, when asked why he had come to England confidently replies, “to do work.” The scene captures the migrants as barely able to speak the language of the country, an impression that is based only on the case of two examples. The parallel to Ellis Island may indicate a massive wave of thousands of astute migrants. The reason behind exaggerating the scale of migration may be linked to the general notion of moral panic sweeping through the media and political discourse at the time.

To set up the context for the documentary, a map of Eastern and Western Europe divided by the Iron Curtain is shown and the narrator explains that twenty years after communism collapsed, the European Union had decided to expand and allowed post-Soviet countries to join. Flag banners of Sweden, Ireland and UK represent the only three countries that allowed immediate work permits to the newly accepted countries. Then, statistics appear to state that 800,000 people from Eastern Europe had entered the UK alone, and most of them, nearly 500,000 were migrants from Poland. This animation-based representation of historical facts categorises the new EU countries as part of the Soviet bloc, and certainly reinforces the *border* between the Eastern and Western Europe. Common associations assigned to the West revolve around its prosperity, progress, freedom and democracy. In contrast, Eastern Europe is assigned negative values “such as underdevelopment, poverty and the lack of democracy” (Wilk 2010, 339). What is more, the classification of Poland as a post-communist country fortifies the unfavourable concept of it being an “other,” a part of Europe that tends to be discredited by the media discourse with references to communism, low standards of living and crime.

The documentary revolves around two cities, Peterborough in the UK and Gdańsk in Poland, which may be a strategical narrative setting for contrast. The narrator describes Peterborough as the first city in the world that was fully designed in the 1960s by a computer including its housing and residential buildings. It is also suggested that the computer design had not taken into consideration the extra fifteen thousand new migrants from Eastern Europe moving into the city in 2004. Samuels is seen as he takes a walk down Peterborough’s Linking Road, which apparently is the area most transformed by incoming waves of immigrants. Sentimental black and white footage is shown presenting Peterborough as a calm, typically British market town. In contrast, the next scene is of Samuels passing by the road and its foreign food stores accenting that now the area is “a little slice of the world, with the strongly Polish flavour” (5.14). These comparisons of old and new could also suggest that the city lost its British flavour due to the migrants.

The next scenes present occupations which migrants take, showing people picking vegetables in a farm field as well as doing factory, carpentry and building work. The narrator states that all this work had contributed to the fastest growth of British local economies. A stonemasonry factory is shown, where most of the labourers are Lithuanians, some who had worked there for over three years. While proceeding to an interview with the owner of the Stamford

Stone, who stresses Lithuanians' great work ethic and impact, a Soviet-era choir music is played in the background to the accompanying images of men working in the factory. Indeed, if the Lithuanians packed up and left, the business would be in serious trouble and in danger of closing down. The scene ends with a sarcastic remark from Samuels: "extra work, more hours, no tea breaks? What was this way of working? Better call the union." This motif and the connotative ambiguity of the word "union" could be treated as a device with the music choice, which intentionally connects Lithuanians to the Soviet Union. Behind this image and sound manipulation lays a suggestion that the good work ethic and reliability of Eastern Europeans perhaps comes from a regime.

Another problem occurring in Peterborough is the overcrowding of local General Practice doctor surgery. It is explained that only within the span of six months the GP had to deal with a massive influx of over 10,000 Eastern European patients. The GP doctor Jitendra Modha identifies two main issues facing the clinic: the language barrier and the lack of funds to hire language interpreters, which necessitates the surgeons to rely on language service call lines, which is too time consuming and expensive.

The next part of the documentary captures a Polish family of four and shows their home, focusing on their daily actions such as brewing tea, gathering at a table, eating breakfast together. The camera also zooms in on a picture of Jesus hanging on a wall of their flat. The narrator mentions that the family share one room in the flat, whilst three other Polish, strangers to the family, live in other rooms. This brief introduction to a Polish migrant family brings to mind a representation of an average family, regardless of their national origin. Tea brewing being a part of British culture could be shown as a link between the migrants and culture they are becoming a part of. The scene showing the children learning English could also be thought of the migrants' willingness to adapt to the local society. The religious motif may seek to represent the family as rooted in Christian values, which brings an association with good will or even connection to the common Christian roots of the UK and Poland, hence showcasing another connection between the cultures. However, the education motif may suggest that British schools had turned into migrant schools, and give a sense of "an overtaking" of all school institutions by newcomers.

A few scenes later, Samuels goes to visit a local neighbourhood watch formed by a residents' group who meet up at the New England Club and Institute in Peterborough. The narrator comments that "here you can meet some pretty angry residents" (22.10). The members speak up about the issues of their concern.

One states that they "are not anti-immigration, but anti-the-amount-of-immigration" (22.29) and refers to the area as "utterly swamped by foreign migration" (22.30). They present a map of Peterborough with most of the city highlighted in white to indicate where it is most saturated with newly arrived migrants, and all group members agree that there are too many migrants. It may be assumed that the group of five residents are the only members of the anti-immigration movement in the city. The main issues they address are the number of migrants simply living and to a certain extent overcrowding the city, which interferes with the British community. In addition, the common benefit-tourist migrant stereotype can be derived from one of the resident's response to the idea of hard-working Poles. The phrase "utterly swamped" in regard to foreigners residing in the area could be identified as water and natural disaster language, which reinforces the negative perception of migrants.

The following part of the documentary is set in Poland, with the narrator beginning with a statement: "a thousand miles away, on the other side of Europe it is not such a bed of roses either, just different" (24.19). A Polish telephone book is opened on the plumber and services section and the audio of a man calling plumber companies can be heard. He receives information from all the companies that there are no plumbers available, as they all left. However, this is only a staged scene for the entertainment of the viewer. As the view changes to the streets of Gdańsk, showing the architecture and main town square, Samuels says that "here in Gdańsk city something is missing" (25.08). He then appears under the gates of Gdańsk's shipyard and brings up information about the free trade union *Solidarność*. Moving to the city again, with sentimental violin music in the background, the narrator explains that the main problem in the city is the number of men that had left the country, resulting in women having to fill in the shortages. The shots capture only women walking around the city and the next frame focuses on firefighter training, where also only women are being trained, all aged between 17 and 25. As Samuels interviews them, they explain that most of the young men in the area had left to work abroad in Western Europe. A window-making factory is shown, where women state the same reasons for taking up such work. The scene showing no men around the city may have been manipulated into achieving an exaggerated and untrue image of the depleted local Polish communities, which is a contrast brought to the overcrowded Peterborough.

The third key part of the documentary starts with a short description of a Polish man, Mariusz, who was content with his job as a security guard

in Poland; however, he decided to leave it to work in Peterborough, where his sister lives. Samuels is accompanying him from Poland on his 30-hour land journey to the UK. As they are welcomed in the sister's house, Samuels finds out that she had left her nursing job in Poland and took a cleaner's job in a restaurant to earn more money to provide for her daughters. This part of the documentary presents how easy it is for a newly arrived EU citizen from Poland to get a job and to move, which is motivated by higher wages, even if it means for the migrant to downgrade from a position they had back home.

The fourth part of the documentary opens up with the question "But what about the great British youth? Are they really unwilling to do this kind of work?" (44.34). The narrator explains that the rise of youth unemployment has been another major issue around Peterborough. Samuels then interviews young men near a Job Centre and asks them about the reasons behind their unemployment. The common answer is that cheap labour from Eastern Europe had taken over the job market, and when applying for a job with approximately two hundred people they do not stand a chance. One Englishman blames all the foreigners for taking the jobs, as he could not get a job for over twelve months. Another says "All the foreigners, they've taken all our jobs, don't they. They work for, like, 50p per hour don't they. So, us English people, we ain't gonna get a job, are they. We work, we want 7 pounds per hour, and they will work for 2 pounds per hour" (45.09). When Samuels asks the third English man how desperate he is to find a job, he replies "Pretty desperate" (45.25). As Samuels suggests going vegetable picking at a farm the next day, he shakes his head and rejects the idea. Samuels then tells them about the large number of jobs on farms that need workers and pay a minimum wage of 7 pounds per hour. The English are not willing to take it up, as they say "that's where all the Poles and Czechs are" (45.45). Thus, there is also a hint of racist prejudice as the young Englishmen show aversion to the idea of working alongside other Europeans. The theme of othering is present, as the English men put blame on the other (Allen 2008). The view of Eastern Europeans working for below a minimum wage is strongly reinforced in the British youths' view. This can be linked to the previous scenes where a job recruitment officer states that the British do not work as the benefits they receive are enough to live on. This image contradicts the commonly expressed idea throughout the media that the typical Eastern European migrant arrives to the UK with an only interest to use the welfare system and to acquire benefits instead of working.

The final part of the documentary revolves around a small campaign which Samuels encourages the Chairman of the City Council of Gdańsk Bogdan Oleszek to stage. With emotional Polish leaflets they go to Peterborough to encourage Poles to return. Before they depart, they also visit Lech Wałęsa, who is named by the narrator the “possible, one last trump card, the most famous Pole alive.” During the interview Wałęsa is sceptical of the idea of encouraging Poles to come back. Nevertheless, Oleszek delivers an emotional speech at the local Polish church in Peterborough after a service in which he presents Poland as a developing country, which is worth coming back to. The gathered congregation of Poles is, however, not convinced and lists reasons for not returning: low wages, no changes for the better, and the lack of opportunities back home. Out of the whole group, only one person raised their hand when Samuels asked who is willing to return home. This develops the idea that Poles are not willing to return to Poland because of its poor economy and workforce system and are going to reside in the UK permanently.

The final scene shows separate shots of the Poles who are content staying in Peterborough for good, the local residents who are still filing complaints to the local council regarding the migration influx, and a homeless Czech who is preparing to sleep in a local park, determined to stay in the UK regardless of his situation. The documentary thus leaves us with a sense of wonder and an unanswered question whether there are more Europeans who have come and never acquired their dream of British prosperity. As Allen (2008) comments the destitute Czech can be perceived as a signal or warning to those who are yet to arrive to the British Isles that not everyone succeeds.

Altogether, the documentary may leave the viewer with a realisation that the life of migrants is not as easy as is presented in the common media narratives on benefit tourism. Rather than living on benefits, migrants have to endure hard work and long hours to earn their living and have some savings. The newspaper’s response to *The Poles are Coming!* appeared in *The Guardian* after the movie premiere (Wollaston 2008). It was kept in the same infotainment-infused tone and approached the topic of Eastern European migration as a story that has been retold. However, Wollaston (2008) highlighted an important factor, which is that British migration opens a gap for new incomers to the UK. The documentary along with its reviews in the media began a discussion and granted insight into the possibility of an unnecessary moral panic that was widespread in Britain at the time. Yet, at the same time, it has shown that not only Poles, but also many other nationalities are lumped

together and occasionally vilified by the local communities that feel threatened, themselves being also multicultural and fragmented.

4. Analytic Categories to Study Stereotyping through Content and Discourse Analysis

To further examine migrant representations, some content and discourse analytical studies were applied to examine processes of group labelling and targeting (cf. Chovanec and Molek-Kozakowska 2017). These studies, such as the thematic report on *Migrants and Media Newsmaking Practices* (Bennett et al. 2011, 11), often concluded that “the portrayal of specific groups and group characteristics is stereotypical and/or negative focusing on roles of the victim or the threat prevails.” The dominating narrative in the news coverage of migrant-related *topics* is often paired with the theme of “terrorism and crime” and, as discourse analytical studies emphasize, the re-occurring *linguistic* tactics used by journalists to portray migrants negatively (Bennett et al. 2011). Hart (2010) has identified the *topoi*, that is “argumentation strategies,” that are employed to establish the migrant image as “an external danger” and associate them with “disadvantage, burden, finance, displacement, exploitation, crime and disease” (144).

Correspondingly, more studies in the area have confirmed that the use of *metaphors*, in particular those related to water, strengthen the negative depiction of immigrants (RSCAS 2011). As described by Charteris-Black (2006, 13), the negative portrayal of migrants is attained through “natural disasters” theme by use of water related figurative descriptions such as “floods, torrents, tidal waves.” Wilk (2017) specifies that strategic language use is present in the media discourse in *labelling and predication*. Pre-scripted representations of people’s various experiences are intertwined with known cognitive patterns in the newspaper articles to be communicated to the masses.

Given these points, it is also important to take into consideration the example of the coined term “Euroscepticism” that first appeared in the UK in the 1980s (Spiering 2004). According to Spiering (2004), the *frame* of Euroscepticism was formed in the UK partially as a result of the British tradition of othering themselves from the rest of Europe. The naturalization of the idea of the country and its people are different to Europeans is therefore visible in the press and political arena with respect to EU migration. As Spielgman (2013) states,

the visible othering of the Europeans, in comparison to the British nation, gives priority to an accusatory approach employed by the press and media. This in result can “reinforce the invader concept and vilify immigrants” (Spielgman 2013, 99).

4.1. Case Study Two: The Content and Discourse Analysis of *The Guardian*

The Guardian, a quality British compact newspaper, is a daily known for its popularity among the elites (Fomina and Frelak 2008). Although its circulation is limited to 132,793 copies per day, as reported by Audit Bureau of Circulations (2019), its online readership reaches over 2.5 million readers (Newsworks 2019). Owned by the Guardian News and Media, *The Guardian* stands for liberal and socio-democratic values and usually takes a pro-European stance (Wilk 2010). The coverage of Polish migrants alongside other Europeans in the online articles of *The Guardian* should have a potential to question stereotypes and obliterate the moral panic. The scope of selected articles includes those published between March 2008 and January 2019. In a purposeful sampling procedure, 10 articles (see appendix 1) were chosen from a selection of search results on immigration from the online section *Europe news* and *Opinion*, which in their headline had the following terms: “Poles,” “Polish immigration,” “Polish migrants,” “Polish,” “Eastern Europeans” and were representative of various periods and opinions. It is important to note that, although *The Guardian* regularly covers immigration issues and analyses them in the context of social and economic policy, it relatively rarely singles out one nationality as a headlined item.

The first article marks the beginning of a discussion that followed after the BBC documentary directed by Tim Samuels *The Poles are Coming!* was first aired. The article (1) in its title “The Poles have come” strongly alludes to the documentary title. It is uploaded to the section *Opinion* and appeared on the same day that Wollaston’s (2008) documentary review was published. The article points at the perfect timing of the documentary’s appearance in the media as well as its unintentional answer to the unnecessary political proposals from the British government. The author opines that the government is not necessarily doing anything to improve the British economy and that “overstretched local services and the frustrations they create are threatening Britain’s goodwill towards the cheap labour” (Taylor 2008). This reinforces

the idea that the Polish are cheap labourers and are becoming a burden to the British society due to the sheer number of unassimilated communities. In the article, a quote from the documentary has been intentionally changed, and instead of the term “Eastern Europeans,” the journalist put “the whites.” This is possibly an attempt to racially assimilate the migrants, yet at the same time the term “Eastern Europeans” appears three times in the article, which potentially seeks to stigmatize Poles by representing them as coming from “the other” Europe.

The next article (2) titled “Polish immigration to the UK: wild claims don’t add up” seems to have the purpose of clearing the moral panic. It was published in 2010 and, as its headline indicates, it questions the widely reproduced negative portrayal of the Polish migrants, which do not align with the statistics the article quotes. The article argues that, due to the large numbers of British citizens who work outside the UK, there is a space created for migrant workers from the EU. However, it stresses that Eastern Europeans are able to work harder in certain sectors than the British nationals. This representation is conjoined with the statement that the migrants arrive to Britain via “cheap air routes such as Ryanair” (Travis 2010). This may be an indication of the poorer, less privileged status of the arriving European migrants from “new ex-communist states.” This brief introduction can leave the reader with the false impression that only due to A8, the countries are freed of their communist associations.

Later in 2010, an article which triggered over 400 responses in the comments area came up with a more pessimistic approach. The article written by Ed Balls, a Labour MP, “We were wrong to allow so many Eastern Europeans into Britain” (3) debates whether there are sufficient restrictions that would prevent unskilled workers entering the UK. The typical pro-European perspective of *The Guardian* is not noticeable, as the author criticizes EU regulations and plans. Addressing the economic risks posed by certain EU actions, the statement “large countries in Europe [are] forcing smaller countries to implement spending cuts” (Balls 2010) uses figurative language and implies a difference between the status of certain EU member states. The article then proceeds to signal the problem of the “wave of unskilled” workers that are coming to the UK, which only to a certain extent benefits the British economy. However, it is also argued throughout most of the article that contrary to the EU assumptions of mobile labour market, Britain should implement restrictions on “unskilled” European workers. The article ends with a controversial statement

"The world needs Britain at the heart of Europe" (Balls 2010), which underscores a nationalistic undertone of the feature.

The fourth feature, published in 2011, "Going home: the Polish migrants who lost jobs and hope in UK" (4) represents the downside of migration to UK and presents the Polish migrants as victims. The article begins with a story of a successful Polish man whose parents were able to afford his stay and higher education in Britain, and his return to Poland to live in relatively abundant conditions. The rest of the piece is devoted to young Polish men who due to unfortunate circumstances were left "destitute" and jobless. The article presents the men as victims of the economic "downturn" which began in the UK after 2006. It is stated that due to their lack of English language skills they were unable to hold a job. When one of the men became homeless, he was forced to steal to survive and ended up in prison for almost a year. The article may frame the assumption that the Polish migrants cause more trouble than benefit, and again, are a burden to the economy.

The following article from 2012, "Poles are here to stay in Britain, but it'll take time to make a cultural splash" (5), begins with the statement that Poles are not only the largest group of migrants living in the UK but also outnumber Indians and Pakistanis. These figures could be regarded as outstanding; however, the article was later amended and the incorrect number of 2 million Poles residing in the UK was replaced by 800,000. The article then drily sums up the reasons behind immigrant Poles' choice to live in Britain. What is stressed is the unfortunate lack of cultural enrichment to the society by the migrants, as they belong the working class. This foregrounds the idea that Poles are nothing else but labour force, without any culture or tradition to keep and represent. The next part of the story is dedicated to great Polish expatriates who contributed to such areas as "literature, art or science" (Pyzik 2012). What strikes one is the author's remark that, as a result of their emigration, many did not know that they were Polish "as if emigration wiped away their Polishness" (Pyzik 2012). This could potentially signify that even if there happened to be any cultural potential amongst the working class Poles, people would not recognise them as Polish. This representation draws a contrast to other articles, where Poles are made to be a clearly noticeable group and visible through their "otherness." In the last paragraph, the author asserts that the Poles would most of all want to be recognised for the input they had into British history. This statement may aim to evoke sentiment and the feeling of connection to the Poles, which would assimilate rather than other the migrant in the society.

The sixth piece focuses on a Polish blood donation campaign that took place in the UK. The 2015 article, titled “Polish migrants to strike and give blood to demonstrate importance to UK” (6) recorded an incredibly high number of comments under the piece (1,635) and an even higher number of media shares (4,614). In view of the incoming Brexit referendum, the article marks the tensions and reports on the unconventional blood strike, initiated by British Poles Initiative members. It is noted that UK’s National Health Service is in need of 200,000 blood donors. Instead of a strike, which was described as “risky,” the Polish campaign had the aim of proving the importance of Polish migrants and workers in the British system. It is narrated that due to the rise of British right-wing parties, the Poles began to feel “scapegoated” and discriminated against. The article also puts in context the British-Polish history, reminding us that “thousands of Poles fought in the British army” and “shed blood and lives for the UK” (Davies and Carrier 2015). This strongly emotional remark may provoke the reader to remember the Polish involvement in the Battle of England and think more inclusively of Poles as Europeans with a common history.

The next article was written after the Brexit referendum, which had taken place on the 23rd of June 2016. According to The Electoral Commission results, 51.9% of British voted to leave the EU and 48.1% of voters opted to remain in the EU. The headline reads “Britain’s Poles wanted to stay here for ever, until the EU referendum” (7). The article opens with a description of the 2004 events, when Poland had joined the EU. It is stated that Britain needed labourers at the time, and the arriving Poles in large numbers were not only filling the gap but also boosting the economy, as their services were cheap. It then describes the circumstances of most Polish migrants as they work in jobs way below their qualifications; however, “the exchange rate between sterling and Polish zloty was enough to compensate for swallowed pride” (Krupa 2016). The author brings up and denies the common assumption that Polish migrants’ main aim is to take advantage of the British benefit system. The language is vivid and possibly seeks to evoke the readers’ understanding and empathy. Again, a reference to the Battle of Britain is made and the Poles’ significant input. The author also describes the communist period and proceeds to recount Poland’s “democratic transition in 1989” (Krupa 2016). The Poles that made their living in the UK are described as a community that had “gained confidence in their value, built their social skills, and developed fluency in English” (Krupa 2016). The article represents the Polish as a valuable part of the British society and points to the harsh reality that the EU referendum imposed on them. This representation

of Polish migrants differs from those described in articles (1), (3), (4) and (5) and could be perceived as pro-European and anti-Brexit.

The eighth out of the ten articles, “Britain’s Poles: hard work, Yorkshire accents and life post-Brexit vote” (8), was written two months later. The article begins with a paragraph in which a small town of Wakefield in Yorkshire and its resident Poles are presented as everyday citizens who run small businesses and make a successful living by working alongside native-born British. The Polish are characterised as “hard-working,” very much adapted into the British way of life and whose English has a “broad Yorkshire” accent (Pidd 2016). This positive depiction could have an underling intention of persuading the reader of Polish migrants’ assimilation and, as a result, aid in identifying them as interwoven in the British society. In the next part of the article, the writer focuses on the initial fear that was dominant in the British public discourse and how the numbers of incoming migrants exceeded the expectations of UK’s government and society. This could be regarded as an attempt to assure the reader of *The Guardian* of support and positive intentions towards EU migrants, specifically the Poles. In the last part of the feature, the writer interviews Poles and addresses their perception of the referendum results. The last part of the article is devoted to the rise of British hate-crime and xenophobic attacks on the Polish migrant minority since the Brexit vote. Although some Poles may leave the UK due to the vote, “hundreds of thousands of Poles will never go home” (Pidd 2016). This final part may serve as an emphasis of Poles’ assimilation into the British society and their will to acquire permanent residential status against all odds.

The penultimate article in the selected series goes by the headline “Poles in the UK urge May to protect them from a no-deal Brexit” (9). Written in 2018, the article tackles the Polish community’s fears of a Brexit without any deal that would protect the residential and working status of EU citizens living on the British Isles. In an interview with the chairman of the Federation of Poles in Great Britain, it is stated that over 1 million Poles live in the UK. These numbers are not, however, backed by any sources. This therefore may only be a strategic exaggeration to empathize with the British Poles that would suffer the “no-deal Brexit.” The Poles are again represented as hard-working people who, because of the lack of English language skills, may be in a disadvantaged position. It is claimed that the migrants may not understand that they will “have to register for a new ‘settled status’ immigration category post Brexit” (O’Carroll 2018). This portrayal of Poles – as unable to adjust

and understand the language – can unintentionally present the Polish migrants to the reader as still a burden in the British society.

The last article out of the selected ten focuses on the hardships Polish migrants are facing in the UK after the Brexit vote. The article, published in January 2019, is titled “Everything changed in 2016: Poles in UK struggle with Brexit” (10). The article takes on a similar narration as articles (7) and (8). There are three interviews with successful Poles, all of whom have steady jobs. It is described that all of them took the Brexit vote personally and are uncertain of what the future may bring, as the political dealings between Britain and EU are tense and unstable. The author then gives approximate statistics and states that around 900,000 Poles live in the UK. Again, the number of Polish migrants is constantly fluctuating throughout the articles, without indication of references to official statistics. According to the interviews, most of the Poles and those in the Polish community around them are planning to return to Poland. This is supported by Polish prime minister’s speech in which he encourages [Britain] to return the Poles back to Poland. At the end of the article it is mentioned that the Poles, being under pressure and feeling of discrimination towards them from the British society, are “becoming quite anti-British themselves” (Davies 2019).

To summarise the findings from the selection of the articles, it is important to note a narrative change which took place. The post-A8 articles take on a neutral, descriptive tone; however, they use such language to subtly “other” the Eastern European migrants. Articles (3), (4), and (5) present the same qualities of objective attitude in describing the migration phenomena, but at the same time pointing towards the burden that Poles possibly impose on the British society. The Poles are also represented as a lower working class (e.g., 4), who are prone to become homeless and jobless. This portrayal victimises the Poles and presents them as unable to cope in the British system. The narrative then changes in the run-up to the Brexit referendum. Article (6) depicts Poles as historically bonded with the British and their unease as they are forced to organise a protest campaign to prove, so, while articles (7), (8), (9) and (10) mostly focus around Poles’ success and assimilation into the British society and the harm Brexit may impose on them. They are described as hard-working and an asset to Britain. It is clear that the approach shifted from somewhat negative after the A8 migrant arrivals to positive with the emerging Brexit debate and referendum taking an effect. Markedly, the numbers of Polish migrants arriving and residing

in the UK fluctuate from figurative hundreds of thousands to thousands or to millions.

Overall, it can be seen from this short analysis that the representation of Polish migrants in *The Guardian's* features throughout the years 2008–2019 began with a cautious, yet not fully negative, approach, then proceeded onto representing the migrant as a victim of British economic downturn and ended in positioning the Polish migrant in a favourable light in the stage leading towards and shortly after the referendum (perhaps to counterbalance the conservative outlets’ coverage).

The final stage of analysis presents the most frequent terms gathered from the selection of 10 *Guardian* articles from the years 2008 to 2019. All of the analysed articles, listed in appendix 1, were published online and are available on the official webpage of the newspaper (www.theguardian.com). The total word size of the gathered material is 838 words. The common issue present in all the articles concerns Eastern Europeans, and in particular Poles, who migrated to the UK after A8. *The Guardian* features are spread across the timescale of post-A8, pre-Brexit referendum and post-Brexit referendum, which enabled us to observe whether the language used and narration of migrants varied depending on current events. The starting point in this analysis is an argument which Wilk (2010, 345) poses that “*The Guardian* portrays Poland in a positive light, while at the microlevel, i.e. the context of Polish emigration to Great Britain, the picture seems to be more negative.” With this calculation, it is possible to see the main semantic fields and connotative links the Poles are associated with.

The terms which have the highest percentage of occurrences are listed alphabetically in Table 1 below:⁸

Term	Year(s) article was published	Number of occurrences	Percentage (%)
Brexit	2016, 2018, 2019	20	2.38 %
Britain('s)	2008, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2016, 2018, 2019	58	6.92 %

⁸ The whole dataset can be accessed through the link:
<https://drive.google.com/open?id=16iZVjiU9fDjVPkGhZxTFyJaY9h5U1oFU>.

British	2008, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2018, 2019	33	3.93 %
Eastern European(s)	2008, 2010, 2011	8	0.95 %
economic	2008, 2010, 2011, 2016	11	1.31 %
economy	2010, 2013, 2016, 2018, 2019	9	1.07 %
English	2008, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2016, 2018, 2019	25	2.98 %
EU	2010, 2016, 2018, 2019	32	3.81 %
Europe('s)	2010, 2012, 2016, 2019	18	2.14 %
European(s)	2010, 2016	9	1.07 %
immigration	2008, 2010, 2016, 2018	9	1.07 %
job(s)	2008, 2011, 2012, 2016, 2019	32	3.81 %
migrants	2008, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2016, 2018, 2019	25	2.98 %
migration	2010, 2011, 2019	16	1.90 %
Poland	2008, 2010, 2011, 2012 2013, 2016, 2019	51	6.08 %
Pole(s)	2008, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2016, 2018, 2019	55	6.56 %
Polish	2008, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2016, 2018, 2019	118	14.08 %
UK	2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2016, 2018, 2019	62	7.39 %
work(-ing,-ed)	2010, 2011, 2012, 2016, 2018, 2019	28	3.34 %
worker(s)	2010, 2011, 2013	20	2.38 %

Table 3: Most recurring terms in Guardian's news articles regarding Polish immigrants.

The term “Polish” was found 118 times and term “Pole” in singular or plural form “Poles” was found 55 times. These are of highest occurrence, while the term “Eastern European(s)” occurred only 8 times. This suggests that although *The Guardian* employs the macro-discriminating phrase “Eastern European” (Wilk 2010) to describe most A8 states citizens, in the case of selected articles it was not as observable. The term “Polish” can be seen to depict direct targeting of particular nationality group out of any other A8 migrants. Second to these, terms “UK” 62 times, “Britain” 58 times, and “British” 33 times, appear most frequently. These can be interpreted as a strong national belonging and an entry point for all the issues, as the “migrants” and topic of “migration” directly affects “the UK.” Words such as “work” (with the differentiation in tenses; -ing, -ed), “worker(s),” “job(s),” “economic” and “economy” appear on average from 9 to 32 times and make up the third of most repeated terms. As they can be directly related to employment and economy and the negative terms, which could be noted along such terms as “downturn” are not included here. This suggests the positive impact behind these, and in alignment with all the other terms, it could be perceived that the language *The Guardian* uses to depict the migrants goes along the positive terms of economic boost with the employment factor. On the whole, the terms which appear at frequency of above 1% out of all the gathered data of 838 words appear to carry a neutral meaning. However, it could be argued that the selective targeting of Polish migrants among other A8 incomers is strongly visible and may serve the purpose of othering them.

5. Conclusions

To conclude, both content and discourse analyses present the evolving ways in which *The Guardian* had portrayed the image of Polish migrants who arrived to the UK after the EU enlarged in 2004. Poles, being the largest and the most active migrant group, became the media’s target due to the British political and societal response to their substantial influx. Although *The Guardian* is known for their liberal and progressive values, its framing of Poles changed along with the political events that were, at the time of publications, occurring in the UK. By the use of specific language to describe the phenomena of Polish migration to the UK, *The Guardian* implemented stereotyping of the Poles through “othering” them as a strain to the British society and system due

to their lack of necessary language skills, inability to seamlessly assimilate and make a cultural contribution to the society.

Yet, *The Guardian's* coverage has to be treated in the context of the larger media discourses operating in the UK. Some stereotypes of migration were also addressed by the BBC's documentary *The Poles are Coming!* directed in 2008 by an award-winning English journalist Tim Samuels. He has aimed to portray the very beginnings and the impact of the large migration influx of Poles (but also other Eastern Europeans who were lumped together) into the UK. Rather than following the common negative media approach, Samuels chose to narrate the issue from a problematizing perspective to convey the issue in an infotainment mode. Indeed, reactions to his film may vary depending on whether the viewer's position is pro- or anti-immigration.

The analysis of *The Poles are Coming!* enables one to obtain a more complex image of the stereotypes of Polish migrants in the UK. Although the infotainment documentary tackled the common assumptions of Eastern European migrants, it did not portray them in terms of the straightforward moral panic approach, but in a nuanced way. Rather, it was possible to perceive the positive depiction of the A8 Europeans as the movie scenes revolved around migrants who work in occupations English people would not take. They are well deserving of their earnings and do not live on benefits, as media (and politicians) typically claim. Then again, a few common stereotypes could also be noticed in scenes which focused on the issue at its root, namely in Poland. The depiction of male-depleted Polish cities was unfavourable and manipulated to suit the entertaining tone of the whole documentary, as it included a ridiculing representation of Polish political figures and Polish society that enabled the "othering" of Poland in the larger context of its role in the European Union. Last but not least, the film exposed various fissures in the local and national communities across Britain and revealed how the changing patterns of migration intertwine with economic and political factors rather than only personal preferences and cultural codes.

This study has taken a look at the role of the media and their potential to guide people's judgments and opinions on many social issues (Wilk 2017), particularly those that relate to "othering" and negative stereotypes. As previous studies have shown, the media have flourished due to fomenting discontent and moral panic (Cohen 2002). The same mechanisms are now an indelible part of the British media coverage of migrant Poles. One could claim that these mechanisms have possibly influenced the margin of results of the Brexit

referendum. The main conclusion that arises from this study is that although the British media and press vary in their representations, editorial lines and political support, a degree of othering of Polish migrants is pre-existing in its discourse, probably as a result of a deep-seated stereotypical view of Eastern Europe.

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