# The Revival of the Classical Racist Discourse in Europe: A Critical Discursive Analysis of Racism in the Context of Russia-Ukraine War

إحياء الخطاب العنصري الكلاسيكي في أوروبا: تحليل خطابي نقدي للخطابات العنصرية خلال الحرب الروسية-الأوكرانية

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#### Abstract

With the rise of critical theories and legal regulations that criminalize racism and accentuate tolerant and liberal values, racist discourses turned to be articulated indirectly (Essed, 1990; van Dijk & Wodak, 2000; Wodak, 2008), and a neo-racist discourse replaced classical racism to be ostensibly respectable and democratic with reference to cultural, rather than racial, difference (Barker 1981; Jayasuriya, 2002; van Dijk, 1997, 2000). However, a blatant and essentialist racist discourse has found its way back to the public sphere in light of the Russia-Ukraine war. Racist remarks have been documented in different types of texts directed to the masses. Therefore, this paper investigates the discursive strategies through which classical racism normalizes its reappearance in a supposedly liberal and democratic political environment. To achieve its objectives, the study adopts the Discourse-Historical Approach (Wodak, 2008) to analyse 18

texts of politicians and media reporters and commentators that include racist and discriminatory remarks in justifying the classification of refugees into 'like us' and 'different' categories. The study finds that the racist discourse uses special rhetoric in order to adapt to the current sociopolitical realities by combining classical elements of racism, including those of culture, race, and religion, with spatial proximity. The result is that the close White Christian Europeans are the only social actors who belong in the in- (superior) group.

**Keywords:** Classical Racism, Neo-Racism, Critical Discourse Analysis, Discourse-Historical Approach, Russia-Ukraine War, Refugees.

#### ملخص

مع ظهور النظريات النقدية والتشريعات القانونية التي تجرم العنصرية وتؤكد على قيم التسامح والليبرالية, أخذت الخطابات العنصرية منحىً مبطناً, وتم استبدال الخطاب العنصري الكلاسيكي باخر جديد ليبدو في ظاهره ديمقر اطيا ومتسامحا من خلال الاشارة الى الاختلافات الثقافية لا العرقية. الا ان خطابا عنصريا أصوليا واضحا قد ظهر من جديد في ظل الحرب الروسية الاوكرانية, حيث تم رصد العديد من الخطابات العنصرية التي تخاطب الجماهير. بناء على ما سبق, تتناول هذه الدراسة الاستراتيجيات الخطابية التي تم توظيفها في تبرير ظهور العنصرية الجديدة في محيط سياسي من المفترض انه ليبرالي وديمقر اطي, حيث انتهجت الدراسة منهج التحليل الخطابي التاريخي لرووث وداك, وذلك من خلال تحليل نصوص سياسية واعلامية تحتوي على عبارات عنصرية صارخة تبرر تقسيم اللاجئين الى قسمين: "نحن" ضد "هم". خلصت الدراسة إلى أن هذه العنصرية المتراتيجيات المليبرا من حليل نصوص سياسية واعلامية تحتوي من خلال جمع عناصر العنصرية الكلاسيكية من ثقافية وعرقية و دينية مع القرب المكاني وأظهرت نتائج التحليل أن الأوروبيين المسيحيين البيض هم فقط من ينتمون الى مجموعة ال "نحن"(الأسمى).

الكلمات المفتاحية: العنصرية الكلاسيكية، العنصرية الجديدة، التحليل النقدي للخطاب، المنهج التاريخي لتحليل الخطاب، الحرب الروسية-الأوكرانية، اللاجئون.

#### Introduction

Racism is a social practice that is manifested discursively (van Dijk, 2000; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). It is produced and reproduced by means of discourse, which in turn constructs or reconstructs stereotypical images and perspectives about groups of people, refugees, minorities, immigrants,

etc., establishes collective identities by classifying people into in- and outgroups, and then justifies and legitimizes these prejudiced categorizations (van Dijk, 1997, 2000; Wodak & Busch, 2004; Wodak, 2008).

As a discursive practice, racism used to take blatant forms against specific social actors (Catalano, 2011; Krolikowski, 2011; van Dijk, 1997, 2000) including apartheid, slavery, lynching, and racist remarks with reference to racial supremacy and skin colour (Catalano, 2011; Krolikowski, 2011; Teo, 2000; van Dijk, 1997, 2000). However, with the rise of critical theories and legal regulations that criminalize racism and accentuate tolerant and liberal values (Billig, 1991; Catalano, 2011; van Dijk, 1993; van Dijk & Wodak, 2000; Wodak, 2008), racist discourses started to be indirectly articulated (Essed, 1990; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995), and the neo-racist discourse tended to be ostensibly respectable and democratic with reference to cultural, rather than racial, difference (Barker 1981; Jayasuriya, 2002; van Dijk, 1997, 2000).

Against expectations, however, the Russia-Ukraine war has become a context in which classical racism against non-Europeans have surfaced in public discourse (Bayoumi, 2022; Roane, 2022), and racist exceptionalism has been prominent both inside Ukraine and in other European countries (Bayoumi, 2022). At the time when both Ukrainians and non-Ukrainian residents in Ukraine were trying to flee the country, a "Ukrainians first" policy was operated, by virtue of which only Ukrainians were allowed to board trains and buses first while non-Ukrainians were obstructed in Ukraine (Dovi, 2022). On another level, people with colour were discriminated against by elite groups and Western media organizations on the ground of not only religion and culture, but also race and colour, as Western politicians, journalists and commentators expressed more concern for blue-eyed and blond-haired refugees (Bayoumi, 2022; Roane, 2022). On the ground, Ukraine's European neighbouring countries received the white Ukrainian refugees with open arms despite the abuse and demonization by these countries of non-European refugees, particularly Muslim and African ones, for decades (Bayoumi, 2022). Discursively, the discriminatory discourse in classifying refugees into 'like us' and 'different' groups has an explicit and essentialist (racial) fashion. It is developing a

unique rhetoric in which classical racism is discursively reproduced to justify the traditional dichotomy between Europeans (in-group) and non-Europeans (out-group) to adapt to the socio-political schemata as imagined by the rising right in Europe.

This study, therefore, investigates the discursive mechanisms through which classical blatant racism finds its way back to the public sphere. The study adopts Wodak's (2008, 2009) Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) to explore the strategies used to dichotomize social actors into inand out-groups, and the argumentative bases on which this dichotomy relies. The analysis is interested in how spatial proximity to the Western elite groups is essentially intertwined with racial, religious, and cultural similarity, and how both dimensions are necessary for the new racist discourse to identify who is in and who is out. So, presumably, geographical closeness is only one dimension that is used inseparably from race, religion, and culture in producing an essentialist racism that attempts to adapt to current political realities.

#### **Literature Review**

Historically speaking, racism used to be explicit and blatant, and racist attitudes and derogatory remarks used to be reflected directly (Catalano, 2011; Krolikowski, 2011; van Dijk, 1997; Pentima & Toni, 2009). This involved explicit violence that can be found in apartheid, slavery, lynching, and overt linguistic reference to skin colour and racial superiority (Teo, 2000; van Dijk, 2000; Catalano, 2011).

In recent decades, however, racism has turned to be expressed in a rather covert, ostensibly commonsencial and non-discriminatory form that is apparently established on cultural, rather than racial, bases (Wodak & Busch, 2004), leading to what is termed as neo-racism; a social practice by which racist ideologies are subtly expressed in discourse (Catalano, 2011; Froio, 2018; Huddy & Feldman, 2009; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; van Dijk, 2000; Walker, 2001; Wodak, 2001, 2008; Wodak & Reisigl, 2005). Although it refuses immigration, asylum, and multiculturalism, neo-racism, paradoxically, maintains a non-discriminatory image as it opposes apartheid, slavery, and other classical forms racism (Catalano, 2011; Froio,

2018). In this regard, racists express racial prejudice not in terms of racial superiority but socio-cultural differences (Hamberger & Hewstone, 1997; Leach et al, 2000; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995; Sawires & Peacock, 2000; Sonn et al, 2000; van Dijk, 1997; Tougas et al, 1998; Walker, 2001; Wodak & Busch, 2004). Consequently, the out-groupers, who are perceived as racially inferior, are according to this neo-racist discourse, socio-culturally different from the prejudiced in-groupers (e.g. in terms of religion, language, customs, and cultural values), and one would agree that the question of racial or regional dissimilarity is irrelevant (van Dijk, 1997, 2000; Jayasuriya, 2002).

This change in the nature of racism into a more socially-acceptable practice is attributed to two main reasons. First, it has been no longer acceptable to voice discriminatory remarks publicly, and racial opinions and practices have been tabooed when clashing with the ideological values of tolerance, liberalism, and democracy (Billig, 1991; van Dijk, 1993; van Dijk & Wodak, 2000; Wodak, 2008; Catalano, 2011). Second, compared with the blatant comments which are inimically segregationist, subtle racism is considered to be much more effective (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986; van Dijk, 1997, 2000; Walker, 2001) that it continuously influences the public's beliefs, attitudes, mental models of groups of people, and thus behaviours (Bissell & Parrott, 2013).

Racism has been subjected to numerous analyses in the field of critical discourse analysis. Various research projects tried to outline the discursive mechanisms by which racism is produced, reproduced, and enacted. In this, language patterns are correlated with socio-political structures and political and ideological motivations. All in all, the misrepresentation of non-Europeans, mainly Muslims and immigrants, was found to feature in Western elite discourses. It is realized by various discursive strategies to maintain a line of distinction between Us and Them. Yet, these strategies vary according the varying contexts. More importantly, the racist discourse varies in its fashion of expression, from explicit to less evident discursive realizations, as previously mentioned.

Some studies found that a negative attitude towards non-Europeans has been constantly constructed based on the claim that those social actors are a threat to the social fabric of the European countries. For instance, in his analysis of the representation of refugees and asylum seekers in British newspapers, Khosravinik (2010) finds that the mainstream British media misrepresents these groups by adopting various linguistics strategies, especially nomination and predication. Overwhelming generalizations associate them with threats and dangers, thus urging readership to have an antagonist stance against those who are classified as the 'Other'. In another study, Baker, Gabrielatos, and McEnery (2013) analyzed a corpus of British media news reports in covering Muslim related topics between the years 1998-2009. The researchers found out that the dominant discursive strategies in (mis)representing Muslims were implicit, where Muslims were usually collectivized and associated with conflict, terrorism, and extremism.

The rhetoric of racism and discrimination in Europe took a major turn after the refugees' crisis in 2015/6. Several studies show that the 'fear' from the Other was the major premise onto which the anti-non-European stances were constructed. As such, as Wodak (2020) postulates, fear of the 'Other' was massively and extensively employed by right and conservative elite institutions in Europe to construct a negative image for immigrants, especially Muslims and Africans. The neo-racist discourse was based on a number of fallacies that construct the Other as a threat against pure cultural values of Europe. For instance, in their analysis of the Polish Catholic Church's perception of the recent movements of immigration to Europe, Krotofil and Motak (2018) discovered that the majority of Poles have negative stances towards immigrants, which contributes to their concerns about Poland's EU membership. Discursively, the practices associated with racism are latent and multifaceted, and evade the simple and direct classification of positive Us and negative Them. As for the Polish media, Konopka's (2019) analysis of the Polish press coverage of Muslims showed that the news reporting incites Islamophobia by representing Muslims as sources of threat. The conservative media adopt discursive

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strategies that also demonize liberal media in Poland as sharing similar sources of danger against Polish cultural values.

The *politics of fear* (Wodak, 2020) continued to guide the discursive construction of Muslims and immigrants in other European countries, especially in the aftermath of the Brussels attacks in 2016. For instance, Pop (2016) argues that the Romanian mainstream media and the dominant political trends establish a civilizational antagonism between the West and the Muslim world, claiming that the socio-cultural values in these spheres are incompatible.

What is common in the findings of these studies is that the racist discourse against non-Europeans, especially Muslims and Africans, is usually justified by the exploitation of events in which some Muslims/Africans or Muslim countries are involved (i.e., attacks by Muslims, the war in Syria), so the rightist elites managed to constantly associate Muslims with danger and direct threat. However, in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war, neither Muslims as individuals nor any Muslim country have a direct role in the conflict. In addition, few studies in the existing literature deal with the reviving explicit forms of racist discourse, as it might have been against expectations that blatant discriminatory discursive practices would adapt so fast with the changing socio-political realities. Initial observations show that classical racism is publicly reproduced on essentialist basis alongside religious and cultural prejudices, all of which are intertwined with dimension of spatial proximity. So, this paper mainly addresses the new racist discourse that has been expressed by Western elite groups in Europe during the Russia-Ukraine war, as it rejects non-Europeans on the ground of not only religious or cultural differences but also, inseparably, race at a time when racial prejudice has supposedly ended in liberal and tolerant societies (van Dijk, 1993; van Dijk & Wodak, 2000; Wodak, 2008). To this end, the study explores the strategies used to classify social actors into in- and out-groups, and the argumentative bases used as a rationale for the classification made. The findings of this study are thought to provide important insights about the rapid discursive shifts racist discourse is taking to express itself explicitly. This not only helps in understanding the discursive nature of

racism, but also identifies its correlations with socio-political structures, thus putting this issue under sufficient investigation and critique.

# Methodology

# The Discourse-Historical Approach

The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) is an analytic methodology to the broadly defined field of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Fairclough, 2013). CDA is an interdisciplinary approach to discourse analysis where a systematic, descriptive, and explanatory study is conducted from a critical perspective (Baker et al, 2008) in order to detect the link between language and the socio-political life (Engström & Paradis, 2015; Fairclough, 2001), viewing discourse as a social practice (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Wodak, 1996). CDA seeks to unveil inconspicuous and significant structures of ideology, racism, unequal power relations (e.g., between social classes, men and women, and ethnic or cultural majorities and minorities), as well as one group's dominance of another (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Mullet, 2018; van Dijk, 1993; Wodak, 2016; Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

Reisigl (2017) and Wodak (2009) maintain that DHA is one essential way of applying CDA. It serves as a vehicle for detecting manifest and latent dynamics of power and the potential agents involved in these dynamics (Engström & Paradis, 2015; Wodak, 2009). It is a research within the framework of not history per se, but within the text and the context, which might extend to the wider historical context (Wodak, 2010).

DHA has proved to be an efficient methodology for the study of discourses related to racism and immigration (see Flowerdew & Tran, 2002; Wodak & van Leeuwen, 1999; Hartmann & Husband,1974; Jones, 2000; KhosraviNik, 2010b; Lynn & Lea, 2003; van Dijk, 1987, 1991) among other prejudice-related topics that, as previously mentioned, focus on the classification of social actors into in- and out-groups (van Dijk, 1997, 2000; Wodak & Busch, 2004; Wodak, 2008). For that particular reason, we assume that the DHA is the most appropriate methodology to use in the study of the blatant racist discourse that has emerged lately.

At the analytic level, DHA distinguishes between three dimensions of analysis; themes/ topics, strategies, and linguistic means and forms of realization (de Cillia, Reisigl, & Wodak, 1999). Themes are overall macro meanings that can be only observed by language users. They are made out by a coherent mapping of propositions with relation to a pragmatic background that makes processing the information possible. As such, themes are not assumed beforehand as a top-down fashion of analysis. Rather, they are worked out based on the different representations of the discursive strategies and the pragmatic awareness of the analyst (see Unger, 2013). Second, the analysis will take place at the macro strategies level. A strategy is "a more or less intentional plan of practices (including discursive practices) adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic goal". Finally, the linguistic realizations, such as nominations, predications, metaphors and processes are analysed.

Wodak (2008, 2010) and Reisigl (2017) maintain that the discursive construction and legitimation/justification of in- and out-groups necessarily implies the use of strategies of positive Self-presentation and negative Other-presentation. These strategies include:

- Referential and nomination strategies
- Predication strategies
- Argumentation strategies
- Perspectivization

# **Referential and Nomination Strategies**

These are the strategies by which a speaker/writer discursively constructs in- and out-groups, as they identify social actors, objects, events, phenomena, actions, etc. (Wodak & Reisigl, 2005; Wodak, 2015). Referential strategies are realized through the use of proper names, deictic terms, metonymies, and synecdoches, etc., (Reisigl, 2009; Wodak, 2001). In this regards, the analysis groups together the linguistic items that nominate and construct the in- and out-groups, such as "Europeans" and "Syrians".

# **Predication Strategies**

Predication is the discursive strategy of explicitly or implicitly labelling the named categories positively or negatively with characteristics and qualities that are realized through stereotypical mental models and evaluative traits (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Wodak & Reisigl, 2005; KhosraviNik, 2010a; Engström & Paradis, 2015). Predications are linguistically realized through using adjectives, prepositional phrases, relative clauses; explicit predicates or predicative nouns, adjectives, explicit comparisons; allusions, presuppositions, pronouns; or implicatures among other rhetorical devices (Reisigl, 2009; Wodak, 2001). So, adjectives and comparisons such as "closer", prepositional phrases such as "with blue eyes", among others, are grouped under the label "predications", as they positively or negatively characterize the nominated categories.

It should be noted that some referential strategies function as predications when considering all the denotations and connotations a reference may have, thus serving as micro-argumentative schemes that decide the audience's standpoint from the social actor(s) referred to (Wodak & Reisigl, 2005). For instance, some nominations, such as "people", which refers to non-Europeans, function as micro-argumentative schemes that denote negative characteristics when they feature alongside the negative predications used to characterize the out-group, such as "with an unknown past".

# Argumentation Strategies

Argumentation is mainly concerned with the arguments that are employed to justify the nominations and predications of the social actors involved in the discourse under investigation (Wodak, 2015; Reisigl, 2017). Strategies of argumentation are topoi and fallacies. Topoi can be defined as parts of argumentation that belong to the obligatory argumentative premises, be they explicit or inferable (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Grue, 2009). Topoi are general ideas reservoir from which an argument can be produced (Richardson, 2004), and they can be explicated in the form of conditionals such as "if X, then Y", or causal paraphrases as

"Y, because X" (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 69–80). Fallacies, however, are arguments that are apparently valid but are not so (Hansen, 2002). In the analysed data, topoi are investigated in the warrantless arguments and identified in the form of conditionals, as in the topos of *comparison and assimilation*, which suggests that "if X is similar to you, you should sympathize with them and take them in", as will be discussed later in the analysis (see sections 4.1 and 4.3.1).

#### Perspectivization

According to Engström and Paradis (2015), any linguistic realization, be it persuasive rhetoric or not, is always perspectivized and framed. In other words, perspectiveization is an omnipresent strategy of any discursive practice (KhosraviNik, 2010a) by which an interlocutor positions their viewpoint in reporting or narrating events by means of choosing language realizations and framing these goings-on and social actors based on the interlocutor's perspective (Renkema, 2004; KhosraviNik, 2010a; Fitri, 2013). This process of framing entails expressing often socially-motivated attitudes (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996).

By employing these strategies, the analysis will answer the following questions (Reisigl, 2017):

- 1. How are persons, objects, phenomena/events, processes and actions named and referred to linguistically?
- 2. What characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to social actors, objects, phenomena/events and processes?
- 3. What arguments are employed in the discourse in question?
- 4. From what perspective are these nominations, attributions and arguments expressed?

## **Data Collection**

This study adopts the principle of triangulation in the collection of data (see de Cillia, Reisigl, & Wodak, 1999), in which different sets of texts

from different genres are analysed. Triangulation at the methodological level, and at the level of data collection, is an important feature of DHA that validates the findings of the study. A phenomenon such as racism is believed to express itself in different types of discourse, so to map its discursive nature it is necessary to draw on different text types to capture it interdiscursively. Therefore, this study encompasses a corpus of 18 texts by politicians, media reporters, and commentators from different European TV channels and politicians that commented on issues related to refugees in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war. Although many discourses featured in numerous media platforms to comment on this topic, this study chose to limit its scope to a number of media organizations that have a wide range of readership, and which are considered to be representative of the (elite) media landscape in Europe. These organizations are the BBC, CBS News, BFM TV, The Daily Telegraph, CNEWS, and ITV (UK). Although the number of these organizations is limited, they can provide a representative discursive tendency in Europe in dealing with such a major socio-political event. So, instead of claiming generalizability, this study is interested in an in-depth contextualized analysis of a relatively small number of texts to identify the correlations between language (and argumentative) patterns and socio-political structures and ideological constructs.

The data was collected in the period between 24 Feb and 17 March 2022. Texts were first reviewed by the researchers to include only the ones relevant to the research interest of the study. So, the analysis processed texts which directly address the topic of Ukrainian (white) refugees in a wider context of discussion in which reference is made to non-Europeans refugees and immigrants. All of these texts caused further controversies and received remarkable coverage in world-wide traditional and social media outlets. The producers of these texts are white European politicians, journalists, and media commentators.

The original texts are in English, French, Bulgarian, and Ukrainian. As for non-English texts, however, the analysis used their English translations that are released by the media agencies themselves.

#### Discussion

The in-depth analysis of the strategies of reference and nomination, predication, argumentation, and perspectivization identified a number of macro themes that mark the argumentative discussion over the Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian refugees. As the following section shows, the systematic investigation of these themes reveals the discursive mechanisms through which racism finds its way to the public discourses.

# Assimilation-Based Sympathy

Sympathizing with the white Christian European social actors based on not only spatial proximity to the speakers but also their racial, religious, and cultural similarities is a salient topic in the data at hand. The analysis touches on several discursive strategies used in the positive Selfpresentation and negative Other-presentation to determine who fits in the in-group based on both the proximity and assimilation dimensions. On the one hand, social actors are referred to by metonymic nominations that refer to geo-political entities. The in-group, for example, is referred to by "this [...] place" (Ukraine), "this [...] city" (Kyiv), "Europe", and "Ukraine", and the out-group is referred to by "Iraq", "Syria", and "Afghanistan". On the other hand, nominations of the two groups invoke the element of assimilation. Those who belong in the in-group are referred to via referential and nomination strategies related to race, as in "White"; religion, as in "Christians"; and culture, as in "Europeans" and "Ukrainians", where strategies of racialization, religionization, and ethnicization are used respectively. When used with predications such as "look like US", "[their cars] look like OURS", "they seem so like US", "they are very similar [to US]", among others, such and other nominations serve as micro-argumentative schemes based on material proximity, race and physical appearance, religion, and culture. So, all White Christian Europeans belong to the in-group and are, consequently, represented positively. The out-group, on the contrary, is nominated with reference to religion, such as "Muslims"; and to culture, such as "Arabs", "Syrians", and "Algerians". Similarly, the referential strategies used to name the outgroup function as micro-argumentative schemes to denote negative traits

when they feature alongside the negative predications used to characterize the out-group, which are realized as "unlike us", "it is harder and harder to integrate them", and "with an unknown past". Such predications impose negative representations on Muslims, (Muslim) Arabs, Syrians, Iraqis, and Afghans.

As previously mentioned, positive Self-presentation and negative Other-presentation require strategies of argumentation and persuasion in order to justify the discriminatory classification of social actors. The analysis found that the speakers use different types of topoi to justify their claims. See example 1 below by the French far-right presidential contender Eric Zemmour in an interview with BFM TV:

# Example 1

If they have ties to France, if they have family in France ... let's give them visas. It's a question of assimilation. There are people who are like us and people who are unlike us. Everybody now understands that Arab or Muslim immigrants are too unlike us and that it is harder and harder to integrate them. We are closer to Christian Europeans. (Eric Zemmour, 8 March, 2022)

Notably, "closer" in Zemmour's "we are closer to Christian Europeans" is multifaceted. When viewing its spatial aspect, "closer" means that Ukrainians are geographically in close proximity to France. Nonetheless, because there are non-Christian and non-European countries that are, more or less, as spatially close to France (e.g. Algeria and Morocco), spatial proximity alone is not enough for the French people to justify their exclusive sympathy with the Ukrainian refugees. This explains the need to the assimilation dimension, which highlights the racial, religious, and cultural aspects of the linguistic choice. Zemmour justifies the sympathy with, and inclusion of, Ukrainians, and the exclusion of the other refugees by employing the topos of *comparison and assimilation*, which suggests that if X is similar to you, you should sympathize with them and take them in. He even uses the nominations "Christian" and "Europeans", rather than "Ukrainians" to ascertain the similarities between himself and the in-group. The topos supports the speaker's conclusion that

France can give Ukrainians visas because they have ties to, and families in, France. Notably, mentioning that Ukrainians have families in France has a topos of *humanitarianism and sympathy*, given that a family is a vulnerable segment that evokes emotions. Zemmour, furthermore, employs the topos of *religion and culture* to legitimize the classification of the social actors involved and the sympathy with the in-group. Besides, the justification is supported by the use of the fallacious argument that it is hard to integrate Arab or Muslim immigrants because of the religious and cultural differences. Interestingly, the capitalized deictic terms in the above utterances indicate that the nominations, attributes, and discriminatory arguments are expressed from a Eurocentric perspective, which extends to elements beyond those of religion and culture, mainly elements of racial superiority.

Other utterances justify sympathizing with white Ukrainians is the Former Deputy Prosecutor General of Ukraine David Sakvarelidze's, who uses a topos of *race*, i.e., If X's race is so and so, one should sympathize with them. See example 2 below:

## Example 2

It's very emotional for me because I see European people with blue eyes and blond hair... being killed every day.

(David Sakvarelidze, 26 Feb, 2022)

The predications "blue eyed" and "blond haired" are physical traits that restrict Sakvarelidze's sympathy with a particular race. His argument implies that if the victims were non-Europeans with a different race, he would not sympathize with them. Accordingly, Sakvarelidze's argument is justified by the topos of *race*, which entails that those who belong in the out-group are not worth sympathy even if they are victims of the same regime and go through similar events, such as Syrians.

## Race-Based Civilized-Uncivilized Dichotomy

The reference to social actors' physical traits, as was explained above, takes an essentialist turn when it introduces a civilized-uncivilized

dichotomy. The in-group is mentioned metonymically by deictic terms, such as "here", or by near demonstratives that refer either directly to them, such as "these", which signifies Ukrainians, and "they", which refers to the Ukrainian refugees who, in context, are labelled as Europeans; or metonymically to the places they come from such as "[t]his [...] city" in order to highlight their spatial proximity. However, predications that refer to civilization, and thus culture, socio-cultural standards, and mental qualities, such as "civilized", "prosperous" and "middle class", as well as "intelligent" and "educated" respectively, are frequently used to filter those who are spatially close but also civilized like *us*.

Given that the in-groupers with whom the speakers sympathize based on race, religion, culture, and place (see section 4.1) are the same social actors presented positively in terms of civilization, being civilized becomes a matter of not only being advanced and prosperous, but also parallel with the idea of coming from a specific geo-political entity and belonging to a particular racial and ethnic group. Those who are white, Christian, and European belong to the intellectuals and the civilized sphere, unlike their non-white, non-Christian, and non-European counterparts.

Unlike the in-group's predications, the out-group is inferably negatively constructed by attributes that denote them as uncivilized, ignorant, and primitive. See example 3 that follows by the Prime Minister of Bulgaria Kiril Petkov:

## Example 3

These are not the refugees we are used to. They are Europeans, intelligent, educated people, some are IT programmers... this is not the usual refugee wave of people with an unknown past. No European country is afraid of them. (Kiril Petkov, 25 Feb, 2022).

Petkov compares between the in- and the out-groups by means of structural opposition. He refers to the in-groupers with near demonstratives, viz, "[t]hese" and "this", thus discursively positioning them closer to himself. Besides, referring to the in-group's, i.e., white

Christian Europeans, traits, viz., intelligent and educated, Petkov makes an over-generalization, mainly a conventional implicature, by using the nomination "Europeans" to positively name the in-group, thus functioning as an argumentative device, and by collocating it with "intelligent" and "educated", which implies that all members of the in-group are civilized, intelligent and educated. Besides, by contrasting the two social actor groups while not referring to the out-group's traits regarding intelligence and education, the speaker implies that the out-group is unsophisticated, ignorant, backward and primitive. In this discriminatory remark, Petkov uses both the topos of *definition*, i.e., if X is designated European, then X should carry the qualities of being civilized and intellectually superior, as such qualities are, according to the speaker, essential in any European; and the topos of *danger and threat*, i.e., if X is not European, X is dangerous for, and poses a threat to, Europeans. The latter topos is evident in Petkov's "[n]o European country is afraid of them", where "them" refers to Ukrainians. It also appears in the use of the metaphor "wave", which serves as a nomination that has an argumentative function that presents the outgroup as being dangerous. Indeed, by stating that the intelligent and educated Ukrainian refugees pose no threat to Europe, he constructs another negative image of the out-groupers by implying that the non-Europeans are dangerous and, more or less, barbarian because, as he claims, they have an unknown past and have no education background.

While racially classifying social actors, other speakers deny the fact that they are racists and stress positive Self-presentation such as being liberal and tolerant. They employ disclaimers in order to defend their racist opinions and justify their in-group–out-group classification while denying or mitigating the prejudice. While so doing, those who criticize the out-group use variants of the rhetoric 'I'm not prejudiced but', claiming that their criticism of some social actors is fact-based, reasonable, commonsensical and objective (see Augoustinos & Every, 2007; Rojo-Martín & van Dijk 1997; van Dijk & Wodak, 2000). See examples 4 and 5 below by CBS news correspondent Charlie D'Agata:

## Example 4

This isn't a place, with all due respect, like Iraq or Afghanistan that has seen conflict raging for decades. This is a relatively civilized, relatively European – I have to choose those words carefully, too – city, one where you wouldn't expect that, or hope that it's going to happen. (Charlie D'Agata, 25 Feb, 2022)

The denial of racism is obvious in D'Agata's "with all due respect" as well as "I have to choose those words carefully, too", by which he constructs a Self-image as being tolerant in order to tone down the derogation of the classification of the social actors to whom he refers, as previously mentioned, by means of metonymy. Given the predications used, the out-group is negatively characterized as "see[ing] conflict raging for decades" whereas the in-group is positively described by the attribute "civilized". This comparison between the out- and in-groups provides the latent meaning that the former is uncivilized, hostile, and barbarian, and it explicitly states the Europeanness of civilization, which is supported by the use of the above-mentioned topos of *definition*. Similar to Example 3, "European" is used as a predication that positively names the in-group, and it collocates with "civilized".

Interestingly, the speaker uses near demonstratives, viz., "[t]his [...] place" and "[t]his [...] city" to position himself in close proximity to the social actors he considers to fit in the in-group. Then he specifies more who is considered to be civilized by collocating "civilized" with "European", both of which are overtly preceded by the adverb "relatively" that evokes the question of "relative to whom?" Since the discriminatory remark in question is perspectivized from a Eurocentric stance, portraying white Christian Europeans as being the only civilized group, and as the latter are discursively portrayed as being spatially and culturally closer to the speaker, then the answer to this question is "relative to the speaker in particular, and to white Christian Europeans in general". So, the in-groupers are civilized in the way white Christian Europeans define civilization, and they are Europeans in the way white Christian Europeans are Europeans.

Although D'Agata supposes that the disclaimers he uses mitigate prejudice, he was widely criticized for his derogatory remark. As a result, on the very next day, he publically made an apology in which he, again, used such a rhetorical device and re-stated his prejudiced opinion. Notice the disclaimer in example 5 below:

#### Example 5

I just wanted to clarify something I said yesterday in describing the conflict here. I spoke in a way that I regret, and for that, I'm sorry. What I'd hope to convey is what's unique about the fighting on the way here is that this country has not really seen this scale of war in recent years unlike some conflicts in countries that I covered that tragically suffered too many years of fighting. You should not compare conflicts anyway. (Charlie D'Agata, 26 Feb, 2022)

The speaker used the deictic term "here" and the near demonstrative "this" in "this country" in order to position himself closer to the in-group. D'Agata apologized by using the disclaimers "I spoke in a way that I regret, and for that, I'm sorry" and "[y]ou should not compare conflicts anyway". Yet, his racist view resurfaced again by comparing between the two social actor groups. In both of his statements, he emphasizes the idea that non-Europeans have gone through wars and conflicts for decades, thus war is the norm in these countries. This theme is elaborately discussed in the section that follows.

#### Wars and Conflicts in Non-European Countries Are Normal

The construction of wars and conflicts as a normal state in non-European countries is key in the rise of the blatant racist discourse. As the analysis below show, the strategies used in the realization of this theme essentialise the state of war in non-European countries so that less, if any, human and political action is expected to stop these wars. In contrast, the abnormality of war in Ukraine requires urgent intervention, simply because the victims are like *us*.

# Normalization of Wars and Conflicts in non-European Countries Based on the Element of Assimilation

Normalization of wars and conflicts in non-European countries based on *assimilation* is introduced through the frequent comparison between the in- and out-groups. In section 4.1, we discussed how sympathy was exclusive for those who belong to a particular race, religion, culture and place, i.e. white Christian Europeans. This assimilation-based sympathy, which in turn entails not sympathizing with the out-group that is geographically far from the in-group and encompasses non-white, non-Christian, and non-European people, leads to the conclusion that war is an exclusively normal status for the out-group's countries. This idea is evident in example 6 below by UK Journalist, former conservative politician, and Advisor to the Board of Trade Daniel Hannan:

## Example 6

They seem so like us. That is what makes it so shocking. Ukraine is a European country. Its people watch Netflix and have Instagram accounts, vote in free elections and read uncensored newspapers. War is no longer something visited upon impoverished and remote populations. (Daniel Hannan, 26 Feb, 2022)

Hannan describes the events that have taken place in Ukraine as "shocking" because he assumes wars are unlikely to erupt in a European country such as Ukraine, and this can be attributed to the fact that it is spatially in close proximity to him. This is evident from his use of "remote" to describe the out-group's nations. Besides, he attributes his shock to the fact that "[t]hey" (referring to Ukrainians) look like "us" (referring to Europeans), thus blatantly uttering classical discriminatory remarks based on race and physical appearance. In his claim, Hannan uses a topos of *assimilation*, as well as topos of *Europeanness*. The first is previously mentioned in sections 4.1 whereas the latter revolves around the idea that if X is European, then X should not be under the condition in question, war in our case. The latent meaning such topoi suggest is that war is not something shocking for those who are dissimilar to "us"; rather, it is the normal status under which the out-group lives. Other speakers, such as

France's BFM TV Journalist Phillipe Corbé, present the same derogatory idea by the structural opposition of the in- and out-groups, i.e. Syrians and Ukrainians, as example 7 demonstrates:

#### Example 7

We're not talking here about Syrians fleeing the bombing of the Syrian regime backed by Putin. We're talking about Europeans leaving in cars that look like ours to save their lives. (Phillipe Corbé, 26 Feb, 2022)

Corbé refers to the in- and out-groups by the nominations "Syrians" and "Europeans" (referring to Ukrainians) respectively. Although both references are followed by predications that denote fleeing war, the speaker disregards the war taking place in Syria by stating that it is not his topic, but the one in Ukraine is. He uses the deictic term "here" to portray the in-group as being closer to him than the out-group, considering war to be a normal status in Syria. This normalization of the war in Syrian in particular, and in non-European regions in general, is justified by the topoi of comparison and assimilation and of Europeanness. The former is evident in his use of "in cars that look like ours", where he stresses the socio-cultural similarities, whereas the latter appears in his nomination of Ukrainians as "Europeans". Interestingly, the in-group's predication pertaining fleeing the war is followed by the conditional "to save their lives", thus associating Ukrainians who are under war with being victims. However, the out-group's predication does not extend to mention the reason behind fleeing the war, although it is commonsensically recognized as to save life. This may evoke the exclamatory question of are Syrians fleeing the bombs for different reasons?, which leads to another topos, viz., that of valuableness, which suggests that if X is European, then X's life is valuable and should not be threatened by any danger. Consequently, despite being backed by the same party, i.e., Russia, war in Syria is considered to be normal whereas in Ukraine it is an unusual event that is worth talking about.

# Normalization of Wars and Conflicts in non-European Countries Based on the Element of Civilization and Social Values

War in Ukraine is similarly described as being unusual or unexpected compared to that in non-European regions based on the element of civilization. This sub-topic can be illustrated by instances 4 and 5 above, which are expressed from a Eurocentric perspective, as D'Agata negatively presents the out-group as not being civilized because they have been going through conflicts for decades compared to the in-group that is positively presented as civilized (see section 6.2). In these utterances, the speaker employs the near demonstrative "[t]his" and the deictic term "here", which metonymically refer to Ukrainians, to shorten the distance between himself and the in-groupers because he considers them to be as civilized as he is. In his argument in example 4, after mitigating his racist view by using a disclaimer, D'Agata employs a topos of normalization, i.e., if X has been in a state of war for a long time period, then it becomes the normal status for X. Hence, the speaker normalizes the out-group's being under war. In example 6, D'Agata reemphasizes this normalization and then uses the disclaimer "[y]ou should not compare conflicts anyway", to tone down this normalization and its negative meaning.

## **Proximity-Based Homogeneous Community**

The discourse in the analysed data constructs a homogeneous community to which the in-group belongs. As has been shown so far, homogeneity is based on two main, inseparable, dimensions: spatial proximity, and elements of race, religion, and culture. Both dimensions are essential in identifying who is in and who is out. So, the element of geopolitical closeness alone does not suffice for one to fit in the European community, as racial, religious, and cultural elements are key defining features of the in-group. The inseparability of the latter dimension from the former is evident in the white Christian Europeans' discrimination against black Ukrainians (see section 1). So, those who belong in the ingroup, i.e. white Christian Europeans, are the ones who fit in such an imagined polity.

Through the analysis, this discursive proximity was found mainly in the deictic terms and demonstratives. Near demonstratives such as "These [...] refugees" and "this [...] refugee wave" in example 3, "this [...] place" and "this [...] city" in example 4, "this country" in example 5, among many others, are used to refer to Ukraine, Ukrainians, Kyiv, or Europe. These linguistic devices position those to whom these demonstratives refer closer to the speaker, thus as belonging to the in-group. Other linguistic devices used to construct this proximity include deixis. The deictic term "here" was frequently used to refer to Ukraine, a place that is viewed as being close not only spatially but also racially, religiously, and culturally. This construction of proximity serves as a vehicle for the construction of a homogeneous European community where the in-groupers are the ones who belong. Given that the in-group is determined by elements such as race, religion, and culture in the first place, then by civilization, those who belong in such a community are white, Christian Europeans who are supposed to be civilized and culturally superior.

One example of the above discursive construction of the European *sameness* by emphasizing spatial proximity is Chancellor Karl Nehammer's derogatory remark where he uses the phrase "neighbourhood help" to refer to the help Austria offers to Ukraine:

#### Example 8

Of course we will take in refugees, if necessary. It's different in Ukraine than in countries like Afghanistan. We're talking about neighbourhood help. (Karl Nehammer, 28 Feb, 2022)

After he uses metonymic nominations that positively and negatively represent the in- and out-groups respectively, Nehammer's argument is supported by the previously mentioned topos of *comparison* (see section 4.1). So the neighbourhood help occurs when the neighbours are spatially close, and when they belong in the white, Christian, and European group.

#### Conclusion

This research aims at investigating the racist discourse against non-Europeans that is revived in Europe during the Russia-Ukraine war. It

analyses Western elite groups' prejudiced remarks from a critical (linguistic and discursive) perspective to understand how a blatant and essentialist racist discourse is replacing the more indirect, cultural-based, neo-racism. Within the frame work of critical discourse analysis, the study adopts the Discourse-Historical Approach that situates the analysis of language in a wider socio-political and historical context. By this a thorough discursive analysis of language patterns is conducted to reveal the set of arguments that motivate how social groups are constructed relevant to racial, cultural, and religious differences.

The analysis reveals that the classical racist discourse is revived in the aftermath of Russia-Ukraine war, as prejudice against non-Europeans, especially Africans and Easterners, have become more obvious through the Western elite groups' use of a unique new rhetoric based on bringing together spatial proximity and the similarity of race, religion, and culture, thus combining the elements of the classical racist discourse with those of neo-racism. The speakers' exclusive sympathy towards white Christian European social actors on the basis of both spatial proximity to the speakers and their racial, religious, and cultural similarities is one facet of this new discrimination. The claim that only such a group of social actors is worth sympathy starts with the speakers' classification of social actors into an in-group viewed as worth sympathy and an out-group seen as not worth it, and then justifying this classification with reference to spatial closeness as well as racial, religious, and cultural assimilation.

The analysis also shows that the Western elite groups' discourse classifies the white Christian Europeans and their counterparts who belong to the out-group into civilized-uncivilized spheres. This classification is made and justified with reference to the in-groups' geographical closeness to the interlocutors as well as belonging to the white race, Christianity, and European culture which, to them, equals being civilized. The new racist discourse becomes more evident in the discursive theme of normalizing wars and conflicts in non-European nations. The interlocutors in this regard construct their claims of considering tragedies to be a normal status in non-European regions as regards assimilation and socio-cultural values, not to mention spatial proximity. Consequently, it can be concluded that

war is an exclusively normal status for the out-group's countries, and that it should not take place in Ukraine in particular and in Europe in general.

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