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## Strange Heaven – The Social Implications of Nikola’s Case

During the research in Norway, our Polish-Norwegian team encountered a social fact which inspired us to create a separate research field in the project. Many interviewees mentioned the name of The Child Welfare Service of Norway: Barnevernet. The majority of opinions about this service were negative – both in the respondents’ narratives and on the internet forums for the Polish migrants (‘mojanorwegia’) or social network fan pages (*Polacy w Stavanger*, *Polacy w Norwegii*). There are vividly negative emotions present in the Poles’ statements about raising children in Norway, and the fear of Barnevernet is particularly apparent. It was this ‘fear’ that triggered the research presented in this article. We started to look for its presence in both the Polish public reality and in the private sphere. We decided to use a critical discourse analysis to discover communication mechanisms which have influenced the shape of the Polish attitude towards Barnevernet.

**Key words:** migration, discourse, Barnevernet, fear

### Introduction

Poland is a country that has experienced a massive economic migration. The most important reasons of the Polish migration abroad are: difficult post-transformation reality, high unemployment rate, and low wages. Norway is currently one of the most popular destinations for the Polish economic migration. It is estimated that there are about 100,000 Polish people in Norway, which makes them the big-

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gest immigrant group. Currently, more and more Polish women and children migrate to Norway, following the men who migrated earlier.

The Poles who live in Norway permanently are aware of the many cultural differences between Poland and Norway. Despite the differences, PAR<sup>4</sup> Migration research shows that Poles adapt very well to new conditions and the Scandinavian norms, concerning for instance family and domestic chores division (Żadkowska, Kosakowska-Berezecka, Ryndyk 2016). The children of the Polish immigrants go to Norwegian schools and kindergartens where they not only learn the Norwegian language, but also acquire the Norwegian habits (Bourdieu 2005). Still, in encounters with the Norwegian public services we find that the Polish immigrants experience a vast array of services with diversified modes of supporting family integration (Nødland, Vedøy, Gjerstad 2016). The research on striking a balance between private and professional life proved that many Polish are so fond of the Norwegian leisure activities that they gladly engage in physical activities together with their families (Kossakowski, Żadkowska, Herzberg 2016). Living in Norway has a huge impact on the quality of the family life.

During the research interviews with families in Norway, our Polish-Norwegian team encountered a social phenomenon which inspired us to create a separate research field in the project. Many interviewees mentioned the name of The Child Welfare Service of Norway, Barnevernet. The majority of opinions about this service were negative – both in the respondents' narratives and on the internet forums for the Polish immigrants ('mojanorwegia') and the social media fan pages (*Polacy w Stavanger*, *Polacy w Norwegii*). We encountered the same negative opinions in Poland among the Poles who had a possibility of moving and starting a life in Norway. As an example, we provide three opinions that we collected:

1. About this horrific institution... the way the media shows it is a little exaggerated. Only this famous carrying off by Rutkowski here from Norwegian family, but no. Somehow I would like everything in Poland. To Polish school, in Poland – Magda (twenty-six years old) and Bogdan (twenty-eight years old), no children, two years in Norway.
2. My wife was very much against Barnevernet until she read in Polish on the internet about this four-year-old who got the shit beaten out of him so badly he is now deaf and blind. What a life this kid has, what happens to his stepfather, cohabitant, fuck him. So this kid will be disabled until death. You don't hear about such things here. Barnevernet's sword is so close to your neck it disciplines you. If Barnevernet decides your kid is in danger in the community, it has every right to take the kid

<sup>4</sup> All data comes from PAR Migration Navigator. The project WLB\_GE: *Socio-cultural and Psychological Predictors of Work-Life Balance and Gender Equality Cross-Cultural Comparison of Polish and Norwegian Families* is funded by Norway Grants in the Polish-Norwegian Research Programme operated by the National Centre for Research and Development. The project consists of five complementary components (work packages). A different research unit runs each of them. Particular parts of the project concentrate on different goals, using different methodological approaches. The article is based on cooperative work of Work Package 1 and Work Package 5.

away from you, and you have no right to appeal. You can appeal later, but you cannot appeal the decision, so the kid is physically taken away from you, and that's what scares Poles the most – Sara (thirty years old) and Adrian (thirty years old), parents of one, one-and-a-half years in Norway.

3. Frankly speaking, this is a totally unpredictable institution to me; nobody has control over it. One office worker decides whether they take your child away; and he/she can be mistaken, right? Time and again these kids are taken and then the case is explained, what really happened in that family. Darn it, if such a small kid, let's say, I don't know, a three-year-old, is taken away for a year to a foster family, nobody can tell me it's for the child's sake, because it is not – Marta (thirty-two years old) and Sebastian (thirty-two years old), parents of one, two years in Norway.

The emotions present in the Poles' statements about raising children in Norway are vivid and negative, and the fear of Barnevernet is especially apparent<sup>5</sup>. It is that fear that triggered the research presented in this article. Together, our Norwegian and Polish project team members asked the reasons of these emotions. Do we observe a moral panic among the Poles and the Polish migrants? Can this phenomenon be understood in terms of the cultural differences? How do the Poles transform notions that they give to their family while adapting to living inside the Norwegian culture?

We started to look for these emotions both in the Polish public reality and in the private sphere. We decided to use a narrative analysis, as it is understood in the frame of critical discourse analysis, to discover the communication mechanisms that have influenced the shape of the Polish attitude towards Barnevernet. We discovered that the infamous case of the Nikola kidnapping was repeatedly mentioned in the publications and interviews that we analyzed. The case concerns the kidnapping of a nine-year-old Nikola, in 2011, from her foster home in Norway, by a Polish celebrity detective Krzysztof Rutkowski, and taking the girl to Poland. So together (Norwegian and Poles) we realized that this case constructed a point of departure for us to understand the phenomenon of the moral panic around Barnevernet. We concluded that texts published at the time the case was still in progress (2011), both in Poland and in Norway, established the narrative around the Poles' relations with The Child Welfare Service of Norway. The aim

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<sup>5</sup> Currently Barnevernet is one of the most controversial Norwegian institutions because of its policy towards migrants. It is regulated by the Child Welfare Act from 1992. However, it also raises reservations among Norwegians, for it possesses a very wide range of authorizations that enable it to enter a family's private life and interpret events taking place there from the perspective of children's rights circumscribed by law and Norwegian culture. The cases of Barnevernet taking the right of custody away from foreigners are publicized more and more often. Before we start to evaluate Barnevernet, we have to note the fact that The Norwegian Children Act, chapter 5, clearly places the responsibility for the upbringing of children with their parents. In order to ensure a secure environment for children the purpose of the Child Welfare Act is formulated as follows:

- to ensure that children and young persons who live in conditions that may be detrimental to their health and development receive the necessary assistance and care at the right time,
- to help ensure that children and young people grow up in a secure environment.

of this article, however, is to describe and to deconstruct the narration about the Nikola's case, to discover the hidden facts of this story, how the interpretation might differ, the reasoning about the emotional reactions, and in the end, what meaning do the narration and national scripts, used by the Polish immigrants living in Norway, have.

## Methodology

In this article, we are connecting the two perspectives: one represents the narration analysis, and questions how 'the first' version of a story might live and influence social attitudes towards institutions such as Barnevernet both in Poland and in Norway; the second perspective asks how 'living in Norway' might change this attitude and allow for the incorporation of the Norwegian version of the story. As a base of this work, we chose a qualitative perspective in which we confront the public voice as represented by the media, with the perspective of a person who is living in certain conditions. Within our research in the Polish press concerning Nikola Rybka and Krzysztof Rutkowski, we used basic tools created within the critical discourse analysis (Wodak, Meyer 2001) and adapted by sociologists (Janks 1997). We assumed that there exists a link between the subject level, the ideological level, and the knowledge level, and that institutions influence subjects and their actions through knowledge, thus controlling their social actions (Barczewski 2008: 70–95; Chomsky 1978; Douglas 1980; Jorgenssen, Philips 2002; Nowak 2010: 237–249). The text informs a reader about how it came to existence and how it is to be read. The author introduces certain concepts to suggest how the text has been produced and how it is to be consumed. If we take the perspective of a critical discourse analysis, we consider that:

Our knowledge of the world should not be treated as objective truth. Reality is only accessible to us through categories, so our knowledge and representations of the world are not reflections of the reality 'out there', but rather are products of our ways of categorizing the world, or, in discursive analytical terms, products of discourse (Jorgenssen, Philips 2002: 16).

We used the synchronic method to select and analyze the body of texts in our research. Our goal was to explore the most important features of the Polish media coverage concerning Barnevernet, and to determine what kind of picture of this institution the Polish public discourse creates. We wanted to take a closer look at the linguistic manipulations which accompanied the coverage of the Nikola Rybka's kidnapping. So we decided to analyze the articles published between 2011 and 2012. The main source was the "Super Express" (SE), because it was the newspaper that had first published the Nikola's case. We discovered a very conservative

style<sup>6</sup> of narration at that time, and other sources that repeated the information published by SE. SE was cooperating with Krzysztof Rutkowski who was one of the main players and the narrator in the Nikola’s case. The second source was “Gazeta Wyborcza” which represents a liberal style of narration, closer to the government and its official representation.

From articles published in those two newspapers, we chose six articles to present the main plots in the narration about the Polish migrants and Barnevernet<sup>7</sup>. It is the reason why we used a discourse analysis in three contexts: linguistic – examining argumentation strategies and content analysis, and also considering grammatical systems specified for certain media; psychological – where we study sets of methods and techniques aimed at transmitting a content; and social – where we try to describe how the communication status influences the social reality, and how it is connected within the sphere of activities undertaken by individuals. Hence, we treat discourse as a social interaction which takes place in a specific context (Rancew-Sikora 2007, 2009).

The purpose of the following analysis is to find main plots and discourse strategies that have appeared in the Polish and Norwegian mass-media, introducing the Barnevernet institution. We analyzed articles published in newspapers in Poland and Norway between 2011 and 2012, where the case of Nikola was mentioned. In this work, we gave much more attention to the publications from 2011, because we consider them as those constructing the main social habits of interpretation.

As a point of departure for the coverage of the Rutkowski case in the Norwegian media, we chose three episodes that are connected to the activities by Rutkowski, Barnevernet, and the international relations from 2011 (13 articles), 2014 (14 articles) and 2015 (21 articles). Mapping the Rutkowski’s case in the

<sup>6</sup> Conservative style – regards the family to be the most important value, characterised by Christian norms, defamilialism of institutions and patriarchal attitude towards gender roles and parenting style, As Hidi and Graham wrote: “Conservatist have lowest scores on Harm and Fairness, and very high scores on Ingroup, Authority, and Purity. They had the lowest scores on Openness and the highest scores on Right-Wing Authoritarianism and Social Dominance Orientation, as well as the highest frequency of religious attendance” (Hid, Graham 2009: 114).

<sup>7</sup> The analysis of articles published from June 18, 2011 to December 30, 2011. They were taken from websites and archives of two main Polish daily newspapers: “Super Express” and “Gazeta Wyborcza”. Out of 11 articles concerning the Nikola’s case, six were chosen for the body of analysis. The Nikola case description starts with an article published in “Super Express” and ends with information published in a local “Gazeta Wyborcza” issue, which announces the end of the trial in December, and the court’s decision to keep Nikola in Poland. Three other publications are added as auxiliary materials, published in liberal newspapers “Newsweek” and “Wprost”, and in conservative “Frona”. These are opinion-forming weekly newspapers, and they are published in large quantities (with an exception of “Frona”) (also available online). Another category of analysis is films: *Child Hunting* by TV Polsat and *Escape from Paradise* by TVP, both showing Polish immigrant issues. They were broadcasted in 2011. We only mention them here, without further analysis. However, we think they strongly contributed to establishing opinions about Barnevernet and Norwegian child welfare. The whole material that we have collected and analyzed about Barnevernet contains 32 items.

Norwegian media we searched for the media coverage about these cases through the search engines Retriever and Google, and ended up with a number of representative printed articles, commentaries, and letters to the editor. We ended up with forty-eight articles, thirteen articles from 2011, fourteen articles from 2014, and twenty-one articles from 2015. Having systematized the types of newspapers, titles, types of articles, authors, and the descriptions of heroes, villains, helpers, and the main messages in the text, we can paint a picture that represents the overarching story printed in the Norwegian newspapers after these three episodes. Our theoretical point of departure has been the discourse analysis as inspired by Foucault (1970).

In addition to the media discourse analysis, we have used interviews collected during the Par Migration Project. The reason of using them was to show that the media headlines and stories about Barnevernet are strongly present in the collective memory (Halbwachs 1979) of the Polish immigrants living in Norway. They do read and repeat stories about the Polish children and Barnevernet. We have conducted and analyzed sixty-nine interviews with couples (joint and individual interviews, fifteen within the project component Work Package 5, and fifty-four within Work Package 1), plus twenty-three interviews with civil servants within the health and education sectors in 2014, in the three municipalities in the county of Rogaland, using a semi-structured interview guide, tape recorder, and notes. The researchers were present at each interview. The interviews were held in Norwegian and organized in the work places of the respondents. The interviews from Work Package 1 were conducted in 2014 with Poles living in Norway (thirty-seven semi-structured, in-depth, individual interviews and eighteen joint interviews) and with Polish couples (the same group of respondents) in Norway in 2015 (seventeen semi-structured, in-depth, joint interviews). Brief descriptions of the respondents provided in the brackets indicate their age, number of children, and the time they have stayed in Norway (as of February 2014).

## 1. How to Build Fear? The Nikola's Case as a Recurring Cultural Script in the Poles' Narratives

In addressing Barnevernet (The Child Welfare Service of Norway) which operates in Norway, detective Krzysztof Rutkowski's 'Rambo' case of the Nikola's kidnapping is one of the recurring narrations present in the Polish and Norwegian media. Nikola and her family migrated from Poland to Norway in 2006. She had been living in Norway with her parents for five years then. Having had decided that Nikola was not being properly taken care of by her parents, Barnevernet took care of the girl a year before issuing a decision to move her to a foster family. After the girl was taken away, the parents asked the Polish embassy and lawyers for help. Finally they received help from the detective Krzysztof Rutkowski who in 2011 kidnapped the nine-year-old girl from the foster home where she had been

temporarily staying. The detective took her away to Poland where her parents had been waiting.

The case of this 'double kidnapping' reverberated throughout media and diplomacy. Norway demanded Nikola's 'return' and the Polish consul compared Barnevernet to a fascist organization. Both the Norwegian and the Polish media covered the Nikola's case and monitored it until finally, in December 2011, the court in Szczecin, Poland, decided that Nikola will stay in Poland (Winnicka 2012).

As we have written before, the case of Nikola and Rutkowski was mentioned many times in the narrations concerning Norway and the situation of the Polish families. It has been recalled in both the Polish and the Norwegian newspapers whenever the points of dispute between Barnevernet and the Polish immigrants appeared in the public discourse. It has a special function in the narratives about the Polish families in the Scandinavian countries, and has been inscribed into the structure of the Polish collective memory. Its echoes are found not only in the articles published in the Polish press, but also in documentaries (*Barnevernet – Hunting for Children, Escape from Paradise*) and fictional films. Dariusz Gajewski's film *Strange Heaven* (2015), a story about a Polish immigrant family, is based on this case. The kidnapping of Nikola from her foster family in Norway had also diplomatic repercussions: a worker of the Polish embassy in Norway was sent back to Poland after he had publicly denounced Barnevernet.

What we learn about Barnevernet from Poles living in Poland and in Norway refers to the fear narrative rooted in the Nikola's case. A characteristic feature of the media coverage of that event is that none of the respondents (as well as none of the journalists back in 2011) used solid facts which could help Poles understand and become familiar with Barnevernet as an institution aimed at protecting children's rights. One hypothesis is that the social fear might explain why Polish and other migrants are in opposition to the actions of Barnevernet. They are afraid to cooperate with it. This attitude has been revealed in the interviews with the Norwegian public servants.

Why do Poles have negative attitude towards Barnevernet? We decided to look for the course of fear in the Polish and the Norwegian media, and in the narrative strategies that the Polish and the Norwegian newspapers adopted in presenting the Nikola's case. We investigated how it was possible that some Polish immigrants were not familiar with the Barnevernet policies and with the Children Welfare Acts, and why they were avoiding the contact with this institution, were not looking for the information about it, and often referred to the Nikola's case (Haavind 1987, 2006: 683–693).

The Nikola's story, due to its repetitiveness and the specific means used to describe it, seems to have been embedded into the role of the cultural script which evokes the awareness of the risk related to the family migration to Norway. Cultural scripts pass information about feelings and their meaning. Norbert Elias noticed that the reaction to the cultural script is never individual; it depends on the history and human relationships (Furedi 2007: 5). The way Nikola's case was depicted by

the Polish media had a major impact on the way Barnevernet is perceived by Poles living in Poland and for migrants abroad. Currently it functions as a warning. The narrative about Barnevernet in Poland evokes the fear of losing a child.

The emphases on emotions is another feature present in the articles. The narratives about the Barnevernet function as a warning against moving to Norway with children. The analysis revealed that the language used in the Polish media describing the Barnevernet story is one that evokes fear. A warlike, conflicting discourse, the Nazi references, and invoking the most tragic visions – all this must have brought the given results.

The Nikola's case seems provocative in both societies, and in various forms. The Norwegian media described Nikola as being kidnapped from her foster family. The Polish media claimed that Norway took the child away from her Polish parents, endowing the description with negative connotations. In the articles that we studied, this tendency perspires throughout the Barnevernet debate. It begins with the comparison of Barnevernet with Hitlerjugend (the Hitler Youth):

It's some kind of bullshit. Barnevernet officers act like Hitlerjugend. Because of a low rate of natural increase in Norway, they want to take the immigrants' children away no matter the cost and naturalize them by force. And they especially like Polish children – Anna Warchoł, Polish consul in Oslo, the capital of Norway, has no doubts. She tried to intervene at the institution, but she claims she's been fobbed off (“Super Express”, June 18, 2011)<sup>8</sup>.

The ‘Hitlerjugend’ plot is the one that obscured the Nikola and Barnevernet's case. Polish newspapers, especially “Gazeta Wyborcza” (GW), focused on this component of the events. The activities of Anna Warchoł, the Polish consul in Oslo, recur in the GW<sup>9</sup>. The first reaction to the material published in SE on Krzysztof Rutkowski's actions equates Barnevernet with the whole Norwegian society, both in SE and GW. It is a generalization; perhaps it is a discursive formula which expresses the conflict, and an attempt to put a pressure on Norwegians who in turn could influence Barnevernet.

It is significant that so little has been written about the institution, its goals and history, yet so much more has been written about detective Rutkowski, at least in 2011. Rutkowski himself became an interesting issue for the Norwegian media. Of course, this may be the result of the fact that Rutkowski used the Polish media quite effectively to promote himself and his actions, thanks to the help of the Rybka fami-

<sup>8</sup> *Krzysztof Rutkowski wyrwał Nikolę norweskim oprawcom*, [http://www.se.pl/wiadomosci/polska/krzysztof-rutkowski-wyrwal-nikole-norweskim-oprawcom-zdjecia\\_193310.html](http://www.se.pl/wiadomosci/polska/krzysztof-rutkowski-wyrwal-nikole-norweskim-oprawcom-zdjecia_193310.html) (accessed: 10.07.2015) and *Norwegowie ukradli nam dziecko*, [http://www.se.pl/wiadomosci/polska/norwegowie-ukradli-nam-dziecko\\_191468.html](http://www.se.pl/wiadomosci/polska/norwegowie-ukradli-nam-dziecko_191468.html) (accessed: 10.07.2015).

<sup>9</sup> 2016, GW published more articles titled: *Taken away, kidnapped, We won over another child, Alexander got stuck on the border, Norway wants little Nikola back, Poles in Norway fight for their sons*. We obtained electronic access to these articles in the GW Archive (July 15, 2015). The publication about Nikola we also found in “Wprost” and “Newsweek” and other less significant publications.



ly. The story can also be treated as a plot that obscures the core of the matter, namely, the difference in the parenting standards between the Polish and the Norwegian culture, or the limits of public intervention into the family life. Neither GW nor SE wrote about those issues. The headlines suggest a conflict and blame the Norwegians. “Super Express”: *Norwegians stole our baby!* and GW: *Norwegians write about ‘Rambo’ Rutkowski and kidnapping, and the detective is proud of his actions* (the first paragraph in GW: *Norwegowie piszą o ‘Rambo’ Rutkowskim i kidnapingu, a detektyw dumny z akcji* – GW Szczecin, 30.06.2011, [www.gazetawyborcza.pl](http://www.gazetawyborcza.pl)). It states:

They catch children in Norway like dogcatchers catch dogs, though they don't use nets yet, detective Krzysztof Rutkowski announced during a press conference in Szczecin. He recaptured Nikola, a nine-year-old Polish girl, from her Norwegian foster family earlier that night. She was placed there thanks to municipal child welfare and care organization, Barneverntjenesten.

Both the Polish and the Norwegian media buy the Rutkowski's manipulation; what he really did was carrying off Nikola, since her story, as well as the problems of children in Polish families, literally disappeared from the sphere of the journalists' reflection in 2011. From this moment on, the newspapers wrote mainly about the detective, how he ‘liberated’ the girl, how she came back home, and how the diplomatic conflict evolved. “Gazeta Wyborcza” also evaluates Rutkowski's actions. There is almost no reference to Barnevernet; GW quotes a short statement from an employee of the institution. Yet, GW and SE very radical opinions, such as: “Norway created a system of Norwayzation of Polish and other foreigners' children to save their own (Norwegian) families” (GW)<sup>10</sup>. In both articles, Rutkowski becomes the main character of the narrative. Even though Nikola is a very important figure, little attention is being paid to her. What can we learn from the SE's article?<sup>11</sup>

It was a well-thought operation made with military precision. The stake was the future of a little Polish girl – Nikola (9). The Norwegians took her away from her parents and gave her to a foster family. They did it because they claimed... she is sad at school. However, the girl was liberated from her confinement and carried away to Poland. The interception was organised and supervised by detective Krzysztof Rutkowski (50) (SE 2011).

Just like the child Nikola, also the Barnevernet's voice is marginalized in the articles. The Barnevernet coordinator's statement was published in GW, but the quality of the article seems debatable. We read in the articles that SE cooperated with Rutkowski, and the underlying motive seems to be to hype his actions and make him more popular. “Super Express” appears as a major opinion former in the case.

<sup>10</sup> [www.gazetawyborcza.pl](http://www.gazetawyborcza.pl). Norwegians write about ‘Rambo’ Rutkowski and kidnapping, and the detective is proud of his actions.

<sup>11</sup> *Norwegowie ukradli nam dziecko!*, SE, 18.06.2011, [http://www.se.pl/wiadomosci/polska/norwegowie-ukradli-nam-dziecko\\_191468.html](http://www.se.pl/wiadomosci/polska/norwegowie-ukradli-nam-dziecko_191468.html) (accessed: 16.04.2014).

A very warlike, fighting spirit is clearly visible in the text. The whole procedure is directed against the Norwegian people and culture. In both articles, the plot of 'Norwayzation' (adopting Polish children by Norwegian families) appears, with reference to Rutkowski.

Leaving aside tragic cases of kids taken away from parents, the attitude the Polish media claims to have towards the problems of migrants' children, seems intriguing. One can say that Nikola's situation is presented as a problem of emotional separation. It seems that in the Polish community culture there is an understanding that intimacy means much more to Poles than to Norwegians, or that the Norwegian and Polish expressions of love and affection for children take different shapes<sup>12</sup>. In Poland there exists a very strong stereotype of Norwegians who are seen as those who do not express physical intimacy, 'Scandinavian chill', and who consider intimacy as somewhat shady (look at the *Terror Barnevernet* documentary and a Polish father story).

A child's intimacy borders are dynamic and blurry in Poland. They change as the child grows. Parents have the right to touch their child, because a child's body in some (biological) way belongs to the parents. This view cannot be hidden. The first SE article is entitled: *They stole our baby*. One can steal an object, something that belongs to him or her. It is possible that in some Polish families, a child is still perceived as a family's property, while in *Barnevernet*, regarded from the Polish perspective, the notion of a child's subjectivity is based on independence, and the emotional bond with parents seems to play a secondary role.

Another emotional issue recurring in many articles is the problem of being "gloomy and sad": "Office workers in Norway, where the Polish family lived for five years, stated that the girl should go to a foster family. Why? Because she was sad at school" (SE, 18.06.2011).

Having read this, we understand that *Barnevernet* may be criticized for interfering for irrelevant reasons. On the other hand, it seems that in Poland, a child's sadness is not a satisfactory reason for a social care institution to intervene. It is reported in the articles that teachers, not the parents, noticed Nikola's sadness. The parents did not see what was going on. The Norwegian media told a somewhat different story: they reported that *Barnevernet* had pointed at the quarrels in the girl's home as much as a year earlier, and perhaps the girl's sadness was the result of the atmosphere at her home.

It can be argued that in Poland such a situation would be regarded as an internal family affair, and hence hardly anyone would dare to intervene. A Polish family, often understood as a closed community, does not share information with public institutions. Probably the limitations of the public interference in Norway are different.

<sup>12</sup> In 2012, narration about the Nikola case changed in liberal media. The article in GW published in 2012, *How they make children in Norway*, claims that in Poland, emotional closeness (parental/family love) is expressed by physical closeness (Polish children sit close to their mothers, Norwegian children are free to run), things like touching and stroking are a sign of parental care and love, which is not necessarily seen like this by Norwegians, because it may be perceived as violating a child's intimacy.

Sadness therefore is a path through which Poles relate to their emotions, but also to public institutions. This has been strongly discussed in the Norwegian media which presented an exaggerated picture of the institution described in the Professor Nina Witoszek's text as typical<sup>13</sup>. As a reaction to the 'twin case', the author compares Barnevernet to Politburo, and she has some right to do so. We can perceive this as an intentional rhetoric in a discussion that aims at drawing the Norwegian public's attention to the problems Barnevernet encounters in its actions.

Another matter worth considering is the very little amount of information in the analyzed articles about the way Barnevernet works. "Super Express" writes very little about it and also GW does not pay much attention. The articles focus on a negative description and expose the flaws. As in our narratives, Barnevernet always appears as a silent institution, which is disturbing, since on the one hand it impedes a person's self-defense, and on the other, is a sign of inflexibility and the lack of openness. From the Polish perspective, the argument 'it is for the child's good' seems rather absurd.

In the articles published in GW and SE, a divisive approach prevails: the goal is to use Barnevernet, practically absent in the narrative, to establish a negative view of Norwegians. It seems characteristic for a newspaper like SE to target low-educated receivers. The language of the articles abounds in conflicts and accusations. "Linguistic means used by senders, which introduce a hidden/indirect evaluation, are usually based on emphasizing the opposites through hyperbolization of the phenomenon and reference to phrases and linguistic metaphors" (Nowak 2010: 240). In this case, it is very characteristic that there is a certain agreement in the evaluation between the receiver and the sender of the message, and most probably there is one between the receivers of the articles. The question is: an agreement on what? This agreement assumes some distrust. It is implied that the Norwegian institutions act against the Polish immigrants and show hostility towards Polishness, which, as things are, must be defended both by the senders and the readers.

### Nikola's Case: Norwegian Media Perspectives

As a point of departure for our news search we chose three episodes that relate to the activities by Rutkowski and Barnevernet, and international relations. The three episodes are (1) the Rutkowski's kidnapping/rescue of a nine-year-old Polish girl in June 2011; (2) *Child Diplomacy*, a documentary aired in April 2014 on the government-owned television channel (NRK) where Rutkowski's case was one of the three cases presented; and (3) the demonstrations against Barnevernet on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015, with the subsequent petition handed over to the Minister of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion by Barnevernet critics on June 11<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Ł. Kędzierski, *Nina Witoszek alarmuje i wzywa do ważnej debaty*, <http://www.nportal.no/articles/374-nina-witoszek-alarmuje-i-wzywa-do-waznej-debaty> (accessed: 7.07.2015); N. Witoszek, *Tyrania dobroci*, <http://www.mojanorwegia.pl/czytelnia/tyrania-dobroci-czyli-dyskusja-o-barnevernet-cz-i-4878.html> (accessed: 7.07.2015).

The Norwegian media highlighted different perspectives than the Polish ones as to what happened to Nikola. In addition, the case is intertwined in a general discussion about Barnevernet and international affairs. The kidnapping itself became of course a colorful tabloid story, also because people from the Polish embassy were involved in it. Leaving aside the offense and the diplomatic and juridical controversies between the two countries, the Norwegian media is very little occupied with the Polish immigrants, their culture, and the family life as such. It is true that the facts of the Nikola and her parents' story are told and used in a discourse, however, the fact that the girl is Polish and that there may be essential differences between the Polish and the Norwegian society and the family life practices, is not an issue. The media's concern, however, is about Barnevernet and its work methods. Its right to intervene in the family life over the parental will among the migrant communities in general is debated. In regard to legal issues: which acts are applied in given situations, and to what extent do Barnevernet and the Child Protection Act relate to other countries' legislation and to various interpretations of the international human rights?

On a more basic level, this can be considered a part of an ongoing discourse regarding child case. Who is in charge? Which criteria, and whose judgments are valid? We followed these questions by asking who participated in the media discourse at different times.

In 2011 the story is told by journalists in the major Norwegian newspapers. Apparently, this is a well dramatized report on a child removed from Barnevernet by a Polish celebrity investigator, a self-appointed hero who calls himself 'Rambo' and states: "I am the police of my fellow citizens". The abduction of the child was planned, edited and reported to the Polish media: The girl was saved from her 'Norwegian prison'. From the Norwegian authorities' perspective, as reported by the Norwegian media, this is a story of kidnapping and a criminal offence, at the same time recognizing that the Norwegian authorities are powerless within the Polish jurisdiction.

After the documentary *Child diplomacy* was released, we found numerous letters to the editor who criticized Barnevernet, but commonly we found them in smaller local newspapers and special interest press. Headlines like 'Crisis of trust' and 'Where is humanity' can illustrate the mood. The authors were private individuals or people representing interest groups that had various kinds of experiences with Barnevernet. The core of the critique oscillates around various forms of expression of the powerlessness in the encounter with Barnevernet on behalf of minority groups or parents of whose children Barnevernet has taken custody. Only few articles and letters to the editor defend the practices of Barnevernet, and these were by Barnevernet themselves and two politicians. When Rutkowski is mentioned, he is portrayed like a sort of exotic hero who rescues children from Barnevernet and brings them back to their families. Still, in the picture created by the media, the professional and governmental voices are completely missing.

In April 2015 demonstrations were arranged outside the Parliament in Oslo and in front of the Norwegian embassies or consulates in several other larger European cities. This was first referred to in the news and in articles, and a couple of critical reportages about individual cases of women claiming to have had been treated unjustly by Barnevernet were published in major newspapers. Following these episodes, a group of over one hundred professionals handed in a petition to the Minister of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June in which they demanded reforms of the practices in Barnevernet. In the media, this became a public debate between individuals and professional groups. But again, the critics outnumber the defenders. Lawyers in particular gave Barnevernet a very strong critique, worried about the families' legal and human rights, and wanted a debate about what a proper care of children signifies. They argue that we should listen more to international protests, since they might have a point. The other side stresses that the Barnevernet is under pressure from other countries. Even though there have been very few unfortunate events, Barnevernet is doing a job Norway should be proud of, and tries to expand to other countries.

The discourse in the Norwegian media on child care as an international issue is also linked to discourses regarding issues of globalization and a multicultural society. This is a much larger debate on one level regarding which and whose values are to be adopted, and on another level, how they can co-exist and how different countries' jurisdictions relate to one another in case of disagreements. The media do not explicitly become involved into that discourse in the 2011 narrative. The problem touched on the surface is how people living in another country and experiencing problems in their daily life may experience challenges in their meetings and negotiations with other countries' institutions. On the system level, there appear also challenges, since definition power and communication forms are left for the host country to decide. In 2014, this discourse was addressed directly by interest groups and engaged private individuals, while in 2015 the professionals really started to participate in the public discourse. The core question is still who decides what is best for a child? Questions about what good child care is and what acceptable variations in forms and approaches of child rearing are, however, were not asked.

## 2. Social Context of Narration: When a Story is Confronted with Experience

“Fronda” (a Polish Catholic journal<sup>14</sup>) is the newspaper that wrote the most about the different social care systems in 2011. Since the first issue, it contains articles about ‘the death of civilization’, critiques against liberal worldviews and post-com-

<sup>14</sup> “Fronda’s” subtitle, ‘A consecrated paper’, tells a lot about its peculiarity. “Fronda” appeals to Catholic teachings, especially to John Paul II encyclicals, and also using counter-culture aesthetics and postmodernist equipment; *Czy Polska uchroni dziecko przed Norwegami*, <http://www.fronda.pl/a/czy-polska-uchroni-dziecko-przed-norwegami,16386.html> (accessed: 21.12.2016).

munism, and drawings referring to advertisement aesthetics promoting rosary prayer and confession. The journal often criticized the childcare system, not only the one of Norway. “Fronða” protested against the political correctness from the very beginning of its existence and attempted to create ‘the fashion for conservatism’ among the youth.

The article published in “Fonða” is very extensive. The paper’s conservative inclination is very clear here: a family is a community with a separate subjectivity, and the state is an enemy of families. The article tells a lot about mistakes made by childcare institutions, about the traditional family roles, but nearly nothing about children’s rights. A lot of attention is paid to what threatens family values and to anti-family policies in the Norwegian society. And here comes an important question. The mentioned publication, regardless of its radical conservatism and worldview biases, is paradoxically one of the most important among those which consider intercultural differences and problems immigrants may encounter in the process of adaptation to the Norwegian culture. Although those questions do not appear in the article itself, it is strongly felt and easily recognizable that there are differences between the two systems of family life and state child care. Hence the crucial question: What is the relationship between a family and the state in Norway and in Poland? What is a family in Norway? What is a family in Poland? What is it like to be a Polish family living in Norway?

The echoes of these opinions we find in the narrations of immigrants that we met:

Yes, a famous institution. There are so many myths and legends about Barnevernet.

We also look through the lens of the Polish media.

Yes, the Polish media also sustains them, so you do not know what is true and what is a legend. But there is some kind of a tiny whip; you do not spank a kid, no matter what, just like that.

But there is a different mentality here too. I see Norwegians bring up their children differently and I think Polish mentality causes you to love children more but you also hate them more. We are [incomprehensible] more emotional, more [incomprehensible] hug, kiss, and love above life if everything is okay. On the other hand, sometimes your hand is just itching to spank, when the kid is simply naughty. Norwegians are more low-key – Sara (thirty years old) and Adrian (thirty years old), parents of one, one-and-a-half years in Norway.

The Polish respondents living in Norway, when asked about being a parent in Norway, have a unique disadvantage: the Barnevernet. Some of them have fear of the institution they just have heard or read about. In this group there were mostly the interviewees with lower social status and who often do not raise any children (like Magda and Bogdan). The other group talked about the fear that comes from little knowledge and the lack of information on the one hand, and on the other hand, they admitted that they personally knew someone who was in trouble because

of Barnevernet. They often understood cultural differences by observing the way Norwegian parents treat their children (like Sara and Adrian recall). The majority did not understand the role and the goals of the institution. There were, however, some respondents that made an effort to understand how Barnevernet works, what rights a child has, and how they should behave and act as parents in Norway. But still, they felt uncertainty and they did not have trust. Public servants in Norway report that they do not understand why Polish immigrants have fear of Barnevernet, and they think that has to do with misunderstandings and misconceptions.

### 3. Conclusion

In this article, we have described how the narratives in the Nikola's case developed and took different strands in the Polish and the Norwegian national media. In the Polish media we see examples of how cultural differences might function as a tool of conflict and a strategic argument for building a negative relationship between two countries, and how this policy of integration through fear can influence the lives of Poles who migrated to Norway. It is important, however, to emphasize that migrants, through the process of adaptation, can become the translators of culture. In interviews and inscriptions on Polish forums, we found voices that defend and explain the system of values that is important for Norwegians. In the conclusion, we would like to present the main aspects that we discovered while working on the Nikola Rybka's case.

As the first argument, we saw that introducing a national plot, as appeared in the Polish articles, attached importance to Nikola and her family's problem. The confrontation of Poles with Norwegians brought a perspective of a diplomatic case. It made invisible the questions related to cultural differences, concerning the place of a child in Polish and Norwegian families. It highlighted negative emotions and stereotypes between Poles and Norwegians. We conclude that in 2011 and even today the issue of preparation of Polish families for a new life in Norway is missing in the media. Children's status in Norway should be explained by the media to help Polish families integrate, understand how Barnevernet works, and know how to get rid of the fear of this institution. In the Polish media, Barnevernet's actions are interpreted as anti-Polish and intentional, having no aim to improve the demographic situation in Norway, and not as an act on behalf of children's rights. Such radical statements may increase fear among immigrants. So, in the Polish news, Barnevernet is pictured as if it had no mission to protect children's rights, because nobody writes about it. Nobody describes the procedures, legal proceedings, etc., and nobody offers solutions to Barnevernet concerning what it could do and how it could help Norwegian and Polish people.

These aspects are present in the narratives of our Polish informants. We found that experience changes the perspective. Polish migrants do not speak about the Norwegian politics or about the Norwegian actions; they talk about Barnever-

net as an institution that is powerful in Norway. Polish migrants can point out problems and they even propose solutions (like Nina Witoszek), while the narrative in the Polish media continues on the total adaptation or the conflict strategy. Migrants more often take the perspective of a child. They try to discover positive solutions for children.

In the Norwegian narrative we initially found the exotic portrayal of the Nikola's kidnapping, while the Norwegian authorities remained more or less silent. Then in the next phase, we saw protests against Barnevernet of several various minority groups, until the authorities and Barnevernet itself become an active part in the narrative in the third phase. Still, we find that it is the limits of Barnevernet's authority in an international and multicultural context that is discussed, not the needs of a child.

In conclusion, we found that the case-narratives in the media of different nations adopt quite different perspectives. Generally, the Polish versus the Norwegian media take two different strands as to who makes decisions regarding a child at risk – the parents or Barnevernet. Neither of them explores the child's situation and the difficulties of adapting to a different country and inter-cultural context. As we mentioned above, the Polish media narratives, warlike discourse, the perspective of kidnapping, and the Norwayization of Polish children, create a view of Barnevernet among Poles. Barnevernet plays the role of a threat to Poles who are willing to move to Norway. The Norwegian media narratives discuss Barnevernet's role and the room for a manoeuvre in the international context.

Fear is a powerful tool of social influence. The Norwegian system of values may turn out to be a very unknown and difficult space for family lives of many Poles. It can be hard to live in Norway according to the traditional and conservative family values, while in Poland a family is perceived as a separate, independent group of people to which a child belongs. The fear of being forced to change a lifestyle may lead to the decision of a life 'in separation' for many Polish families and the raising of children in Poland. There are many different strategies of confronting the fear of Barnevernet in Poland, visible on the internet forums for migrants. Some of them search for information themselves even before the arrival, others take part in meetings and embrace the Norwegian point of view, yet another group 'avoids the danger'. These strategies may serve as an interesting survey category which may help Barnevernet reach more Poles and work on the change of image.

The national context is only one of the several narrative layers concerning Barnevernet. The issues concerning the relations within a family and its status can serve as another possible point of reference or a common ground for senders and receivers of the message. Poland perceives a family as a bastion of independence and freedom. Due to their historical experiences, Poles respond negatively to the attempts of the state to regulate the families' lifestyle. The conservative discourse defends a family as a mainstay of freedom. The situation is much different in Norway where Norwegians have a trust-based relationship with the state and



its institutions whose function is not only to care, but also to regulate. The Poles in Norway perceive this as a huge threat.

At the end, we would like to point out that the fear also generates behavioral changes. The Polish immigrants have concerns about the Norwegian system of values. We find that Barnevernet also understands that the fear of losing a child is present among the Polish immigrants. We argue that it is a good moment to pose a question: What can this fear bring in the long run for the Polish and the Norwegian societies? We think that the politics or the pedagogics of fear have short-term positive effects. We have shown that Poles adapt to the Norwegian culture just because they want to save families – as a Polish value rooted in different influences – and are not adapting the more hidden Norwegian norms about the relations in family. It is possible that immigrants who share the fear play a role where they are 'always smiling, talking with teachers, calling the school, informing about private life events', yet they do not understand and they are not sharing the reason of their acting in this way with the Norwegians. Where there is fear, there is no trust, and trust is the basis for social integration.

In order to address the fear, a solution could be that Barnevernet and other institutions that cooperate with the Polish immigrants in Norway work to build a real trust, if they consider integration as partially their responsibility. Many Polish families migrating to Norway might benefit from a program that could help them recognize cultural differences and influence the way their activities as parents are judged. Participation in workshops might help them understand what is considered an action against a child's good in Norway, and confront it with the Polish style of child-raising, expressing emotions or dealing with the conflict in the style of the Scandinavian culture. Hopefully, it would help them to get rid of their fear of Barnevernet, and help their children adjust to the new life conditions.

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