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A Polish Oedipus. On the Situation of the Polish Community in Great Britain in the Context of the TV serial *Londoners**

Introduction; 1. The Polish community in Great Britain; 2. The TV serial *Londoners*; 3. An interpretation of the serial *Londoners*; Conclusion.

Introduction

Although the Poles have lived in Great Britain for almost two centuries they are associated with the year 2004 when the British government opened the labour market to new EU-members. This was the reason why a great number of Polish citizens came to the United Kingdom. Their visible presence caused an increased interest in them. E.g. film makers decided to produce films about present situation of British Polonia (the Polish community abroad). The TV serial *Londyńczycy (Londoners)* is the last production on this subject.

An expression „Polish Oedipus”, used in the title, corresponds with a main character of the Greek mythology and tragedy, researched by René Girard, a French specialist in literature and anthropology [Girard 1987, 152; Girard 1991, 38-46; Girard 1992, 40-43; Girard 1993, 101-112.135-136; Girard 1994, 123-126]¹. Oedipus was accused of crimes against the social order. When Oedipus confessed his guilt his opponents changed their attitude. Their previous aversion changed into admiration. British Polonia is presented in different ways –positive and negative. Polish organizations which are active in Great Britain try to defend Polonia’s good name. This was the reason that they condemned *Londoners*. From their point of view Polish black heroes who are present in the serial justify the statement that this TV production is a kind of negative propaganda. In this article I will give an answer if they were right or not.

* Nniejsze opracowanie stanowi tekst wykładu wygłoszonego w ramach międzynarodowej konferencji zorganizowanej przez Colloquium on Violence and Religion pt. *Fearful Symmetries: Religion, Co-Existence and the Secular* (Londyn, 8-12 lipca 2009 r.).

¹ More on René Girard vide: Romejko 2003-2003, 55-64; Romejko 2007, 59-77.

1. The Polish community in Great Britain

The history of the Polish presence in the British Isles covers the period of the last ten centuries. Sigrid Storråda (Świętosława) was probably the first Pole who lived in Great Britain. Her son Canute the Great ruled in England, Denmark and Norway [Sword, Davies, Ciechanowski 1989, 17]. Regular Polish-British contacts started in the 14th century [Koczy 1939, 23]. Later there were representatives of the state and church authorities, merchants, scientists, religious dissidents and adventurers among those who came from Poland to Great Britain.

The Polish migration to Great Britain started in the 19th century after the collapse of the November Uprising. By 1838 800-1000 Poles had settled in Great Britain. In the 17th century there were only 59 Poles who were naturalized there [Paradowska 1992, 412-413]. The Polish migration after the January Uprising was smaller than the group who came after the November Uprising. Those who came towards the end of the 19th century were economic migrants. Many of them wanted to go to the USA. They did not have enough money to pay for the journey. This was the reason that they decided to stay in Great Britain. They were not warmly welcomed. Especially local labour did not accept them. As cheap workers they were serious competition [Sword 1996, 20].

It is not easy to provide an exact number of Poles who lived in Great Britain at the turn of 19th and 20th centuries. This difficulty is caused by the fact that many Poles changed their original names. Quite a number of Jews who came from the Polish Russia kept their Polish names². Because many Poles lived in London in Jewish districts the local authorities treated them as Jews. Around 1890 there were between 3 and 5 thousand Polish migrants in Great Britain [Badeni 1890, 1-5]. Some of them were able to make a name for themselves. There were writers, artists, engineers and businessmen among them³.

Towards the end of the year 1930, 8 million Poles lived abroad. At the same time the Polish community in Great Britain was one of the smallest. Between 1918 and 1938 1057 Poles settled in Great Britain. There were four main Polish settlements in England: London, Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds. In Scotland Poles settled a local coal basin. Fr Teodor Cichos who was between 1926-1938 the Rector of the Polish Catholic Mission in London estimated that there were 2 thousand Poles in London. 250 Polish families stayed in touch with the Polish mission. Many of them came to London at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries above all from the Polish Russia. They worked as artisans, shopkeepers and

² Between 1881-1914 150 thousand Jews came to the United Kingdom. One of them was Michael Marks. Together with Thomas Spencer he established a chain of shops which is known as Marks & Spencer [Winder 2004, 174-176].

³ E.g. Joseph Conrad (novelist), Feliks Janiewicz (founder of the Philharmonic Society), Edmund Naganowski (novelist and columnist), Emil Młynarski (conductor), Edward and Jan Reszke (opera singers), Tadeusz Godlewski and Edmund Strzelecki (scientists) [Paradowska 1992, 417].

tradesmen. There was a dozen of the Polish intelligentsia in London but they did not maintain contacts with the Polish mission [Sawicki 1944, 30; Tarka 2006, 4].

The situation of the Polish community in Great Britain changed fundamentally during and after the Second World War. After the France's surrender (May, 1940) Polish soldiers and civilians, including members of the Polish government came to Great Britain. After the war the British authorities decided to bring the soldiers of the Polish II Corps who till that time were stationed in Italy to Great Britain. The Brits were afraid of a mutiny, because the soldiers did not accept the post war political order, especially the borders of the new Poland. Soldiers who came to Great Britain were disarmed. The British government preferred the cheapest solution of the „Polish problem” – it expected they would repatriate. 95 thousand soldiers of the group of 249 thousand decided to return to Poland. The new Polish government did not want a quick repatriation – it was afraid that the soldiers from the West could disturb the process of winning power in Poland [Leitgeber 1977, 57-58]. Besides of the Polish soldiers, there was a group of 33 thousand Polish civilians. They were refugees or members of the soldiers' families. After the Second World War, a group of 14 thousand Polish displaced persons came to Great Britain. A decision to invite them was a part of the European Voluntary Workers program. As worker-volunteers they were recruited in Nazi concentration camps in Germany and Austria. In 1949 there were 150 thousand Poles who lived in Great Britain [Patterson 1977, 215-216; Wilson 1992, 19].

The Polish ex-soldiers became a basis for the Polish Resettlement Corps (PRC) which was established in 1946. The corps was a paramilitary organization where its members got an opportunity to learn English and trades which were useful for the British economy [Leitgeber 1977, 77-80; Zubrzycki 1988, 147-153]. The PRC was dissolved in December 1949. Till that time only a few were not able to manage on their own in British society [Zubrzycki 1956, 90-91; Sword, Davies, Ciechanowski 1989, 324-325]. It did not mean that those who managed had an easy life. Many of them experienced difficulties to find a fixed job. They were underpaid. Those who decided to repatriate were kept in humiliating conditions in camps in Scotland [Episkopat 1947, 7]. Those who could not manage on their own lived in hostels set up in previous soldiers' camps. The hostels were gradually closed in the following decade [Ziarski 1953, 7; Zweig 1954, 103-104].

In the 1950s many Poles who decided to stay in Great Britain rose in the economic hierarchy. They took more professional jobs. Many of them got clerical or teaching positions. They opened their own enterprises too. In 1954 there were 1 thousand Polish businessmen; six years later – 2,5 thousand [Sikorski 1966-1967, 195; Chodubski 1995, 77; Radzik 1997, 23]. They bought more and more fixed properties which were earmarked for a private and social use, among others for pastoral and veteran, activity. The Centre for Polish Arts and Culture (POSK) in London is a symbol of a dynamism of the Polish community. The

POSK was built in 1970s [Cud 1989, 10-12]. Until now it is a seat of many Polish educational, social and cultural institutions⁴.

About 20 years after the war the Poles were an integral part of British society. They stood out from other groups of Polonia which settled in various countries of the world. It was because it had military roots and the Polish government in exile and its departments had their seat in London. On these grounds the Poles who lived in Great Britain did not accept the term Polonia. They preferred other names such as: refugees, emigrants or simply Poles. The British Poles emphasized that the term Polonia meant economic migration, e.g. to the USA, and they did not come to Great Britain because of economic but for political reasons [Interview with Koźmiński]. Generally the Poles in Great Britain were active only on professional and neighbourly plane but they were absent in other spheres of British life. Those who tried to make a political career were criticized. They could not expect any help from their countrymen [Kiedy 2002, 2]. This behaviour was a consequence of the ideology of the Polish exile community in Great Britain. On the ideological level they expressed the temporary nature of their existence in Great Britain. This conviction contrasted with their everyday life. Many of them treated Great Britain as their home and not as a foreign country [cf. Garapich 2005, s. 5].

The ideology of being in exile was joined with a negation of communist Poland, to which the British Poles refused the right to be the real Poland. They directed their aversion towards the Poles who in later decades came to Great Britain. They explained they were afraid of communist spies from the country. Not infrequently they were simply unjust in their behaviour. The case of the so-called priest „with regime passports” is an interesting illustration of the above problem [Romejko 2001, 256-257].

The official ideology of the Polish community in exile and its everyday life did not tally. Despite the prohibition of the Polish government in exile the Poles from Great Britain kept in touch with their relatives in Poland. E.g. young men looked for future wives there. The Polish emigration to Great Britain was scanty compared to analogous communities in West Germany, the USA and Canada [Iglicka 2001, 20-24]. The so-called „solidarity” migration was a visible group of Poles who came in the 1980s to Great Britain. Many more Poles went to West Germany and Austria – respectively 91 and 79 thousand. At the same time there were only 4,4 thousand Poles from the „solidarity wave” in the United Kingdom [Kultura 1982, 129]. Many of those who in the 1980s came to Britain ceased to stay in touch with the Polish community and with Polish pastoral care also [Interview with Świerczyński]⁵.

⁴ Cf. the Posk's website: www.posk.org.

⁵ Monsignor Stanisław Świerczyński was the rector of the Polish Catholic Mission in England and Wales (1991-2002), London. The situation was caused by the fact that the Polish community did not accept the newcomers. The other problem was that the solidarity emigration did not have a political but an economic character.

In 1992 the British government decided to abolish visa duty for Poles. Previously it had been difficult to get a British visa. It was expensive too [Sword Sword 1996, 50-51]. This decision resulted in many Poles coming to Great Britain where they took on illegal jobs. The situation changed in 2001. Later it was possible to work legally as a self-employed person. A business visa was necessary to get a work permit. This system generated pathological situations. There were people who were able to profit from access to information. For a payment they helped their countrymen to arrange all necessary certificates. In this way many of them made a Fortune [Garapich 2008a, 741-742].

On May 1, 2004, the British government opened the labour market fully to all new EU-members. In this way it wanted to find a remedy for a shortage on the local labour market with the help of non-Muslim workers. The Muslims were perceived as a source of potential terrorists [Lecture given by Iglicka]. This decision helped those Poles who worked illegally till that time and resulted in more newcomers than expected arriving from Poland. They came not infrequently unprepared, without an arranged job and place to stay. They became an easy prey to various swindlers [cf. Garapich, Foczpański, 2004, 11]. The so called wailing wall – a window of a shop next door to the Posk where job advertisements were placed – became a negative symbol of the Polish presence in Great Britain. There were many Poles near it who abused alcohol and behaved vulgarly. The local authorities, police and Polonia's representatives took action to close the wailing wall. They were successful [Bugajski 2004, 11; Bugajski 2005, 1].

In a relatively short time the Polish newcomers made a name for themselves as good, solid and, above all, cheap workers. This was the reason that many British employers preferred them to the local labourers. It was not rare that non-Polish migrant workers presented themselves as Polish to get a job more easily [Pracodawcy 2007, s. 1]. In past decades the Polish pilot who fought in the Battle of Britain was a symbol of the Polish presence in Great Britain. Nowadays his place is occupied by the Polish plumber [Cf. Śpiwok 2005, 5].

We do not have data about the exact number of Poles who live in Great Britain. This situation results from the lack of precise research about this problem. E.g. data given by the Home Office include only these Poles who are employed in Great Britain. Those who do not work or who work as self-employed are not taken into consideration [Každy 2006, 6]. Manipulated data are often used in an anti-migrant propaganda⁶. The number of Poles in Great Britain is estimated as between 0,5 and 1,5 million. The figure depends on criteria of Polishness⁷. We can expect more precise data after a census which will take place in 2011. In the eyes on an averages Briton the term Pole has a wider meaning. It is caused

⁶ Migration Watch UK is an example of an institution which readily manipulates data. The results of its work are used by representatives of conservative and national parties [Garapich 2004a, 1; Garapich 2004b, 6].

⁷ According to the Federation of Poles there are 0,75-1,5 million Poles in Great Britain [Informator 2007, 166].

by the fact that Poles dominate among A-8 migrants. It is not rare that there are references to the Poles in various press headlines while articles are about migration to UK in generally⁸.

An increase of the Polish community in Great Britain creates favourable conditions for the development of a service industry geared towards Poles. Polish shops with food from Poland, Polish speaking money transfer offices and bank departments are opened in places of Polish settlement. Polish newspapers and magazines are edited. „Dziennik Polski” is the oldest and the most serious daily. „Nowy Czas” is another serious magazine. There are „Cooltura”, „Goniec Polski” and „Polish Express” among known Polish tabloid weeklies. They have weekly a circulation of 20–60 thousand [Garapich 2008, 742]. There are Polish web portals and web broadcasting stations. New Polish local and national organisations have been established. After a moment of hesitation they decided to join the Federation of Poles in Great Britain⁹. The *Polska! Year* – one-year series of cultural events (2009–2010) is an opportunity to present the best of Polish culture [vide www.polskayear.pl].

2. The TV serial *Londoners*

The history of the Polish community in Great Britain is not unknown to film producers in Poland and Great Britain. *Londoners* stands out from other productions with its grand scale and numerous audience¹⁰. The serial was produced between July and November 2008 in Poland and in London among others in „Polish” Ealing. It has 13 parts, 45 minutes each [Ruszyły 2009]. The first part was presented on Thursday, October 23, 2009, at 21.10 on the first channel of Polish Television (TVP1). Successive parts were broadcast every Thursday at 21.10. In fact they were broadcast about 5 minutes later. Each part was preceded by TV commercials. The production of the serial cost 13,5 million PLN (ca. £ 2,5 million) [Ziemia 2008a, 12].

Greg Zliński and Maciej Migas directed the serial. Ewa Popiołek and Marek Kreutz wrote the screenplay. Polish and British actors play in the film. The

⁸ Cf. an article about loses which are generated by foreign citizens who study in Great Britain [Henry 2009, 16]. There is no information about students from Poland there. The largest groups come from Germany and France. Nonetheless the following headline was placed: „Parents will ask why a Polish student can get a place but their own children cannot, warns vice-chancellor”.

⁹ The Federation of Poles was established in 1947 as a platform of dialogue between the British government and the Polish government which officially was not recognized by the British authorities. With the passing of time the federation became an umbrella for other Polish organizations. It has gained recognition in 1989 when the Polish government in exile ended its mission [Interview with Mokrzycki].

¹⁰ Cf. the following films: *Oda do radości* (dir. Anna Kazejak, Jan Komasa, Maciej Migas, 2005); *Outlanders* (dir. Dominic Lees, 2006); *It's a Free World...* (dir. Ken Loach, 2007) and *Somers Town* (dir. Shane Meadows, 2008).

Polish actors are known from previous cinema and TV productions. Greg Zgliński said about *Londoners*: „It’s a story about some Poles who go abroad and they don’t accept the situation they are confronted with. London is for them a symbol. *Londoners* is not a documentary serial and not a serial generally about the Poles in London. It’s a feature film based on some stories which were heard here... The life stories of the main characters of the film has been treated selectively and they are not representative. We don’t talk about average Poles who found their place in new circumstances and live a quiet life. These are rules of commercial production – you chose what suits a spectacular narration” [Subbotko 2008, 15].

Later Greg Zgliński’s opinion turned out to be divergent from TVP’s propaganda. In the advertising campaign the serial was promoted as a kind of modern national epic. It was stressed that you can see the Polish everyday life in the serial. Greg Zgliński himself was aware of this dissonance between his own vision of the film and its promotion by TVP: „I know that the serial is widely advertised and presented as the story of the Polonia and for the Polonia” [Subbotko 2008, 15]. The authors of the screen play Ewa Popiołek and Marek Kreutz express their opinion in the same tone. They wanted to produce not only a kind of „practical” film but a film which should be a feature chronicle of the youngest Polish migration. They quote their staying in London and observation of the life of the Poles there [Małolepszy 2008, 7]. On the internet website on the serial *Londoners* the following statement was placed: „*Londoners* is a film portrait of Poles who lived in the British Isles. (...) The serial presents the good and the bad side of the new Polish migration, talks about problems and difficult choices with which the main characters are confronted. *Londoners* is a feature chronicle of the new Polish migration. (...) It was produced a serial which is a featured fiction; at the same time everything presented in it happened to somebody”¹¹.

The plot of *Londoners* comes down to the history of three couples: Asia (Natalia Rybicka) and Andrzej (Lesław Żurek), Ewa (Gabriela Muskała) and Marcin (Robert Więckiewicz), Mariola (Roma Gąsiorowska) and Darek (Przemysław Sadowski). We meet all of them except Mariola in the first part of the serial. Some of them are in Poland, others in London. Asia is a girl from the countryside. She had just passed her school-leaving examinations and decided to leave. She is going to London to her boy-friend Wojtek (Marcin Bosak), whom she met six months earlier. She does not know that he is a drug dealer. She believes that she is bringing him medicine. In fact she smuggles drugs to London. Marcin, a history teacher is going to London too. He is accompanied by his son Staś (Michał Włodarczyk). Ewa, Marcin’s wife and Staś’ mother, has lived in London for three years. She works as a nurse in a local hospital. Paweł (Rafał Mackowiak), a young financial adviser from Canary Wharf, is going back to London too.

¹¹ <http://www.tvp.pl/serie/serwis/obyczajowe/londynczycy/o-programie>, April 28, 2009.

In London we meet Andrzej and Kinga (Maja Bohosiewicz). Andrzej works as a builder on one of construction sites managed by Darek. Together with Kinga he works in a pub in Soho. Andrzej wants to achieve more than a builder's job. By contrast with him Kinga does not have very ambitious plans. Shoes for 175 pounds and holidays in Tunisia would satisfy her. The house which belongs to Nina (Grażyna Barszczewska), a sixty-year-old Pole, is the place where the heroes of the serial meet each other. She suffers because of a cold relationship with her daughter Kate (Nadia Aldridge) who wants to sell their family house. Nina does not accept that – she is afraid of loneliness in her old age.

Asia does not find Wojtek at the airport. Instead of him she meets his „friends” to whom Wojtek owes money. They take over the drugs which Asia smuggled and leave her somewhere in London. Asia manages to find Wojtek's flat. There she meets Darek. He decides to leave the flat where he lived together with Wojtek. He explains that he has had enough of Wojtek and his acquaintance. He offers her help – he suggests she should go back to Poland. „You are a nice girl. London is not worthy of you” – he explains.

In the pub one of the guests licked Kinga's hand. This incident annoys Andrzej who hits him. He forces Kinga to leave the pub. This irritates Kinga who expected a generous tip. After a quarrel they part. Kinga quickly finds a new „comforter”. It is Robal (Michał Czarnecki) – Andrzej's friend from work. When Andrzej discovers her infidelity he decides to return to Poland where he experiences an alienation from his surroundings. This experience and the fact that Kinga withdrew all the money from their account are the reasons he decides to go to London again.

Ewa is convinced that Marcin and Staś are going to spend their holiday in London. When Marcin tells her that he wants to stay in London for a longer time she is not content. In the meantime she builds a new life in London. In this life there is no place for the daydreaming husband and the adolescent son. However, there is a place for her Indian lover Zayed (Selva Rasalingam), who works as a doctor in the same hospital, and for taekwondo training. Ewa's double life becomes the reason that she parts from her husband. In this way Marcin gets an opportunity to get know London from a homeless perspective.

Asia ends her relationship with Wojtek. Thank to this decision she is able to stabilise her personal life. She uses Mariola's help whom she meets by accident in a pub. She stays in her flat. Mariola seems to be a person who is well up on London's everyday life. Soon it will change. Asia will be Mariola's support. Once Asia confesses to Mariola that she must not come home. She is afraid her father would mock her that she believed Wojtek. Mariola answers that for her father is not important where she actually lives.

Because Asia needs money she decides to phone Paweł, whom she met during the flight to London. Then he invited her to go with him to a party. He offered 300 pounds. Asia phones him and says she accepts his invitation. The friendship with Paweł gives Asia an opportunity to make important decisions

in her life. Paweł and his boss James (Ryan Hurst) fix Asia up with a maid's job at Alvin (James Doherty), a stock exchange tycoon. Next they force her to steal data from Alvin's computer. Although Asia does what they expected, she changes her decision – she throws the portable disc with the stolen data into the Thames. Her decision was influenced by Alvin's friendly attitude towards her. He advised her to start her studies in one of the make-up schools in London. She parts with Paweł who prefers his career to her.

When Andrzej is looking for a job in Canary Wharf he meets James by accident. James was the man whom he hit in the pub and later won a vodka duel with him. In this way Andrzej impressed James. He proposes to Andrzej to run a canteen in the office in which he works as a director. Andrzej gets the job but at the same time Romek (Marcin Tyrol), who till this time has run the canteen, is fired. Andrzej intervenes on Romek's behalf – they start to work together. In order to achieve promotion they agree to cook dinner for James' guests. The dinner becomes a disaster because Wiola (Małgorzata Buczkowska), Romek's wife suddenly refuses to help. Again Andrzej works as a builder. He hits on idea to run a catering firm for Polish builders. Together with Romek he buys a buffet-van. Thanks to Nina's financial support he buys 16 more buffet-vans. He wants to expand his new venture.

Asia becomes friends with Andrzej. Before they met in various situations. This friendship slowly turns into love. Mariola meets Darek. She decides to marry him. Before she wanted to marry an Englishman. This was the reason she tried to become friends with Peter (Dominic Cazenove), an Englishman who cooperated with Darek in the building business. Because of Mariola's romantic character Peter decided to „sell” her to Darek. To win Mariola's acceptance Darek plays an Englishman. By accident it comes to light that he is Polish. At first Mariola is very angry. She reconciles herself with Darek when she discovers she is pregnant.

The last part of *Londoners* is a spectacular happy end. Asia and Andrzej confess they love each other. Asia gets a place in a make-up school. Andrzej becomes a businessman. Darek buys Nina's house. Nina sold it him on condition that she would live there until her death. Paweł and James – the villains of the serial are punished – some clerks in their company are made redundant. They manage to stay. Wojtek is under arrest. He was „betrayed” by his own mother who preferred to see him alive in prison than free and dead. The marriage of Marcin and Ewa gets a new chance. Ewa meets Zayed's mother who tells her that he is engaged and will marry a woman in India in six months. It is the reason that Ewa's relation to Zayed cools. After a road accident she is taken to a hospital where Marcin and Staś watch over her.

Londoners was warmly received by the Polish audience. It was proceeded by a big advertising campaign in the Polish mass media including the Internet [cf. the web site: londynczycy.tvp.pl]. It is pointed out that the first part was watched by 5 million people. The average audience amounted to 3,83 million.

It was the largest audience at that time. The audience was dominated by people from villages and small towns, the poorly educated and women. It does not mean that other social groups were not represented¹². TV announcers emphasized that everybody likes *Londoners* and the Poles from Great Britain discern their everyday life in it. E.g. during a transmission from London (on the background of Tower Bridge) Katarzyna Nowicka, a reporter of TVP's evening news *Wadomości*, quoted opinions after the broadcast of the first part of *Londoners*. She said, that the Poles praised *Londoners*, because "this is the London they know, (...) the London they love, where they work and are happy". She added that they saw in the serial "...their everyday migrant reality"¹³.

Representatives of the old and new Polonia's organizations in Great Britain expressed a contrary opinion of *Londoners*. From their point of view the situation presented in the serial stretches the truth. E.g. Monika Tkaczyk, a trustee of the Polonia organization Poland Street said: „The film spreads slanders about the Poles. Both the older and younger generation of Polish migrants do not accept the view which is given in the film. ...that what we watch is not the depiction of the real Polish life in abroad. I think that some of the scenes were simply invented. For instance a scene in which a Polish shop assistant wears only lingerie at work...” [Ziembra 2008b, 6].

It was pointed out that the serial is an act of sabotage of the attempt to improve the Polish reputation in Great Britain. The representatives of Polish organizations called for a boycott and protests against the serial. Representatives of such organisations as the Federation of Poles, the Polish Professionals and the Polish City Club issued an appeal to TVP. A petition was sent to the National Council of Radio Broadcasting and Television in Poland and to the speakers of the Senate and the Parliament. Wiktor Moszczyński, the spokesman of the Federation of Poles, said: „The Poles were proud to be called Londoners before. And suddenly we experience a programme which exposes them to ridicule. It undermines the pride of the Poles who live here. (...) What a pity that it was not shown that Poles pay their taxes here” [Ziembra 2008b, 6].

An idea to sell the serial to a British broadcaster received severe condemnation. Jan Mokrzycki, the chairman of the Federation of Poles, noted: „We are able to tolerate that *Londoners* was produced and broadcast in Poland. But the idea to sell it to British television is madness. (...) We fight every negative opinion in the British mass media of the Poles who live here and here we stab

¹² 4,3 mln widzów 'Londyńczyków', http://www.wirtualnemedial.pl/article/2524032_43 mln_widzow_Londynczykow.htm, May 2, 2009; 5 mln widzów obejrzało premierę 'Londyńczyków', http://www.wirtualnemedial.pl/article/2502470_5 mln_widzow_obejrzało_premiere_Londynczykow.htm, May 1, 2009; 'Londyńczycy 2' z niższym budżetem, zdjęcia od maja, http://www.wirtualnemedial.pl/article/2692784_Londynczycy_2_z_nizszym_budzetem_zdjecia_od_maja.htm, May 2, 2009.

¹³ A short reportage before the broadcasting of the second part of the *Londoners*, TVP1, October 30, 2008.

ourselves in the back. It is hard to believe that Polish Television, which is supported by Polish tax-payers, is behind this" [Ziemia 2008a, 12]. Mr Mokrzycki hopes that the protests will be successful: „We have, after all, a certain experience and we know the country better than others" [Ziemia 2008a, 12].

Polish politicians spoke on *Londoners* too. They were criticised by Joanna Fabisiak, an MP from the Civic Platform, who is the chairman of TV Polonia's council. She forced the council to condemn the serial. Marek Borowski, an MP and the chairman of the Council for the Poles Abroad, was informed about the serial too. He promised to urge the screenplay authors to meet the representatives of Polonia in Great Britain. At the same time he distanced himself from the question of the serial. He emphasized that it is not a problem for Polish MPs [Protestów 2008, 12].

It is expected that the demands of Polonia's representatives will influence the sequel of *Londoners*. An interesting initiative was taken up, i.e. a competition entitled: *My adventure with Great Britain*. It was organised by TVP and Grupa Wydawnicza Polskapress – the editor of the daily „Polska”. Participants had to write a short story about the most interesting, the most shocking and the most delightful experience of England. It was decided that the most interesting stories would be used in the sequel [Szybki 2008, 14].

3. An interpretation of the serial *Londoners*.

„We fight every negative opinion in the British mass media of the Poles who live here and here we stab ourselves in the back”. The words quoted above of Mr Mokrzycki are a critique, which we can describe, after René Girard, as Oedipal. Is Mr Mokrzycki right in his opinion? Are we permitted to use the adjective Oedipal in the description of *Londoners*? Often the serial is accused of presenting negative heroes, who strengthen negative stereotypes about the Polish community in Great Britain and that the serial does not present positive aspects of the Polish presence in London¹⁴.

There are about 40 Poles in the serial. Three of them are clearly negative heroes. There are other seven negative anti-heroes but they have a lesser signification in the serial. Wojtek and Paweł stand out as anti-heroes. Wojtek is a small drug dealer who breaks the law and comes into conflict with London's criminal gangs. He is a habitual liar too. He is ready to lie to his friends and even to his mother. In this way he exposes them to a serious danger. Paweł is a young parvenu from Łódź. He gave up his studies to come to London. In his

¹⁴ Cf. Mr Moszczyński's statement: „Everything presented is only half the truth. Positive aspects are not shown such as: activity in various organizations, importance of the church which helps alcoholics... In spectators' eyes there are lonely Poles, who spend their lives in London's underworld. It is difficult to resist an impression, that they are not rightful citizens of the European Union, who can, after all, work and act legally" [vide Ziemia 2008b, 6].

opinion money is the most important thing in the world. Once he explains to Asia: „...because that's a business. That's how it's done here. Because that's a shit-hot feeling to have somebody by the short and curlies and to know he can do nothing because you have money. Do you understand?”. When he accidentally meets his friend from university and his family and experiences that in fact he is spiritually a poor man he is not able to make proper a decision. Jacek, alias Doctor (Janusz Chabior) is the third clearly negative Pole in the serial. He is a homeless alcoholic. There is only one important thing for him, namely a bottle of cider. He has no scruples to exploit Polish greenhorns who come from Poland to find work in London.

Other „black sheep” appear accidental. We can point out: Agnieszka and Jacek, who cheated Asia at the wailing wall; two vulgar Polish women, who gave Darek and Peter a dressing-down during a dancing lesson; Andrzej's future brother-in-law Grzesiek, a social parasite, who prefers to live off his future mother-in-law; Michał and Anna, young people from Poland who, together with Marcin, take part in an English course – describing Poland they are able to talk only about vodka and football fans.

Other Poles we meet in *Londoners* are average people. Darek is the most outstanding figure of the serial. He comes from Białystok and he has lived for six years in London. He is a resourceful businessman in the building trade. He is honest – he pays his workers on time. When he gets a good contract he pays more. He is modest which is proved by the fact that he drives an old van. He helps others e.g. he helps Nina in her illness and agrees to buy her house giving her an opportunity to live there until her death. When Marcin and Ewa quarrelled he gave Staś refuge in his room. He is very patient towards Mariola.

Staś is an interesting person in the serial. In the beginning he seems to be wayward. Knowing him closer we are confronted with a drama of a twelve-year-old boy, from whom everything he loved was taken. First he must leave his friends from Poland. When he made friends with Miguel, a Brazilian boy, he experiences that Miguel must go back to Brazil. The most difficult problem in his life is the relations between his parents.

In the serial we meet about 20 non Polish persons. Two of them are clearly negative figures. It is James and Kate. James is Paweł's boss and guru at the same time. Imitating him, Paweł wants to prove that he is better than James. James comes from a small town near to Liverpool. From his point of view life is a permanent struggle. James is impressed by those who are strong, e.g. Andrzej who conquers him in a vodka duel. James does not tolerate those who are weak, e.g. he treat McCormick (Ben Adams), his subordinate, like dirt – spitefully he remind him his Scottish roots. James is a person without moral restraints. He is ready to use others or to break the law to make a profit.

Kate is Nina's daughter. It is difficult to describe her as a Pole because she forbids her mother to speak Polish to her children. Nina teaches her grandchildren Polish in secret. When she find out that her mother has sold the house

to Darek she demands the money, which she paid for her mother's eye operation. These two women are the only representatives of the old Polonia in Great Britain. Their relationship does no credit to those who settled during and after the Second World War in Great Britain and who expressed themselves as highly moral. On the contrary they accused those from communist Poland of being examples of moral degeneracy.

Other non Polish figures are neutral or positive. John, Staś's English teacher is one of the positive heroes of the serial. He can discern that Staś is a „fine lad”. In the face of difficulties he is kind and resolute at the same time. Alvin, in whose house Asia works, is kind to her. He advises her to study what she likes. On the „English side” there is no person who could be a counterpart of Darek.

The heroes we meet in *Londoners* do not justify the theory about serial's support for negative. The serial presents average people, a widely understood Polish working class, who try to find their future in London. This description of Polish Londoners contrasts with an image which is promoted by the Polish organizations in Great Britain, which do not accept a Polish plumber and would prefer a Pole who has a career e.g. in the City¹⁵.

Michał P. Garapich, who works as a researcher in Cronem (Centre for Research on Nationalism, Ethnicity and Multiculturalism), comments on the criticism by Poland Street, one of the new Polish organizations in Great Britain: „A nervous reaction shows, that the young lawyers and PR, marketing and bank professionals, who are present in this organization feel a dislike of and prejudice towards people – who are, as a matter of fact, the majority of the «Polish Londoners» – of another class background and poorly education. They would prefer that all Poles would be professors or bankers. In fact they do not protest against the message of the serial, but they express discomfort at being associated with people of a lower social position. Speaking of such a trivial matter they stress their elite status and that they are something better (...) than a builder or a cleaner. An elitism which appears here unexpectedly is unfortunately typical for Polish organisations” [Garapich 2008b, 58].

The image of „Polish London” which is presented in *Londoners* is not accepted by Polonia's representatives but it is welcomed by those for whom they were produced – by average spectators in Poland. It is confirmed by recent studies that viewers are of this type. It is expected that the heroes of the serial are „one of us” and it is so. The spectators of *Londoners* do not feel strange. It is because the serial is alternated with shots of places in London which are commonly known e.g. Tower Bridge. These are the places where we see the heroes of the serial. For the *Londoners*' producers it does not matter that there is a considerable distance between „Polish” Ealing and the city centre. The London which is presented in the serial is more attractive than it is in reality. Even a squat where Marcin and Doctor sleep is more „posh” than many houses in Poland and Great

¹⁵ Here we can point such organization as: the Polish City Club and the Polish Professionals in London where there is no place for a plumber from Poland.

Britain. The only reminder of the actual state of the city is contained in Kinga's statement, who complains to her friend: „I will not hold on... These are my best years... I suffocate in this bloody tube, I work my arse every night. What for? What the hell for?” [Londyńczycy, part 1]. Each of the heroes knows he/she has one task to fulfil which is quite well known in Poland: to survive. Robbie Williams reminds us about this duty in his song *Supreme*, which starts every part of *Londoners*. The singer appeals to his audience: „You must survive” which is to say in the „London jungle”.

There is a certain divergence which is visible between the opinions of the producers of the serial and TVP. On the one hand it is pointed out that *Londoners* is only a commercial product and as such its role is to entertain spectators in Poland and as a consequence to sell more commercial [Ozaist 2008, 3]¹⁶. On the other hand the serial is billed as a docufiction on Poles in London¹⁷.

Is the serial *Londoners* contaminated by the Oedipal way of thinking? Yes and no. If we assume that *Londoners* was produced to entertain the audience in Poland, than we will discover that this serial is one of many productions e.g. in Poland and Great Britain. Some of them are able to evaluate accurately modern society, others repeat various stereotypes, the rest break social taboos and give an opportunity to discuss them [interview with Kolankiewicz]. A certain problem appears if we treat the serial as a chronicle of the modern Polish migration. Such interpretation is promoted by TVP without considering potential consequences. In the second case it could be possible that somebody, being confronted with the message which is brought by the serial, would feel uncomfortable or offended and, as a consequence, would protest [cf. Ozaist 2008, 3]. Before *Londoners* was broadcast Greg Zgliński said: „Everybody sees from the angle of his own experience. Those, who experienced similar situations, who had difficulties at the beginning, would recognize storyline in the serial. Someone else can say that everything was made up because the hero got a job at once and his life followed a normal pattern” [Sępek 2008, 63].

The Polish activists in Great Britain expect that the serial will not be sold to British broadcasters. Is the anxiety that it would be stabbing ourselves in the back justified? The answer could seem to be „yes” but on one condition, namely, that each Pole would be an outstanding person, e.g. a Spitfire pilot in the past or a high-ranking official in the today's City. Yet this is not the Polish

¹⁶ Andrzej Urbański, the ex-chairman of the TVP said: „This film is made for the audience in the country. ...there are many of them – four millions. Firstly Poles like this film. Secondly it is not a story about the middle-class in the Anglo-Saxon sense [vide Moi 2008, 58].

¹⁷ *Londoners* was presented at the last International Public Television Screening Conference (INPUT) in Warsaw. There is the following description of the serial in the catalogue which was edited on the occasion of the conference: „«Londoners» presents in an attractive way those who had the courage their lot and start over abroad. We see Poles, for whom London is a workplace, and those who fight determinedly for survival there. This serial is also a dramatized chronicle of the youngest Polish migrant circles”. [vide Input 2009, 162].

reality in London. The Poles who live there are various. There are those who managed to achieve a lot, those who are simply ordinary people and there are pathological individuals too. We can suppose that a potential broadcast of *Londoners* would not damage the good image of the Polish community in Great Britain. It is justified to expect, that the serial would become a favourable occasion to present the Poles as similar people to the British and to show that the Poles are something more than a collective name for newcomers from Middle and East Europe. The very high quality initiative *Polska! Year* is worthy of being recommended but taking into consideration the mental capability of an average Briton it is not sufficient.

Conclusion

From the point of view of average Britons the fact that the Poles were allowed to settle in Great Britain during and after the Second World War and in 2004 and later was and is a consequence of British openness, tolerance and readiness to show a „political generosity”. This is not true. The most important reason was pragmatic. It was simply profitable to support the Poles, first as an ally then as cheap workers.

There is a dark side to the pragmatic vision of the world. People who want to be pragmatic above all will be ready to sacrifice others to achieve their own goals. They will not notice the real consequences of their decisions. Representatives of the Polish community in Great Britain try to protect the good name of their fellow countrymen. Sometimes they forget about necessary self-restraint. Not every negative description of Polish life should be criticised. *Londoners* is an example of such excessive zeal. The opinion that the serial is a stab in the back is not justified. A criticised idea to broadcast the serial in Great Britain could bring more benefits than losses. It would give an opportunity to experience a bit of Polishness and above all that the Poles are not as alien as many Britons think.

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Polski Edyp. Sytuacja społeczności polskiej w Wielkiej Brytanii w kontekście serialu telewizyjnego *Londyńczycy*

Streszczenie

Dzieje społeczności polskiej w Wielkiej Brytanii obejmują ponad 150 lat. Dla wielu Brytyjczyków Polacy – nie licząc krótkiego okresu II wojny światowej – nie stanowili interesującego tematu. Polonią brytyjską zajmowała się wąska grupa badaczy. Sytuacja uległa zmianie na skutek przyjęcia Polski do Unii Europejskiej (2004). Ponieważ Wielka Brytania jako jeden z nielicznych krajów otworzyła rynek pracy dla nowych

członków UE, na Wyspach Brytyjskich pojawiała się znaczna ilość „nowych Europejczyków”; większość z nich stanowili Polacy. Imigrantami zaczęto interesować się intensywniej niż dotychczas. Poświęcano im nie tylko opracowania naukowe, artykuły prasowe, lecz także utwory literackie oraz filmy. Jednym z nich jest wyemitowany przez TVP 1 na przełomie lat 2008/2009 serial pt. *Londyńczycy*. W kraju został on przyjęty pozytywnie, czego potwierdzeniem była wysoka oglądalność. Inaczej oceniano go w Wielkiej Brytanii, szczególnie w środowiskach działaczy polonijnych. Krytykowano go, że prezentowany w nim obraz społeczności polskiej jest kłamliwy. Oceniano go jako sabotaż, który niweczy działania podejmowane w obronie dobrego imienia Polaków. Postrzegano w nim postawę typową dla mitologicznego Edypa, który przyznawał się do „grzechów”, których nie popełnił. Przy okazji krytyki ujawniała się tendencja do zawłaszczania praw do decydowania o tym, który obraz „brytyjskiego Polaka” jest słuszny. Dla działaczy polonijnych jest nim osoba wyjątkowa – w przeszłości bohaterski żołnierz walczący „za wolność waszą i naszą”, obecnie robiący karierę w londyńskim City. Nie ma tam miejsca na przeciętność, a tym bardziej na mierność, na którą za to znalazło się miejsce w serialu *Londyńczycy*. Problematycznym okazał się sposób reklamowania serialu – w ramach kampanii reklamowej promowano go nie jako serial mający dostarczyć rozrywki, lecz – co stanowi zdecydowane nadużycie – jako „kronikę najnowszej emigracji”.