

One of us:

Analyzing on-screen representation of Ukrainian migrants in
contemporary Polish fiction film (2016-2023)

Student Name: Kacper Nożewski

Student Number: 669578

Supervisor: Dr. Jasper Vanhaelemeesch

Media and Creative Industries

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication

Erasmus University Rotterdam

Master Thesis

June 2024

Word Count: 15 570

One of us:

Analysing on-screen representation of Ukrainian migrants in contemporary Polish fiction film (2016-2023)

Abstract

This thesis explores the representation of Ukrainian migrants in contemporary Polish fiction film, focusing on how these depictions reflect existing stereotypes on migrants, identity, and othering. The study employs a qualitative content analysis approach grounded in cultural studies and film analysis theory. This research examines four feature fiction films produced between 2014 and 2023: *Wołyń/Hatred* (Smarzowski, 2016), *Kler/Clergy* (Smarzowski, 2018), *Памфір/Pamfir*, (Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk, 2022) and *Zielona Granica/Green Border* (Holland, 2023). These films were selected based on their thematic relevance, critical acclaim, and availability, reflecting on the evolving dynamics between Poland and Ukraine during the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, and the full-scale invasion in 2022. The study identifies key themes in the portrayal of Ukrainian migrants, including their roles as workers, their family and cultural ties, and the socio-political contexts influencing their representation.

The analysis reveals that these films contribute to a nuanced understanding of Ukrainian migrants, highlighting both the positive and negative aspects of their portrayal. On one hand, the films foster empathy and a sense of shared identity between Poles and Ukrainian migrants. On the other hand, they also perpetuate certain stereotypes that could reinforce societal biases. Through this analysis, the study aims to shed light on the socio-cultural dynamics between Poland and Ukraine as reflected in contemporary Polish cinema.

KEYWORDS: Polish cinema, Ukrainian migrants, film analysis, stereotypes, representation

Table of Content

Abstract	2
1. Introduction	4
2. Theoretical framework	8
2.1 Migration and its representation in film.....	8
2.2 Representation in cultural studies.....	11
2.3 Film analysis through cultural studies	13
3. Methods	15
3.1 Qualitative content analysis	15
3.2 Sample selection and data collection.....	16
3.4 Data analysis.....	19
3.4 Reliability and validity	20
3.5 Limitations, ethics and positionality of the researcher	21
3.6 Summary	22
4. Results	22
5. Conclusions.....	38
Reference List	41

1. Introduction

Migration, a phenomenon as old as humanity itself, has become a particularly prominent aspect of our lives within the global perspective in recent decades, in the context of the ongoing military conflicts and humanitarian crises. The advancement of technology and the pervasive influence of media have transformed how we perceive and engage with human migration, allowing us to observe more closely than ever before (Hopkins, 2009, p. 36). Additionally, visual media, including films, television, and online platforms, have provided platforms for discussion and representation of migrant experiences, influencing public discourse and perceptions of migration dynamics. This thesis sets out to observe how Ukrainian migrants are represented in contemporary Polish film and how these depictions contribute to existing discourses on migration, identity, and othering. This study focuses on four fiction feature films produced between 2014 and 2023 that include Ukrainian characters: *Wołyń/Hatred* (Smarzowski, 2016), *Kler/Clergy* (Smarzowski, 2018), *Памфір/Pamfir* (Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk, 2022), and *Zielona Granica/Green Border* (Holland, 2023). The significance of this study lies in its focus on the on-screen representation of Ukrainian migrants, which is particularly relevant given the recent geopolitical events. Within the European context, Ukraine and Poland stand out as players in the migration dynamic over the last decade. Poland, bordering Ukraine and situated on the eastern edge of the European Union, has emerged as a crucial transit and destination country for Ukrainians escaping the war (Duszczek & Kaczmarczyk, 2022).

The conflict began in 2014 when Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula and occupied the Donbas region. This 8 year long conflict escalated dramatically on February 24, 2022, when Russian Federation troops invaded Ukraine, further intensifying the migration. The invasion has been condemned by the vast majority of the international community as being against the international law and violating Ukrainian sovereignty. It marked a pivotal moment in the crisis, exacerbating existing tensions and prompting a surge in displacement. As a result, Ukraine has witnessed a substantial outflow of refugees fleeing violence, persecution, and instability, seeking refuge both within its borders and beyond. It has also added complexity to the dynamics between the host countries and the migrants, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive responses to address the humanitarian and integration challenges faced by displaced individuals and communities. Amidst these developments, Ukrainians constitute one of the largest groups of third-country nationals living and working within the European Union (EU), as highlighted by Fedjuk and Kindler (2016, p. 4). The third-country national, in the context of the regional organisations like

European Union, is a foreign citizen who resides in an EU country, and does not have the nationality of any of the 27 member states (Ahamad Madatali & European Parliamentary Research Service, 2022, p. 214). In the recent years, labor migration has been a significant aspect of this movement, with Ukrainians contributing to various sectors of the Polish economy, continuously being the most numerous minority group to receive the work permit in Poland since 2010 (Statista, 2023). It is essential to recognize that Ukrainians have been migrating to Poland for many years, drawn by historical ties between the two nations, employment opportunities and better economic stability. After the Second World War, the dynamics between two countries were complicated, caused by the war itself, transformation of the political systems and the border changes, resulting in the complex identity of the border regions (Tsependa, 2014, p. 22). This longstanding pattern of migration has reshaped communities and networks between the two countries, enriching the social, cultural, and economic landscape. While the conflict has been predominantly centred in eastern Ukraine, more than 16 million people countrywide, which is more than a third of Ukraine's population, were impacted by the invasion and ongoing war (Düvell 2023). During the year following the invasion, approximately 8 million Ukrainians were displaced by conflict and crossed foreign borders in search of safety. This continuous relocation of Ukrainians is one of the major refugee flows since WWII (Düvell 2023). Ukrainian nationals who have crossed international borders have primarily travelled to member states of the European Union (Eurostat, 2023). The significant number of Ukrainian nationals have gone to Poland which, by June 1 2022, has registered close to 3.7 million arrivals (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022).

This longstanding pattern of migration has not only transformed the homogenous ethnic and demographic landscape of Poland, but has also given rise to a complex interplay of cultural exchanges and social interactions. The immediate international financial aid for Ukraine, to the military conflict in the first months after the start of the conflict did not solve the multi-layered challenge, brought by social dynamics between the migrants and hosting countries. As an example, Polish public television channels owned by the ruling at that time right-wing party (Law and Justice), prior to the parliamentary elections in 2023, gained a lot of criticism for their stereotypical portrayal of migrants (Kalan, 2019). As depicted in various media outlets, the example of the main television channel (TVP1), reflects a broader trend of populist discourse and nationalist narratives that have gained popularity in Poland and Europe. Ukrainian migrants, in the first months after the start of the invasion, were portrayed in contrast with the refugees from the Africa, the Middle East,

and South Asia who are usually depicted through a lens of suspicion and fear, with narratives emphasizing their alleged impact on crime rates, job competition, and social cohesion (Zawadzka-Palucka, 2022, p. 106). It suggests that the media were categorising the refugees and prioritising the need for humanitarian aid towards the Ukrainian migrants, for the sake of their own political agenda. The aim of this study is to examine the specific case of Ukrainians in Polish film, rather than to compare it with other migratory periods or groups. However, the circumstances surrounding Ukrainians fleeing to Europe in 2022 significantly differ from the 2015-16 refugee crisis in Europe, partly due to the proximity, ease of travel, and support from an existing diaspora. According to Abdelaaty (2022), Europeans perceive Ukrainians as white and Christian, which aligns with their self-image and increases the acceptance of asylum applications and the generosity of refugee policies. There have been additional factors contributing to the empathetic response toward displaced Ukrainians noted by researchers. De Coninck (2023) argues that despite some differences, similarities such as symbolic threats, familiarity from global events, and the perception of Russia as a threat have influenced this treatment. Düvell & Lapshyna (2022, p. 211) also emphasize the influence of fears stemming from the Cold War and other historical aspects, including regional politics, pre-existing migration arrangements, and the resulting perceptions, sentiments, and obligations.

On the other hand, according to Jurek (2019) common stereotypes about Ukrainians in Poland include perceptions of them as alcohol abusers, uncultured, socially backward, and lagging behind in civilization (Jurek, 2019, p. 33). Jurek highlights that these stereotypes can lead to discrimination and exclusion in various aspects of life, such as denial of service in restaurants or disrespect towards Ukrainian women working as cleaners. Therefore, the impact of these stereotypes in the daily lives of Ukrainians in Poland might be significant. It can result in social stigma, limited job opportunities, and challenges in accessing goods and services. Additionally, these stereotypes can affect the mental well-being of Ukrainians, leading to feelings of alienation and discrimination. Another aspect of the existing discourse about Ukrainian migrants was introduced by Polkowska & Filipek (2019). Their research on the „precarious” worker identity of Ukrainian migrants in Poland further highlights several key motivations and factors influencing their migration experience. Ukrainians are motivated to work in Poland due to the country's EU membership, perceived stability, and better working conditions compared to Ukraine (2019, pp. 564-580). The ease of finding employment in Poland, with employers increasingly seeking employees directly from Ukraine, adds to this motivation. Cultural and historical

community relationships, linguistic proximity, and geographic proximity allow for frequent visits to their families, making Poland a primary work migration destination for Ukrainians. Ukrainians often accept work at wage levels and conditions below those generally applied in host countries, as conditions are still perceived as better than in their home country (Polkowska & Filipek, 2019). As Zawadzka-Palucka (2022) noted at the end of her research, there is a possibility of change in the attitudes towards Ukrainians in Polish society with regard to the ongoing war, increasing economic crisis and aversive sentiments towards foreign nationals residing in Poland over long period of time. Therefore, such shifts in attitudes could have significant consequences, including the potential for migrants to be used as scapegoats, where they are blamed for the economic difficulties faced by the country. This scapegoating can lead to increased social tensions, discrimination, and a further marginalization of migrant communities, exacerbating the challenges they face in integrating into Polish society.

It becomes important to study the representation of Ukrainians in Polish visual media to comprehend the evolving dynamics between the two nations over the long period of time. Films not only portray historical and social realities but also shape the discourse surrounding migration by emphasizing certain themes or perspectives over others (Kubrak, 2020). This makes film a potent medium for understanding how migrants, particularly Ukrainians in Poland, are viewed and represented in the broader societal context. The choice of the country of analysis was motivated by the fact that Poland has welcomed the one of largest numbers of the displaced Ukrainians up to date (Eurostat, 2024). The central research question guiding this inquiry is: How are Ukrainian migrants represented in recent Polish fiction films? This question is supported by several sub-questions that aim to dissect the cinematic portrayal of Ukrainian migrants. First, the study examines the various aspects of Ukrainian migrants' characters and experiences as depicted in the films. This involves analyzing the thematic elements of their identities, character relationships, background stories, and behaviors to uncover underlying stereotypes and themes associated with these representations. Furthermore, the research delves into how these cinematic depictions contribute to or challenge the existing discourses on migration, identity, and othering within Polish society. It also explores whether and how the portrayals of Ukrainian migrants reflect changes over time, considering the shifting political and social landscape between Ukraine and Poland. By structuring the analysis around these questions, the study aims to shed light on the socio-cultural dynamics between Poland and Ukraine as reflected in contemporary Polish cinema. The answers to these questions will be sought through a

qualitative content analysis, informed by cultural studies and film analysis theories.

To that end, the remainder of this study is structured as follows: First, it provides a theoretical framework to contextualise the study, including engaging with existing research concerning the representation of migrants in visual media, especially films. Next, it explains the methods of data collection and analysis. From there, it presents the main findings.

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter elaborates upon the theoretical background of this thesis by providing the introduction to the representation of migration in film, the cultural studies, and film analysis. Moreover, this section expands upon the existing portrayals of Ukrainian migrants in Polish films, examining the existing narratives and themes.

2.1 Migration and its representation in film

Before delving into the subject of migration in European and Polish cinema, it is important to set the scene with an definition of migration in broader context of visual media. Migration itself is understood as a multifaceted phenomenon that deeply influences formation of modern societies, cultures, and identities (Koshel & Yakovenko, 2020, p. 2). Defined as human mobility, migration might be short-term, such as for work permits, or it may result in long-term settlement. The main factors influencing it are nations' unequal economic progress, environmental disasters, military conflicts, or governmental policy changes (United Nations, 2020, pp. 129-135). This phenomenon has made European countries prime destinations for immigrants from Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, as well as not so distant Eastern Europe (Eurostat, 2022). In many host countries, the influx of migrants has sparked debates and controversies surrounding issues such as national identity, cultural assimilation, economic competition, and social cohesion (Marino & Dawes, 2016, pp. 1-2). These tensions have been intensified by factors such as perceived threats to jobs and resources, concerns about security and terrorism, and political rhetoric that seeks to capitalize on fears and anxieties related to migration through „scapegoating”. Scholars such as Ahmed (1999) and Chambers (1994) have conceptualized migration as a movement and dislocation, highlighting the challenges and opportunities inherent in crossing physical and cultural boundaries. The studies recognise the difficult experiences of migrants and the phenomenon of „othering”, where individuals or groups are cast as different or alien through media representations. The way these issues are perceived by the society is often shaped by the political agenda of the governments and the general representation of the migrants in visual media, like films. As demographic shifts, economic disparities, political

instability, and environmental changes continue to drive patterns of human mobility and network, the phenomenon of migration has concentrated increased attention and scrutiny on both local and global scales.

In media discourse, migrants are often depicted from various perspectives and viewpoints, which can influence public perceptions and attitudes towards migration issues. Across news media, for example, migrants are frequently portrayed in relation to events such as refugee crises, border crossings, and immigration policy debates. Figenschou, Beyer & Thorbjørnsrud (2015) argue that in polarized news stories migrants tend to be defined as intruders, but also as heroic victims of war, natural disasters and oppression (Figenschou et al., 2015, p. 66). Hence, depending on the framing, migrants are depicted as victims in need of assistance, threats to national security, or economic burdens on host societies. Similarly, in popular culture and entertainment media, migrants are often portrayed through a range of stereotypes and tropes that reflect broader societal attitudes and biases. Migrants may be portrayed as „others“, criminal threats, or sympathetic protagonists struggling to overcome adversity. These representations can both reflect and reinforce prevailing stereotypes and narratives surrounding migration, ethnicity and identity. In the article discussing the influence of media on public perceptions of immigration, Danilova (2014) emphasizes how the language employed in media coverage of migrant-related stories vividly reflects and simultaneously shapes the prevailing narrative portraying migrants as „the other“. Building on this perspective, Chouliaraki (2013) argues that the fundamental structure of visual media, such as films, inherently creates a divide, where certain individuals observe while others are observed. This arrangement fosters a moral distance between the viewer and the subject of the film, providing a space for private emotions. Chouliaraki refers to this as the "paradox of authenticity", where the media constantly seek innovative ways of representation and narration to evoke vulnerability as a cause for global solidarity. This observation leads directly into another crucial aspect of media impact: audience engagement. As media representations shape societal views, they also underscore the importance of how these narratives are framed. The impact of these portrayals extends beyond the screen, influencing real-world perceptions and interactions regarding migration. It is critical, therefore, that media representations provide balanced perspectives that foster understanding rather than perpetuating misconceptions (Wright, 2008; Musarò & Parmiggiani, 2017). According to Wright (2008, p. 11), both still and moving images wield significant influence in communicating messages and shaping debates, acting as cognitive frameworks that modulate individuals' perceptions of their environment. It aligns with the

theory introduced by Kahneman, Slovik & Tversky (1982, p. 4), about the human inclination to simplify judgments by using intuitive tools, or mental shortcuts. In other words, these „everyday shortcuts” require less mental effort and allow for simplified thinking of the viewers. This provides insights into how visual portrayals serve as codes that modulate narratives and shape the experiences of individuals. King and Wood (2001) analyzed the impact migrant communities have had on the social and cultural fabric of societies across the world that has resulted in increased mediatic attention” (King and Wood, 2001, p. 6). They highlighted the crucial role that media plays in shaping the migration process and the collective migration experience through various means.

As we narrow the focus to European cinema, we see how the continent's evolving multicultural dynamics have reshaped its film industry. In the past decades, European cinema has changed its form as a result of an increasing number of filmmakers with a background related to migration, and a growing interest in the dynamics of postmodern multiculturalism (Berghahn and Sternberg, 2010, p. 21). This engagement has led to the emergence of what Berghahn and Sternberg (2010) describe as "migration cinema", a genre of films that focuses on the experiences, challenges, and stories of migrants and diasporic communities. These films often explore themes such as identity, belonging, cultural displacement, integration, and the impact of migration on individuals and societies. By employing this framework, the study aims to explore the underlying themes and discourses that create and form the identity of Ukrainian migrants in Polish film. Through the storytelling techniques and visual styles, migration cinema plays a role in raising awareness about issues related to migration, fostering intercultural dialogue, and promoting empathy and understanding among audiences (Berghahn and Sternberg, 2010, p. 30). Filmmakers contributing to the discourse of migration employ diverse approaches to construct images of societies, recognizing the role of cinema as a cultural artefact that both reflects and challenges societal norms. Therefore, according to Mikos (2013), films have to be understood essentially as media of communication, embedded in the circumstances by which society communicates and interacts (Mikos, 2013, p. 2). Positive minority character representations can play a role in improving diversity attitudes. Previous research shows that exposure to certain minority depictions can contribute to prejudice reduction (Banas et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2022; Żerebecki et al., 2021). For these effects to take place, audiences need to engage with characters positively (Wong et al., 2022, p. 5). Additionally, characters should be portrayed in ways that defy negative stereotypes and can teach audiences how to develop friendly interactions with diverse others (Żerebecki et al., 2021,

p.3).

Recent scholarly research further illustrates the evolving portrayal of Ukrainian migrants in Polish cinema. For instance, Lewis (2019) delves into the concept of "border trouble" in recent Polish cinema, analyzing four fiction films that challenge traditional notions of identity and memory through complex narratives of transnationalism and visual commemoration. This study highlights how these films address cultural trauma and identity in the Ukrainian-Polish borderlands, reflecting on post-war reckonings and the legacies of historical border shifts. Additionally, building upon the previously introduced theory on the minority depictions and contribution to prejudice reduction, Rosinska's (2022) analysis of the Polish series *Ukraińcy/ The Ukrainians* (2022) serves as a practical example of how media can transcend stereotypes by showcasing Ukrainians in various social and professional roles. This portrayal challenges and promotes nuanced and empathetic understanding of the lives of Ukrainian migrants. Rosinska (2022) argues that by presenting these individuals in diverse contexts, the series directly contributes to reshaping public perceptions and enhancing the dialogue around migration and integration within Polish society.

As we conclude the introduction of migration in European and Polish cinema, it becomes evident that a positive representation plays an important role in shaping societal perceptions and attitudes towards migration and cultural identity. Building upon this foundation, the following part of this framework looks into the concept of representation in cultural studies. It delves deeper into media discourse and power dynamics, in order to highlight the core meanings that underpin representation of migrants in film.

2.2 Representation in cultural studies

Cultural studies is an interdisciplinary field that encompasses a diverse range of disciplines. It draws on various theoretical frameworks to examine cultural and power relationships to identify new ways of thinking about power that can effect social change. Rather than just researching cultures, cultural studies focus on the ideas, images, and practices that shape our understanding and methods of discussing certain themes in society (Hall, 1997, as mentioned in Barker, 2003, pp. 4-6). An important belief in this field is that it is necessary to understand the media's role in both the production and reproduction of inequality in society (Nunn, 2016, p. 484). This includes examining issues such as race and gender, as media can shape, and manipulate people's ideas and attitudes about these topics. Stuart Hall, a major researcher in cultural studies, describes culture as a means by

which we make sense of or give meaning to phenomena (Hall, 1997, p. 9). Consequently, culture plays a crucial role in the concept of representation as a meaning-making process.

In this thesis, this approach acknowledges the complexity of cultural studies, using it to observe the interplay between media portrayals of migration and their reflection on cultural and social perceptions. A cultural studies perspective suggests that the stereotypes and categories used in processes of racialization reflect power imbalances where dominant groups in society have the greatest authority to categorize, position, and "define" the less powerful (Hall, 1996, pp. 442-444). However, these power dynamics and their discursive consequences are never static but are always temporally and locally situated (Andrews, 2002). This implies that the study of representations of Ukrainian migrants in Polish cinema must be situated within a broader theoretical framework that considers the image of the migrant and the phenomenon of migration as conveyed in destination countries. It is essential to account for the social, political, and historical context from which these representations emerge.

In examining film from a cultural studies perspective, representation and discourse are relevant concepts connecting it to media. Inadequate representation is not only harmful to individuals, but also restrictive to society (Pitkin, 1967, p. 4). Strong and positive representation is required to break down destructive preconceptions surrounding certain communities (Pitkin, 1967). Hence, the notions of representation and discourse are essential when analyzing cinema through the lens of cultural studies. Representation on screen is a critical concept for many societal groups. Hall (1997) emphasizes the importance of representation, stating it is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture (Hall, 1997, p. 15). This implies that how groups, such as migrants, are represented is crucial to societal perceptions of these groups. Signs, visuals, and words are utilized to express certain concepts during this process. The concept of discourse is pivotal to the constructionist approach, initially introduced by Foucault and expanded by Hall (Adams, 2017). While approaches to representation, such as the semiotic approach, often focus solely on language and how words operate as specific signals within a language, the concept of discourse places representation in a broader context. Representation evolves from merely creating meaning to producing social knowledge that is intricately linked to social practices and power dynamics (Hall, 1997). In discourse, language is not merely a system of representation but also a practice that shapes and is shaped by social contexts. Discourses are defined as a collection of statements that provide a language for discussing—a way of representing

knowledge about—a specific topic at a specific historical moment (Hall, 1992, p. 291, as cited in Hall, 1997, p. 44). In this case, every sort of sign system counts as language, and that includes media, such as films too. As far as film and television goes, these are images, sounds, writing, language, graphics and music (Hartley, 1994, p. 265). The signs can stand for objects in the so-called real world, but they can also stand for abstract ideas and fantasy worlds. Discourse involves the development of knowledge through language, assembling, defining, and creating the objects of our knowledge so we can meaningfully discuss and reason about certain issues. This indicates that everything we know is part of discourse, and nothing can have significance outside of discourse.

In conclusion, the study of cultural studies within this thesis has laid a groundwork for understanding the between media representations and societal perceptions, especially in the context of migration. Through the lens of cultural studies, we have explored how media serves not just as a reflection of reality but as an active participant in the construction and negotiation of cultural identities and power dynamics. This approach emphasizes that representations in media, particularly in film, are not merely depictions but are powerful mediators of social knowledge and attitudes. As we transition to a more focused analysis in the next section, we will apply these concepts of representation and discourse specifically to the realm of film. Thus, bridging cultural studies with film analysis will enable exploration of mechanisms through which cinema not only mirrors societal changes but also actively participates in cultural discourse. This next section will further elaborate on how films function as dynamic sites of cultural negotiation, where meanings are not only displayed but also contested and redefined.

2.3 Film analysis through cultural studies

Building upon the already established theoretical framework, this section delves into the theory of film analysis, drawing on the insights of Mikos (2014), and the foundational concepts of cultural studies. This approach is essential for understanding how films represent societal structures, ideologies, and power dynamics, aligning with the broader themes of representation and discourse discussed earlier.

According to Stuart Hall (1997), representation operates through two systems: the system of signs, where articulation occurs, and the system of mental concepts, which classify and organize the world into meaningful categories. Reality does not exist outside of representation. This notion implies that films, as systems of signs, represent both real and possible worlds, reflecting societal realities and abstract ideas. These representations are

dynamic, influenced by historical, cultural, and social changes, and are sites of struggle over meaning (Taylor & Willis, 1999).

Mikos (2014) builds on this by emphasizing that film analysis should focus not only on what is shown but, crucially, on how it is shown. The ideological components of films correspond to societal structures and reflect relations of dominance and power (Berger & Luckmann, 1971, p. 12). Analyzing both content and representation in films is vital for understanding the processes that govern the meaningful construction of the social world. Films communicate with viewers through reception and appropriation, where viewers create a "received text" enriched with allocated meanings and structured experiences. This indicates that films do not contain fixed meanings but rather operate with potential meanings that unfold through viewers' engagement, serving as semiotic resources within cultural contexts. The cognitive purpose of film analysis introduced by Mikos (2014) involves examining films on multiple levels to understand how their structural functions influence reception. The analysis conducted in this research focuses on content and representation, where, according to Mikos, "everything said and shown in a film contributes to the production of meaning and the social construction of reality" (2014, p. 9). Narration and dramaturgy involve weaving situations, actors, and activities into a coherent story that engages viewers emotionally and cognitively. This level examines how stories are told and structured to reflect both societal reality and imaginative possibilities. Characters play a crucial role in advancing the plot and are linked to societal concepts of identity and roles. The analysis explores how viewers perceive characters based on societal knowledge and cultural contexts. Mikos (2014) further highlights the aesthetic techniques such as camera work, montage, and *mise-en-scène*, guiding viewers emotionally and cognitively, adding to the film's emotional and psychological impact. Finally, films acquire meaning through their interaction with viewers within specific historical, economic, cultural, and social contexts, which influence the production and interpretation of meaning in film texts.

By integrating the concepts of representation, discourse, and reception from cultural studies with Mikos's multi-level film analysis, this chapter provides a basis to research how Ukrainian migrants are represented in Polish cinema. It considers how these representations are received and appropriated by audiences, taking into account the power dynamics and socio-cultural contexts that influence both the creation and interpretation of these cinematic portrayals. In conclusion, the case of Ukrainian migrants in Polish cinema is a multifaceted subject that intersects with broader debates on migration, identity, and media representation. By critically engaging with existing literature and analysing film

content within the theoretical framework of cultural studies and film analysis this research aims to see how Ukrainian migrants are depicted and how these representations align with the existing discourse.

3. Methods

This chapter will firstly discuss qualitative content analysis and how the methods will be applied in this research. This will be followed by a section concerning how the data collection was conducted. The third section will elaborate on how the data will be analyzed. Finally, the ethical considerations of this research will be considered.

3.1 Qualitative content analysis

This study employed a qualitative content analysis (QCA) approach to explore the visual representation of Ukrainian migrants in Polish cinema. The reason for adopting qualitative methods is that qualitative research is frequently used to acquire a better understanding of phenomena that are complicated and sensitive (Flick, 2008), in this case providing rich insights into the complexities of migrant representation in film. The research methodology adopted for this study was grounded in the principles of qualitative content analysis, a systematic approach „facilitating the reduction of certain phenomena into conceptualised categories, enabling flexible, systematic analysis and interpretation of them” (Schreier, 2012, p. 170). Content analysis offers a rigorous method for exploring the multifaceted dimensions of cinematic representation, allowing for the identification of recurrent themes, character archetypes, and narrative tropes. According to Mayring (2015, p. 5), QCA approaches texts as linked to their ‘communicative contexts’, which refer to the origin, context, and purpose of the texts’ creation. When analyzing texts, it is crucial to consider these contexts and how they influence the meanings that the text seeks to generate. Therefore, QCA considers both manifest and latent meanings within texts.

This study is grounded in the theory of film analysis as outlined by Lothar Mikos (2008). Mikos' framework provides a structured approach to film analysis, encompassing various cognitive purposes and analytic tools to systematically investigate film content. This approach ensures a comprehensive exploration of the films' representations, aligning with the broader themes of representation and discourse discussed in the theoretical framework.

In the case of this study, applying qualitative methods will give us an insight into how the Ukrainian migrants are represented in the Polish feature film and will help us

understand how these representations contribute to the existing discourses on migration, identity, and othering in the context of media.

3.2 Sample selection and data collection

The material for analysis in this study includes four feature films, each with a minimum duration of 40 minutes, confirming their classification as full-length feature films. These films, predominantly dramas, were selected for their ability to present complex characters and narratives. The films' nationalities of production were mostly Polish, except for *Памфір/Pamfir* (Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk, 2022), which was a multinational project involving Ukraine, Poland, France, and Chile, and *Zielona Granica/Green Border* (Holland, 2023), a co-production between Poland, France, the Czech Republic, and Belgium.

The selection criteria included thematic relevance, critical acclaim, and availability for in-depth analysis. Films were specifically chosen if they featured Ukrainian characters and addressed migration-related themes. These films were considered for their potential to illuminate various aspects of Ukrainian migration, including identity, motivations for migration and socio-political dynamics, although not all films dedicated equal narrative space or depth to these themes. The assessment of films for inclusion was guided by preliminary indicators such as the presence of Ukrainian characters and the relevance of migration as a theme within the narrative. While it was not feasible to confirm the absolute prominence of these themes without detailed analysis, films were initially selected based on the expectation that they would provide valuable insights into the experiences of Ukrainian migrants. This expectation was based on film synopses, existing reviews, and available descriptions of plot and character dynamics.

The selected films were either critically acclaimed by film festivals or gained significant attention in Polish media. *Zielona Granica/Green Border* (Holland, 2023), was selected to compete for the Golden Lion at the 80th Venice International Film Festival, where it had its world premiere on 5 September 2023. Following screenings at the 2023 Toronto International Film Festival, 2023 Vancouver International Film Festival and 2023 New York Film Festival, highlight its international recognition. Similarly, *Памфір/Pamfir* (Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk, 2022) was showcased at the International Film Festival in Rotterdam. *Wołyń/Hatred* and *Kler/Clergy* (Smarzowski, 2016 & 2018) were specifically chosen for their availability in Polish cinemas and the significant media attention they attracted due to their controversial portrayals. *Wołyń/Hatred* (Smarzowski, 2016) explores the historical tensions and events of the Volhynia massacre, a topic that has sparked discussion and debate within

Polish and Ukrainian society regarding historical memory and reconciliation. In Poland, the film was nominated for several awards at the Gdynia Film Festival and was praised for its connection to Polish history. However, in Ukraine, the film was banned, a decision justified by the Ukrainian ambassador to Poland, Andriy Deszczyca, who argued that the film could incite unrest on the streets of Kyiv, especially „at a time when Ukraine is trying to defend itself from Russian aggression”(Niemitz, 2016). The head of the Ukrainian Association in Poland, Piotr Tyma, asserted that the movie would "kill off Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation efforts”, criticizing its reliance on what Ukrainian media claimed were „only Polish historical sources”. In Poland, critics around the ruling right-wing Law and Justice party (PiS) gave the movie positive reviews, while cynically twisting its message to fit their nationalist aims (Niemitz, 2016). *Kler/Clergy* (Smarzowski, 2018), on the other hand, provides a critical look at the Catholic Church in Poland, including subtle portrayals of Ukrainian characters which reflect broader societal attitudes towards migrants and ethnic minorities. The film achieved remarkable commercial success, reaching the fifth largest cinema audience in Poland since 1989, with over 3.5 million viewers within just 18 days of its regular distribution. Despite its popularity, *Kler/Clergy* was not without controversy. It was notably criticized by right-wing conservative groups, and even Poland's Minister of Culture, Piotr Gliński, distanced himself from the film's funding, criticizing Smarzowski for turning an important topic into a „caricature” (Springer, 2018). These criticisms underscore the film's significant impact on Polish society and highlight its role in stimulating public discourse on issues within the Church and its interaction with broader social issues, including migration. These films were selected for their ability to engage the public and stimulate debate, making them particularly relevant for a study focused on the representation of Ukrainian migrants and the dynamics of Polish-Ukrainian relations. Their presence in Polish cinemas ensured wide viewership, while their controversial natures meant that they were discussed in media.

The availability of the films for analysis was another important criterion. Selected films had to be accessible on popular legal polish streaming services (Netflix) or other video on demand (VOD) platforms (vodTVP, mojekino.pl). This ensured that the films could be viewed multiple times for thorough analysis. The inclusion of films that are widely available also implies that they had the potential to reach a broad audience, thereby contributing significantly to public discourse on the topic of Ukrainian migrants. This widespread accessibility can play a crucial role in shaping discussions and perspectives around migration issues in Poland. By selecting films that meet these criteria, this study aims to provide an analysis of the on-screen representation of Ukrainian migrants in Polish cinema.

The chosen films offer a diverse range of perspectives and narratives, contributing to a better understanding of how Ukrainian migrants are depicted in Polish film. *Памфір/Pamfir*, (Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk, 2022) focuses on the economic motivations behind migration, depicting the main character as an economic migrant working in Poland. This narrative underscores the personal and economic challenges faced by migrants and the decisions they must make in a new country. In contrast, *Wołyń/Hatred* (Smarzowski, 2016) delves into the historical tensions between Polish and Ukrainian communities during World War II, focusing on the events of the Volhynia massacre. This historical narrative provides a backdrop for understanding contemporary relations and the deep-seated issues that can influence inter-nation interactions. Meanwhile, *Kler/Clergy* (Smarzowski, 2018), although not centrally focusing on Ukrainian characters, includes them throughout the film in peripheral roles that reflecting the ways in which migrants are woven into the social fabric of host countries. Lastly, *Zielona Granica/Green Border* (Holland, 2023) provides a direct contrast by portraying Ukrainian migrants alongside refugees from the Middle East, highlighting the differing perceptions and treatments based on cultural and ethnical backgrounds. This comparison underscores the variable dynamics of acceptance and integration within Polish society, influenced by broader geopolitical and cultural factors. Collectively, these films provide an exploration of the experiences of Ukrainian migrants—from historical and current military conflicts, to economic migration and the subtleties of everyday integration. The array of narratives not only enhances the depth of cinematic exploration but also mirrors the complexity of migration as an experience that varies widely depending on individual circumstances, societal conditions, and historical contexts.

Systematic content analysis offers a structured approach to examining the selected films, allowing for the thorough documentation of migrant representation through repeated viewings and detailed note-taking to document key scenes, dialogues, character portrayals, and visual elements related to Ukrainian migrants. Operationalization in this study involves defining and measuring the concepts related to the representation of Ukrainian migrants in Polish cinema. This process includes defining key concepts, developing a coding scheme, measuring and documenting data, applying an analytic framework, and interpreting and contextualizing the data. The „representation of Ukrainian migrants” encompasses how these characters are portrayed in terms of stereotypes, character traits, and narrative roles. A comprehensive coding scheme was developed to categorize various elements of representation, including character attributes, narrative dynamics, thematic elements, and socio-political context. Detailed note-taking, translation

and transcription of dialogues, and repeated viewings of each film were employed to ensure thorough data collection. Key scenes, dialogues, and visual elements were documented systematically. Following Mikos' 14-step approach, each film was analyzed to identify and interpret the portrayal of Ukrainian migrants. The steps included developing a general cognitive purpose, watching the visual material, reflecting on theoretical and historical contexts, and conducting a detailed analysis. The analyzed data were interpreted within the broader socio-cultural and historical context, relating the findings to existing theories in cultural and migration studies. This helped in understanding how the representations align with or challenge existing discourses on migrants, identity, and othering.

3.4 Data analysis

Selected films were processed using the thematic analysis approach. This strategy is used to identify patterns in data and categorise them into themes. This specific content analysis had an inductive beginning point, which Kyngäs (2020) refers to as a "inductive content analysis" (Kyngäs, 2020, p. 14), which indicates that the majority of the ideas or categories have been formed during the study rather than beforehand. The content analysis involved a manual coding process. Coding criteria have been established based on identified themes related to Ukrainian migrants and the personality traits that could contribute to creating the identity of these characters. The analysis collected raw data, from which categories, subcategories, or topics can be formed by data reduction (Kyngäs, 2020, p. 15). Though thematic analysis is a particular method, it is similar to other qualitative research approaches in that the researcher starts the analysis with the aim to find meaning and an interest in particular data (Azmi & Razak, 2006). The end goal is to articulate and report the discovered patterns or themes that encapsulate the essence of the data analyzed.

The analysis followed the approach proposed by Mikos (2008), guiding the analysis of the film process. It was structured to align with the overarching goals of this study, which centers on exploring the cinematic portrayal of Ukrainian migrants in Polish films. The process began with multiple film viewings, essential for familiarizing with the content and preliminary themes. This phase was enriched by integrating relevant theoretical and historical contexts, providing a deeper layer of understanding to the migration narratives portrayed in these sampled films.

To operationalize these concepts within the context of cinema, several observable

indicators were defined. These include identifying attributes or traits portrayed in Ukrainian characters across the films. The roles Ukrainian characters play in the film's storyline were examined, whether as protagonists, antagonists, or supporting characters, noting their significance in the narrative. Additionally, the analysis looked at how films portray the cultural identity of Ukrainian migrants, including aspects like language use, cultural practices, and social interactions. Each scene, dialogue, and visual element that pertains to the representation of Ukrainian migrants is documented and analyzed, ensuring that no significant details are overlooked. This meticulous documentation provides a detailed account of how data is organized and analyzed, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the films' content.

The coding process itself was iterative, allowing for continuous refinement of codes and themes as more insights were gained. This approach ensured a dynamic engagement with the content, where no relevant information was overlooked. Regular reviews of the coding process were conducted to ensure consistency and maintain analytical rigor. As the analysis progressed, categories emerged gradually until all relevant findings were appropriately categorized. This process was repeated until every relevant finding had its own place in a category and every category then explained an important aspect surrounding the concept of the Ukrainian migrants.

The culmination of this analytical journey involved interpreting the collected data within a broader socio-cultural and historical context, thereby connecting and relating the findings back to the initial research questions and objectives. As the analysis unfolded, categories and themes were methodically refined and defined, each clarifying different facets of the Ukrainian migrant experience as depicted in the films.

3.4 Reliability and validity

Ensuring reliability and validity in qualitative research involves several strategies. Reliability refers to the consistency and dependability of the research process and findings, while validity concerns the accuracy and truthfulness of the results. To enhance reliability, the coding process was iterative, allowing for the refinement of codes and themes as the analysis progressed. Regular reviews of the coding process were conducted to maintain consistency and rigor throughout the analysis. Validity was addressed through multiple viewings of each film and cross-referencing with existing literature.

3.5 Limitations, ethics and positionality of the researcher

While this study provides valuable insights into the representation of Ukrainian migrants in Polish cinema, it is not without limitations. The small sample size of four films cannot not fully capture the diversity of representations. Furthermore, the analysis is limited to fiction feature films and does not include other media forms such as documentary films television or online news media content. Additionally, the nature of qualitative analysis means that findings are influenced by the researcher's interpretations. Furthermore, the rapidly changing socio-political context may affect the relevance of the findings over time. Future research could expand the scope to include a broader range of media.

The selection of films is limited to those available during this research, as several films have recently premiered at film festivals and are not yet accessible for analysis. Additionally, some productions are still in development or awaiting release, reflecting the growing relevance of Ukrainian representation in cinema since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. This study's focus on films produced within a specified timeframe (2014-2024) may not capture the full spectrum of representations, as some films were produced before the war, addressing earlier events, like the orange revolution in Ukraine.

In this thesis, it is necessary to consider the researcher's background. Research is inherently shaped by the relationship between the researcher and the subject matter. Although this study did not involve direct participants, the identity of the researcher can still influence the research process and outcomes. Researchers inevitably bring their own biases to the table, which can shape their interpretations and findings. Reflexivity, which involves a continuous process of self-examination and critical reflection, is essential to recognize how a researcher's background, education, and experiences may impact the study (Bourke, 2014). This is particularly important in qualitative research methods like content analysis, where personal interpretation and cultural context play significant roles (Brennen, 2013). Therefore, reflexivity on the positionality of the researcher is vital, as it can significantly influence text interpretation. As a white individual, who identifies with Polish culture through nationality and primary acquired education, I am part of the target audience for these films and see my own culture reflected in these productions. I understand the socio-political references, recognize the actors' appearances, and am familiar with the real dynamics included in the scripts. While these aspects might influence research outcomes concerning ethnicity or culture, this thesis focuses on the concept of representation, which I can relate to as a migrant myself. It is also important to note that I

have been invested in the situation of Ukrainian migrants since the war began. I have consistently paid attention to various aspects of the films and their portrayal of reality, engaging in background research on film theories and directors' interviews. Therefore, it was necessary for me to set aside my personal opinions at the outset of this research to maintain a critical perspective on the representation of Ukrainian migrants in the analyzed films.

3.6 Summary

In short, this research employs qualitative content analysis, specifically focusing on film analysis. The objective is to explore the representation of Ukrainian migrants in Polish cinema. The analysis targets various aspects of four selected films: *Wołyń/Hatred* (Smarzowski, 2016), *Kler/Clergy* (Smarzowski, 2019), *Памфiр/Pamfir* (Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk, 2022) and *Zielona Granica/Green Border* (Holland, 2023). These films were chosen due to their relevance and temporal alignment with significant events in Ukraine, particularly the onset of the war, thereby offering insights into the representation of Ukrainian characters over time. To address the research question, the analysis focuses on how Ukrainian migrants are depicted, both as individuals and within groups. By examining single and group characters, the study aims to uncover recurring themes, stereotypes, and narrative patterns that contribute to the overall portrayal of Ukrainian migrants in these films. When discussing the content analyses, some examples were already shown, but the following part of the thesis will lay out the results in more detail, showing the themes that arose from the thorough analysis of the four films.

4. Results

This chapter presents the findings from the qualitative content analysis of four selected Polish films: *Wołyń/Hatred* (Smarzowski, 2016), *Kler/Clergy* (Smarzowski, 2019), *Памфiр/Pamfir* (Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk, 2022) and *Zielona Granica/Green Border* (Holland, 2023). Several interesting findings surrounding the Ukrainian migrants came to light. The below part of the thesis will discuss final four themes, which all show different aspects of the ways in which Ukrainian migrants are depicted. The results are organized thematically, identifying key themes across the films and discussing the significance of these themes in the context of the socio-political landscape of Poland. The below sub-sections present the detailed results of the analysis. Each code and subcode were found at least once. In the sections that follow next, each code is being discussed along with qualitative observations.

These four categories are: identity, challenges, relationships, nationalism. The result section will be concluded with a summary of the results and discussion, followed by the conclusion of the thesis.

Identity

In the analysed examples from contemporary Polish fiction films, the portrayal of Ukrainian migrants is often centered on the theme of their identity, which delves into how these individuals negotiate their sense of self and belonging amidst cultural tensions and dynamics of their community and the society. This exploration is captured through various cinematic narratives that depict the process of cultural integration and the dynamics within migrant communities. During the analysis, the theme was build upon four main codes: cultural integration, belonging, national identity and religion.

In *Hatred* (Smarzowski, 2016), one of the first scenes sets the stage for a cultural integration through a wedding between a Polish woman and a Ukrainian man. During this ceremony, a Catholic priest attempts to bridge ethnically divided guests with a speech aimed at reconciliation. He warns of „false prophets” who, rather than preaching a universal brotherhood under God, promote the „kingdom of Ukraine”, thus subtly underscoring the persistent tensions between Polish and Ukrainian communities (*Hatred*, Smarzowski, 00:03:50). This scene serves multiple interpretive possibilities. It can be seen as an effort to foster cultural reconciliation by emphasizing shared religious values. Alternatively, it might be also viewed as a critique of Ukrainian aspirations for sovereignty, perceived through a lens of Polish skepticism. This moment at the wedding is significant, as it not only represents the union of two individuals from different cultural backgrounds but also symbolizes the broader attempts at integration between the two nations. The mixed marriage can be interpreted as a metaphor for potential unity and peace, or it could reflect the complex and often conditional acceptance of migrants, dependent on their assimilation into the dominant cultural norms. The priest’s speech, while promoting unity, also highlights the fragile nature of this integration, suggesting that beneath the surface, deep-seated cultural and nationalistic tensions continue to simmer, potentially threatening the cohesion of the community. The portrayal of this wedding conceptualises the ongoing cultural negotiations and the push and pull between maintaining one's identity and merging with a new community. It illustrates how cultural and national identities are deeply intertwined with historical grievances and current socio-political contexts, influencing

individual and collective perceptions and actions. In the climactic scenes of the film, the narrative revisits the earlier introduced mixed Polish-Ukrainian couple during the events of the Volhynian genocide. The scene contrasts their initial wedding, intended to symbolize cultural integration, with their brutal demise amidst the genocide. This ending can be interpreted from various analytical perspectives. Firstly, it might be seen as a representation of the destructive effects of nationalism and ethnic strife. The death of the couple could symbolize the breakdown of attempts at integration and coexistence, where personal relationships and individual identities are overshadowed by overarching historical and nationalistic conflicts. This could be viewed as a narrative commentary on the historical inevitability of conflict in regions with deep-seated ethnic divisions. This sequence, especially when contrasted with their wedding scene, serves as a narrative tool to explore themes of identity, further explored theme of nationalism, and the personal impact of historical conflicts. The film uses these characters' journey to reflect on the broader implications of cultural and national identity conflicts, offering a reminder of the personal stakes involved in historical and national disputes. Through this, *Hatred* (Smarzowski, 2016) not only portrays the circumstances of the Polish-Ukrainian conflict but also shows a deeper consideration of the ongoing impacts of historical legacies on contemporary relations.

Adding another layer to the theme of identity, a scene from *Hatred* (Smarzowski, 2016) depicts an Ukrainian man, one of the guest at the aforementioned wedding, being introduced at a social gathering, emphasizing his origin from Lvov but affirming his acceptance within the group: „He arrived from Lvov, but he is one of us” (*Hatred*, Smarzowski, 00:07:00). This moment can be viewed as an affirmation of a shared cultural identity that transcends geographical origins, promoting a sense of unity. Alternatively, it might reflect the conditional acceptance of migrants, dependent on their assimilation into the dominant cultural norms, thus highlighting the ongoing cultural negotiations migrants navigate. This portrayal aligns with themes of belonging and identity, suggesting both integration and the complex nature of acceptance within a new cultural circle.

The theme of national identity and its implications is further dramatized in a stirring declaration during a community meeting in *Hatred* (Smarzowski, 2016), where a newly appointed Ukrainian mayor of the village vocally asserts Ukrainian sovereignty in opposition to Polish dominance: „Dear Ukrainians. The end has come to our oppressor. We are putting Poland in the grave” (*Hatred*, Smarzowski, 00:34:00). Understood literally, the statement can be seen as a bold assertion of Ukrainian sovereignty and resilience, reflecting a desire for national recognition and independence from Polish influence. This could be interpreted

as a moment of empowerment and defiance, resonating with a sentiment of liberation from historical oppression. It evokes a strong sense of national pride and collective identity among the Ukrainian villagers, serving as a call to unite under a common cause for autonomy and respect. However, this proclamation also has darker implications, suggesting a shift towards aggressive nationalism and potential violence. The phrase „putting Poland in the grave” can be interpreted as a metaphor for the complete eradication of Polish influence and presence, which could exacerbate ethnic cleansing and violence. This aspect of the speech illustrates the possibly dangerous side of nationalism, where the push for national identity and sovereignty crosses into the realm of ethnic hostility and conflict. It portrays the potential for nationalistic fervor to turn into destructive actions, reflecting the film's thematic exploration of the tragic consequences of unchecked nationalism, which will be analysed in the later part of the findings. Moreover, another quote from the film deepens this theme of national identity intertwined with historical conflict. As the tensions escalate, another character reflects on the deep-seated divisions, stating, "They ordered us to speak Polish and practice Catholicism. They tore down orthodox churches so that all people become Polish-Catholic" (*Hatred*, Smarzowski, 00:10:00). This line underscores the cultural and religious impositions faced by the Ukrainian community, highlighting the historical attempts at forced assimilation and the erasure of Ukrainian cultural identity. This can be seen as further justification for the Ukrainian community's resentment and radical actions, providing a historical context that explains but does not excuse the violent outcomes.

On the other hand, in *Pamfir* (Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk, 2022), the title protagonist's return to his family home is a poignant moment that delves into the themes of identity and the dual challenges of maintaining familial bonds while securing economic stability abroad. When Pamfir surprises his family, especially his son, with his return and a gift of a bicycle, he confesses the limited time he can spend with them, saying: "I only have two weeks" (*Pamfir*, Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk, 00:01:35). This moment underscores the personal sacrifices inherent in the migrant experience, with forced separation from the family. This scene can be interpreted as highlighting the emotional costs associated with economic migration, emphasizing the pain of separation that migrants endure for better financial opportunities. Alternatively, it could also critique the pressures that economic imperatives impose on migrants, often at the expense of their personal life, suggesting a broader commentary on the socio-economic systems that dictate such difficult choices for migrant families. This portrayal also potentially reinforces stereotypes about Ukraine as a poor and

destabilized country, driving its citizens to seek precarious and temporary employment abroad. Such depictions can contribute to a one-dimensional view of Ukrainian migrants, primarily seen as economic refugees escaping adverse conditions, rather than as individuals with diverse experiences and capabilities. This aspect of the narrative may perpetuate a narrative that focuses on economic despair rather than offering a more nuanced portrayal of the migrant experience, where individuals also bring skills, resilience, and aspirations to their new communities.

The complexity of national identity is further depicted in *Zielona Granica/Green Border* (Holland, 2023), where personal and national identities collide. In a scene at the border between Ukraine and Poland, a man bids farewell to his female family members at the border, choosing not to cross with them but to stay in Ukraine saying: "I can't, I have to stay" (*Green Border*, Holland, 02:16:00). This decision reflects not only personal and patriotic commitment to defend his country but also aligns with the enforced regulations requiring men to stay and participate in national defense. This scene can be interpreted as highlighting the heroism and personal cost of patriotism, while also delving into the complexities of state policies that mandate such sacrifices, reflecting the profound impact of national crises on individual lives and family dynamics. This may also emphasise the temporary nature of migration to Poland due to the war and thus avoid stereotyping migrants as a „threat“.

Earlier mentioned Catholicism and Orthodoxy, along with a wedding ceremony, underscore the religion as one of the factors shaping the characters' lives and interactions. This sets the stage for a deeper examination of how religion intersects with identity and community dynamics within the narratives of the films. In *Hatred* (Smarzowski, 2016), these tensions are particularly noticeable. The film explores the historical and deeply-rooted conflicts between Catholicism and Orthodoxy, which are portrayed as major factors in the broader nationalistic and conflicts with the ethnic background. For example, a supporting Ukrainian character from the village in which the story takes place expresses resentment towards enforced assimilation policies that threaten their cultural identity: "They ordered us to speak Polish and practice Catholicism. They tore down orthodox churches so that all people become Polish-Catholic" (*Hatred*, Smarzowski, 00:10:00). This dialogue highlights the use of religious rhetoric to further nationalistic agendas, with one Orthodox priest stating: "Let weed and wheat grow together until the harvest. First collect the weeds and then tie them in bundles to be burned! Brothers and sisters, we need to cleanse the Ukrainian soil! We need to fill the rivers and lakes with Polish blood because Ukraine has to

be pure like a glass of water!" (*Hatred*, Smarzowski, 01:50:45). These scenes underscore how religion can be manipulated to justify or instigate violence, reflecting the complex role of faith in shaping cultural and national identities.

In *Clergy* (Smarzowski, 2019), the interplay of religion and identity is captured during a confrontation where a Ukrainian man defends a priest from accusations and physical assault, affirming his belief in the priest's innocence with a respectful "Godspeed" at the end of their interaction. This instance not only shows the respect for religious figures but also the religious undertones that permeate individual actions and interpersonal relationships within the community. Furthermore, the daily spiritual life of Ukrainian characters is intricately portrayed in *Pamfir* (Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk, 2022). Olena, wife of Pamfir, often references her faith as a guiding force in her life, reflecting the deep-rooted religious values in her community. After her son accidentally burns down the chapel, she resignedly remarks on their situation with a reference to divine will: "This is how God wanted it" (Pamfir, Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk, 00:20:00), illustrating how faith provides a framework for understanding and coping, but also highlighting the morality of the character grounded in the faith.

In the qualitative content analysis of Polish film focusing on Ukrainian migrant identity, several key sub-themes have emerged. Cultural integration is depicted in scenes showing cultural blending at community events. The theme of belonging is explored through personal narratives of migrants seeking acceptance within new communities, highlighting the inclusion-exclusion dynamics and „othering”. National identity is scrutinized through dialogues and conflicts that underscore historical grievances and the migrants' deep connection to their homeland. Religious divides are portrayed in the tensions between different religious groups, revealing the dual role of religion in both uniting and dividing communities. Additionally, casual religious expressions are observed as everyday practices that shape migrants' interactions and spiritual life.

Challenges

The sampled films provided an overview of the challenges that Ukrainian migrants are facing, including: poverty, labor, and corruption.

The theme of economic hardship, that could be simplified to poverty in the representation of Ukrainian migrants in Polish cinema is explored through various scenes that depict economic challenges and labor conditions, shedding light on the broader socio-economic context faced by these characters. The films *Clergy* (Smarzowski, 2019), *Pamfir* (Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk, 2022), and *Hatred* (Smarzowski, 2016) depict various aspects of

poverty, illustrating both the literal and metaphorical struggles of the migrant community. In *Clergy* (Smarzowski, 2019), the dire situation of a young boy who is the altar boy at the priest's church and his family is illustrative of the intersection between poverty and criminality, casting light on systemic issues affecting migrant families. A conversation between a policeman and a priest delves into the boy's precarious living conditions and his stepfather's criminal history, prompting reflections on societal neglect or potentially reinforcing stereotypes about the migrant community's predisposition towards criminal behavior: "Do you know how he lives there, who comes there? How many times has his stepfather been to the prison?" (*Clergy*, Smarzowski, 00:41:45). Following this discussion, the film portrays a priest ascending a dilapidated stairwell, passing a drunk man while overhearing distant Ukrainian conversations. This scene visually and audibly encapsulates the physical and social decay linked with migrant poverty (*Clergy*, Smarzowski, 00:42:05). The presence of alcoholism and general disrepair may serve as a metaphor for the neglect and marginalization migrants often face, yet it also risks perpetuating negative stereotypes regarding their lifestyles. Adding another layer to this theme, another scene in *Clergy* presents a gritty tableau of a communal living area in the apartment visited by the priest, where men sit around a table speaking Ukrainian and drinking alcohol. The casual, yet visibly tense, atmosphere in the apartment - open and untidy - illustrates another facet of the challenging conditions migrants navigate (*Clergy*, Smarzowski, 00:42:15). This repetitive setup in the following scenes not only highlights the communal but strained living situations often encountered by migrants but also raises questions about the broader societal perceptions and perhaps biases towards these communities. This scene, like the others, is open to interpretation either as a critique of the harsh realities faced by migrants or as an unfortunate reinforcement of certain stigmatizing views. The theme of poverty is further explored through the lens of labor in by showing on of the unnamed supporting Ukrainian character working at the graveyard as a grave digger, and in *Pamfir*, where the protagonist engages in manual labor - digging wells (*Pamfir*, Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk, 00:11:40). It is emblematic of the marginal economic positions often occupied by migrants. This portrayal not only highlights the hard realities of migrant labor but also emphasizes the dignity and resilience in their struggle for economic survival. In *Hatred* (Smarzowski, 2016), economic disparities are sharply illustrated during an interaction where a Ukrainian spouse negotiates over vodka prices with a Jewish seller. The dialogue underscores the economic marginalization and societal segregation faced by Ukrainians: "You are marrying a Polish girl and can't afford a good vodka? - You wouldn't give such a price to a Pole" (*Hatred*,

Smarzowski, 00:06:45). This scene can be seen as a reflection of the economic hardships faced by migrants, but might also critique the societal structures that perpetuate such disparities.

Moreover, in another part of *Clergy* (Smarzowski, 2019), the environment of the apartment building where the young boy lives is depicted as squalid and chaotic. Men argue outside the building over debts related to drugs: "He is quiet and does not reveal the truth. -This is already your problem, he owes me ten. In Mexico, someone dies all the time because of cocaine", highlighting the harsh realities of poverty and its association with substance abuse and violence (*Clergy*, Smarzowski, 01:38:00). This could be interpreted as a portrayal of the environments in which migrants often find themselves, or as an exploration of the desperate measures some may take when faced with economic duress.

Another aspect that was conceptualized during the analysis was corruption. In *Pamfir* (Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk, 2022), the issue of institutional corruption is illustrated through the protagonist's brother casual revelation about the ease of bypassing legal repercussions. Pamfir's brother is making a remark about the simplicity of resolving smuggling charges through a small bribe stating "-If you get caught smuggling you pay 30 euros and you are free." (*Pamfir*, Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk, 00:03:15). Not only it suggest the systemic corruption, but also reflects a resigned acceptance of these corrupt practices as a part of daily life. This scene can be analysed as a reflection of the pragmatic strategies migrants employ to navigate through corrupt systems that might otherwise jeopardize their survival and livelihood. On another level, it critiques the systemic barriers and individual's morals within institutions supposed to uphold justice and fairness, highlighting how deeply ingrained corruption can undermine the social fabric.

The sub-theme extends to interpersonal exploitations, depicted through Pamfir's interactions that involve reciprocal favors to navigate through bureaucratic and corrupt systems. For example, Pamfir's arrangement with a priest to secure a work permit, when he asked Olena to give the priest the documents as „he will help with the work permit and I will dig him a well in return." (*Pamfir*, Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk, 00:05:30) showcases the web of mutual dependencies that characterize migrant experiences. Literally, this scene can be interpreted as a pragmatic adaptation to the challenges faced by individuals, where informal networks and personal favours become necessary strategies for achieving what should ideally be straightforward administrative tasks. Alternatively, this interaction can be seen as highlighting the ethical compromises migrants are forced to make, revealing a deeper critique of a system where personal gain often precedes professional integrity.

Further deepening the exploration of corruption, *Hatred* (Smarzowski, 2016) includes a portrayal of how corrupt practices can affect even the most personal interactions, as seen when Ukrainian villagers negotiate their safety amidst ethnic cleaning by bribing local officials to overlook minor infractions stating that „Sometimes a small gift to the right person can keep you out of trouble.” (*Hatred*, Smarzowski, 01:22:30). This suggests how corruption can become a normalized aspect of survival, particularly in contexts of conflict and instability.

The corruption is further portrayed in *Green Border* (Holland, 2023), which highlights the differential treatment of migrants at borders, adding layers of complexity to the discussion of corruption and systemic challenges. The film illustrates Ukrainian migrants experiencing a relatively smoother border crossing compared to the severe hardships faced by other refugees trying to cross the Polish-Belarusian border. This contrast is starkly portrayed in scenes where desperate refugees attempt to bribe border guards for a chance to cross safely, begging "Here, take this... just let us through, please." (*Green Border*, Holland, 01:58:00) shedding light on the dark realities of border politics. This disparity not only reflects on the pragmatic survival strategies employed by migrants but also critically examines the ethical and moral dilemmas inherent in the administration of border control policies. The ease of passage for Ukrainian migrants can be seen as a reflection of political alliances and cultural proximity that influences migration policies, highlighting a form of institutional corruption where legality and compassion are selectively applied based on nationality. Conversely, the struggle of other refugees underscores the harsh reality of corruption that exploits the vulnerable, portraying a system riddled with moral decay where life-changing decisions are swayed by bribes rather than humanitarian need. Such scenes from *Green Border* (Holland, 2023) build upon the narratives seen in *Pamfir* (Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk, 2022) and *Clergy* (Smarzowski, 2019), creating a broader discourse on corruption that spans personal survival tactics to institutional malpractices affecting migrants. The personal challenges of the characters do not change the fact that the willingness of the Ukrainian characters to use corruption on the daily basis is reinforcing the negative stereotype about participation in illegal activities.

Relationships

The theme of relationships explores the complexities of familial bonds, empathetic reaction, and humanitarianism in terms of the behaviours of the characters. In a previously introduced scene at the beginning of *Pamfir* (Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk, 2022), the protagonist

unexpectedly returns home, bringing a bicycle for his son. This moment, where his son joyously acknowledges the gift: "It's my bike?! I knew my dad would bring it to me" (*Pamfir*, Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk, 00:09:45), symbolizes the connections and commitments that persist despite the economic hardships faced by migrant families. This scene can be interpreted literally as a father fulfilling his familial role, providing for his child's happiness and well-being despite the personal cost. It underscores the traditional family values where the parental role is closely tied to providing and caring for one's children. On a metaphorical level, this scenario explores the emotional toll that economic migration exerts on family dynamics. The joy of the gift juxtaposed with the reality of Pamfir's sporadic presence at home raises questions about the costs of maintaining familial duties through migration. The scene highlights the sacrifices involved in such decisions, where physical presence is traded for material support, reflecting a common dilemma faced by many migrants who balance between earning abroad and being present in their families' daily lives. Moreover, the emotional weight of these decisions is further explored in later conversations where Pamfir's role as a provider is elaborated by his wife, alongside his absence, emphasizing the complex interplay between providing financial stability and the emotional absence felt by his family.

In *Green Border* (Holland, 2023), the film juxtaposes the experiences of Ukrainian migrants with those of other refugees to critically examine the disparities in humanitarian responses based on nationality and geopolitical considerations. Ukrainian migrants are depicted crossing the Polish border with relative ease, in stark contrast to the severe adversities faced by other refugees, who are shown attempting to bribe border guards out of desperation. This portrayal emphasizes not the nature of Ukrainian migrants themselves but rather the inconsistencies in humanitarian aid, suggesting that empathy and assistance are influenced by the migrants' country of origin and ethnicity. This different treatment not only raises questions about the ethics of international humanitarian efforts and equality but also serves as a commentary on the policies that govern distribution of aid. It suggests that international responses to crises are often skewed by political and cultural biases, which can lead to unequal treatment of migrants and refugees. The film might provoke viewers to reflect on the ethical implications of these practices and the role of international policies in exacerbating or alleviating the struggles faced by displaced individuals. Furthermore, amidst these broader systemic challenges, *Green Border* (Holland, 2023) highlights moments of individual kindness, such as a scene where a Polish volunteer reassures and guides Ukrainian refugees with the promise, "I will guide you, don't worry." (*Green Border*,

02:17:00). This act of personal empathy underscores the potential for human compassion to make a significant impact, even in the face of overwhelming systemic injustices. It suggests that individual actions can provide relief and support, serving as a counterpoint to the biased and often dehumanizing approaches seen in broader policy-making practices. By presenting these contrasting experiences, the film not only critiques the selective nature of compassion in current humanitarian practices, as exemplified on the Polish border with Belarus, but also encourages a more nuanced understanding of migration issues. It challenges the audience to think critically about the role of media in shaping perceptions and policies towards migrants and underscores the need for a humanitarian approach that transcends national and ethnic prejudices. Therefore, *Green Border* (Holland, 2023) acts as a narrative tool, provoking a discussion of how aid, empathy, and policy intersect in the context of global migration and crisis response. The depiction of Ukrainian migrants crossing borders with relative ease compared to others creates a specific narrative that may influence public perception. This representation could be seen as suggesting that Ukrainian migrants are more „acceptable” or „less problematic” than migrants from other regions, which aligns with broader political and social narratives in Europe that prioritize certain migrants over others due to geopolitical ties, race and cultural proximity. Such portrayals can reinforce existing stereotypes or biases in the public mind, shaping policy and social attitudes towards different migrant groups.

Moreover, *Green Border* (Holland, 2023) illustrates moments of individual kindness amidst these broader systemic challenges. A scene shows a Polish border guard carrying a child across the border, symbolizing the humanitarian response to Ukrainian refugees. The emotional weight of this scene is further emphasized by the dialogue between a woman and her daughter: "Why are you crying, aunty? - God help us, we don't have a home anymore. What am I supposed to do?" (*Green Border*, 02:17:00). This interaction portrays the migrants as victims needing rescue, highlighting the human side of the migration crisis and the compassionate actions of individuals amidst a backdrop of policy and prejudice. The closing scene of *Green Border* (Holland, 2023) captures the ongoing disparities in European migration policies. By contrasting the welcoming of nearly two million Ukrainian refugees in Poland during the early weeks of the Ukraine war with the tragic fatalities of about 30,000 people trying to cross various European borders since 2014, the film underscores a disparity in humanitarian responses. This disparity is not just a commentary on numbers; it reflects a deeper, systemic preferential treatment based on geopolitical ties and national origins. This scene highlights the selective empathy and support that certain

groups receive over others, suggesting that while some refugees find a safe haven, others meet perilous fates at borders, notably at the Polish-Belarusian border where people continue to die as of spring 2023. The mention of ongoing deaths is particularly important, reminding viewers that the crisis is neither static nor fully addressed, but a continuing human tragedy that evolves with changing political landscapes. By showing these differing experiences, the film invites viewers to reflect on the unequal application of compassion and legal protections in the European response to refugees and migrants. It challenges the audience to consider how media representations and public discourse can influence policy and perception, potentially leading to significant shifts in how migration is managed and understood.

The narratives from *Pamfir* (Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk, 2022) and *Green Border* (Holland, 2023) provide a nuanced exploration of how relationships are navigated within the context of migration. They reflect on both the resilience and vulnerability of migrant families, the complexity of community dynamics, and the often selective nature of humanitarian responses. By weaving these themes into their plots, these films encourage audiences to reflect on the multifaceted experiences of migrants as they negotiate personal identities, family commitments, and the broader societal reactions they face in new cultural landscapes.

Nationalism

In *Hatred* (Smarzowski, 2016), the depiction of Ukrainian nationalism is not only portrayed through the expressions of nationalist sentiment during communal gatherings, toasts, and speeches, but also through brutal acts of violence as the plot develops. It provides a contrast to theme of humanitarianism seen in other films, and elaborates on the theme of the national identity introduced before. This film delves into the dark side of nationalism by exploring its most extreme manifestations during the historical conflicts between Poles and Ukrainians.

In one of the first scenes, during the poignantly illustrates this dual nature through a toast at a community gathering where a character proclaims: To the Ukrainian nation and the state! Why does a Polish settler get acres and the Ukrainian nation lives in poverty? (*Hatred*, 00:07:15). This quote not only highlights the economic disparities fueling nationalist sentiments among Ukrainians but also portrays the deep-seated resentment towards Polish settlers. It can be interpreted as a rallying cry for fairness and equality, yet it also exposes the divisive nature of nationalist ideologies that can perpetuate conflict and

exclusion. Further emphasizing the intensity of such nationalism, another character expresses a willingness to sacrifice, stating: If you look for death, die for Ukraine (*Hatred*, 00:29:00). This line reflects the extreme patriotism that can drive individuals to extreme actions in the name of national identity. It underscores the depth of commitment to national causes but also hints at the tragic human costs of such conflicts. Moreover, the alignment with controversial historical figures is highlighted in a toast that chillingly states, "Let's toast Hitler, he will help us form the independent sovereign Ukraine, you'll see" (*Hatred*, 00:16:10). This statement is particularly jarring as it aligns Ukrainian nationalist aspirations with a figure synonymous with tyranny and genocide. This juxtaposition illustrates the moral ambiguities and ethical dilemmas inherent in nationalist movements, showing how the desire for national sovereignty can sometimes lead to alliances with reprehensible figures and ideologies.

The film portrays this through vivid scenes that depict acts of violence committed in the name of nationalism. For instance, a scene shows Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) committing acts of violence against Polish civilians, which includes the graphic depiction of a Polish village being attacked, homes being set on fire, and individuals brutally tortured and murdered. These scenes, seen from the perspective of the Polish girl, escaping the village, are not just depictions of physical violence but are also symbolic of the deep-seated hatred and division that can stem from unchecked nationalist fervor.

Moreover, the film includes a speech by a newly assigned Ukrainian mayor of the village, that encapsulates the intense nationalistic sentiment during the meeting in front of the administrative building in the village driving these violent acts. "Dear Ukrainians. The end has come to our oppressor. We are putting Poland in the grave" (*Hatred*, 00:34:00). This line can be interpreted as a call to arms, underlining the us-versus-them mentality that often accompanies aggressive nationalist movements. Additionally, during the speech of the mayor the Polish flag is taken off, and replaced by the Ukrainian. Such rhetoric not only underscores the identity and pride of the Ukrainian nationalist movement but also highlights the destructive consequences of such ideologies.

These acts of violence contrast with the representations of migrants in films like *Green Border* (Holland, 2023), where Ukrainian migrants are portrayed more sympathetically, emphasizing their vulnerability and the humanitarian aspects of migration. The brutal scenes in *Hatred* (Smarzowski, 2016) challenge the viewer to reconcile the image of Ukrainians as both victims and perpetrators, complicating the narrative around migration and nationalism. Additionally, the historical context of the film adds another layer of

complexity. *Hatred* (Smarzowski, 2016) is set during a tumultuous period in Polish-Ukrainian history, specifically referencing the massacres carried out by the nationalist Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) during World War II. These historical events are crucial for understanding the portrayal of nationalism in the film, as they reflect the deep-rooted animosities and the cyclical nature of violence and retribution that have characterized Polish-Ukrainian relations. By juxtaposing these acts of nationalism and violence with other films' more humanitarian portrayals, *Hatred* (Smarzowski, 2016) invites viewers to reflect on the nature of national identity and the often tragic consequences of nationalist ideologies, seen through the lens of the Ukrainian example. This approach not only provides a historical perspective on the conflicts but also prompts a critical examination of how such past events shape contemporary attitudes towards Ukrainian migrants in Polish cinema. The film's timing and historical focus might also influence current perceptions, potentially awakening negative sentiments by revisiting painful chapters of history for the survivors and the older generation, thus affecting the contemporary discourse on nationalism and migration.

Additionally, the title *Hatred* for the film, which is known internationally by this name, conveys multiple layers of meaning that resonate deeply with its thematic content. This choice of title not only reflects the intense emotions depicted within the film but also engages with broader historical narratives and audience perceptions. At one level, *Hatred* speaks directly to the theme of the Polish experiences of brutality during the Volhynia massacre, where the film focuses predominantly on the Polish perspective. This could be seen as supporting a narrative of Polish victimization, highlighting the animosity endured by the Polish community and reinforcing a collective memory that frames Poles primarily as victims in historical conflicts. This aligns with the national memory that emphasizes suffering and martyrdom, integral elements of Polish historical identity. However, the title also invites critique due to its potential for oversimplifying complex historical relationships. By choosing "Hatred" as the title and focusing largely on Polish suffering, the film has been critiqued for presenting a one-sided view that might skew perceptions of the events by not adequately representing the Ukrainian perspective or the multifaceted causes behind the conflict. In this regard, the title might encapsulate the deep-seated animosity that can arise from such unidimensional historical narratives, which do not fully acknowledge the grievances and motivations of all parties involved. The Polish title, *Wołyń* refers directly to the Volhynia region where the depicted atrocities took place, grounding the film in a specific geographical and historical context that is immediately recognizable to a Polish

audience. This naming not only locates the events but also invokes the memory of the Volhynia massacre, a deeply traumatic chapter in Polish-Ukrainian history, suggesting a focus on the specificities of the historical events and their lasting impacts on Polish national consciousness.

On a more universal scale, the title *Hatred* reflects the destructive power of unchecked animosity and prejudice, making the film relevant beyond its specific historical context. It serves as a cautionary tale about the consequences of allowing hatred to drive societal actions and policies, inviting viewers from different backgrounds to reflect on similar patterns of ethnic, national, or religious hatred in their own histories. Furthermore, the title resonates on an interpersonal level, illustrating how personal grievances and traumas can escalate into collective action and violence, thereby intertwining personal and collective hatreds. This raises questions about the origins of such hatred—whether they stem from personal wounds, manipulated narratives, or historical injustices—and how these can spiral into large-scale tragedies.

Finally, *Hatred* implicitly calls for dialogue and reconciliation by presenting the dire consequences of entrenched animosity. The film's portrayal of the effects of hatred suggests an urging for contemporary societies to address historical wounds through open dialogue and mutual understanding rather than through silence or retaliation. This perspective advocates for a reflective approach to historical memory, emphasizing processes that heal and bridge divisions rather than deepen them.

The analysis of cinematic portrayals of Ukrainian migrants in Polish films has uncovered a wide range of themes that intersect with the theoretical frameworks discussed in the initial chapters of this thesis. Through an examination of sampled films this study has observed varied representations that reflect and challenge the existing discourses on migration, identity, and cultural integration as theorized in the fields of migration studies and cultural studies. At the outset, the thesis explores migration not just as a physical movement but as a process that deeply influences modern societies, cultures, and identities. Theories from scholars like Koshel & Yakovenko (2020) discuss migration's multifaceted impacts, emphasizing how it reshapes economic, social, and cultural landscapes. These theories are reflected in the films analyzed, particularly in *Pamfir* (Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk, 2022), which portrays the economic motivations behind migration and the personal and societal challenges that accompany the migrant's journey. The portrayal aligns with the theoretical notion that migration is a complex process shaped by a

variety of forces including economic disparity and political instability.

The thesis incorporates theories related to how media influence public perceptions and societal narratives, as discussed by Ahmed (1999) and Chambers (1994). These theories emphasize the role of media in 'othering' migrants and shaping societal attitudes through representation. The analysis of *Green Border* (Holland, 2023) showcases how media can both challenge and reinforce public perceptions of migrants, depicting varied humanitarian responses that reflect deeper societal and geopolitical biases. Drawing on the work of Stuart Hall, the thesis discusses how cultural representations in media are critical in constructing public knowledge and shaping social identities. This theoretical backdrop is crucial for understanding how films like *Hatred* (Smarzowski, 2016), *Clergy* (Smarzowski, 2018), and *Green Border* (Holland, 2023) navigate historical memory and national identity, contributing to or contesting narratives of Polish-Ukrainian relations. These films illustrate the interplay between media representations and national identity, emphasizing the role of cultural narratives in influencing collective memory and social cohesion. The application of Lothar Mikos's framework for film analysis, which integrates cultural studies' insights into media analysis, provided a methodological foundation for examining how films communicate complex themes about migration and identity. This approach revealed how films can serve as cultural artifacts that reflect and interrogate societal norms and values, particularly in their portrayals of migrants' experiences and challenges. In *Green Border* (Holland, 2023), a main focus of analysis is the epilogue, which serves as a contrast to the main narrative of the film. While the entire film was analyzed, special attention was given to how Ukrainian migrants were depicted in this final part. The epilogue underscores the disparities in humanitarian responses, showing Ukrainian migrants crossing the Polish border with relative ease compared to the severe adversities faced by other refugees. This portrayal not only critiques the inconsistencies in humanitarian responses but also highlights the influence of geopolitical and cultural factors. This contrast suggests that empathy and aid are often influenced by the migrants' country of origin and ethnicity, raising critical questions about the fairness and ethics of international humanitarian efforts. These findings align with Abdelaaty's (2022) theory that Europeans tend to see Ukrainians as culturally closer due to their shared characteristics such as being white and Christian, which increases the acceptance of asylum applications and the generosity of refugee policies. The depiction of individual kindness amidst these broader systemic challenges, such as a volunteer guiding refugees, highlights the potential for personal agency and compassion to make a significant difference in the lives of those affected by crisis, serving

as a counterpoint to the more systemic issues of biased humanitarian aid. This analytical focus on the epilogue complements the thematic exploration provided by other films in the study.

This analysis confirms that Ukrainian migrants are represented in a multifaceted manner that reflects both historical tensions and contemporary challenges. The films explore themes of economic migration, cultural integration, historical memory, and the varied humanitarian responses they receive. These cinematic representations influence public perceptions by highlighting the complexities of the migrant experience and challenging existing stereotypes. By presenting Ukrainian migrants in various roles, from victims to agents of their own stories, the films encourage viewers to reconsider their views on migration and recognize the nuanced realities faced by migrants. In conclusion, the findings from the film analysis resonate with the theoretical frameworks outlined, offering nuanced insights into how Ukrainian migrants are represented and perceived in contemporary Polish fiction film. This analysis answers the research questions about representation and impact but also sheds light on the socio-cultural dynamics between Poland and Ukraine as reflected in contemporary Polish cinema. By critically engaging with existing literature and analyzing film content within the theoretical framework of cultural studies and film analysis, this research provides an observation of how Ukrainian migrants are depicted and how these representations align with or challenge existing discourses on migrants, identity, and othering.

5. Conclusions

This research aimed to explore the visual representation of Ukrainian migrants in contemporary Polish cinema, focusing on how these cinematic portrayals contribute to existing discourses on migration, identity, and othering. The study employed a qualitative content analysis of four feature films - *Wołyń/Hatred* (Smarzowski, 2016), *Kler/Clergy* (Smarzowski, 2018), *Памфiр/Pamfir*, (Sukholytkyy-Sobchuk, 2022) and *Zielona Granica/Green Border* (Holland, 2023) - produced between the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The primary research question guiding this study was: How are Ukrainian migrants represented in recent Polish feature films? Sub-questions included: What stereotypes and themes are associated with Ukrainian migrant characters in Polish cinema? How do these representations contribute to, or challenge existing discourses on migration, identity, and othering in the cinematic context? Do the representations of migrants change throughout the four movies, reflecting the evolving dynamics between

Poland and Ukraine?

The analysis identified several recurring themes across the four films: identity of the Ukrainian migrants along with the challenges they are facing, it shed light on the relationships between the migrants and Ukrainian migrants and Poles. Lastly the nationalistic discourse was analysed. They provide an overview of the experiences of Ukrainian migrants. Collectively, these themes reflect the diverse realities of migration, spanning historical conflicts to contemporary integration challenges. They highlight the role of cinema in both reflecting and influencing societal attitudes toward migrants. By presenting these nuanced portrayals, the films encourage viewers to consider the complexities of the migrant experience, fostering a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics at play. The identified themes enhance the research of migration as an experience that varies depending on individual circumstances, societal conditions, and historical contexts. Through these themes, the films offer varied perspectives on migrant experiences, shedding light on the nature of identity, belonging, and integration in a changing world. The representations of migrants do indeed change throughout the four movies, reflecting the evolving dynamics between Poland and Ukraine.

While the three films offer either a historical perspective or unrelated to the current geopolitical context plot, the epilogue of *Green Border* serves as a contrast to the main narrative of the film, showing Ukrainian migrants crossing the Polish border with relative ease compared to the severe adversities faced by other refugees. This film, the only one from the analysed sample, is the direct reflection of the war and the contemporary migratory movement from Ukraine to Poland.

The findings align with the theoretical frameworks of cultural studies and film analysis. Stuart Hall's concepts of representation are visible in how these films produce and reproduce societal attitudes toward Ukrainian migrants. The thematic analysis also reflects Lothar Mikos' film analysis theory, which emphasizes the role of films in shaping viewers' perceptions through narrative structures, character development, and visual storytelling.

Future research could expand the scope to include a broader range of media forms and a larger sample of films. Investigating the representation of Ukrainian migrants in television series, documentaries, and online platforms could provide more nuanced insights. Additionally, the comparison of the representation of Ukrainian migrants alongside other migrant groups, such as those from the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, could highlight the differing narratives and stereotypes applied to various communities, contributing to a broader understanding of how ethnicity and nationality shape migrant representations. By

addressing these areas, future research can build on the findings of this study to further explore the dynamics of migration, identity, and representation. Such efforts could contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how migrants are depicted and perceived, ultimately informing more empathetic and inclusive public discourses.

In conclusion, the representation of Ukrainian migrants in Polish cinema is a complex subject that intersects with broader debates on migration, identity, and media representation. It is crucial for media, including films, to offer nuanced and empathetic portrayals of migrants to foster understanding and social cohesion. By continuing to critically engage with these representations, scholars and filmmakers can contribute to more inclusive and diverse narratives in the media landscape.

Reference List

- Adams, R. (2017, November 17). Michel Foucault: Discourse.
<https://criticallegalthinking.com/2017/11/17/michel-foucault-discourse/>
- Ahmed, S. (1999). Home and away. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2(3), 329–347.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/136787799900200303>
- Andrews, D. L. (2002). Coming to terms with cultural studies. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 26(1), 110–117. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723502261007>
- Azmi, N. H., & Razak, F. H. A. (2006). Making meaning from children's diary data: Thematic analysis. *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Information Technology*, 89(1), 220-227
- Baldwin, J. A., & Raney, A. A. (2021). Enjoyment of unoriginal characters: Individual differences in nostalgia-proneness and parasocial relationships. *Mass Communication and Society*, 24(5), 748–768. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2021.1916035>
- Barker, C. (2003). *Cultural studies: Theory and practice*. SAGE publications
- Bayraktar, N. (2015). *Mobility and migration in film and moving Image Art: Cinema Beyond Europe*. Routledge
- Bennett, B., & Tyler, I. (2007). Screening unlivable lives: The cinema of borders. In K. Marciniak, A. Imre, & A. O'Healy (Eds.), *Transnational feminism in film and media* (pp. 21–36). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230609655_2
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1971). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Penguin.
- Berghahn, D., & Sternberg, C. (2010). Locating migrant and diasporic cinema in contemporary Europe. In D. Berghahn, & C. Sternberg (Eds.), *European Cinema in Motion: Migrant and Diasporic Film in Contemporary Europe* (pp. 13-49). Palgrave.
- Brunarska, Z., Kindler, M., Szulecka, M., & Toruńczyk-Ruiz, S. (2016). Ukrainian migration to Poland: A “local” mobility? In M. B. Kassel & M. B. Omelaniuk (Eds.), *Ukrainian migration to the European Union: Lessons from migration studies* (pp. 115–131). IMISCOE Research Series. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-41776-9_7
- Campani, G. (1993). Immigration and racism in southern Europe: The Italian case. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 16(3), 507–535. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.1993.9993794>

- Chambers, I. (2008). *Migrancy, culture, identity*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203182093>
- Chaplin, E. (2009). Visual impact: Culture and the meaning of images. *Visual Studies*, 24(2), 183–184. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725860903106203>
- Danilova, V. (2014, July 16). Media and their role in shaping public attitudes towards migrants. *Our World United Nations University*.
<http://ourworld.unu.edu/en/media-and-their-role-in-shaping-public-attitudes-towards-migrants>
- De Coninck, D. (2023). The refugee paradox during wartime in Europe: How Ukrainian and Afghan refugees are (not) alike. *International Migration Review*, 57(2), 578–586. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183221116874>
- Düvell, F., & Lapshyna, I. (2022). On war in Ukraine, double standards and the epistemological ignoring of the global east. *International Migration*, 60(4), 209–212. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.13038>
- Düvell, F. (2023, February 24). Russlands Überfall auf die Ukraine und die kriegsbedingte Flucht [Russia's attack on Ukraine and the war-related flight]. *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*. <https://www.bpb.de/themen/migration-integration/laenderprofile/518559/russlands-ueberfall-auf-die-ukraine-und-die-kriegsbedingte-flucht/>
- Duszczek, M., & Kaczmarczyk, P. (2022). War and migration: The recent influx from Ukraine into Poland and possible scenarios for the future. *CMR Spotlight*, 4(39).
- Eurostat. (2023). Temporary protection for persons fleeing Ukraine – monthly statistics. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Temporary_protection_for_persons_fleeing_Ukraine_-_monthly_statistics [14/05/2024]
- Eurostat. (2024). Beneficiaries of temporary protection at the end of the month by citizenship, age and sex - monthly data. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR_ASYTPSM_custom_7394287/default/table?lang=en [24/05/2024]
- Fedyuk, O., Kindler, M. (2016). Migration of Ukrainians to the European Union: Background and Key Issues. In: Fedyuk, O., Kindler, M. (Eds.), *Ukrainian Migration to the European Union* (pp. 1–14). IMISCOE Research Series. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-41776-9_1

- Figenschou, T. U., Beyer, A., & Thorbjørnsrud, K. (2015). The moral police. *Nordicom Review*, 36(1), 65–78. <https://doi.org/10.1515/nor-2015-0006>
- Fiske, J. (1987). *Television Culture*. Methuen.
- Hall, S. (1996). New ethnicities. In D. Morley, & K. Chen (Eds.), *Stuart Hall: Critical dialogues in cultural studies* (pp. 442–452). Routledge.
- Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Sage Publications.
- Hopkins, L. (2009). Media and migration: A review of the field. *Australian Journal of Communication*, 36(2), 35–54.
- Jurek, K. (2019). Stereotypy na temat Ukraińców funkcjonujące w Polsce. Imigranci z Ukrainy w Polsce. Potrzeby i oczekiwania, reakcje społeczne, wyzwania dla bezpieczeństwa [Stereotypes about Ukrainians operating in Poland. Immigrants from Ukraine in Poland. Needs and expectations, social reactions, calls for security]. In Miszewki, K, *Imigranci z Ukrainy w Polsce. Potrzeby i oczekiwania, reakcje społeczne, wyzwania dla bezpieczeństwa*. (pp. 31-42). Wydawnictwo AWL
- Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A. (1982). The psychology of preferences. *Scientific American*, 246(1), 160–173.
- Kalan, D. (2019, December 5). How Poland's public television became a mouthpiece of the Law and Justice Party. *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/25/poland-public-television-law-and-justice-pis-mouthpiece/>
- Koshel, I., & Yakovenko, M. (2020). Migration: Sociocultural context of a study. *E3S Web of Conferences*, 210, 15015. <https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202021015015>
- Kosho, J. (2016). Media influence on public opinion attitudes toward the migration crisis. *International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research*, 5(5), 86–91.
- King, R., & Wood, N. (2001). *Media and migration: Constructions of mobility and difference*. Routledge Research in Cultural and Media Studies, London and New York, 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203458549>
- Kubrak, T. (2020). Impact of Films: Changes in Young People's Attitudes after Watching a Movie. *Behavioral Sciences*, 10(5), 86. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs10050086>
- Kumar, A. M., Goh, J. Y. Q., Tan, T. H. H., & Siew, C. S. Q. (2022). Gender stereotypes in Hollywood movies and their evolution over time: Insights from network analysis. *Big Data and Cognitive Computing*, 6(2), 50. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bdcc6020050>

- Kraidy, M. M. (2002). Hybridity in cultural globalization. *Communication Theory*, 12(3), 316–339. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2002.tb00272.x>
- Kraidy, M. M. (2002). Hybridity in cultural globalization. *Communication Theory*, 12(3), 316–339. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2002.tb00272.x>
- Kyngäs, H. (2020). Inductive content analysis. In *The application of content analysis in nursing science research* (pp. 13-21). Springer, Cham.
- Lecheler, S., Matthes, J., & Boomgaarden, H. (2019). Setting the agenda for research on media and migration: State-of-the-art and directions for future research. *Mass Communication & Society*, 22(6), 691–707. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2019.1688059>
- Lewis, S. (2019). Border trouble: Ethnopolitics and cosmopolitan memory in recent Polish cinema. *Eastern European Politics and Societies*, 33(2), 522–549. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325418815248>
- Madatali, A. H. (2022). *Rights of third-country nationals who are long-term residents in the EU* (Report PE 699.469). European Parliamentary Research Service. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/699469/EPRS_BRI\(2022\)699469_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/699469/EPRS_BRI(2022)699469_EN.pdf)
- Marino, S., & Dawes, S. (2016). Introduction to Fortress Europe: Media, migration and borders. *Networking Knowledge*, 9(4), 1-3. <https://doi.org/10.31165/nk.2016.94.443>
- Mikos, L. (2014). Analysis of film. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis* (pp. 409-423). SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446282243.n28>
- Musarò, P., & Parmiggiani, P. (2017). Beyond black and white: The role of media in portraying and policing migration and asylum in Italy. *Review of Sociology*, 27(2), 241–260. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2017.1329034>
- Naficy, H. (2001). *An accented cinema: Exilic and diasporic filmmaking*. Princeton University Press. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA52604435>
- Niemitz, D. (2016, November 2). *Volhynia (Hatred) by Wojciech Smarzowski—a gripping account of the 1943 massacre*. World Socialist Web Site. <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2016/11/02/volh-n02.html>
- Nunn, A. (2016). The production and reproduction of inequality in the UK in times of austerity. *British Politics*, 11(4), 469–487. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41293-016-0040-6>

- Polkowska, D., & Filipek, K. (2019). Grateful precarious worker? Ukrainian migrants in Poland. *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 52(3), 564–581. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0486613419857295>
- Rosinska, O. (2022). Narratives of Polish-Ukrainian interaction in Polish documentaries. *Obraz*, 40(3), 51–62. [https://doi.org/10.21272/obraz.2022.3\(40\)-51-62](https://doi.org/10.21272/obraz.2022.3(40)-51-62)
- Rossade, K., & Leal, J. (2008). Introduction: Cinema and migration since unification. *GFL Journal*, 1, 1-5.
- Schreier, M. (2012). *Qualitative content analysis in practice*. SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529682571>
- Springer, A. (2018, October 16). “Kler” z kolejnym rekordem. Historyczne otwarcie w UK i Irlandii. *Onet Kultura*. <https://kultura.onet.pl/film/wiadomosci/kler-z-kolejnym-rekordem-historyczne-otwarcie-w-uk-i-irlandii/w3fh48j>
- Statista. (2023). Foreigners who received work permit in Poland 2010-2022, by citizenship. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1261570/poland-foreigners-who-received-workpermit/> [05/05/2024]
- Taylor, L., & Willis, A. (1999). *Media studies: Texts, institutions and audiences*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Tukachinsky, R., Walter, N., & Saucier, C. J. (2020). Antecedents and effects of parasocial relationships: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Communication*, 70(6), 868–894. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqaa034>
- Tsependa, I. (2014). Ukraine and Poland: Facing the 21st century challenges. *Journal of Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University*, 1(4), 21–26. <https://doi.org/10.15330/jpnu.1.4.21-26>
- The UN Refugee Agency. (2022). *Global Trends Report 2022*. UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency. <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends-report-2022>
- Zawadzka-Paluckta, N. (2022). Ukrainian refugees in Polish press. *Discourse & Communication*, 17(1), 96–111. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17504813221111636>