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The Silenced Migrants

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HNRS 490

June 2, 2023

Capstone Presentation Transcript

This is the transcript for my Honors Senior Capstone Presentation, accompanied by a slideshow with pictures and graphs.

Slide 1: Introduction;

The Silenced Migrants,

By: Alisa Nguyen

Advisor: Dr. Melina Juarez

Slide 2: Table of Contents;

1. Motivations for this topic
2. Background on the Syrian Civil War
3. Guiding Question and Research Approach
4. Overview on the Crises
5. Causes of Refugee Influx
6. Differential Treatment for Ukrainians
7. Comparing the Treatment of BIPOC refugees
8. Media Influence
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Slide 3: Motivations for topic;

As a child of POC refugees escaping from war, it breaks my heart to see how we treat different immigrants and refugees today. Many people are looking for a better life because their

countries were torn apart by conflict that the Western world played a large role in. Treating everyone, regardless of their skin color or why they left their home country, with kindness is what I hope you take from this presentation.

Slide 4: Motivations for topic continued;

Seeing the way everyone jumped to help Ukrainian refugees but ignore or infantilize the myriad of issues there are not only in the US, but all around the world really confused me. That was, until I realized it was all about race.

Slide 5: Background on Syrian Civil War;

The groups of people(ethnic and religious divides) that live in Syria were joined together by borders created by French colonialists, who were in control from 1923-1946. One minority group in Syria found an opportunity to align themselves with French authorities. They helped them build the Syrian military, which rose to power in 1963. This prevented the majority group in Syria from holding any influential political power in the country. In an attempt to gain more power and influence, they began to organize uprisings and garnering support, most notably in 2011 when more serious war and conflict broke out after decades of conflict and tension(Beauchamp).

Slide 6: Refugee definition(Brown);

“people who have been forced to flee their homes and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country”

Slide 7: Migrant definition(UNHCR);

“Migrants choose to move not because of a direct threat of persecution or death, but mainly to improve their lives by finding work, or in some cases for education, family reunion, or other reasons. Unlike refugees who cannot safely return home, migrants face no such

impediment to return. If they choose to return home, they will continue to receive the protection of their government.”

I originally made a mistake in my project and did not search up the differences between these two until too late. To call any of these refugees migrants would invalidate their experiences of being forced to leave a war torn country in search of safety.

Slide 8: Guiding question for this project: How has white supremacy and racism in Europe shaped the contrasting migration experiences between Ukrainian and BIPOC migrants and refugees?

Slide 9: Research approach: To approach this question, I compared the treatment of refugees from the 2015 crisis, who were predominantly BIPOC, to Ukrainian refugees. Some factors I looked into are institutional barriers or lack thereof, public perception, media coverage, and treatment by fellow refugees.

Slide 10: Overview of the Crises section header

Slide 11: Ukraine Crisis;

Due to the conflict with Russia, around 8 million Ukrainians have been recorded in neighboring countries and around Europe. Currently, Poland hosts approximately sixty percent of refugees from Ukraine. Unsurprisingly, countries that are typically staunchly against refugees like Czechia and Slovakia have accepted refugees. In an effort to make this transition easier, UNHCR & UNICEF have partnered to create safe spots for refugees. A quote from the UN Refugees website states that “The UN Refugee Agency saw a \$700 million funding gap in the first year of the war in Ukraine, putting great strain on operations in Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Iraq, Ethiopia and other countries in dire need of support”,

showing that there was a clear priority in which refugees received the most aid. In a single year, the UNHCR provided over 4 million people in Ukraine with humanitarian assistance(UNHCR).

Slide 12: 2015 Refugee Crisis;

The journey for refugees from the 2015 crisis has been nothing short of dangerous and heartbreaking. Over three thousand people were reported dead or missing just in 2021 due to dangerous journeys and obstacles they faced. By the end of 2015, five point two million refugees attempted to escape war torn countries like Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Many of these refugees are sent to non-EU countries such as Turkey for processing for an undetermined length of time. Sea arrivals are common, with 114k sea arrivals in just 2021 in Italy, Greece, Spain, Cypress, and Malta. Due to the nature of these journeys and the instability these people faced in their home countries, many children have missed upwards of 4 years of school due to conflict in their home country. There has also been an increasing number of women and children(traveling separately) making the journey alone, which has added to the thousands of people who have died or gone missing since 2015(UNHCR).

Slide 13: Causes of Refugee Influx section header

Slide 14: Ukrainian Crisis;

War and conflict with Russia has been increasing throughout the years, with Russia slowly becoming more aggressive in their tactics. In the years leading up to 2022, in order to strategically improve their power against Ukraine, Russia began placing more military units along the Ukraine and Russia border. Everything came to a head when Putin announced a full scale land, sea, and air invasion to target Ukrainian assets and large cities on Feb 24th, 2022. A quote from the Council on Foreign Relations states that, “Russian forces invaded a largely unprepared Ukraine after Russian President Vladimir Putin authorized a ‘special military

operation' against the country. In his statement, Putin claimed that the goal of the operation was to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine and end the alleged genocide of Russians in Ukrainian territory.”(UNHCR)

Slide 15: 2015 Crisis;

There are a myriad of reasons that all add into the 2015 crisis, but the primary reasons are that many people left to flee the conflict and persecution happening in Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Eritrea and Iraq. The Syrian Civil War significantly worsened in 2011 due to uptick in government control and uprisings staged by Syrians due to decades of rising tensions and conflict. This resulted in over 14 million Syrians having to flee the country, and 70% of the remaining population requiring some type of humanitarian aid and being displaced. Conflicts in countries such as Somalia and Eritrea have also contributed to the crisis, with refugees fleeing due to persecution and repression based on identity, as well as the impacts that climate change and severe famine have caused(UNHCR).

Slide 16: Differential Treatment for Ukrainians section header

Slide 17: Benefits to being Ukrainian;

In light of the crisis with Russia, “Europe has granted Ukrainians automatic residency and visas, Ukrainians are at the front of the line for housing and refugee services.” They are also “offer[ed] automatic recognition and, therefore, direct access to services for which other asylum seekers often wait months and years.” This automatically puts them at an advantage because they do not have to jump through hoops to have access to services that will set them up for success in the EU. Since the 2015 crisis, the EU has had the time to improve their immigration system and possibly implement automatic recognition prior to the Ukrainian crisis, but they have not chosen

to do so. This shows that BIPOC refugees are not a priority, nor will special treatment be given to them even in times of emergency(Bird and Noumon).

Another advantage that Ukrainian refugees have is that they are registered for the Temporary Protection Directive and therefore have better access to resources such as work permits, residency rights, schools, healthcare, housing, and banks. This lowers their crime rates and positively impacts their success, as well as their integration into the country. They also have access to more countries, because countries that do not typically accept refugees due to wanting to maintain a homogenous population such as Czech Republic and Slovakia have accepted Ukrainian refugees during this crisis. This is due to their alleged similarities, whether that be culturally, religiously, or ethnically(Bird and Noumon).

Slide 18: Automatic Recognition definition(EUR Lex);

Aims to expedite the process of Ukrainian refugees gaining stable employment. Allows for refugees to work at their skill and qualification level rather than being underpaid for their abilities.

Slide 19: Number of Refugees to Europe Surges to Record 1.3 Million in 2015 & Europe's asylum seekers did not equally disperse across countries; visuals(Conner).

The visual on the left shows that there is a slight uptick in refugees after the start of the Syrian War in 2011 like talked about in the earlier slides, and with conflict becoming more unsafe there is a huge influx of refugees in 2015. The EU had not seen this amount of asylum seekers in at least three decades.

The visual on the right shows a list of how many first time asylum seekers applied in each country in relation to the countries population. This will be relevant to the next slide.

Slide 20: Countries that have taken in Ukrainian Refugees visual(Bird and Noumon);

Estonia, Czech Republic, Poland, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Latvia were the top six countries to take in Ukrainian refugees. None of them even make the list on the previous slide. This shows that not only did Ukrainian refugees have access to more resources and services, but they also had more access to countries. Part of the reason why there are so many refugees in these countries is proximity to Ukraine, but these countries are also known for their closed borders and disdain for refugees and migrants.

Slide 21: Comparing the Treatment of BIPOC refugees section header

Slide 22: A Treacherous Journey;

For the many BIPOC refugees, the journey was nothing short of distressing. To start off, the United Kingdom announced that they would deport anyone who made it into the country. In France, the specialized riot police force was deployed in an attempt to limit the amount of refugees that got into the country. France also imprisoned over 47,000 refugees in detention centers and bulldozed active camps starting in 2016(Walia).

The majority of refugees lived in pop up camps, many times near landfills and without clean water, electricity, sanitary facilities, or food. To this day, many refugees that lived in these unfavorable conditions are still stuck in them due to a lack of help from the government and limited access to resources to help them get back on their feet. From 2018 to 2019, forty percent of border deaths worldwide occurred in the Mediterranean. One in every 4 people attempting to get into Europe via boat lose their lives to treacherous conditions, starvation, and other factors. The support that Ukrainian refugees received from the European area was not something that was seen in the 2015 crisis(Walia).

Slide 23: Disheartening Experiences;

A quote from an asylum seeker says, “I never thought I would be living on a street like that in Europe,” Mr. Mohammadi said. “Our country has been at war for 45 years, and I thought I could get a better life here.” As refugees from the 2015 crisis have been waiting on long lists for years, they now get to watch as Ukrainians are prioritized and new measures are put in place to accommodate them. “Some politicians have blamed the strains on the system on asylum seekers from Syria, Afghanistan and other places outside Europe”(Solomon and Pronczuk) even though many of the new refugees are Ukrainian.

Slide 24: Empty Welcoming Words;

While it is common knowledge that right wing organizations want to put an end to migration by cutting off routes and passages, that does not mean that left leaning political parties are doing their part either. Technically, the left is not inherently against migrants, they do not back up their words with actions. This rhetoric that left leaning parties push, ‘refugees welcome,’ hides the unwelcoming reality that almost nine hundred thousand refugees face, and are left in a limbo all across Europe just in 2019. Many still live in camps or on the streets, are underpaid and exploited for their skill level, wait for claims to be approved, and can not integrate due to the odds stacked against them. This idea of creating a welcoming social environment does nothing if the infrastructure is not built to support all migrants, regardless of their background(Walia).

Slide 25: Racism from Ukrainians;

One example of racism coming from Ukrainians is the story when “white women and children were given priority on vehicles departing the country, African women were barred from trains leaving Kyiv even though there were empty seats”(Howard et al). This shows that in comparison, the lives of African women were not worth saving and they should leave those seats for other white women and children. That kind of blatant racism should not need to be explained,

and is truly unspeakable. Ukraine's Deputy Chief Prosecutor, David Sakvarelidze said on BBC, “It’s very emotional for me because I see European people with blue eyes and blonde hair being killed.” This shows his clear priority and that the lives of European people are worth more than those of BIPOC. Unlike other scenarios where we see non-verbal evidence of this, Sakvarelidze has said the quiet part that many people think out loud.

Another story came from the UN, who said “[they] also bore witness to the ugly reality that some Black and Brown people fleeing Ukraine – and other wars and conflicts around the world – hav[ing] not received the same treatment as Ukrainian refugees. They reported disturbing incidents of discrimination, violence, and racism.”(UNHCR) This only reinforces what we see about white Ukrainians treating people escaping their own country unfairly.

Slide 26: Challenges both Communities Face;

While there are many contrasting events between the two refugee groups, they do have a bit in common. Both communities face some hostility and resentment, and on some occasions, violence. For example, a “hotel [that was] being prepared for asylum seekers near Dresden was partly torched. In October, a hostel housing Ukrainians in Germany was set ablaze, too”(Solomon and Pronczuk). This is a clear sign that asylum seekers were unwelcome in these areas and that regardless of race, they are not wanted by some.

The continual influx of refugees has also put unsustainable strain on EU finances and causes anti-refugee sentiments to grow as taxpayers take on more burden. While this is unfortunate, refugees can be a great investment for the economy given the opportunity. It is well known that the European area has an aging population, so younger refugees would help immensely in bridging that gap. Another issue that both refugee groups face is that men,

regardless of age or race, are seen as less vulnerable in comparison to children and women. This puts them more at risk to stay in unsafe situations.

Slide 27: Anti-refugee sentiments definition;

the expressing of resistance, aggression, and/or malice towards refugees

Slide 28: Media Influence section header

Slide 29: Ukrainian Crisis;

When the media addressed violent issues regarding Ukrainians, the issues are attributed to other reasons. One example of this is about a violent encounter resulting in a death, where the violence that occurred was attributed to overcrowding and lack of organization at the Polish border. There is no mention of purposeful violence or a threat to law enforcement or other refugees(Lampart). Ukrainian refugees are also seen as long term investments for the economy, with sources discussing how they can pad the aging labor force and that their integration into the labor market is promising. Accepting Ukrainian refugees is approached as a return on an investment, with the investment being putting resources into integration for Ukrainians and the return being a healthier and more stable economy(Bird and Noumon). This shows that integration and long term residency is not only an option, but also a priority.

Slide 30: 2015 Crisis;

Refugees from the 2015 crisis were depicted as threats in a myriad of ways, whether that be culturally, economically, or threats to national security. They were also at much higher risk for adverse living conditions, inhumane treatment, and deadly journeys. Despite this, the media primarily covered their clashes with law enforcement and other violent encounters(McCann et al).

In the next slide, we see how asylum seekers from the 2015 crisis were already the victims of fear mongering, which only reinforces the knowledge that these refugees are unfairly portrayed in the media.

Slide 31: Snippets from a UK article(Culbertson).

Slide 32: Number of Articles Addressing the Topic of Integration, (McCann et al);

When addressing integration, it was more often addressed when regarding Ukrainian refugees. This demonstrates that effort is being put into improving the life of Ukrainian refugees and a future is seen for them in the EU. It also shows that integration and stability is a priority, as well as adequate housing. This implies that POC refugees are not as deserving to stay within EU borders long term.

Slide 33: Sentiment analysis values by month & Frequency of key words by year(McCann et al);

To preface, negative one is the worst sentiment and positive one is the best sentiment. The overall trend that we see is the sentiments from 2015 were more negative than the sentiments from 2022. We also see that sentiments from 2015 got better further into the year, showing that BIPOC refugees were not living up to harmful stereotypes and the negative expectations. On the other hand, sentiments from 2022 got mildly more negative as time progressed, which can be attributed to growing anti-refugee sentiments and the strain on financial resources. Regardless of this decline in positive sentiments, refugees from 2022 were still viewed more positively than refugees from 2015 were.

Keywords in articles also play a role in perception and can be attributed to media influence. We see that the words “illegal,” “flood,” “wave,” and “tide” were used significantly more when discussing the 2015 crisis. These words, comparatively, have a negative connotation. Events like floods, tides, and waves are larger than a stream or a pour. Refugees from the 2015

crisis were only illegal because they were not accepted with welcoming arms by Europe, when all these countries are all being torn apart by war. The choice of words that the media uses shapes the perception of refugees, and can ultimately harm refugees and their chance of success in a country.

Slide 34: Wrapping Up section header

Slide 35: Importance;

Unfair treatment of migrants based on race furthers the legacy of colonization and continues to build the wealth of specific races. The unfair treatment is also unethical and racist, and further perpetuates harmful stereotypes. The lack of support that POC refugees have gotten have caused them to be more susceptible to crime and other illegal activities. For no fault of the refugees, public perception makes the lives of BIPOC refugees more difficult. This presentation clearly highlights the night and day differences between how each group of refugees are treated. I hope that everyone learns from this presentation and works to fight their own biases, because everyone deserves to be treated like a human being.

Slide 36: Thank you slide

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