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The Ukrainian Refugee "Crisis" and the (Re)production of Whiteness in Austrian and Czech Public Politics

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Abstract

This text brings into analytical focus the workings of whiteness within the politics regarding Ukrainian refugees in two neighboring countries, Austria and Czechia. This comparison aims to contextualize various racial hierarchies in which Ukrainian refugees are embedded, and to connect public discourses translated by mass media and critically accepted by scholars and experts with the personal experience of refugees and those recruited to help them in reception centers. We follow the layering and conversion of racial hierarchies through examining three interrelated realms of public policy: (1) the conflation of illiberal and liberal populisms concerning the Russian invasion and the subsequent refugee movements in the discursive practices of leading politicians and those responsible for refugee politics; (2) the intersectionality of gender, class, and race as a locus of control over Ukrainian women, who comprise the majority of those fleeing the country; and (3) elaborating an extreme case of forging whiteness, within the overt and covert racist practices concerning Ukrainian Romani refugees. To conclude, we discuss possible directions for future research that apply critical whiteness studies for understanding how racial hierarchies design public politics concerning refugees, and what can be done to minimize the injustices determined by whiteness.

Keywords

Whiteness; Anti-Roma discrimination; racial hierarchy; liberal nationalism

Prologue

In this text, we examine the reception of civilians (mostly women) who have fled Ukraine after the Russian invasion, exploring the emerging problems and

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challenges of this refugee "crisis."[1] We argue that critical whiteness studies offer the most suitable lens for unpacking such challenges, facilitating a better understanding of how to minimize the injustices produced by racially and nationalistically informed practices concerning refugees.

Our analysis of the rhetoric that accompanies this refugee "crisis" has convinced us that we are witnessing the (re)production of liberal racism – an ideology that espouses "making the best of the European experience the model for everyone, and the eventual perfection of mankind consisting in everyone becoming creative Europeans" – in which one group is necessarily seen as irreparably inferior to another group because of cultural disadvantage (Popkin 1989, 89). We accept liberal racism as an indispensible part of liberal nationalism, the umbrella concept introduced by Yael Tamir (1993) to encompass multiple, widespread theorizations aimed at objectivizing negative images of nationalism as a form of political consciousness that inevitably leads to chauvinism and to other forms of injustice. We adopt a critical view on liberal nationalism as inevitably producing the risk of generating various forms of social hierarchies (Huddy and Del Ponte 2019), especially in countries with a recent authoritarian background (Kiss 1995).

More cultural rather than racial as such, liberal racism combines racial or quasi-racial description with characterizations of national customs, religion, language, and other features (Smith 2015, 120–21). This mixture has made nationalistically tinged racism not only an effective ideological complement to the project of colonial expansion but also a source for the production of an invisible norm, which universalizes humanness, simultaneously erasing its racial character (Montag 1997, 285).

In this text, we return to such racism its visibility – by examining how Ukrainian refugees are embedded in various racial hierarchies by national-level integration policy actors. The critical visualization of whiteness is possible only with consistent contextualization, which, we argue, involves a revision of the intersectionality of gender, class, race, and nation. We offer a comparative analysis that brings into focus the entangled history of applying racial hierarchies in two neighboring Central European nation states, Austria and the Czech Republic, with very different approaches to refugees that nevertheless involve the imposition of whiteness.

1 Since the 2010s, a critical view on conceptualizing the issues and challenges regarding refugees in terms of "crisis" has developed in various realms, from deepening the understanding of visualization of refugees, for instance (Memou 2019), to the critical analysis of EU politics as exploiting discourses of emergency (Maricut-Akbik 2021).

Introduction: When Whiteness Questions Subjectivity

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in late February 2022, refugee assistance has become one of the central tasks of the European social security system, as well as national social welfare policy. Taking in huge numbers of forced migrants, mostly women, minors, the elderly, and people with special health-related needs, European states, especially in Central Europe, have faced numerous challenges in developing appropriate integration strategies and managing social mobility among refugees. In early March 2022, the EU had decided to regulate the status of Ukrainian refugees in accordance with its Temporary Protection Directive (2001/55/EC), to ensure better options for integration and also to align the national legislation of EU members with the EU mission of protecting refugees.[2] This strategy has emerged from the intention to share responsibility for managing refugees among different levels of authority and local communities. European countries have initiated multiple projects aimed at supporting Ukrainian refugees. including various services in the Ukrainian language, and special measures for providing access to regular education and the labor market. Previous critical analysis of temporarily displaced persons shows that they remain totally dependent on state and national-level standards of minimal social protection (Bulakh 2020). While these standards vary from country to country, those who have arrived in Germany or Austria have fared better than those in Poland, Slovakia, or Czechia.

But what have Ukrainian refugees actually experienced since they escaped the brutality of war? Forty-year-old Nadezhda,[3] who fled Eastern Ukraine in April 2022 with her 20-year-old daughter, lives in Austria with the status of a temporarily displaced person. She has been on the waiting list for social housing for more than two months and enjoys (or, in her words, "abuses") the hospitality of the family that initially hosted her. She explains some of her experiences with searching for housing:

> They [the Austrian authorities] give good housing to those they like. And who am I?! A permanent makeup specialist, a single mother without higher education. I was already unofficially offered a chance to meet a lonely 75-year-old Austrian man, who has several apartments, and who "needs

2 Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382 of March 4, 2022, establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine within the meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC, and having the effect of introducing temporary protection. On March 17, 2022, the Czech Republic issued Law 65/2022 Zákon o některých opatřeních v souvislosti s ozbrojeným konfliktem na území Ukrajiny vyvolaným invazí vojsk Ruské federace, aimed at connecting the EU Directive with national regulations.

3 All names of research participants are pseudonyms.

> care." The idea was that I need to ask at the meeting what expectations he has for such care. But I do not lose hope to find something![4]

Even if Ukrainian refugees arriving in Austria do not provide any information about their social status in official forms, the mandatory interviews with employees of the migration service and social services become a source of information about refugees, based on the impressions of the interviewers.

A Czech colleague involved in assisting refugees reports her impressions from observing the arrival of refugees at the railway station in Brno, the country's second largest city: "They [Czech families who offer accommodation to Ukrainian refugees] have gone to the railway station to observe newly arrived refugees. They walk around and choose among the refugees, like in a slave market, those that they will agree to host."[5]

These and other conversations with those who have escaped the war and those that help refugees to cope with the first challenges of life abroad point to the potential risks of exclusion, which stands in stark contrast to the mission espoused in official EU documents, namely, "fostering self-reliance and enabling the displaced to live in dignity as contributors to their host societies, until voluntary return or resettlement."[6] These risks are common for forced migrants, even in the case of Ukrainian refugees, for whom the intersectionality of gender, race, class, and nation has afforded a privileged position in the local "hierarchy of tolerance" (Božič et al. 2022). In European countries following the Directive of the EU, Ukrainian refugees have already received more opportunities for integration, including better health insurance and more options for implementing the right to work, than refugees from the Middle East or even those from Ukraine who arrived after the annexation of Crimea and the escalation of the military operation in eastern Ukraine in the period between 2014 and 2022. But what can these better opportunities tell us about respect for the subjectivity of refugees?

The struggle for agency among refugees, especially women, is a central concern for the international efforts to manage forced migration (Río and Alonso-Villar 2012). International experts insist that any division of refugees, or even migrants in general, in terms of the degree of their proactive or reactive positioning, comes with the very real risk of objectifying them (Turton 2003).

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4 Personal communication, June 8, 2022.

5 Personal communication, June 30, 2022.

6 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (2016) Lives in Dignity: From Aid-Dependence to Self-reliance. Forced Displacement and Development. Brussels

From the very careful selection of terminology and language[7] to the choice of protection measures, the international system of refugee protection aims at including the experiences of all who have fled their permanent place of residence due to the inability to live in safety.

The headlong and often unmanageable changes that accompany forced migration sharpen the dilemma best articulated by Agamben, who opposes "bare life" to political existence, *zōē* to *bios*, and exclusion to inclusion (Agamben 1998, 8). The choice to inhabit the spaces of least extremes initiates the processes "that bring the individual to objectify his own self, constituting himself as a subject and, at the same time binding himself to a power of external control" (ibid., 119). As with other life changes, forced migration contextualizes an individual's location as physically situated in a spatial and temporal frame, in a specific (national) territory, collective, shared, and jointly constructed (Vacchelli 2011, 772).

Refugees find themselves in between different contexts of statehood and nationhood, including the entire set of intrastate regimes, gender regimes, and those gender-, class-, and nation-informed hierarchies that regulate both public and private life in European nation states. Along with this inter-country in-betweenness, forced displacement is a part of deterritorializing demographic flows within which Ukrainian refugees experience "disintegration from within and invasion from without of family and community as (relatively) autonomous sites of social production and identification" (Brown 1993, 393). Refugees are incited to try and practice behavior-based identities, accompanied by the production of disciplinary practices charged with conjuring and regulating "subjects through classificatory schemes, naming and normalizing social behaviors" (ibid.).

The intention of host societies to help refugees become economically independent stems from the intention to embed as many as possible of the new arrivals in the middle class, a move "that represents . . . normalization rather than politization" (ibid., 395). Such goals are reflected in the politics of placement; for example, supporting Ukrainian academics through short-term nonresidential fellowships or stretching the rules to facilitate the development of individual entrepreneurship in many EU countries. This short-term planning, central to the assimilation of those who obtain the status of temporarily displaced persons, reinvents the multilevel production of whiteness as a main source of desirable behavior or identity that "signals

7 For instance, experts prefer not to use any definitions related to the "voluntary" or "involuntary" choice to migrate, instead opening up space for individual suggestions from the side of displaced people themselves.

the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage" (Frankenberg 1993, 236–37). It further reinvents social hierarchies and makes refugees (especially those who even before leaving Ukraine faced discrimination) more vulnerable in front of these multiple shortcomings in bridging short- and long-term strategies of integration.

The remainder of this article brings into focus the white "experience" of refugees from Ukraine, mostly women, as central to shaping their new subjectivity. We follow the definition of whiteness developed within gender studies, as "a multi-layered construct embedded in the fabric of westernised society and centred on the way that white institutions, cultures, and people are racialised and ethnicised by history and society" (ibid.).

Our analysis focuses on three interrelated realms of producing whiteness within the Ukrainian refugee "crisis." First, we examine the reproduction of various racial hierarchies applied to refugees that have resulted from the conflation of illiberal and liberal populist nationalism concerning the Russian invasion and the subsequent refugee movements. Then, we examine the intersectionality of gender, class, race, and nation as a locus of control over Ukrainian women. We explore the discursive practices concerning the deeply rooted, inter- and intra-racial hierarchies in which Ukrainians are embedded, and how they challenge already developed approaches to understanding the gender regimes experienced by Ukrainian women. In the final section of the analysis, we elaborate an extreme case of forging whiteness, within the overt and covert racist practices concerning Ukrainian Romani women who have fled to Europe as a result of the war with Russia.

To make the analysis more instructive, we examine the pressure of racial hierarchies on the politics concerning Ukrainian refugees, and refugees themselves in Central Europe, through comparing Austria and Czechia. If whiteness is a relational category, "coconstructed with a range of other racial and cultural categories, with class and with gender" (Frankenberg 1993, 236), comparing two neighboring Central European countries, with closely entangled histories and significant differences in the politics concerning refugees, helps to situate the experiences of refugees beyond the dichotomy of West and East, socialist and capitalist, post-imperial and post-colonial, thus avoiding the risk of transhistorical essentialization.

Since 2015, Austria has taken a position as one of the European leaders in managing the refugee "crisis" caused by the military conflicts in Syria and Afghanistan. The country has garnered second place among EU members on the number of refugees accepted per capita. At the same time, Austria remains

a long-time target of consistent critique from the side of European authorities, who cite the country's need to strengthen women's rights and gender equality, constantly threatened by the dominance of conservative patriarchal practices regarding women's reproductive rights (Mijatović 2022). As in other Central and Eastern European countries, Czechia's resistance to accepting refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, and other hotspots has gained a notorious reputation. The total number of accepted refugees in the period from 2015 to 2022 did not exceed one hundred, and overtly racist anti-Muslim discursive practices are shared by very different political camps (Vymětal and Šíchová 2015). Furthermore, there is virtually no organizational development of services and politics targeted at accepting, managing, and integrating refugees.

Our analysis is informed by publications in mass media (in particular, the most popular internet portals and newspapers) and scholarly attempts to critically revise the impact of whiteness on national public politics related to refugees. We have engaged in purposeful sampling, based on our theoretical interests (Rapley 2014). The primary dataset has been collected through fieldwork that includes 12 informal, unstructured interviews with refugees (conducted in Russian and Ukrainian), as well as those recruited to help them in the initial reception centers (conducted in Russian, Czech and German). One of the authors has also conducted participant observation at one such center, for a period of four months. Finally, we have read and analyzed Facebook posts created by both groups of research participants, again engaging in theoretically informed purposeful sampling.

Setting the Stage: The Conflation of Whiteness in Liberal and Illiberal Populist Nationalisms

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has become yet another dividing line in Europe, not only in matters such as sanctions against Russia, military support for Ukraine, or new energy policy, but also in relation to refugees. The divisions are rooted in the West–East dichotomy and the obvious differences in the experience of accepting and integrating refugees, as well as the attitudes reflected in the rhetoric of public politicians aimed at shaping a desirable idea of Europeanness. This section aims to elaborate the conflation between two types of populist outlooks: liberal populist nationalism based upon eliminating race-informed arguments, including their critique as irrelevant to the politics of equality for different groups of refugees, and the illiberal populist nationalism that stems from manipulating public fears about migration.

Liberal Insensitivity toward Whiteness

Before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, many European scholars were relatively united in defining the refugee situation in the mid-2010s as a "crisis." But the explanations for the driving forces underlying the "crisis" varied significantly. While right-wing politicians continued to play the national security card, which views the arrival of refugees as a serious threat to the nation, and to shift the blame from the political-economic structures that cause displacement in the first place onto refugees themselves (Holmes and Castañeda 2016), critically thinking scholars examined neoliberal austerity, played out through high and increasing levels of unemployment, as well as increasing inequalities in property, income, and welfare as the main sources of the refugee "crisis." In addition, the EU project as a whole, with its framing of civilization, peace, prosperity, and integration, started to be seen by many such experts as undergoing a crisis of legitimacy, with an increasingly critical view on the whiteness inherent to the core of this project (Dahlstedt and Neergaard 2019). These trends, common for many Western European nation states, could be recognized also in the recent and current vicissitudes of Austrian politics concerning refugees.

The specific composition of actors involved in the development of Austria's refugee integration policy is reflected in the cooperation between the Social Democratic Party of Austria (*die Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs, SPÖ*) and Caritas,[8] opposed in public space to the ultra-right forces that have significant influence in the country's politics and policies (Rheindorf and Wodak 2018). In an interview with the news daily *Der Standard*, Michael Häupl[9] responded to a question about the possible change in the mood of the Austrian population toward Ukrainian refugees, seemingly similar to the decline in positive attitudes toward Syrian refugees. He answered sharply: "I do not believe that. The mood did not change in 2015 either. It has polarized itself. Enemies of migration were there 15 years before and they will be there afterwards" (Kroisleitner and Stuiber 2022).

Reliance on the experience of integrating refugees from Syria and Afghanistan has become one of the components of national-level public discourse on Austrian policy toward Ukrainian refugees. One of the managers at Caritas, in answering a query about the procedure to confirm the status of a Ukrainian child with severe disability as a "dependent person," remarked:

8 Caritas is a social aid organization affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church and a member of Caritas Internationalis, founded in 1903.

9 Häupl was a regional leader of the *SPÖ* and the mayor of Vienna from 1994 to 2018, and he has been one of the main ideologues behind the organizational approach to refugee integration since 2015.

> Everything was thought out before the current crisis – how to get additional help for a family with a disabled child, how to solve problems with payments. Everything was worked out eight years ago. And in general, the same bombs, thrown by the same military, from the same country, fall on both Syria and Ukraine.[10]

Along with this neutral approach to integrating Ukrainian refugees, the discursive and material practices by EU officials, especially during the first months of the invasion, stemmed from a systematic demonstration of proximity to Ukrainians. EU leaders were willingly photographed wearing *vyshyvanka* (traditionally embroidered Ukrainian shirts); city halls and other state institutions were decorated with symbols of Ukrainian statehood, such as flags. In these manifestations, it is possible to recognize the intention to detoxify the idea of the "nation" as a source of illiberal, or even totalitarian, politics associated with post-Soviet space, and to envision a way toward reconciliation with liberalism for Ukraine. The obvious rupture between public representations of attitudes toward Ukrainian refugees and the strategy of color-blindness (Frankenberg 1993, 14) clearly ignores the differential constitution of subjectivities in the differing cultural settings to which Ukrainians refugees arrive (Robinson 2007, 484). It further shows an overall disdain for the characteristics – whether gendered, racialized, nationalized, or class-based – of others (Chancer and Watkins 2006, 3). This type of liberal populist nationalism, disseminated not only in Austria but also in other Western European countries, is sharply reflected in the Central and Eastern European public discourses that directly connect the mission to help to refugees from Ukraine with the task to emancipate the nation from the yoke of Russia, as the successor of Soviet authoritarianism.

Assistance to Ukraine as Whitening in the Populist Rhetoric of Czech Authorities

Anikó Imre, one of the first researchers who systematically conceptualized the vicissitudes of public politics in Eastern Europe through the lens of whiteness, has drawn attention to the discursive multifunctionality of white supremacy for nation-building in Eastern Europe, including the post-Soviet space (Imre 2005, 96). The mass-media approach to presenting the war in Ukraine confirms this thesis. The Visegrad countries, which have acquired a reputation as a stronghold of illiberal democracy and populist nationalism, verging on overt racism, have been (with the exception of Hungary) at the forefront of helping Ukrainian refugees, as well as systematically producing

10 Personal communication, April 21, 2022.

the most consistent anti-Russian rhetoric aimed at motivating the West to help Ukraine. This nationalistically oriented rhetoric echoes dissidents' discursive practices of the 1960s and 1970s, which highlighted the opposition between Central Europe as the "Eastern border of the West" with the "the greatest variety within the smallest space" and Russia as an "alien" civilization with "the smallest variety within the greatest space."

This opposition further presents the history of the relationship between Central Europe and Russia as one of an unjust kidnapping (Kalmar 2022, 85–86). In Putin's anti-historical rhetoric, which justifies the invasion through Ukraine's alleged historical affiliation with Russia, both Central and Eastern European scholars and the public easily recognized the analogy of the imposed position of a "younger brother," imposed upon them during their time as satellites of the Soviet Union. Accordingly, emancipation from this experience was associated with support for Ukraine. For instance, the fact that the present-day Russian opposition had chosen Prague for its "summit" testifies to the fact that "the Czech capital is back on the political map of the West after the Zemanian years oriented towards the East" (Šidlová 2022).

The anti-Russian rhetoric of the Visegrad countries calls into question the long-term Western tradition of presenting Central (and Eastern) Europe as "immature" because of its various vicissitudes in the past, including Soviet influence, as factors in the region's infantilization (Kalmar 2022, 45). The efforts of Czech politicians to support Ukraine are often characterized as a factor in making Western Europe change its view of Czechia, moving it (and Slovakia) into the vanguard of European democracy – in contrast to more conservative Poland and Hungary. For instance, the meeting of Petr Fiala, Czech prime minister, with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in May 2022 is seen as successful because "they suddenly began to notice in Berlin that the Visegrad Four, which has become synonymous with various problems and negative news in the past, consists not only of Poland and Hungary but also Czechia and Slovakia." (Schuster 2022). In this and other attempts to present Czechia and Slovakia as more progressive nations, in contrast to the "overcautious West," as well compared to the less progressive and democratic Poland and Hungary, it is easy to recognize the pattern of Balkanism, namely, a scale of prestige among nearly situated Eastern European nation states as "less civilized" in favor of their own status (Kalmar 2022, 52).

Along with reestablishing a hierarchy of progressiveness and dedication to European values, Czech public discourse reflects the changing status of Ukraine in terms of whiteness – through the consistent opposition of "civilized" Ukraine, part of "enlightened" Europe, and Russia, a brutal and

"uncivilized" imperial hegemon. Following the process of "Westernization" among former socialist nation states, certain experts might surmise that through the consistent support of countries such as Czechia and Lithuania, often seen as the most successfully "Westernized," with socialism and Soviet authoritarianism now far in the background, Ukraine finally achieved the status of a candidate for EU membership. But a crucial question remains: is this status enough to defeat the numerous and racially predetermined prejudices against Ukrainians (especially women) that populate various realms of public life in Europe?

Lifting the Curtain: Ukrainian Women under the Pressure of Whiteness

Just one month into the war, Austrian historian Claudia Kraft (Hausbichler 2022) warned about the likely stigmatization of Ukrainian women:

> There is this image of the beautiful, submissive Eastern European woman that has a long tradition. I think many are seeing just how wrong this picture is in these weeks. Many refugee women have a good education and have been uprooted from their good jobs. In the West, Eastern European women are also primarily seen as a cheap labor force. The view of Eastern Europe is strongly influenced by the fact that there is an apparently inexhaustible and increasingly important reservoir of workers there, for example, when we think of nursing staff. It is important that this image is now differentiated by meeting the Ukrainian women who have fled.

In public discourses concerning Ukrainian refugees disseminated in both Austrian and Czech public politics, Kraft's warning has come to fruition through the victimization of Ukrainian women, even within rather different contexts, along different pathways of embedding Ukrainian refugees in multiple racial hierarchies. For example, this difference manifests in Austrian and Czech public discourses through their varying cultural, political, nationalist, and sociohistorical contexts for connecting whiteness and the multiplicity of injustices regarding women, especially female migrants. If in Austria, Ukrainian women are more likely embedded in a hierarchy stemming from the opposition of South and North, in Czechia, the most decisive division reflects the pressure of the West vs. East dichotomy.

Ukrainians in Inter-Racial Hierarchies on the Global Fertility Market

Since Russia invaded Ukraine, Austrian and Swiss mass media affiliated with conservative political forces, and directly with the Roman Catholic Church, have continued to publish articles that discuss the destiny of Ukrainian surrogate mothers and children (often named *Bunkerbabys*), a

heavily debated topic in the German-speaking public space. *Der Sonntag*, the weekly newspaper of the Archdiocese of Vienna, emphasizes that "Ukraine is among a few countries like Russia, Belarus, and Georgia, where such an inhuman practice as surrogacy is permissible" (Harringer 2022), further describing the "unnaturalness" of surrogacy and the suffering of mothers and children involved in "this machinery" because of the war. *Neue Zürich Zeitung* highlights the lack of transparency in the operation of the Biotexcom agency, a major Ukrainian actor on the surrogacy market, along with the "unnaturalness" of the whole process of fertilization among surrogate mothers (Lemcke et al. 2022). Additionally, the article points to the poverty among Ukrainian women, calling their choice to become surrogate mothers "a gesture of desperation."

Increasing attention to the participation of Ukrainians in fertility markets[11] because of the war should be seen as a continuation of a long-term critical view on this and other practices regarding artificial fertilization in the German-speaking space in Europe, and in Austria in particular. In 2012, the Austrian Constitutional Court handed down one of its most notorious decisions, B99/12, granting citizenship to two children born to a surrogate mother in Ukraine for an Austrian couple. After an initial denial by a local court, because of the ban on surrogate motherhood in Austria, the constitutional court justified its decision based on the interests of the children. This decision was met with multiple critiques from the side of conservative political movements, and required strenuous defense by legal experts aimed at protecting European norms of the right to privacy and family life (Köchle 2013). Austrian crime series often present Ukrainian female characters as those who illegally give birth to children bought by Austrian couples, unscrupulous in their means to obtain a long-awaited child, and who become victims of human trafficking, because surrogacy is illegal in Austria.

Notably, the populist–nationalist criticism of surrogate motherhood and other forms of participation in the global fertility market seriously limits the possibilities for building subjectivity among Ukrainian women, portraying them as speechless victims of market forces and toys in the hands of immoral corporations (Hegarty and Layhe 2022). A recent focus in the critical revision of approaches to the feminization and globalization of migration flows concerns the predominance of moral judgments in market imperatives, which prevent Ukrainian women from producing their own knowledge about their experiences (Benería et al. 2012). Feminist geographers who pay

11 Ukrainian legislation regarding the status of parenthood is tolerant of those who make the decision to obtain a child through surrogacy - the intended parents are listed as mother and father.

attention to the different effects of multiplying forms of mobility, the diverse networks sustained between "home" and "host," being "here" and "there," simultaneously have moved from victimizing women who have experienced such migration scenarios to a more nuanced understanding of their choices, as supported by their own intervention in their subjectivity (Yeoh and Ramdas 2014).

While the globalization of fertility technologies and relevant research on the topic shift attention to the essentialization of blood, family, nation, and race, some experts highlight "the labour involved in forming and maintaining family and kinship ties" (Pande 2009 380), and the bodies of some women – usually younger, poorer, and located in the global South – become "bioavailable" for older and more affluent women in the global North (Payne 2013). This bioavailability of Ukrainian women reinforces the analogy with the Global South but at the same time it calls for a more consistent application of critical whiteness, a rarely used methodology brought into action by Ukrainian feminists themselves.[12]

Concentrating on the unstable economic situation, aggressive and even fake advertisements by Ukrainian agencies that offer artificial insemination services (Siegl 2019) reverberate with deeply rooted racial hierarchies concerning Eastern European women as donors of eggs, and wombs, for Western Europeans, the recipients of these services. For instance, Swedish couples who have elected to receive fertility treatment with donor eggs prefer post-Soviet Baltic states, substantiating their choice through the desire to find a donor with a phenotype to match the "Scandinavian" appearance of the parents (Payne 2009, 111). Multiple arguments in favor of Baltic donors are embedded in the cultural imagination of "Eastern Europe" in terms of differential proximity to Europeanness (Bergmann 2013). The transformation of the fertility market from the predominance of bioavailability to "biodesirability" is one of many realms for reproducing inter-racial hierarchies of Eastern Europeans that perceive the "Westernness" of some CEE nation states (like the Baltic states or Czechia) in contrast to the "Easternness" of others (like Ukraine or Russia).

In Western Europe, gender-inflected forms of racism toward Ukrainian migrants resemble those concerning the Global South, and women, like men, "become associated with specific kinds of jobs – generally among the lowest

12 A critical review of the state of art in post-colonial approaches in Ukrainian gender studies is beyond the scope of this text; however, even a cursory overview of the approaches disseminated among Ukrainian scholars reveals the fragmented or even neglected position of critical whiteness. Some attempts to introduce a post-colonial lens to Ukrainian gender studies include work by Maria Mayerchyk and Olga Plachotnik (2019). This work questions the outcomes of the national revival after Maidan but does not extend to the topic of Ukrainian female migrants and their complex identities.

paid, with little continuity or security of employment and characterized by gender-specific forms of risk" (Benería et al. 2013). For example, consider the effects of global care chains typical of female migration from the Global South. Similarly, 200,000 children in Ukraine have been left behind because their mothers have gone to care for children and elderly in other countries (Yanovich 2015). A racially informed view inevitably reinforces the predominance of negative representations of Ukrainian women as entertainers and sex workers, or even the moral panic surrounding female migration from the Global South to the Global North and from East to West (Robinson 2007) on the one hand, and their objectification as victims of various forms of patriarchy on the other, including exploitation by men in private and public spaces. This duplicity should be seen as a driving force behind launching "Eastern Europeanism," a relatively new type of racism that inclines not necessarily toward overt hate, but rather contempt for the "intruders from Europe." (Kalmar 2022, 33–34). In Czechia, Ukrainians face this duplicity and more, placed not only into the inter-racial but also the intra-racial hierarchies incorporated into neo-assimilationism, one of the main features of national-level migration politics in this region.

Ukrainians in Intra-Racial Hierarchies of Neo-Assimilationism

Long-term attribution of Ukrainians to the "bottom level" of the racial hierarchy that includes Eastern Europeans has its roots not only in Western, race-informed arguments but also in the racial hierarchies developed by Eastern European anthropologists themselves. For instance, among Czech anthropologists, Ukrainians have been viewed as the most distanced from "white" Europeans:

> The population of Ukraine differs from the population of *Velká Rus* [Russia] and *Bílá Rus* [Belarus], mainly in those two dark types that participate in the racial construction of its people in Ukraine, namely, the Alpine type and partly the Dinaric type. The Alpine type reaches here from the Alpine massif, the Dinaric type then from the Balkan Peninsula, or perhaps even from Asia Minor, from where it once came to the Balkans. In some regions of Ukraine, the brown complex is at the forefront of the entire racial image. Also, among racially mixed persons, brown components appear very strongly. (Malý 1948, 34)

The question of transforming race-informed views attributed to Slavic groups remains beyond the scope of this text but suffice it to say that in racializing certain groups, for example, Jews and Roma, Central and Eastern European racially-minded thinkers played a significant role. The reproduction of racial

assimilationism targeted at minorities and refugees remains one of the long-term features of Czech politics regarding "others" (Shmidt and Jaworsky 2020). What are the current racially informed social frames within which Ukrainians are embedded?

Visualizing Ukraine as a fragile female figure protected by a handsome European man in camouflage is reproduced by many Central European countries, including Czechia. Such a visualization can be interpreted as one of the many manifestations of racializing white femininity through placing white women and men in the position of victims and rescuers, respectively, from the ostensible sexual threat posed by non-white men toward white women (Frankenberg 1993, 237). The non-problematic femininities of Ukrainian migrants are often described in relation not only to Russians but also to other migrant groups, such as Muslim men (Hopkins 2009).

Hyndman and Giles (2011) show that regardless of gender, "those who wait" in refugee camps in the Global South tend to be feminized and deemed "passive" and hence "authentic" refugees, placed in contrast to "those who move" to seek asylum, viewed through masculinist lenses as politicized, self-serving subjects who threaten the geobody of nation states in the Global North. In the case of Ukrainian female refugees, there appears to have emerged a new, mixed, representation of security: female but active, from the East but Westernized. This image has immediately started to produce disciplining expectations, as well as new forms of surveillance based upon the specific intersectionality of gender, class, nation, and race among Ukrainians.

The positive distinctive features attributed to Ukrainian refugees range from a higher degree of security with regard to Ukrainian female refugees (especially compared to "threatening" Muslim male refugees) to Europeanness, culture, and high education, seen as typical features of Ukrainian refugees. Remarkably, a recent report from the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, aimed at defeating prejudices against the Ukrainian refugees who have arrived in Czechia (Klimešová et al. 2022), evokes the image of "safe," non-problematic people, mostly women, who on average have a better education than many Czechs and who are in the process of learning the Czech language, searching for jobs, and living together with their compatriots and Czechs. Immediately, this report was presented in mass media as a response to the increasing fears of the Czechs in the face of Ukrainian refugees (Čopjaková 2022).

In Austria, this set of stereotypes is activated by Ukrainians themselves, mostly by those recruited to assist in the initial stages of integration – primarily members of the diaspora. One notable example is the persistent

assertion that "Ukrainians, unlike other refugees, ask for cultural passes,"[13] which afford them the opportunity to attend cultural events for free. Along with this positive connotation, expectations of "proper" behavior are reflected in the disciplinary practices applied by Ukrainians that have lived in Austria for a long time, already assimilated and integrated. As one of the translators working at an arrival center posted on Facebook in response to a young woman's search for suitable housing for her elderly parents from Mariupol exhorted: "We expect that you present a proper, civilized, face of us, Ukrainians, to the West, to Austria, a new home for us." Alla's parents[14] were placed in a small room in a multi-room building, in which there was only one toilet for 12 rooms and more than twenty inhabitants, and only one stove in the kitchen.

When Alla asked the organization directly responsible for finding housing to help improve these conditions, she received a rude refusal from the employee, who said that with the arrival of more than 10,000 refugees in the city, she could not change housing upon the first request. She was not even offered the opportunity to fill out an application for a change in housing. An attempt to find help in a Facebook support group for new arrivals turned into an exchange with an employee of the same organization, of Ukrainian origin, who had been naturalized in Austria,[15] who began to shame the woman for her bad manners and ungrateful behavior, not worthy of an "authentic" Ukrainian.

Among the mostly insulting comments, one stood out: "We, the land of Styria,[16] have given you this accommodation, and you should be grateful for this." In this passage, a symbolic gap between "undeserving" refugees on one side, and the nation state and its institutionalized social guarantees on the other side, support the idea of citizenship as a privilege for some migrants and the subject of security measures (Bulakh 2020). The gulf is widened because it is translated by a Ukrainian who considers herself deserving of being affiliated with the host country, in contrast to her newly arrived compatriots. Notably, this attack was supported by other participants in the community, including those who work with refugees. Even after complaints to the organization, those who had tried to discipline the refugees were not sanctioned; the Facebook communication was evaluated by the head of the Department of

13 Personal communication with Inna, 34-year-old translator, originally from Ukraine, June 30, 2022.

14 Alla (name changed), 34-year-old IT specialist. Personal communication, June 19, 2022.

15 Organizations playing a central role in managing primary care for refugees in Austria, such as Caritas, Kinder Freunden, and other various services aimed at helping refugees, have recruited a significant number of those Ukrainians already settled in Austria, to act as interpreters and caregivers (*Betreuer*).

16 The region of Austria in which the organization in Graz is located.

Migration and Refugee Politics "as a private matter, without any relation to the professional duties of those who commented on the request for help."[17]

It is vexing to consider how widespread such disciplinary practices are among Ukrainian communities abroad. The veil of silence around the ethnicization and racialization of Ukrainian refugees is at least partially determined by the systematic abuse of racist arguments in brutal anti-Ukrainian propaganda from the side of Russian authorities, who have brought forward accusations of genocide by Ukrainian authorities as a main reason legitimizing the Russian invasion and multiple war crimes against civilians. But along with this factor, it is reasonable to bring into focus the complex nation- and ethnic-related identities of Ukrainians who live in different parts of the world. We wish to highlight the steady trend and increasing dominance of ethno-centered national identities in relation to civic nationalism through blurring the boundaries between "Ethnic Ukrainian" and "Citizen of Ukraine" (Barrington 2021, 159) in combination with the obstacles posed by enduring attachments to ethnic identity and varying levels of connection to citizenship among key parts of the population (ibid., 169). This scenario makes it possible to put forward a hypothesis about the likely hierarchization of the transnational community based on the specific intersectionality of class, gender, nation, and race.

The impact of increasing ethnonationalism should be examined in the context of the massive displacement of populations from the Eastern region of Ukraine, a hotspot since 2014, to other regions in the country, which were (relatively) safe until February 2022. This process was accompanied by various restrictions on the rights of displaced persons, due to unclear criteria regarding access to the welfare system, as well as tensions from the side of local communities who recognized these newcomers as pro-Russian betrayers. Tania Bulakh (2020) directly describes this experience as a division into citizens of different sorts, reinforcing multiple hierarchies. The call to better understand the operation of racial hierarchies among Ukrainian refugees becomes even more urgent in the context of multilevel overt and covert racism facing Ukrainian Roma since the Russian invasion started.

The Plot Thickens: The Resonance of Overt and Covert Racism against Ukrainian Roma

"They should be shot," proclaimed Jaroslav Červinka, a centrist politician who started his career during late socialism, when reporting to the police in 2001 after a car accident caused by dogs belonging to local Romani people. When

17 Personal communication with a Caritas manager, June 29, 2022.

the police remarked to the politician that the animals had nothing to do with it, Červinka replied that he did not mean the dogs. The reprimand that the politician received for this racist remark did not stop him from repeating the "joke" now – as a comment within the debate regarding the acceptance of Ukrainian refugees of Romani origin. Vít Rakušan, the leader of the political movement to which Červinka belongs, Mayors and Independents (*STAN*), and, simultaneously, the Minister of the Interior, demanded the resignation of Červinka, who had become the mayor of Poděbrady in 2018 (Nohl 2022). In response, Červinka prepared a remarkable apology:

> My statement about Roma was stupid twenty years ago when I said it, and even now that I repeated it. I apologize to all who may have been rightfully affected. Those who know me and know my work as the head of the town hall know that, in fact, I do not consider any form of violence a solution. And not even in exaggeration.

Although Červinka has been expelled from his party, he has nevertheless enlisted the support of local inhabitants, collecting enough signatures to run as an independent candidate for the city council in September 2022 (Rozhlas 2022).

This case is one of multiple examples of how overt racism against Roma operates as a source of legitimation for Czech authorities. Even Rakušan, who had initiated the cancellation of Červinka for his hate speech, reportedly "dealt with the Ukrainian Ministry of the Interior to prevent organized crime by those Roma from the Uzhgorod district, have Hungarian citizenship, but come to the Czech Republic to receive social benefits to which these people have no rights" (Vaculík 2022). As in the rhetoric of Červinka's apology, in Rakušan's statement, Romani people are labeled as "those" or "these" people without being named as ethnically different or belonging to a particular ethnic group.

Neither attempts to introduce quotas for providing long-term conditions for integration of Roma into Czech regions, nor the efforts of activists of various Romani organizations, has led the nation state that received the most Ukrainian refugees per capita among EU states to be open to Romani refugees. On the contrary, Romani families, including those with small children, have been harassed and assaulted on several occasions. Since Roma who arrived in the Czech Republic could not readily find housing, many of them temporarily sought makeshift accommodation at the railway stations in Prague and several places in Brno, including the concert hall of the Merciful Brothers residence. In the public statements of those who provided care to

Roma, intra-racial hierarchies applied to Roma from the side of Czechs were abundantly clear:

> According to Macek, the representative of the order, there are no problems with the current [Ukrainian Romani] residents. However, he cannot say the same about their predecessors: "The first group we had here were five Hungarian Roma women with sixteen children. That was a shock and a big test. They didn't look after the children, they made a mess and destroyed property. We had to supervise them twenty-four hours a day. Fortunately, they had a fight with each other and left on their own. This new Roma family from Ukraine is clean, everyone is working and very hospitable. In addition, we have set rules with them that they must follow and it works. (Pirklová 2022)

Beyond its obvious cultural insensitivity, the approach advocated by Father Macek represents a nationalistically tinged neoliberal communitarianism, or, in its extreme form, welfare chauvinism, one of the most central and deeply rooted characteristics of national-level migration politics in Czechia. The aim is to force migrants to "dissolve" into the host culture by dividing groups into categories based on their degree of assimilation to the nation.

The temporary residence centers were staffed by volunteers, not by authorities, and at the end of May, this initiative was halted in Prague, and in June in Brno. More than five hundred Roma who had stayed at the railway station in Prague were transported to other cities in Germany or other EU states (Krutilek and Janouš 2022). Evgenia Snezhkina (2022), a volunteer of Romani origin, who helped out in Prague, commented: "The state could not cope with the influx of Roma in Prague. And it's hard for me to sympathize here, because before, few people were interested in the fate of their own, and now they were simply unloaded into a couple of tent camps and the volunteer center was closed, so as not to interfere with forgetting about the problem." Several dozen Ukrainian Roma, who finally found their new home in Brno, received direct support from Romani organizations and joined the ranks of Czech Roma, constantly fighting for their rights.

In contrast to the overt racism toward Ukrainian Roma in Czechia, in Austria, the public hardly discusses the problem of discrimination against Roma from Ukraine. Those who have arrived in Austria receive the same set of benefits and options for social housing as other refugees. However, observations shared by those who work with refugees, including Romani volunteers, point to the presence of racist surveillance practices at the national level. For example, according to the observation of an interpreter who accompanied Romani families to register with the police, only when processing Romani documents

did the police put on gloves. In another incident, the registration of a large Romani group did not go smoothly, The children could not sit still in front of the camera, and the police, like the interpreter, had to use a great deal of patience to take the photos necessary for documents. Afterwards, the police had joked that the next time the interpreter should come with other, "normal" children.[18]

Due to various circumstances, many of the Roma who arrive in Austria do not have biometric documents, and some do not even have birth certificates for their children, which puts them in a vulnerable position with regard to the obligation to register with the police. This fact inevitably leads to delegitimizing and excluding Roma; for instance, without biometric documents they could not open a bank account, making them more dependent on the authorities because the social benefits are transferred from hand to hand. The question concerning whether Ukrainian Roma will be involved in the existing, long-term practices of integration for Romani migrants who have arrived from different parts of Eastern Europe remains unanswered.

Generally, the Austrian system of personal accompaniment, or *Betreuung*, is brought into question because of the cultural and language barriers between Roma and those obliged to provide care. While some of *Betreuuers* speak Ukrainian, many Romani people speak the Roma language or Hungarian. In an informal conversation with a Caritas employee, when asked whether it makes sense to provide Roma with curators who speak their language (either Roma or Hungarian) the answer was that the refugees' task is to master German and, if possible, Ukrainian.[19] These expectations confront the quite well-disseminated and overtly racist view on Roma among Ukrainian- and Russian-speaking helping professionals recruited to work at initial arrival centers:

> I observed various manifestations of intolerant and contemptuous attitudes toward the Roma. For example, [other Ukrainian- and Russian-speaking colleagues] told me when I played with Roma children that I would bring home lice. Or the translator approached the children who were drawing under the guidance of their mothers and simply looked at the drawings without asking permission or entering into any communication. When I asked her what she needed, she said it was interesting to see what they could draw. But the following story bothered me the most. A Roma family consisting of three generations: a grandmother with two adult daughters with children of their own had arrived, and, the youngest member, a one-

18 Personal communication with an interpreter, woman, 33 years old, June 30, 2022.

19 Personal communication, April 15, 2022.

> and-a-half-year-old girl, started crying immediately after the adults started filling out the registration forms. I asked Ukrainian speaking staff hired by organizations responsible for the integration of children[20] to help and give the girl a toy, and one of the assistants said to the other: "Give them something plastic – so that we can wash it." I was angry and I said: "These children are not dirtier than others." Apparently, it had no effect, and the child was given a plastic set of forms for playing with sand. I was ashamed to look in the face of the mother and grandmother of the child, and I understood that it was useless to complain…[21]

This and other situations occurring among Roma demonstrate that overt and covert racisms are connected not only as two sides of the same process, racializing and discriminating particular individuals and groups, but also as practices of two national regimes of whiteness, one more liberal or even post-imperial, consistently practiced in Austria, and one post-colonial, typical of Czech and Ukrainian public politics regarding minorities.[22] In the current situation of the refugee crisis these regimes have come into close interaction, producing new forms of whiteness.

The Denouement: toward a Better Understanding of How Whiteness Designs a Refugee "Crisis"

Comparing two country cases of refugee politics through the lens of whiteness offers new insights related to the interconnection between short-term, initial, and long-term politics within a particular refugee "crisis," illuminating the continuities and changes in the history of refugee politics as an indispensable and decisive part of contemporary European history. The Czech and Austrian cases reveal that reproducing racial hierarchies, a core feature of whiteness, is a multifaceted process that includes the layering and conversion of previously established hierarchies through transforming the intersectionality of gender, class, nation, and race as mutually connected criteria for placing people seen as "others" on different "levels" of the hierarchies and disciplining them.

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20 The Austrian organization, *Kinderfreunden*, organized a kind of temporary day care center for children within the initial arrival center in Graz.

21 Personal communication June 7, 2022.

22 According to the Population Census of 2001, 47,500 Roma live in Ukraine. However, according to unofficial data from Romani communities themselves, there are currently 400,000 Roma in Ukraine. As human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International and The Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, have documented, Romani people have become the target of direct physical violence from the side of ultra-right movements such as *Nationalny Druzhiny*, including pogroms conducted in Roma camps. In 2021, the European Court of Human Rights handed down a decision in favor of Romani applicants who had lost their housing as a result of such an attack; see more at ECtHR Case of Pastrama v Ukraine, available online: https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{%22itemid%22:[%22001-208889%22.

Our comparison of the (re)production of whiteness in Austrian and Czech discursive practices regarding Ukrainian refugees reveals different pathways for practicing whiteness. Based on our analysis, we could delineate them, respectively, as "post-imperial," connecting whiteness with the mission of assimilation, and "post-colonial," viewing whiteness as a tool of emancipation. This division could be fruitfully extended and deepened through examining other EU countries. The taken-for-granted criteria for polarizing countries, such as West and East, North and South, capitalist and socialist, liberal and illiberal, take on contextualized meanings through intercountry comparisons targeted at exploring the mechanisms underlying the operation of inter- and intra-racial hierarchies applied to migrants.

Along with the potential for comparative analysis, examining the refugee "crisis" through the lens of whiteness helps to develop its entangled, transnational history as directly connected with the mutual interrogation of national regimes of whiteness that stem from the vicissitudes of nation building and integration into supranational collectivities such as the European Union.

It is reasonable to assert that the Ukrainian refugee case is a manifestation of the uneasy legacy of the longue durée of whiteness among nation states in Central Europe. In fact, it is crucial to include the case of Ukraine in the context of a critical analysis of whiteness in Central and Eastern Europe. Bringing together different geopolitical locations of whiteness is a prerequisite for sustainable politics aimed at providing forcibly displaced people and their host communities with durable solutions regarding not only their specific mid- to longer-term needs but also their subjectivities (McLoughlin 2016).

The experience of accepting and settling refugees from Ukraine for several months already reveals the challenges to understanding the role that racial hierarchies play in reshaping the subjectivities of refugees, how refugees themselves experience the process of being embedded into hierarchies and connect it with their race-, gender-, nation-, and class-informed views and identities. If whiteness aims to legitimize injustice, could those who are objectified through attributing to them one or another degree of whiteness, question its criteria?

Examining the experiences of refugees through the analytical lens of whiteness highlights the task of historicizing forced migration due to war; it is connected with different sites and dimensions of migration, which, in turn, are connected by experiencing whiteness. The consistent public support for Ukraine in the frames of liberal nationalism has begun to transform the long-term embeddedness of Ukrainians in multiple racial hierarchies produced since the end of the eighteenth century, to constructing their whiteness in

contrast either to "barbarian" Russians or, even more, to "barbarian" refugees from Middle East.

Reproducing these hierarchies questions the options for practicing liberal nationalism, in which one of the main prerequisites is the normalization of the internal conflict over identity: "[F]irst, that national identities have multiple components, so inability to embrace one of these does not mean that the identity as a whole is inaccessible; second, that the content of national identities, and their institutional expression, should always remain open to challenge, so if people from minority cultures can demonstrate … that some existing symbol, practice, or institution is for them a barrier to full inclusion, they can make a strong case for changing it" (Miller 2019, 23). For instance, racializing Ukrainian women's bodies in the context of participating in global fertility markets continues to shape public tolerance of a racialized view on refugees. The intolerant attitude towards Roma on the part of post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe becomes a catalyst for racial hierarchies, including the perception of intolerance toward Roma as a sign of insufficient progressiveness or lack of whiteness. This trap of whiteness might be bypassed with a more systematic exploration of the historical roots and interconnections in racializing Roma in the region, remedying the Eurocentric myopia of some scholarly experts, who struggle with whiteness through ignoring it (MacMullan 2005), which leads to the risk of essentialized sameness.

The reproduction of intra- and inter-racial hierarchies in the context of the Ukrainian refugee "crisis" seems inevitable; critical revision and reflection is necessary. Recent negative and pessimistic prognoses regarding the refugee "crisis" in Europe are often based upon analogies between the contemporary situation and Europe in the 1930s and 1940s (Holmes and Castañeda 2016). One of the main hopes to subvert these depressing prospects relies on broad mobilization against reproducing racism within liberal nationalism through practicing critical analysis. Such critical engagement is necessary when those who are at risk of being racialized, like Ukrainian refuges, face multiple practices – empowering some people through the "we-saying" but disempowering others (Code 1993, 24). Clearly, the agenda of critical whiteness is invaluable for these purposes.

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