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## **IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD: THE ARGUMENTATIVE DIMENSION OF PRESS NEWS COVERAGE IN THE DISCOURSE ON MERCY TOWARDS REFUGEES**

Keywords: refugees, critical discourse analysis, media discourse, news, argumentation.

### **ABSTRACT**

This article explores the critical dimension of news coverage of Pope Francis's speech on refugees in market-leading newspapers from three countries — Spain, Poland and the UK — using Critical Discourse Analysis methods. As hypothesised, it revealed bias and fallaciousness in the arguments against refugees in the tabloid press. The daily broadsheets' news articles from the three countries expressed the same positive stance towards accommodating refugees in Europe, which was to be expected. Surprisingly, though, their argumentation was almost identical, weak and scarce, especially when compared to tabloid argumentation on the topic. None of the news articles presented the issue from the point of view of refugees. Given the influence of media discourse, this study discusses important, real-life implications of racially biased discourse on the cognitive, affective and behavioural levels.

On lit les journaux comme on aime, un bandeau sur les yeux. On ne cherche pas à comprendre les faits [...]. On est battu et content parce qu'on ne se croit battu, mais vainqueur (M. Proust, *Le Temps retrouvé*, 1927).

### **INTRODUCTION**

This study springs from the rich tradition of critically oriented reflections on media discourse (e.g. van Dijk 1991; Baker, Gabrielatos 2008; Baker et al. 2008; Chouliaraki 2014; Fairclough 1995; Bartlett 2014). Considering the media's prominent role in providing information to the public and, thus, generating knowledge (van Dijk 2014: 89), triggering emotions and constructing identities (Atwell Seate, Mastro 2015), as well as the influence of media logic on all domains of social life (Altheide, Snow 1991: ix), it is imperative for sociolinguists to continuously put media discourse under scrutiny. However, as van Dijk notes (2014: 155): 'the study of news as discourse [is] marginal at best.' The current study

intends to contribute to advancing the academic community's understanding of media effects by analysing the argumentative dimension of Spanish, British and Polish news coverage of a speech given by Pope Francis on the refugee crisis in September 2015.

The "European refugee crisis" is a topic which deserves special attention due to its prominence within media discourse (as noted by Baker et al. 2008; Kotišová 2017). It is the movement of refugees from war and other crises-stricken parts of the world to Europe, which began in 2015. The term denoting this — in many cases tragic — pursuit of freedom and safety, has been coined as a result of media coverage which presented the movement of refugees within the framework of a crisis (Kotišová 2017), thus raising social concerns and unrest<sup>1</sup>. The media coverage of the "crisis" has borne vast and often grave political and social consequences, which in and of themselves are outside the scope of this study, but point to the importance of drawing academia's and, hopefully, journalism practitioners' attention to the mechanisms which lead to the emergence of specific discursive practices.

The study focuses on a very particular example of discourse on refugees, framed within Christian discourse on mercy: Pope Francis's speech. Subject to the analysis is the argumentative dimension of a corpus of texts. The questions the study is trying to answer are as follows: does the argumentation of the news articles reflect (and, if so, to what extent) the Pope's stance? Does it differ from the Pope's stance (and how)? In other words, does the press construe refugees in terms of a danger to society or rather as persons in danger and in dire need of mercy, as advocated by the Pope? How is the portrayal of refugees justified by the means of press argumentation?

### CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Critical Discourse Analysis can be seen as having stemmed from Michel Foucault's reflections on the role of discourse in the distribution of power in society. Much of his writing is centred around the idea of the powerful elite producing, shaping, eliminating and constraining knowledge, and consequently, social and political realities (e.g. Foucault 1969). This knowledge is transmitted through discourse (van Dijk 2014), understood as a form of social practice (Fairclough 1998; Halliday, Matthiessen 2004). Critical Discourse Analysis aims at exposing and challenging those power relations by studying discourse (e.g. van Dijk 1991; Wodak, Reisigl 2001; Wodak, Meyer 2009; Fairclough 2000; Baker et al. 2008). As Baker et al. (2008: 280) note,

CDA researchers are fundamentally interested in analysing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control, as they are manifested in language. For CDA, language is not powerful on its own — it gains power by the use people make of it and by the people who have access to language means and public fora.

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<sup>1</sup> Even though the numbers do not support the claim that what we are dealing with is in fact a crisis: according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there has been a steady amount of refugees around the world ever since the beginning of the 20th century: 3% of the total global population; whereas in 2016 the number grew to 3.4% — an altogether insignificant rise on a global scale.

Access to public fora is usually reserved for dominant groups in society, who exercise control over dominated groups by inculcating them with the knowledge they claim to be the truth. One such group endowed with an ability to create public discourses are media practitioners. However, they do not possess exclusive control over the discourses they spread, as they are subject to various influences (e.g. Manovich 2005: 227; Lee et al. 2015; van Dijk 2014; Herbert, Thurman 2007; Baker et al. 2008; Scheufele 1999). As a result, a journalist's obligation to remain loyal to the public (Kovach, Rosenstiel 2003: 73) may sometimes be superimposed by their responsibilities towards internal or external sources of influence. As a result, the public have very little control over public discourse (only to the extent that the commercial success of a news outlet depends partially on its audience), thus, from the Foucauldian, critical perspective, they can be considered as subordinate to the dominant elites. On the other hand, refugees possess no control over public discourses, being an out-group of a low social status (Atwell Seate, Mastro 2015) not considered as a possible audience of news outlets. The 'relationship of dominance, discrimination, power and control' (Baker et al. 2008: 280) between the groups in control of press discourse (news producers and other elites), their audiences (the in-group), and refugees (the out-group), is of particular interest for a critical discourse analyst (Chadwick et al. 2018: 4257).

One of the most clear-cut approaches to a critically oriented analysis is the analysis of argumentation which, through the claim supported by a given text, as well as other elements of the argumentation structure, can reveal the knowledge newspaper discourses intend to spread, and thus, question the power relations behind it.

### ARGUMENTATION

According to van Eemeren et al. (1996: 5) argumentation is

[a] verbal and social activity of reason aiming at increasing (or decreasing) the acceptability of a controversial standpoint for the listener or reader, by putting forward a constellation of propositions intended to justify (or refute) the standpoint before a rational judge.

Argumentation can be conceived in a narrow, restricted sense (e.g. Perelman, Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969), or in a more extensive, loose sense, such as the one advocated by Anscombe and Ducrot (e.g. 1997). According to the latter, the argumentative dimension pertains to language, not discourse, and thus becomes an integral and inseparable part of meaning. As a consequence of this extensive conception of argumentation, every utterance, even without an explicitly clear persuasive purpose, includes an argumentative dimension, as it can modify or reinforce the recipient's view of the world, their opinions and beliefs. It is important to emphasise the role of the recipient in establishing the existence of the argumentative dimension in an utterance, because it depends on whether they interpret it as argumentative or not (Fuentes Rodríguez, Alcaide Lara 2007: 15). The argumentative dimension 'foresees reactions from the audience even if the latter

is virtual or apparently absent' (Amossy 2005: 89), while trying to convince them or reinforce their concurrence with the given claim.

### **Identification of claims**

One of the most crucial steps in an argumentation analysis is to identify the claim of an argumentation structure, i.e. a negative or positive position regarding the proposition given as the subject of the debate (van Eemeren et al. 2014: 13–14). Sometimes the claim is stated explicitly. However, it is often made known only through an analysis of the context of the argumentative structure in which it appears (Fuentes Rodríguez, Alcaide Lara 2007: 40). It can be the context of the sentence, paragraph or text, or the broader context of the text's production, distribution and reception. Press discourse is characterised by features (belonging to all levels of context discussed above: the sentence and text levels, as well as the broader context) which unequivocally point to the standpoint of a newspaper article.

### **Arguments, topoi and fallacies**

The importance of identifying the text's standpoint lies in the necessity to prove whether the argumentation 'does indeed provide enough support for the conclusion and even whether it is relevant at all' (van Eemeren et al. 2014: 13). It is crucial to detect fallacies of argumentation, i.e. arguments which seem valid but are not, in order to refute a claim (Tindale 2005).

Sometimes an argument in an argumentative structure is connected to the claim by means of topoi, which are general principles on which reasoning relies, but which are themselves not reasoning, almost always presented as being an object of consensus in a more or less large community (Anscombe 1995a: 35). They are generally accepted assumptions in a given epistemic community (van Dijk 2014) and serve as bridges allowing a premise to reach a conclusion. Their existence is a linguistic fact, as Anscombe (1995b: 49) emphasises. Every topos is a product of the particular sociological and historical context in which it is used as an argumentative tool. Thus, topoi reveal the values, beliefs and opinions conveyed by argumentation very clearly.

In sum, following on from the premise that almost every text possesses an argumentative dimension, and the mass media do not escape this general rule (as suggested by ample research, e.g. Lee et al. 2015; van Dijk 2014; Herbert, Thurman 2007; Baker et al. 2008.), and taking into consideration the number of individuals exposed to the media's logic (Atwell Seate, Mastro 2015: 833), it seems imperative for Critical Discourse scholars to put media discourse and its effects under scrutiny.

### **MASS MEDIA**

Critical discourse scholars have long emphasised the power of the media to influence the public's perception of events and to manipulate it in order to achieve political, societal

or commercial goals (e.g. Manovich 2005: 227; Lee et al. 2015; van Dijk 2014; Herbert, Thurman 2007; Baker et al. 2008); especially the press which, as research suggests, has much more influence on the public's attitudes than other media outlets (Georgiou, Zabrowski 2017: 3). The commercialisation and ideologisation of news-making (e.g. van Dijk 2014: 156; Conill 2004: 143) have led to journalism that, on the one hand, promotes easily sellable stories on a limited number of topics, which is considered to be preferred by readers (van Dijk 2014: 156–157; Harcup, O'Neill 2017); and, on the other hand, journalism that

often tends to interpret rather than describe and speculate rather than stick to known facts, which blurs the line between straight reporting and so-called news analysis [...] found not only in the tabloids but also in the public service news and the broadsheet papers (Nord, Strömbäck 2003: 58).

Some communication scholars have thus advocated the use of terms such as “post-journalism” or “pseudo-journalism” instead of journalism (Altheide, Snow 1991), due to the assumption that most contemporary media content does not meet the pre-requisites of traditional journalism, as laid down by Kovach and Rosenstiel (2003), such as obligation to the truth, a discipline of verification, loyalty to the citizens, independence from those they cover, monitoring those who have power, making what is significant interesting and relevant, and keeping the news comprehensive and proportional.

The discipline of verification (Kovach, Rosenstiel 2003: 100) may be epitomised by Nord and Strömbäck's (2003: 61) three rules of the use of journalistic sources: first of all, journalists should always verify information with two different sources; secondly, the sources should be balanced and independent; thirdly, journalists should avoid using anonymous sources, due to their lack of credibility. However, the uniformity of the access to information due to the concentration of the media in the hands of a few global media conglomerates (e.g. O'Halloran, Smith 2012: 5; Baran, Davis 2012: 224; Lee et al. 2015: 904; Castells 2005: 12) has led news outlets to passively reproduce information without checking it against other sources, whether it originated in a trans-national news agency or a politician's office, as long as it fits the newspaper's agenda (Gozálvez 2004: 228). Sometimes editors may domesticate foreign news obtained from an international news agency, especially if it concerns a country with which they have strong historical and economic ties. Otherwise, they may simply reproduce the news in the form “the dominant players” shaped it (Lee et al. 2015: 904), leading to little or no divergence between coverage among news outlets in different countries.

The prominence of fake and exaggerated news further adds to the unreliability of the media (Chadwick et al. 2018). Even among serious journalists there is a growing concern about the truthfulness of the news they produce and publish, especially using news technologies (Aitamurto 2019).

According to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2003: 201–222), journalists are supposed to make what is significant interesting and relevant and convey it in a comprehensive way. What is more, the news should be proportional in the distribution of noteworthy

and trivial pieces of information (Kovach, Rosenstiel 2003: 223–247). Instead, newspapers prioritise information their readers can easily refer to personally, emotionally or ideologically (van Dijk 2014: 156). As ‘new media industries often do specialize in giving people what they want — even if the long-term consequences might be negative’ (Baran, Davis 2012: 50), news outlets make what is interesting and relevant to their readers significant by devoting more attention and space to it, as well as by placing it in a privileged position and emphasising it by means of other resources (e.g. font size and colour). Thus, what might objectively be of consequence on a far-reaching, global level, gives way to information infinitely less significant, which however touches directly on the lives, interests, emotions and ideologies of the readers. The media give people what they want instead of providing them with information, which does not contribute to a deepening of their knowledge about the world. The abundance of information does not result in a more informed society (Correa García 2011: 38). Moreover, the media often favour trivial information and entertainment because it results in greater shareability, which, in turn, boosts a newspaper’s profits (Harcup, O’Neill 2017: 1480). For the same reason, they limit the amount of hard, impartial data for the benefit of opinions and speculations (Nord, Strömbäck 2003: 58), and put emphasis on the emotional and sensational aspects of news (framing an event in terms of a threat or a crisis would be one example of this approach). This, consequently, impedes the readers from critically challenging the content of the news and, as a consequence, opens the door to the process of manipulation (e.g. Correa García 2011: 41; Manovich 2005: 227, Chouliaraki 2007; Lee et al. 2015), especially considering the influence external sources exert on the process of news production (Scheufele 1999).

The European refugee crisis has been extensively covered by the European media from its very beginning: it engenders strong emotions in audiences; concerns their lives (even though the media may sometimes exaggerate the extent to which the refugee crisis might concern the lives of everyday citizens); and is a widely disputed topic in political circles, which is further communicated to the public by the media.

#### REFUGEES IN MASS MEDIA COVERAGE

According to the “guard-dog perspective”, the media act as society’s “sentry” (Dixon 2015: 788): they communicate to the public which phenomena they should consider as threatening. ‘Those with the least power in the system, such as people of colour, receive the most bias in news coverage’ (Dixon 2015: 788), and, as a consequence, are particularly susceptible to being identified as a threat (Arendt 2015), especially if it arrives from outside the society (Atwell Seate, Mastro 2015). Within this ethnic blame discourse (Dixon 2015: 786), the problematic phenomenon is seen as a result of inter-group conflict bearing harmful consequences for the in-group (European societies).

Ample research suggests that refugees are seen as a threat to the in-group’s physical well-being (Dixon 2015; Arendt 2015; Devlin, Grant 2017), its morals and values

(Atwell Seate, Mastro 2015; Devlin, Grant 2017), as well as their economic stability (Atwell Seate, Mastro 2015; Devlin, Grant 2017), to a significant extent due to media exposure (van Dijk 2014; Dixon 2015, Arendt 2015). Moreover, according to Atwell Seate and Mastro (2015), out-groups which are considered to possess low social status and that compete with the in-group for resources, jobs, etc. (e.g. refugees), engender feelings of contempt — a mix of disgust and anger — as a result of biased news coverage. Researchers also point to the emergence and reinforcement of harmful stereotypes as a result of biased news coverage of people of colour (Dixon 2015; Atwell Seate, Mastro 2015). The everyday use of biased discourse and behaviour (Dixon 2015: 786–787), which influences news production (van Dijk 1991), bears not only implications on affective and cognitive levels, but also behavioural, as demonstrated by previous research (e.g. Atwell Seate, Mastro 2015; Arendt 2015).

The current study intends to verify whether news articles framed within the Christian discourse on mercy, i.e. news reporting on the speech the Pope gave on the necessity to show mercy to refugees, follow the same biased tendency to construe refugees in terms of a threat, rather than echoing the Pope's discourse.

#### MATERIAL

The corpus of texts for the following analysis is composed of texts published in market-leading national dailies in Spain, Great Britain and Poland within one week of the Pope's speech on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September 2015, where he called on European parishes to provide accommodation to refugees. The aim of comparing texts from different discourse communities (van Dijk 2014) is to provide a complex picture of how the press across Europe justifies helping — or not — refugees, and to account for possible divergences among the press in countries of different linguistic, historical and cultural backgrounds.

We have found four news articles which covered the Pope's appeal. Three of them were published in the most-read broadsheet dailies in each country: *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Agora) in Poland (537 words), *The Guardian* (Guardian Media Group) in the United Kingdom (497 words), and *El País* (Grupo Prisa) in Spain (224 words<sup>2</sup>). The fourth text comes from *Fakt*, a daily tabloid published in Poland by the German-Swiss media conglomerate Ringier Axel Springer (576 words). The fact that, among the press of three countries, only one tabloid covered the Pope's speech (even though the majority of market-leading newspapers, at least in Poland and Great Britain, are tabloids), is conspicuous in itself, as it shows that the topic either does not fit other tabloid newspapers' agendas, or it was considered of little interest to their readers (Harcup, O'Neill 2017).

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<sup>2</sup> A mention of the conflict between Colombia and Venezuela at the end of the article was excluded from the analysis.

## ARGUMENTATION ANALYSIS

## Claims

As discussed above, the first step in an argumentation analysis is the detection of a text's standpoint (van Eemeren et al. 2014: 13–14). There are three indicators of the standpoint in newspaper articles. First of all, newspapers are published by publishing houses, which virtually always belong to specific ideological camps (van Dijk 2014: 165), and usually aim at defending and popularising their claims among their readers by means of argumentation. Therefore, their standpoints agree with the assumptions of the ideology they pertain to. Liberal dailies like *The Guardian*, *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *El País*, normally adopt positive attitudes towards immigration in general, so it can be assumed that they will share the conclusion of the Pope's speech.

Tabloids' standpoints, on the other hand, are usually dictated by the most populist views in the given socio-historical context, as emphasised by van Dijk (2014: 156): 'news must sell and make profit. Hence, the contents and structures of news must be such that readers want to buy and read such news reports.' Consequently, if *Fakt* were the best-selling newspaper in 2007 in Poland, according to the data of Związek Kontroli Dystrybucji Prasy (The Association of the Control of Press Distribution), and according to CBOS (Centre for Public Opinion Research), in December 2016 only 4% of respondents declared that they were in favour of letting refugees settle in Poland, it can be assumed that the tabloid newspaper disseminated the exact opposite view: a hostility towards refugees.

Secondly, the title and lead of a press article already inform the reader about the standpoint expressed in it because, firstly, it is the information included in them which will be best remembered by the reader (Cotter 2001: 425); secondly, without them, the text would be more difficult to comprehend (Kozminsky 1977), especially by less-educated readers (Bonfadelli 2002: 68); and thirdly, the newspaper wants to let the reader know that they share the same attitude on a given topic, which will encourage them to continue reading it (Greenslade 2005: 4). The title and lead of *Fakt's* article present negative attitudes towards the Pope's appeal. The title — "Which priests will not take in refugees?" — suggests that disagreement about the Pope's appeal among priests is possible and refugees may not be accommodated in some parishes, which goes against the Pope's wish. The lead continues with the topic of disagreement, discord and divisions, and directly states what the title has already suggested, i.e. that some priests announced that they will not accommodate refugees<sup>3</sup>.

*Gazeta Wyborcza's* and *El País's* titles and leads do not directly point to the conclusion; however, *El País* focuses on the Pope's message ("The Pope asks every

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<sup>3</sup> Translation of the *Fakt's* lead: "The topic of refugees continues to cause controversies and discord. Pope Francis's recent appeal to accommodate refugees in parishes and convents has begun to divide priests. Some negative declarations have already been pronounced...".

parish to accommodate a refugee family”), thus lending it importance, whereas *Gazeta Wyborcza* apparently attempts to awaken their readers’ interest by opting for an ambiguous title (“The Pope appeals, but would Polish parishes take in refugees? We asked priests — and this is what they say”) and lead (“Will the Polish Church respond to the Pope’s appeal to take in refugees? We called parishes in small towns — the priests answered gladly”). *The Guardian* is more outspoken in their support for refugees, including an *argumentum ad exemplum* to support their claim that is already in the title of the article (“Vatican to take in two refugee families as Pope calls for every religion to help”).

The third and most important indicator of a text’s standpoint are the arguments which support it. *Fakt’s* article presents negative opinions on the Pope’s speech first, thus emphasising them. Moreover, much more space is dedicated to the negative responses to Pope Francis’s appeal, and many more arguments support this thesis. Refugees are presented in an unfavourable light, and the article does not contain any reference to either the content or the context of the Pope’s speech, as if judging the speech as being of little importance to the topic. On the other hand, none of the three broadsheet dailies include arguments against refugees, thus their claims almost certainly agree with the Pope’s appeals.

### **Arguments, topoi, fallacies**

The argumentation supporting the claims in each news article is not developed to the same extent. The most striking difference is noted across the two types of newspapers: in the analysed broadsheet newspapers the argumentative dimension is extremely limited; the tabloid’s argumentation against accommodating refugees, on the other hand, is remarkably extensive, albeit mostly fallacious. The tabloid article provides some arguments in favour of refugees, but they are as scarce and weak as in the broadsheet articles.

The schemes which illustrate the argumentation structures of each news article have been organised as follows:

level 0: the claim (either “European parishes should take in refugees” or “European parishes should not take in refugees”);

level 1: topoi, if applicable;

level 2 (or 1 if arguments are not supported with topoi): arguments, including fallacious arguments, the latter marked with a double line;

level 3 (or 2 if arguments are not supported with topoi): supporting arguments.

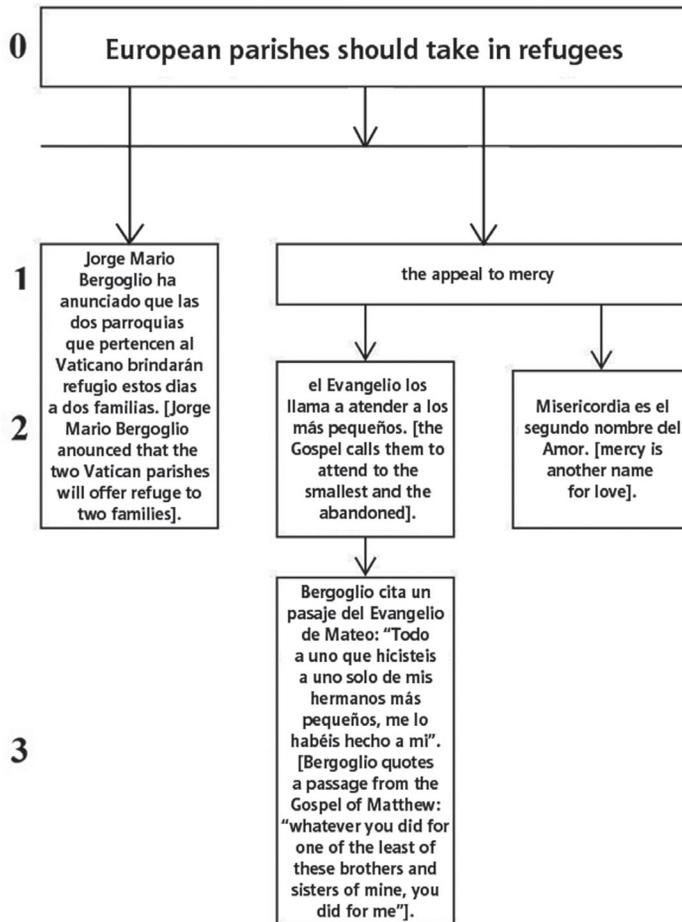


Figure 1: *El País* for refugees: argumentation map

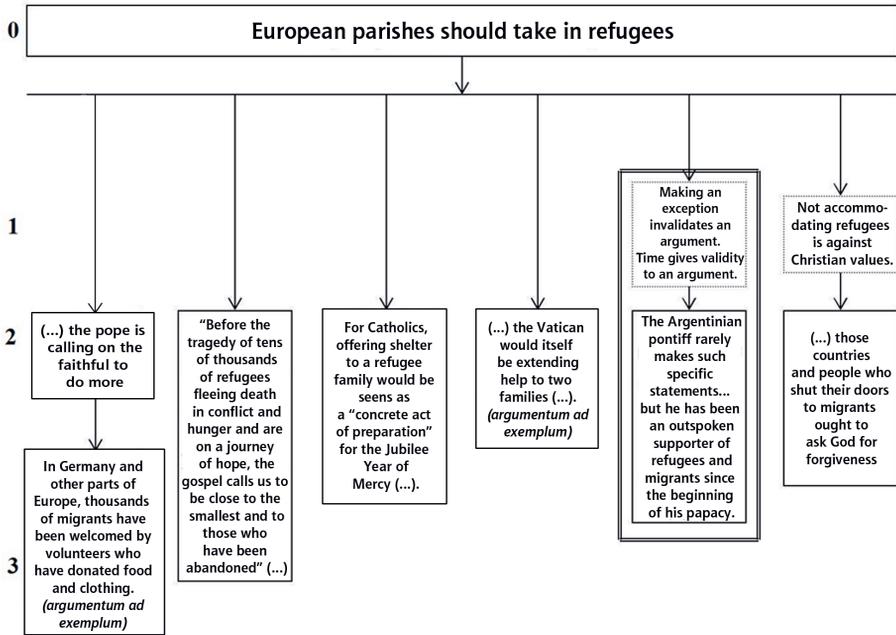


Figure 2: *The Guardian* for refugees: argumentation map

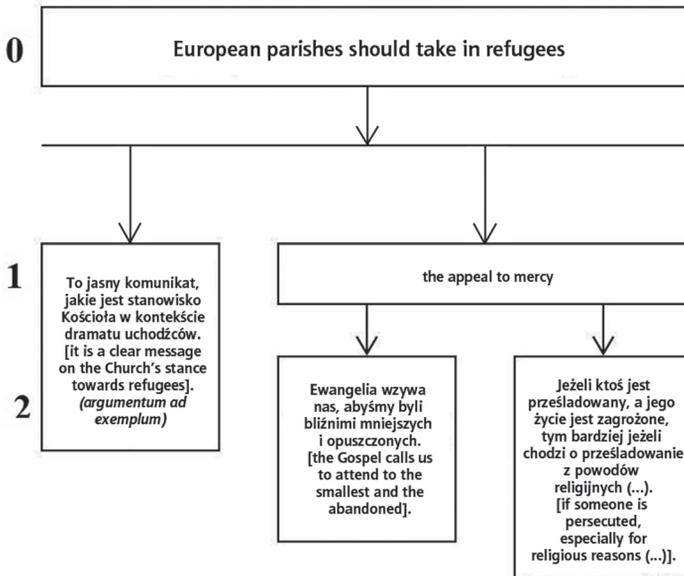


Figure 3: *Gazeta Wyborcza* for refugees: argumentation map

Very few differences have been detected across the articles published in broadsheet newspapers in various countries. They possess the same ideological profile, which, however, can only account for them sharing their standpoint towards refugees and, to a limited extent, for the types of arguments used. The fact that they share most of their arguments is significant. It may be due to the globalisation of press industries, noted by many media scholars (e.g. O'Halloran, Smith 2012: 5; Baran, Davis 2012: 224; Lee et al. 2015: 904; van Dijk 2014; Harcup, O'Neill 2017; Bar, Galperin 2005), which results in media organisations replicating the news obtained from international media agencies (van Dijk 2014: 161; Lee et al. 2015: 904).

The arguments for refugees used by the three dailies can be divided into two main categories (there is only one exception to this divide, which, however, is a fallacious argument, employed in *The Guardian's* article, Vid. Figure 2). The first category comprises arguments originating in the discourse of mercy, usually making an appeal to Christian values and the Gospel. The second, of arguments *ad exemplum*: the example to be followed is usually the Pope, who promises to accommodate two refugee families in the Vatican. The only exception here is *Gazeta Wyborcza*, which does not share with their readers the information about the Vatican's intention to provide refuge to two families: it just communicates the Pope's stance (Vid. Figure 3), which makes for a much weaker argument than its Spanish and British counterparts, especially considering the position of moral authority the figure of the Pope traditionally occupies in Catholic countries. Another example is set by *The Guardian* (Vid. Figure 2): volunteers from 'Germany and other parts of Europe [...] who have donated food and clothing.' The fallacious argument provided by the British daily, which does not pertain to any of the above-mentioned categories, is based on the topoi of time and exceptionality: it assumes that if the Pope rarely supports a cause, it must be unprecedentedly well-founded (Vid. Figure 2).

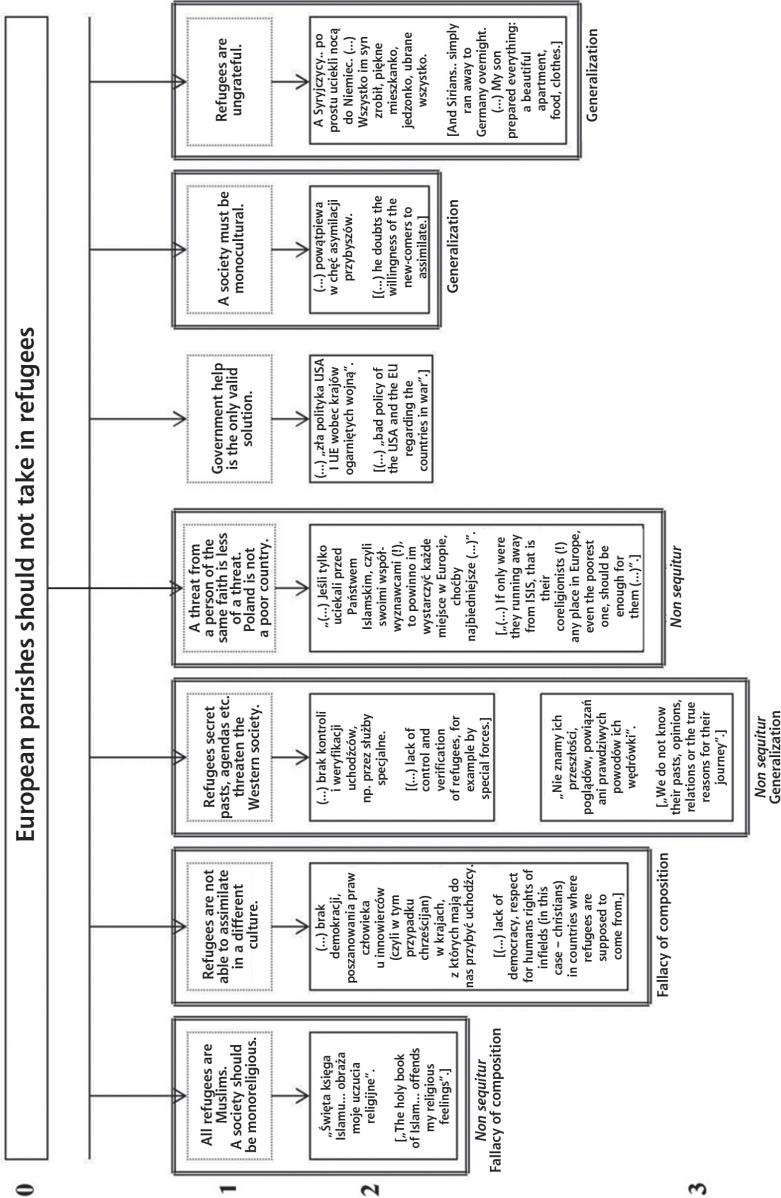


Figure 4: Fakt against refugees: argumentation map

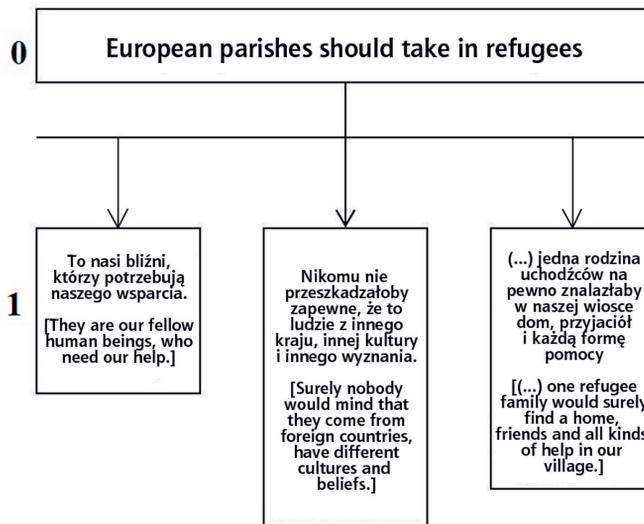


Figure 5: *Fakt* for refugees: argumentation map

The tabloid article's thesis is without a doubt contrary to Pope Francis's claim. The arguments against providing shelter to refugees (Vid. Figure 4) are much more numerous than the arguments for (Vid. Figure 5), even though they are mostly fallacious. However, one should not underestimate their influence on the readers who typically share the stance of the newspaper they read daily (Greenslade 2005: 4), and who are usually not very well-educated (van Dijk 2014: 161), thus they will not intend or be able to question the logic behind the arguments provided in the article. The arguments provided by *Fakt* display the journalist's lack of knowledge of the socio-historical context of the journalist and/or the editorial team, or a purposeful misinformation of their readers, concerning the faiths of refugees (the UN Refugee Agency does not require refugees to indicate their religious beliefs); their inability to assimilate (whereas, according to the study conducted by the Fundamental Rights Agency of the European Union in 2017, 76% of European Muslims declare having a strong connection with their country of residence, 90% of them have friends of different faiths); and their criminal intentions.

It is important to consider the *topoi* which support the argumentation in the tabloid article, as they might reveal the beliefs and opinions held by the community of *Fakt's* readers, or even broadly in society, if we assume that *Fakt* disseminates the most widespread views, as discussed above.

The first of the *topoi* upon which argumentation is built is related to the religious aspect of social life (a society must be mono-religious). This seems particularly striking in contrast to the almost complete absence of references to the speech pronounced by Pope Francis, the highest religious authority in the Catholic world, and the claim of the article which disagrees with his appeal. The article refers to the religious values

supposedly held by its readers on the one hand, but on the other hand refutes the appeal of the head of the Catholic Church.

Two other arguments are based on the assumption that a society should be monocultural and that refugees are unable to assimilate in a new culture, which is unfounded, according to the data quoted above.

The other topos *Fakt's* argumentation is based upon sees refugees as a threat to European societies, considering them to be ungrateful for all the good they have received (which, again, contradicts the newspaper's pronounced lack of intention to help refugees); and finally, judges the priests' negative reactions to the Pope's speech to be acceptable because their help would not be as effective as governmental help.

### DISCUSSION

Due to the limited scope of this study, the results cannot be considered in any way conclusive. However, as Atwell Seate and Mastro (2015: 833) note, within media research, small effect sizes should be seen as much more significant if the high rates of media use in the population are considered alongside them. What is more, the same tendencies have been revealed in the media discourse of three countries. These resemblances constitute an interesting finding and suggest a possible future line of investigation. In order to satisfy the qualitative aspect of this study, a much larger sample of texts would need to be investigated. Altogether, this analysis was very useful in revealing noteworthy tendencies in media discourse, news about refugees in particular, and possible areas of future research.

One of them is the corrosion of professional journalistic practices due to the globalisation of media industries (e.g. Conill 2004: 146; O'Halloran, Smith 2012: 5; Baran, Davis 2012: 224; Lee et al. 2015: 904; van Dijk 2014; Bustamante 2004; Harcup, O'Neill 2017; Bar, Galperin 2005), which leads to newspapers passively reproducing information obtained from international news agencies. As a result, the Pope's speech is covered almost identically in three broadsheet dailies from three different countries, even though all of them had access to the source, the Pope's speech.

The deterioration in the quality of news is also brought about by the commercialisation and ideologisation of news-making (e.g. Correa García 2011: 41; Manovich 2005: 227; Chouliaraki 2007; Lee et al. 2015; van Dijk 2014: 156; Conill 2004: 143). The result is a polarised world (Mitchelstein, Boczkowski 2013: 386) where newspapers cater to the needs of their readers, unconcerned about truth and reliable information (Nord, Strömbäck 2003), creating a simplified, distorted version of reality. The media are dominated by easily sellable stories on a limited number of topics (Harcup, O'Neill 2017), preferably those which arouse strong emotions, such as rage, pity or revulsion (van Dijk 2014: 156–157).

One of those topics is the European refugee crisis, seen as a result of inter-group conflict, which, however, bears harmful consequences for European societies. Within the framework of a crisis, refugees are thus seen as culpable, while European societies are viewed as victims. The media possess the power of governing the reception

of the crisis and the attitudes towards refugees through the means of their news coverage, thus serving their ideological agenda (e.g. van Dijk 1991; Baker et al. 2008; Chouliaraki 2014; Fairclough 1995).

Although the agenda of liberal dailies' is typically to support refugees, bias is still discernible even in this type of newspaper: first of all, through their framing of the refugees' plight as a crisis; secondly, in their weak and scarce argumentation, almost identical in all three newspapers, hence probably simply reproduced, lackadaisically; thirdly, the lack of the refugees' perspectives, opinions and beliefs in the argumentative structures.

The tabloid article's analysis strongly supports the results of previous research into media discourse on refugees, albeit on a smaller scale: the refugee crisis is seen as a threat to European societies, as a result of inter-group conflict (Dixon (2015: 786): 'If they were only running away from ISIS who are their coreligionists (!)', Vid. Figure 4); refugees are construed as threatening European societies' morals and values (Atwell Seate, Mastro 2015; Devlin, Grant 2017; their 'lack of democracy and respect for human rights', Vid. Figure 4); as well as their economic stability (Atwell Seate, Mastro 2015; Devlin, Grant 2017; 'even the poorest place in Europe should be enough for them', Vid. Figure 4). The tabloid article is the perfect example of verbal violence in the form of insinuations (Skowronek 2012: 500–512). Blaming the out-group, as well as the European Union and the USA ('bad policy of the EU and the USA towards refugees...'), Vid. Figure 4), while absolving ordinary people of responsibility, is a clear manifestation of populist discourse, which leads to a polarised world, stereotyping, and feelings of insecurity (Hameleers et al. 2017).

It is particularly interesting to note how the media frames the refugee crisis within the Pope's discourse on mercy. The tabloid article almost entirely disregards the message of the Pope's speech, which seems significant in terms of a possible crisis of authorities: traditionally, especially in a Catholic country, the Pope is the most important moral authority; here his authority seems to be undermined.

## CONCLUSIONS

The objective of this analysis was to verify whether the refugee crisis framed within the Christian discourse on mercy is identified as a threat to European societies in the Polish, Spanish and British press, and how it is justified by means of argumentation. This analysis, albeit limited, led to several important findings which merit further investigation. It showed that bias permeates media discourse by construing refugees as a threat both in broadsheet newspapers (weak and limited argumentation for accommodating refugees, the absence of refugees' opinions, construing the refugees' plight in terms of a "European crisis"), and the tabloid article (extensive, albeit fallacious, argumentation against refugees, disregarding the moral authority of the Pope). Its consequences are relevant on the cognitive and affective level: the repeated mass-mediated association of refugees with the category of threat leads to the formation of harmful stereotypes and negative attitudes in readers' minds (Dixon 2015: 777; Arendt 2015); as well as

the behavioural level: it increases the likelihood of persons of colour being considered as potentially dangerous (Arendt 2015; Devlin, Grant 2017).

These findings stress the need for closer control over the ethics of the media, so that they can better perform their role of providing information and generating knowledge (van Dijk 2014: 89), as well as the significance of education in decontaminating European societies of biased representations of refugees. Both findings would benefit from a closer and more extensive study in the future, which might include a bigger corpus of texts and an analysis of other aspects of media discourse, and an analysis of comments responding the articles, or a multi-modal analysis.

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## STRESZCZENIE

### **Na początku było słowo. Struktura argumentacyjna artykułów prasowych na temat dyskursu miłosierdzia wobec uchodźców**

Słowa kluczowe: uchodźcy, krytyczna analiza dyskursu, dyskurs prasowy, media, argumentacja.

Artykuł zawiera wyniki krytycznej analizy struktury argumentacyjnej artykułów prasowych na temat przemowy papieża Franciszka o uchodźcach w wiodących dziennikach publikowanych w trzech krajach: Polsce, Hiszpanii i Wielkiej Brytanii. Zgodnie z przewidywaniami, analiza ujawniła tendencyjność i błędy logiczne w argumentacji przeciwko przyjmowaniu uchodźców w prasie tabloidowej, a z drugiej strony poparcie dla przyjmowania uchodźców w Europie we wszystkich analizowanych artykułach w dziennikach opiniotwórczych. Zaskakującym wynikiem analizy tych ostatnich była natomiast prawie całkowita identyczność argumentacji, jak również jej niedostateczność, szczególnie w porównaniu z argumentacją tabloidu. Żaden z analizowanych artykułów nie przedstawia tematu z punktu widzenia uchodźców. Biorąc pod uwagę wpływ mediów na wszystkie aspekty życia społecznego, generowanie wiedzy, wzbudzanie emocji i budowanie tożsamości, niniejszy artykuł omawia ważkie konsekwencje dyskursu nacechowanego uprzedzeniami rasowymi na poziomie kognitywnym, afektywnym i behawioralnym, a także rozważa kwestię obniżenia standardów dziennikarskich.