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Appraisal of BA Thesis *The Impact of War on Ukrainian Women Refugees* by Anastasiia Stepanenko

In this thesis Anastasiia Stepanenko sets out to examine the ways in which Ukrainian women refugees are impacted by the current war in Ukraine and contribute to its military and possible conflict resolution. Four chapters focus on survivor guilt, war related trauma, the situation of Ukrainian refugees in the Czech Republic and their societal contributions. Importantly, by considering psychological, social, and political factors, the thesis resists re-inscribing refugee women in prevalent stereotypes of victimhood and casts a light also on their agency and contributions. The thesis is strongest where Stepanenko refers to the activities of specific women such as the unorthodox practices of the TerOnlyFans (4.7) or civil leaders in Ukraine (4.8).

An overall weakness of the thesis is the lack of sources and references to Ukrainian women refugees, including information that might contradict the framing offered. The first two chapters on survivor guilt and trauma read like textbook summaries of literature that notably predates the war in Ukraine without any evidence that shows how (some) Ukrainian women are indeed affected in ways garnered from other conflicts. Claims that Ukrainian women refugees ‘face a myriad of traumatic experiences’ (13) and ‘gender-specific consequences’ (14) or ‘may experience disruptions in health care services’ (12) remain unsupported. This means that the thesis notably does not ‘delv[e] into the experiences of Ukrainian women refugees’ (7) even anecdotally, auto-ethnographically or drawing on media sources, so that little can be learned or concluded on what particular women might need. The same goes for their situation in the Czech Republic (chapter 3) and the general references to ‘language barriers, [and] cultural differences’ (19); as well as the description of Czech organisations – what are their respective strengths and weaknesses and what is the evidence that some offer community and guidance?



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While it is clear that more systematic academic research is not yet available in this ongoing conflict, some effort at corroboration needs to be made since its absence – against the stated aims of the author – effectively obscures and negates the specificity of women’s (and other genders’) experiences. How are experiences of trauma and resilience shaped by region, class, gender, age, family status and more (‘intersectionality’, p.27)? What is the evidence of an inclusive or participatory approach of organisations such as The House of Good Foundation and women’s ‘unity and shared vision’ (23)? Chapter 4 reads more like a policy document than social scientific research. What is the evidence for changing power dynamics and women’s empowerment?

Given this lack of empirical evidence and references (including online sources) I invite Anastasiia Stepanenko to present some cases or case studies on the main issues addressed in the thesis. Is it possible that trauma and agency can coincide? What are areas of tension or ambivalence for Ukrainian women refugees? Even if based on limited experience, what could Czech state and civil organisations do better to assist Ukrainian refugees when public support might wane?

I recommend the thesis for defence and based on the address of the issues outlined suggest the grade 2-3.

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