MIGRANTS AS VISITORS: A COLOUR-BLIND APPROACH AND IMAGINED RACIAL HIERARCHY[1]

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Abstract: ***This article provides the results on research into the attitudes of Czech seniors towards foreigners of non-European origin. It is based on an interpretation of ten semi-structured interviews of a biographical nature, focused on the participants' encounters with otherness. Regardless of the political regime and the period of time, the main feature of this contact is distance and separation from foreigners. From the point of view of seniors, migration is an unnatural and only temporary phenomenon that has to be controlled and restricted by the state. Negative attitudes towards foreigners in the narrations are concealed by seemingly neutral statements that are subject to an effort of not providing any reason for being labelled as a "racist". Nevertheless, it is still possible to uncover the idea of self-evident power superiority over categories of people understood as racially different. Although the seniors expressed various levels of sympathy, indifference, or antipathy towards the individual non-European groups, we believe that these differences are not a manifestation of selective acceptance, but rather a manifestation of imagined racial hierarchy in which groups perceived as submissive are preferred.***

Keywords: ***racial hierarchy; attitudes towards migrants; colour-blind approach; power asymmetry; Czech Republic***

The aim of this article is to explain the ways in which images of racially different groups of foreigners are constructed by Czech seniors. Race is understood here not only as a social construct (Šmausová 1999), but also as social practice

[1] Financial Support from Specific University Research (IGA_FF_2018_023).

focused on the detachment or subordination of groups of people to the dominant population based on their visual features (Alexander – Knowles 2005). From this point of view, we strive to gain insight into the everyday nature of this asymmetrical relation through the analysis of narrations in semi-structured interviews. The presented qualitative research is based on work with ten participants from a town located in eastern part of the Czech Republic. Personal experience with people of non-European origin was determined as the main topic of the interviews with participants. Due to the focus on the ways of constructing racial images, in which the aspect of the visibility of physical differences played an important part, we chose three categories: Blacks/inhabitants of sub-Saharan Africa, Arabs, and the Vietnamese, as all of these categories correlate with the past occurrence of non-European migrant groups in Czechoslovakia during socialism.[2] These categories are perceived differently in measurements within long-term sociological investigation (Šmídová – Vávra – Čížek 2017).[3]

We believe that the content and character of narrations about personal encounters with people bearing a marker of visual difference enable us to clarify the current "racial imaginary" in the Czech Republic as part of the current "immigrant integration imaginaries" in Europe (Schinkel 2017). The investigated accounts and stories are not only a reflection of participants' experience. Human experience – in this case encounters with otherness – is also structured by power relations, and only then is reflection possible (Scott 1992). Rather than only analysing the attitudes, this article therefore deals with an analysis of the power relations where foreigners of non-European origin are placed into an inferior position by the dominating population. Finally, we argue that different attitudes towards each racial or ethnic group do not indicate the level of tolerance or xenophobia of Czech society, but rather cover the hegemonic nature of inter-racial relationships, as the various levels of acceptance are based on the presumed submissiveness of essentially perceived groups of migrants, leading

[2] We are aware that each of these categories is constructed in a different way and mixes racial or ethnic status along with the designation of a group of people from almost the entire continent or language sphere. Our choice is primarily based on emic conceptualisation.

[3] There are differences in the focus of the existing literature on the attitudes to each category in the Czech Republic: we can find several texts about attitudes towards the Vietnamese (Kocourek 2001, Brouček 2003, Bezouška 2016), an increasing number of studies dealing with islamophobia (see Topinka et al. 2016), but deeper research on attitudes towards people from sub-Saharan Africa is missing.

to the reproduction of imagined racial hierarchy. At the same time, the shift of attention towards a discussion on the alleged qualities of foreigners enables the speaker, a representative of the dominant population, to avoid any accusation of racism. In this text, we therefore strive to fill in the knowledge gap related to a certain taboo of the topic in East-Central Europe (Nowicka 2018), as well as to the methodological basis and traditional approaches to research in attitudes towards otherness.

The main theoretical framework for the analysis of this asymmetrical relation in accounts on others is built by the Anglo-American *whiteness studies*. The concept of whiteness is focused on clarifying the ways "white" populations are constructed as the privileged ones over non-whites, including the legitimisation of this asymmetry as a natural one (Doane – Bonilla-Silva 2003). It is thus concerned with more than just attitudes; these are hidden mechanisms of social exclusion on the basis of a shared distinction among people according to the group characteristics attributed to them. Another topic of whiteness studies is the investigation of the impacts of this distinction on the lives of people classified as racially different from the dominating population in various aspects, such as movement in the area, identity, or embodiment (Clarke – Garner 2010, Garratt 2017).

As emphasised by the concept of *new racism*, the present way of constructing differences is not as straightforward as the biology-based racism of the first half of the twentieth century: the inherited higher or lower status according to one's physiology has been replaced by cultural differences. The expression of racist attitudes, strengthening social inequality, is also subjected to the logic of seeming correctness (Bonilla-Silva 2003). In relation to this, Bonilla-Silva talks about "colour-blind racism"; that is, the attitude where the speakers rhetorically emphasise their counter-racist thinking, but in fact still build their image of the world on the *entitlement* of the members of their own group. In contrast to previous historical periods, racial dominance is concealed as non-existent, and its public manifestations and consequences are belittled as marginal phenomena connected only to limited groups of right-wing extremists (Desmond – Emirbayer 2009). The topic of racist constructions and the related inter-racial relationships are also understood as obsolete and not corresponding to the significant shift in the understanding of equality regardless of origin or skin colour.

Research Methodology

The measurement of attitudes of the domestic population towards foreigners is a standard area of sociological research in general, and fully applicable to the Czech society (Chaloupková – Šalamounová 2006, Havlík 2007, Leontiyeva – Vávra 2009, Šmídová – Vávra – Čížek 2017, research series of CVVM).[4] There is also a tradition of comparing European countries, in which the Czech Republic shows – similarly to the other nations of East-Central Europe – high rates of negative attitudes towards migrants over the long run (Leontiyeva 2015). A high proportion of the Czech population considers migration a risky factor in the development of society on the communal level. These people expect foreigners to assimilate, and to abandon introducing a different ethnic identity into the public space. Many research projects are focused on creating a ranking of the (un)popularity of foreign ethnic groups, usually followed by a scale interpreted on the basis of the perception of stereotypically ascribed economic and cultural attributes increasing or decreasing the ostensible feeling of threat or indifference. The stated topic is then complemented by a search for connections between the socio-demographic characteristics of the particular respondent and the alleged qualities of migrants and their country of origin. It is of interest for our study that particularly the search for correlations between attitudes and the status of the particular respondent reveals a very low standard deviation (Leontiyeva – Vávra 2009: 72).

The long-term observation of trends in attitudes may provide interesting information especially in a temporal-spatial comparison, and may call for an interpretation of differences and possible factors influencing these attitudes. At the same time, however, we realise the disadvantage of performing a quantitative survey on the topic of the measurement of attitudes towards migrants: numerous discussions on this topic have taken place, including those on the theoretical and methodological difficulties related to this effort (Bourdieu 1995). Here, our aim is only to briefly point out some of them. It is paradox that the focus on the identification of factors intervening in the form of opinions (typically in the form of variables most often including socio-demographic characteristics) diverts us from the construction of the opinion in and of itself: opinions are frequently

[4] CVVM stands for Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění (Public Opinion Research Centre), available at: https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/cz/.

reduced to statements within the offered scale, which reduces the complexity of the attitudes. A potential shift towards more positive statements expressed over time is not necessarily an indicator of an actual change in the construction of "the other", but captures a change in the social climate, in which it is becoming less acceptable to publicly express xenophobic opinions.

We have consequently decided to apply a qualitative methodology which, instead of measuring the attitudes, enables us to focus on comprehending the perspective of the investigated actors and gaining an insight into it. Rather than searching for correlations and influences, we strive for the (re)construction of the image of others in a way that captures the internal coherence of this image. This is also why we are deeply interested in the actors' ways of ensuring the legitimacy of statements on otherness. We have noticed that the authority of the speakers is very often interlinked with their biographical experience. Attitudes towards migration are not only some kind of impersonal opinions on a topic of public discussion. The case of the so-called refugee crisis, where there are almost no refugees physically present in the Czech Republic but the topic of migration virtually dominates the Czech public space, provides an interesting insight into how the topic is becoming socially significant. We therefore consider it essential to investigate the placement of the actors – the authors of the accounts – inside their own "conceptual framework", which they construct through their accounts and reproduce by repeating them. We want to emphasise the positionality of the speaker that refers to the relational nature of the investigated "attitudes" and the significantly power-based character of this relationship. In our case, we have noticed the power asymmetry regarding the subject (our participants) providing statements about the object, which is detached from the subject as these statements are repeated (Foucault 2002).

We chose the constructivist version of grounded theory as our particular research design. In our view, its main advantage is flexibility and the interconnection of the individual research phases together with a certain rigorousness which occurred particularly in the coding phase. As Charmaz (2006: 130) puts it, the "... constructivist approach means learning how, when and to what extent the studied experience is embedded in larger and, often, hidden positions, networks, situations and relationships. Subsequently, differences and distinctions between people become visible as well as the hierarchies of power, communication and opportunity that maintain and perpetuate such differences and distinctions". We believe that this focus on detecting those hidden relationships and relations through the negotiation of interpretations

within an interview is an advantage when analysing the actors' perceptions of the bearers of otherness, which are incomprehensible without a wider context.

The target group for the selection of research participants was determined as senior citizens of the Czech Republic. The reason for this focus was an effort to observe the interconnection between the actor's personal biography and the construction of their image of otherness and ways of its legitimisation. We were also interested in the form of personal memory in relation to both the political regimes in which the speaker lived, and which could provide different contexts for the forms of their contact with foreigners. The interviews were conducted with a total of ten participants – six women and four men aged 65–88. Five of them were recruited on the basis of a volunteer practice of the first of the authors in a retirement home. The composition of the participant´s second group was based on the snowball method started by the grandmother of the same researcher.[5] All of the interviewees live in a middle-sized town (less than 20 thousand inhabitants) in the eastern part of the Czech Republic. The region of origin of the participants is characterised by one of the lowest numbers of migrants in the country. However, the strong industrial face of the town led to migration from non-European countries already during the era of socialism.

A key element for the implementation of the research has proven to be the establishment of rapport with participants. Mistrust was often apparent at the beginning in relation to the certain sensitivity of the topic, which was manifested in participants' statements claiming that they did not know anything about the topic, and as such, were not suitable for the research. Nonetheless, they agreed in all cases to the interview. Subsequently, after being assured that each piece of information was important and that none of their opinions were incorrect, their initial fears dissipated. Before beginning the research, the researcher spent some time with every participant (ca. 90–120 minutes) to establish a certain intimate bond. One of the main risks identified, at the onset of the research, was the honesty of the participants. We were concerned that the participants would not be honest and willing to tell the researcher their negative opinions, should they have some. After the rapport was established, however, the participants felt free to provide their accounts and express their opinions, no matter what they were. The next limitation of the research that we were faced with was the specific positionality of the first author and her connection

[5] All interviews were conducted in 2016 by the first author during her work on her bachelor's thesis.

to our topic. The father of the researcher had migrated from Africa to the Czech Republic in the 1980s. Because of her different appearance, she was the victim of racial and xenophobic abuse many times. Otherness often causes unexpected reactions, whether positive or negative, and because of this, we kept in mind even the possibility that potential participants might be reluctant to develop a relationship with the researcher based on her visible physical appearance. However, these initial worries were not fulfilled, and it became almost invisible for participants, as if they did not even realise the aspect of her visual otherness, which they condemn in case of immigrants.[6]

The interviews were recorded, except for one female participant who did not give her consent to recording the interview. Some participants were brief in their answers, while others were very communicative. The length of the interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes. The first two interviews were conducted in order to "get familiar" with the field and the topic, and also to test the pilot outline of the interview. After the first coding, slight adjustments were made to the outline, and another eight interviews were conducted. The theoretical saturation was thus achieved, as we no longer found any new information in the interviews. We deem the relatively strong homogeneity in the accounts a very significant phenomenon indicating social consensus, at least on the level of the oldest generation.

We tried to create a varied sample of participants; the research sample includes individuals covering a time span of 23 years. As per socio-demographic characteristics such as education or profession: one woman earned a university diploma, three participants finished their graduation exam (secondary school), and the rest had a vocational or elementary school education. Six of them worked in one large factory, which was one of the two main employers in the town, but in distinct parts and positions. The rest worked in different professions like teacher, official, accountant, or cook. Participants were also distinguished from each other by the scale of contacts and their experience with immigrants of a non-European origin, and they also slightly differed in the manner of the presentation of their own conceptualisation of otherness.

[6] However, as it turned out, the visual appearance of the researcher that suggests her foreign/non-European origin helped uncover other aspects of constructing pictures of migrants. Based on the testimony of the majority of participants, we can assume that due to their personal experience with the researcher, they extracted her from the generalised group of migrants, which they had constructed prior to that encounter on the basis of available (and mostly second-hand) information.

Memory of the Socialist Past

In the interviews with seniors, we tried to embed the topic of their relationship to otherness into a biographical context with the aim of understanding to what extent their attitudes were rooted in their personal experience. We were interested in their occupation: whether they used to be in contact with members of other ethnic groups. Another question was whether their attitude towards people of non-European origin had changed significantly or not since 1989. The majority of the participants used to work in a factory where they used to meet foreigners who worked in the region. This type of contact was related to the Czechoslovak policy of that time, where a lack of workforce led to hiring foreign guest labourers from economically less-developed countries as cheap labour (Drbohlav 2001, Alamgir 2013).[7] Foreigners thus worked in second-rate or physically demanding occupations in factories or tanneries. Experience with people of non-European origin was thus derived from the state programme for controlled migration. Direct contact was nonetheless very limited, as shown below, and this separation was and still is perceived as something "natural". This distance also enabled the participants to assume a tolerant attitude, which was, however, challenged if a foreigner came into closer contact with the participant.

The participants in our research emphasised Cubans, as these were the first people of a different skin colour with whom they came into contact with. Although the Czechs worked in the same factory as the majority of the Cubans, mutual contact was considerably limited, as they worked separately and the work migrants were represented by interpreters. Foreigners were separated from the majority, not only at work, but in everyday life as well; they used to spend most of their time in separate collective hostels or dormitories with their own programme.

> Well, and then a lot of Cubans started working at the plant, you see. Here it was, it was here like that at some time, but not that I would know someone personally, I didn't. And otherwise, I don't remember that we would have it at work like that, not really.
>
> *Diana, 70, worker*

[7] It is true that state-controlled migration had various forms, even short-term internships or study stays. However, with regard to the working environment of the majority of participants, the contact was limited to the environment of factories.

The majority of participants kept a distance from the Cuban people, referring to their insufficient language skills, supposedly low work ethic, or the belief that these foreigners "had a lower work load". While it is true that the participants perceived, for instance, an effort to learn the language, they emphasised the deficiencies, as if they wanted to point out that the Cubans were inferior to the majority.

From the participants' accounts of people from a non-European environment that they encountered at their workplaces, it is apparent that the collective memory reflects their spatial separation, which was even related to a certain mental separation. Groups of foreigners were perceived as a certain aspect of the socialist regime and its internationalism, which, however, remained isolated. From the point of view of present-day seniors, the presence of otherness in their lives in this particular form did not "disrupt" in any way their existing way of life or their perspective of the world. The fact that, from the viewpoint of the participants, the Cubans, as well as for instance the Vietnamese, did not draw attention to themselves in any way, was considered a manifestation of the foreigners' adaptation to the system. The closed nature of the foreigner communities, which was connected with the very low minority acceptance level on the part of ethnic Czechs, was understood as a natural phenomenon (similar see Kocourek 2001). As clarified below, it would seem that this manner of inter-ethnic co-existence became a certain normative element by which all further otherness, entering the public space or the privacy of the participants themselves, was measured. Foreigners whose living space was significantly restricted by work in a separated production, in a factory with a separated hostel, were not perceived as a threat.

The existence of normative mechanisms, to exclude visually different foreigners into a separate environment, manifests itself in situations where otherness suddenly involved the participants themselves. A woman who used to come into contact with foreigners even before 1989, in particular with an African man and his daughter, a multi-racial child, can serve as an example. Although the existence of a person of a different skin colour was rare, the participant emphasised her neutrality:

> Well, the girl was a mulatto with curly hair, so she was like... I have never been a racist. I've never felt any kind of... strong aversion or something, you see. We took it as a normal thing, but it was rare here.
>
> *Vilma, 65, cook*

Everything changed later, as her daughter married an African. Here we can observe how attitudes towards otherness change when it involves the participants themselves:

> Well,... because at that time it wasn't here at all, you see... the thing, like dark-skinned races and stuff. Before '89 it was a complete taboo here, you see. So when it happened to us, it was like, what will the others say, how will they look at the situation, and how will we cope with it. Well, it wasn't easy at all. I'd never thought it would be so hard.
>
> *Vilma, 65, cook*

The shock of the encountered otherness, which is still present in the memory, may be clearly perceived in this account. It is apparent that this sincere dismay is not connected to the presence of people of a different skin colour in Czechoslovakia. As we have seen earlier, the woman "did not mind" their isolated presence. Everything changed radically, however, when a foreigner crossed the defined boundary and became a relative of the speaker, who did not like the more intimate contact. It also broke the taboo which threatened the speaker, because the impact of disciplinary sanctions for breaking the separation – "what will the others say" – applied to the speaker herself.

Contact with Otherness after 1989

The fall of the communist regime in 1989 brought about an opening of borders, and resulted in the gradual arrival of more immigrants into Czech society; the Czech Republic consequently became an immigration country. The official amount of foreigners in Czechoslovakia was 30,000 at the end of the 1980s, whereby their numbers increased to 100,000 by the mid-1990s (Leontiyeva – Vávra 2009). Foreigners currently make up more than 4% of the total Czech population. Even after the borders were opened, the participants rarely came into contact with foreigners. The nature of the separation after 1989 was, however, different from that in the era of socialism. The borders were closed in the past and immigrants only came here within state-controlled migration. Their lives in the Czech Republic were therefore controlled, with a separation embedded in the system. At present, the situation is different. It is nonetheless obvious from the interviews that the emphasis on separation still remains in the minds and social practice of the participants. It is evident from the interviews that

the distancing of the majority group is based particularly on a fear of otherness significantly restraining mutual contact.

Participants emphasised having either no or only little experience with foreigners of non-European origin, resorting to a selective choice of only a few pieces of information, on the basis of which they regard these foreigners. Their awareness of the issue was often based on information they have received from the news (for instance, in relation to terrorist attacks in France or Germany, infectious diseases in Africa, etc.). They subsequently regard all members of the particular nation on the basis of such news, and typically search for negative aspects and problems in otherness, as it is not familiar to them as a matter of fact. The certain unfamiliarity with otherness and the fear of it cause participants to perceive immigrants as a negative wave that needs to be avoided. Despite being aware of immigrants in this country, the participants regard them as some kind of taboo that they need to be distanced from. As a consequence of the lack of reliable information, they a priori assumed a negative attitude, which is, however, frequently a result of their own uncertainty.

The situations in which the participants had to deal with people from other ethnic groups occurred most frequently at work or in shops. Some of the Vietnamese workers left the factories in the 1990s and began to turn their interest to trade, which led to the establishment of new shops and markets. The participants visited and still continue to visit such places, which is why they primarily come into contact with the Vietnamese. Apart from them, some participants also come into contact with Africans (in the neighbourhood or within the family, as in the case mentioned above). It should be noted that these neighbourhood or family relationships were entirely accidental: the participants did not choose them. The individual participants adapted their behaviour towards African people or the Vietnamese in order to meet their categorical generalisation of the particular ethnic group as a whole. In the case of personal contact, they tended to avoid it or restrict all interaction with members of another ethnicity to the minimum:

> We only greet them, sometimes we talk a little, but otherwise nothing special.
>
> *Oskar, 83, foreman*

It is apparent from the research that although they came into contact with otherness more in the present, the participants only enter into interaction with people of non-European origin briefly or try to limit it to a minimum, as

otherness still poses a problem for them. Brief contacts at work, in the shop, or on the street are rarely sufficient to overcome the inner separation. In spite of a significantly different collective experience, the Czech environment displays features of racial segregation and isolation of the majority group from the minority similar to those reported by sociological research dealing with the US environment (Bonilla-Silva – Goar – Embrick 2006). It is thus possible to reconstruct the *white habitus* as an aspect of the existence of light-skinned individuals in a society distancing itself from people of a different origin and skin colour. This residential and social segregation limits the opportunity for white people to establish a relationship with a visually different person. The *white habitus* promotes solidarity within the one ethnic group, which subsequently supports the maintenance of a negative or stereotypical view of a group of people seen as racially different. In the interviews, the manifestation of distancing based on skin colour was read between the lines, and came to the surface rather as a mistake, as in following statement:

> My daughter has an American husband, but I do not mind because he's a white man.
> *Zora, 80, official*

Participants in our research did not perceive separation as a serious problem, on the contrary, they expected and presented it as totally "natural". It is true that the interviews revealed hints of the fact that the former regime prevented them from contact with otherness, and suggest that the current young generation, which has had the opportunity to travel more and explore otherness in its natural environment, has a more tolerant attitude. The question remains, however, as to whether the participants would actually be interested in getting to know the foreigners in the countries of their origin were they in the position of the present young generation, as they immediately confirm that they do not mind separation and limited contact with members of another ethnicity, nor do they seek out this contact in any way.

> I could imagine it similarly to America. A Chinese district, a black district, another one next to it. Like in England. And I'd leave them somewhere to the side.
> *Balthasar, 87, foreman*

The analysis of biographies enables us to look into specific moments of crossing the separation and thus intensifications of mutual contact. We assume

that the specific nature of these encounters enables a better understanding of distance mechanisms on the basis of white habitus, because they do not lead to the reassessment of the stereotypical opinions as well as mental separation. This is well illustrated by the statements of Balthasar, who worked as a foreman in the factory, and in comparison with the rest of participants, his encounters with people from the non-European countries happened on a daily basis. The content of his statements was different from others, as he did not try to camouflage his xenophobic opinions. This particular memory is (among others) a case in point:

> I worked in (name of the factory) all my life, and I stayed there, even though I had there all sorts of Mongolians, Angolans, and whatnot. All these strange people basically.
>
> *Balthasar, 87, foreman*[8]

It is obvious that the participant's long-term contact with workers of different nationalities did not deepen his empathy or prompt his willingness to maintain closer relationships with them. Moreover, Mr Balthasar addressed very negatively even the Vietnamese, which made him an exception among the other participants, who commonly referred to the Vietnamese as examples of "successful integration". However, due to personal reasons and a positive personal experience with a Vietnamese girl, this participant applied an individual evaluation instead of a general category, where he accepted only one representative of an ethnic group while simultaneously rejecting the group as a whole.

> The Vietnamese? Well, not that! The girl, yes. But those Vietnamese in general rather... well, those military occupations of theirs, everything they burnt and so on. So, there, I'd stay away from them. For example like neighbours, in fact I've got them here... There they are (he points from the window at a building).
>
> *Balthasar, 87, foreman*

We registered this strategy of expressing tolerance of only one particular person from a different ethnic group in the case of two other female participants, whose biographies cover more intense contact with otherness. One of them was the aforementioned woman whose son-in-law was a man from southern Africa.

[8] The English translation does not convey the pejorative air of the original expressions used by Balthasar. Specifically, the terms Angolan and Mongolian are, in their original form, far more offensive – as opposed to their English equivalents („...vydržel jsem tam, i když jsem tam během svého života měl všelijaké různé Mongoláky, Angoláky a já nevím, co všechno to bylo").

The second case is a woman who occasionally took care of a little girl living nearby who had Vietnamese parents. In both cases, this experience was understood as something personal and extraordinary, when an opinion regarding otherness and migration generally remained unchanging. In addition, the social context of both experiences gives us insight into the normativity of separation and distance in Czech society: the woman taking care of the Vietnamese girl mentioned unfriendly looks and insults by some people in her surroundings. As a result, she decided to go with the pram to another part of the city. The separation of inhabitants cannot be considered as natural or as a random phenomenon. It is reaction based on social norms, the abidance of which is monitored by the surroundings and possibly penalised if breached.

The Colour-Blind Approach

The research has shown that the participants, in an effort to present their views, use various rhetorical strategies enabling them to avoid the accusation of racism, while at the same time maintaining their distance from otherness. A similar approach is discussed in research on the white population in the USA, where the respondents report to the researchers that distinguishing between the individual racial groups does not matter to them at all; they behave, that is, in the same way towards everyone. This *colour-blind approach* is a reply to the civil rights movement and the internalisation of the attitude that distinguishing on the basis of race is socially unacceptable (Bonilla-Silva – Goar – Embrick 2006). This contradiction between the presented neutrality (and the speaker's correctness) and the actual distance is manifested in a form of the conceptualisation of diversity and also in social life. In spite of the different social context in the USA, it is possible to observe in the accounts of participants a persistent effort not to say anything that might be taken as explicit racism. This suggests that the interviewed seniors – apparently under pressure – react to the social consensus on the unacceptability of the conviction that one social group is superior to another. This is closely related to the phrases and constructions of the strategies used by the participants to justify or mitigate the negative accounts concerning otherness. A typical example is the statement: "I am not a racist; I don't mind it, because it doesn't concern me personally." They use such phrases in situations that are difficult for them, but they do not want to give the impression of being racists (a similar situation are Poles living in Britain; Nowicka 2018). In many cases, it was difficult for the participants to talk directly or at all about why

otherness or a closer contact with it poses a problem (for instance, otherness in a family) or to explain their worries, such as in the following statement:

> I don't know, I'm not a racist, but they just bother me being here; I can't explain why.
> *Vilma, 65, cook*

If the participants wanted to express their negative attitude towards otherness, they often used vox populi – that is, the people around them – and presented their own opinions through it, so that their attitude remained non-racist, such as in statements "My neighbours say that..." or "We don't want such people here." The same applied when the participants spoke for themselves. They used various means in their statements enabling them to mitigate the negativity of their statements in an effort to maintain the colour-blind approach. If they wanted to point out something negative, they used a positive reference at first, in order to give their statement the impression of a certain "balance". This is a way of creating ostensible objectivity, which appears, for example, in journalism; here, however, it sounds rather ironic:

> Well, I don't mind the black people, I like jazz, but like, they don't have to be here either.
> *Balthasar, 87, foreman*

The participant chose a certain ornament on the exotic object to which he expressed his sympathy, but in fact, this partial attitude did not change anything in their relationship to the target group. The aforementioned ornament – jazz – only plays the role of an indicator of the speaker's humanity and culture, and as such is not a demonstration of the relationship complexity in the inter-ethnic context. On the contrary, these and similar statements exhibit the great distance to otherness, which in the speaker's view has no place in their own environment.

One might notice that the participants, in the previous utterances, expressed themselves in various ways on the topic of acceptance or rejection of people of non-European origin: this language game of "I mind" or "I don't mind" seemingly gives the impression that the speakers stated various aspects of their opinions. It is also possible that the seniors-respondents would select various options of their attitudes in a potential survey. One can assume, however, that these statements are actually closer to each other than may seem at first glance, as all of them are built on the grounds of distance and indifference

towards somebody who does not belong to the ethnically delimited "us", as for example in this statement:

> Well, those niggers, I don't mind it.
>
> *Boris, 77, worker*

This is also true for the speakers' strategies based on the "neutral" attitude. The neutral attitudes mostly apply to non-prominent objects, or even those that are entirely unfamiliar to the subject. The participants in our research expressed it most frequently with the following words: "I don't know, neither this nor that, I don't think anything about it."

> As for my activities, I never came into contact with them, and so I don't have anything against them.
>
> *Oskar, 83, foreman*

These wishfully neutral views concealed a satisfaction with the separation that occurred at other interview sites; the manner of narration often acknowledged that distance was desirable and normal. Thus, this attitude can be understood as fully integral in the participants' agency, and not an expression of neutrality: showing indifference can be in this context namely understood as an active life attitude.

One of the strongest discursive means of distancing oneself identified within our research is the usage of demonstrative pronouns – most frequently the pronoun "it". Its frequent usage demonstrates the great detachment with which the participants build the image of the object in their accounts. A foreigner of non-European origin is not perceived through the prism of their personal uniqueness, but as an impersonal item, with whom it is impossible to have any relationship with. Usage of demonstrative pronouns emphasises the visibility of a certain element of strangeness entering a highly familiar environment, and at the same time, enables the speaker to emphasise the distinct boundary between the speaker and the different individual. Referring to an individual as "it" implicitly emphasises the individual's inferiority and denies their humanity. One of the women who struggled with her daughter's marriage to an African, remarked:

> But I had never imagined that it could ever happen even to me and that I would have it at home.
>
> *Vilma, 65, cook*

Stereotyping and Racial Hierarchy

The participants had the distorted idea that the origin of an individual or their physical features reflected a different experiencing of the world (mentality) and way of living (culture). Their attitude to the mentality of immigrants revealed a high modality according to which each ethnicity has its essential quality that cannot be changed. In their view, an individual member of a particular culture is then inevitably a bearer of the group essence, and culture was a result of the common life of these individual bearers (Barker 2002). Although the majority of the respondents claimed that they were not influenced by any prejudice and that all of their opinions were exclusively their own, the contrary was true. When comparing their individual accounts, it was apparent that they were more or less comparable, and stemmed from a historically typical prejudiced image of the hierarchy of individual "races" in Czech society. The Vietnamese were thus perceived mostly as adaptive, and as hard-working traders. Dark-skinned people from a variety of African countries, in contrast, were poor, backward, and uneducated. Finally, the Arabs were perceived as non-adaptive, dangerous, confrontational, "slobs", or religious fanatics. It is obvious that the participants tended to distinguish between ethnic and racial groups according to their perceived characteristics in the context of "entitled natives". The resulting hierarchy is thus a means of discursive power over non-European migrants.

The Vietnamese earned the greatest respect in the participants' eyes due to their ability to succeed as traders, as they proved their independence from the Czech economic system in a certain way, which was pointed out as a problem in the case of other ethnicities. The reason for the more positive attitude on the part of the participants towards the Vietnamese was that in their view, the Vietnamese removed their culture and traditions from the public space and did not ask for any public recognition of their culture or religion. Apart from that, their assimilation tendencies were appreciated – such as learning the language, as they have thus become invisible in our society.

> There, I'd already take them normally, like our people, not like those Muslims.
>
> *Oskar, 83, foreman*

In spite of the participants' appreciation of the Vietnamese adaptability, they were glad not to have to come into any closer contact with them. They were aware that the Vietnamese lived in their surroundings, but they did not know where

exactly. An interesting fact is that even though the participants stated they accepted the Vietnamese, they accepted them only to some extent and only at markets, in factories, or in the neighbourhood, where they were used to them. They would not, however, accept them in closer interactions – as friends or family members.

As already mentioned above, sub-Saharan Africans were perceived by the participants as uneducated, poor, backward, and in particular, due to the colour of their skin – as "the black ones". The unified image of the inhabitants of Africa is influenced especially by the media, which portrays their lives in this way. Although they had practically no information about the people from the African countries, their attitude towards them was fairly positive. In cases where they expressed their opinions on them, the participants constructed their ideas based on the depictions in travel documentaries portraying the poorest parts of Africa. In this light, it is not surprising that such depictions lead to strong generalisations, where all inhabitants of the continent are perceived as poor, uneducated, backward, coming from a rainforest or dirty slums, but are ultimately optimistic. In one case, it was determined that due to their home environment, the participant associated all Africans with diseases and dirt, and they were therefore afraid of any contact with them.

The above-mentioned depiction raises something that may be called limited sympathy in the participants. They partially sympathise with the hard living conditions of the inhabitants of Africa. In this connection, they often mentioned the conditions under which they are willing to accept those people in their country. They maintained the idea that "backward" Africans needed to be educated and cultivated, as these opportunities were denied to them in their country. For this reason, they were willing to accept them, for instance as part of an internship or a job that would teach them something, and thus enhance the quality of their life. However, there always was the condition of their returning to their own country, so that they could further use their skills to improve the living conditions in their homeland. It is apparent that the participants were applying the scheme of the Third World development aid programmes dating from the era of socialism.

As already stated above, four participants had an African neighbour. They stated that they did not mind these people, as they were decent, and the participants believed that they had adapted to the system. The people from African countries were accepted as neighbours, because the participants were used to them. They greeted each other, exchanged a few words, but they would not establish any closer relationships with them. In general, the participants do not mind these foreigners if they did not come into contact with them too

frequently or if they encountered such a contact only rarely in the scope of necessary communication on a casual level.

The perception of the Arabic people is influenced by the discourse of Orientalism, which forms their perception. In Western films and in the news, "Arabs" are deprived of their individuality, personal features or experience; they are mostly connected with lechery, unequal treatment of women, religious fanaticism, or a bloodthirstiness realised through terrorist attacks (Said 1979). They were perceived in the same way by the participants in our research, in whom this depiction raised a collective wrath. The participants were accustomed to obtaining mediated information about the negative aspects of Arabs or Islam, and were therefore not reluctant to state negative things about them. The strategy of hiding negative attitudes ceased to be necessary in this case. We suppose this is related to a high degree of social consensus, when "Arabs" and "Muslims" in the Czech Republic (Topinka et al. 2016) have become the target of collective hate in the public space.

The participants mentioned Arabs and their religion most frequently; with statements about them also being the most negative ones. All of their statements were connected with an image of violence and the threat that Islam posed according to them. The attitude towards Islam did not differ among the individual participants, being negative in all cases. Islam is perceived as the Arabic lifestyle, where all actions, behaviour, or thinking are realised under the influence of the religion. Islam became a fundamental problem for the participants, as the understanding of the faith was connected to Allah, who only encouraged violence through enforcing the faith. It followed that Arabs were only religious fanatics, and as such, could threaten the participants' lives.

> Well, I would be a bit afraid, like that they could harm me.
>
> *Stela, 65, accountant*

Another aspect pointed out in relation to Islam was the clothing of women, which was connected to one of the main symbols of the Islamic threat in present-day Europe. The participants perceived it as a threat, as well. Veiled women evoked negative feelings such as uncertainty, worries, or misunderstanding. They also aroused feelings of darkness and subordination, where a woman is subordinated to her husband, brother, or father. This strong gender inequality was seen as an important example of the incompatibility of Muslim culture with European standards.

> I really hate that those women are there like... um... veiled, that they have to be and they are inferior and I hate this the most about Islamic countries. That they are like a skivvy, like nobody! That only men everywhere.
>
> *Diana, 70, worker*

It is paradoxical that none of the participants had ever actually met anybody from Arabic countries, nor were they aware of any "Arabs" present in their surroundings. Despite this fact, they spoke about what Arabic people are like with great certainty. All characteristics of Arabs were significantly affected by the media images, which lead the participants to worry about potential contact with them as a dangerous ethnic group. On the basis of mediated experience, Arabs were attributed the essential quality of being "idlers", not adapting to anything at all, and, according to the participants, they "would never work in our country". The stereotypical view of these people, underlining their presumed quality of being "non-adaptive", can be clearly seen below:

> Yes, they would never adapt here, they'd want to be the masters and command, those Arabs.
>
> *Zora, 80, official*

It is very important to realise here that this perception does not merely display a completely negative attitude on the part of our participants, who are manipulated by the massive influence of the local media. We interpret this and similar sentences as a demonstration of the hidden and taken-for-granted dominance of white and European "natives". Unlike "Asians", who were perceived as submissive, "Arabs" did not fit into the power scheme of the participants as members of the "superior West". Arabic people, in their imagination, were escaping from the inferior position that is attributed to them. This supposed "ignorance of Western dominance" by "Arabs" was consequently perceived as a threat to the participants as Westerners. We believe that this may be an explanation for the massive surge of islamophobia in Central Europe targeted at anyone identified by the local population as a Muslim or an Arab.

From this point of view, we would like to explain one paradox and provide a different perspective on quantitative research, which is built upon the presentation of a scale of attitudes to various groups of foreigners living in the Czech Republic. We argue that this variability is not a manifestation of tolerance or at least a differentiating approach based on specific individuals. As demonstrated

above, the perception of non-European migrants is burdened by a strongly stereotypical view emphasising their group essence. This is related to their restricted place in the social space based on mutual separation, the limited opportunities of migrants, and their general subordination.

Participants shared essentially established opinions on the different races/ethnicities living in the Czech Republic and thus created, or confirmed, a specific scale of acceptance. This racial hierarchy is imagined – i.e. without a real basis, but real in its consequences through social performance, and is based on the idea of limited acceptance of the individual groups that are classified according to their alleged qualities in relation to the nationally delimited space. We believe that the key concept for the comprehension of allocation of the individual groups within this imaginary scheme of acceptance is their alleged submissiveness. While masked as the ability/willingness of migrants to learn Czech, work hard, or become invisible, understanding the interconnection of all of these with the ability to assimilate and the dominant position of the participants enables for an insight into the existing power-based conceptual framework. The "hard-working Vietnamese" and the "non-adaptive Arabs" are in fact only the two opposite sides of this limiting hierarchy and the imprint of this scheme in the collectively shared images by Czech seniors.[9]

This racial hierarchy is also in perfect harmony with the colour-blind approach: the seemingly differentiating view of migrants allows the speaker to manoeuvre extremely well and resist the accusation of being racist by pointing out those migrant groups which the speaker "does not mind". The effect of this strategy is a rhetorical emphasis on the alleged qualities of individuals belonging to vaguely defined racial categories, distracting attention from the subject matter – the dominance of white Europeans (Hall 1980). The position of the speaker, who in fact constructs the entire hierarchy by the requirements for assimilation, is thus being hidden.

Orientalism and Rejecting Migration

Because of this reason, we consider it important to involve the position of speakers (our participants) in this assessment of non-European groups in order to understand the nature of the expressed relationships. It is obvious that despite

[9] Alena Alamgir (2013) discusses a similar hierarchisation of minorities in the case of the Vietnamese and Roma people.

the expressed differences in opinions, the participants identified themselves with the Orientalist idea that they, as members of the West, occupied a significantly higher position in this described social hierarchy. It is particularly the concept of Orientalism that enables us to explain the form of cultural hegemony of the West over the East. The East, that is the non-Europeans, is considered a non-developed and intellectually immature region in need of the guardianship of the West (Barša 2011). According to Said, the issue of the Orient is in fact an issue of the West talking about "the Orient" as an undeveloped place incapable of modernisation (Said 1979). It is clear from the aforementioned facts, as well as from the following statements by the participants, that the mainstream's belief is that there is no other way than to cultivate the backward Orientals.

> *Interviewer*: So you say blacks have their own culture, how do you imagine it?
> *Participant*: Well, I don't know, but I think that today they are at last adapting, like to the Europeans here. In the past, we used to take them, or I used to take them as Africa, as a whole. Simply as an undeveloped place, like that they live there in some of those villages, in the rainforest. But now, when I see it on TV, there are now big cities, modern, you see. So, well, it is growing more alike.
>
> *Oskar, 83, foreman*

If we think about the meaning of the expression "at last", we come to the conclusion that the participant is evaluating and emphasising the long-term development of the East lagging behind the West. The superiority of the West is perceived as natural and inevitable. It should be noted that in this case, the topic is only the development of the "undeveloped" East, not colonialism, exploitation, or slavery.

Despite the acknowledgement of the development of countries outside Europe, the dominant framework into which "the Orientals" are placed is backwardness. This may be perceived in situations where an encounter with a foreigner disrupts routine cognitive schemes. One of the interviewed women vividly described her encounter with a dark-skinned man who asked her for advice on the street, having lost his way:

> Once I went from the shop, down the hill, and a car was moving along, a black one with black glass. The car pulled to a stop and there was a Negro inside... But he was black, like really totally black, like... Well and when he rolled down the window, I became really startled, I was really startled by him and he was asking me

> something. And I was so unhinged that I wasn't able to answer. And he started to roll up the window and told me 'you see black man' and something like that I was being unhelpful and he left. But I wanted to help him, but I was so startled by him and I was so surprised, so alarmed... and he was offended. But he was some kind of classy one; he was looking for something.
>
> *Stela, 65, accountant*

This passage documents the shock from otherness and the subsequent distance described earlier. The woman was taken aback because she experienced a difference in her familiar environment. Also of interest is that the critical component of the surprise is not merely the presence of a visually different person, but the entire situational context – an expensive car, smart clothes – raised a cognitive dissonance with the deeply rooted idea that a dark-skinned man is a poor person dependent on the help of others.

The presupposition of the West's superiority over the East has even influenced the perception of the position which migrants might occupy within the Czech society. In the view of the participants, they are excluded into non-attractive occupations under the supervision of Czech workers, and this position is perceived as natural and fair. Any crossing of this delimited space is, similarly to the cognitive dissonance mentioned above, commented on with incomprehension, or even condemnation, as in the case of one participant irritated by the fact that after 1989, his Vietnamese co-workers wanted to abandon shift work and start a business.

> Well, the Vietnamese, I used to call all of them Vietcong, well, these people, not that they would not work at all. But as soon as they got to know the job [i.e. working position in the factory] and found out after a short time – one or two months, they came to me pleading that they wanted to leave, that they didn't want to work in shifts. And so they understood it in some way that they can come here and can do whatever they want, but they didn't understand that it's not like that.
>
> *Balthasar, 87, foreman*

This statement may be interpreted as an illustration of thinking based on a clear separation of citizens of one country, on the basis of the belonging principle, from foreigners, who constitute the subordinate group. From the participant's point of view, the main issue is their own agency, which could remove them from their subordinate position. The existence of foreigners is

admitted exclusively in terms of power and control, but not in the form of social equality.

The participants presented without embarrassment a fairly hard statement of assimilation, and their willingness to accept members of a different ethnicity to their country under the specific conditions set by them. It can be stated that they are willing to offer equality to those intending to be like "us" – Czechs – and adapt to the system of our society. In case of cultural assimilation, this involves mastering the Czech language, as well as a compliance with the customs of society, such as respecting the alleged belief that religion does not belong in the public space. Apart from this, another demand is complete inclusion in the labour market as working migrants, whose presence is a benefit to the economic system of the receiving country (similar results show Šmídová – Vávra – Čížek 2017).

A minority insisting on a complete, or at least a partial, preservation of their own culture is considered an enemy, with their chance for tolerance by mainstream society decreasing rapidly. The participants in this study believed that co-existence with such "enemies" was impossible, and therefore required an obliteration of the difference or at least its detachment from the public space. For an ethnic group of non-European origin to be tolerated in the Czech Republic, there is a demand for its social subordination, which shall be manifested in its assignment to a particular narrow segment of work, as could be seen above in case of the perception of controlled migration from the countries of the former Socialist block.

In their attitudes towards migrants, the participants reproduced this directive approach based on their own dominance:

> If he [a Vietnamese worker] wanted to leave for a different position, I'd try to emphatically explain to him where his place is. And he'd better stay in that place.
>
> *Balthasar, 87, foreman*

If, from the viewpoint of the Czech majority, the immigrants decided not to respect the conditions for assimilation expected from them, the participants are willing to accept them here only for a certain amount of time. The immigrants were thus perceived as visitors coming to the Czech Republic for a better education or better economic situation, or fleeing a war conflict for a certain time. Their behaviour was consequently expected to reflect this, as the participants considered them only visitors here. Longer co-existence without their assimilation was out of the question.

> Well, I'd take them as visitors, but they visit you and behave here as if they were at home. They don't understand they're only visitors here.
>
> *Oskar, 83, foreman*

The image of an immigrant as a short-term visitor corresponded fully with the requirement for forced assimilation. Any otherness present in Czech society is for the research participants thus "put into its place" and is admitted only temporarily. It should become "a sponge" absorbing the influence of the dominant and superior culture, which the temporary migrants later use in the country of their origin, to where they are expected to obediently return.

> Well, when they just come from their country for a visit, a holiday, or to spend some time with a family for instance, then I agree. But... or to study here or for internships, that's alright, but when they leave the country when there's misery and poverty and they are just searching for something better somewhere else, they should search for something better where they are, they should be helped where they are. They'd better stay in their country and be provided with what they need or be helped so that they can live in their country and could... Well, because they simply know that environment and I think that everyone feels best at home, in their own place.
>
> *Alice, 83, worker*

It is apparent from the cited passage to what extent it is influenced by the practice of controlled migration in the socialist era, which focused on help to "fellow countries" in the form of educating future experts. What is more interesting in our view, however, is the fact that this statement can work fully in the present public discourse, which is based on the legitimisation of anti-immigration and nationalist attitudes (Foner – Simon 2015; Horáková Hirschlerová 2017). The demand within the current surge for the self-determination of nationally delimited entities thus coexists well with reflections of internationally targeted help to countries of the Third World during the Cold War. There is a clearly evident rejection of migration as a relevant social phenomenon. If this ahistorical belief is embedded in the context of the history of emigration from the Czech Lands in the twentieth century, the selectivity of the historical memory, based on significant social distinctiveness, makes a bizarre impression.

The research participants expressed their alleged helplessness in situations connected to the perceived increase in the number of immigrants and their "non-adaptability" and to the political situation in the Czech Republic,

which they cannot influence in any way. They also understood immigration as a manifestation of retribution to the white people for the past colonisation of the immigrants' original territory, and they simultaneously fear that the immigrants are coming to the Czech Republic to gain what was taken from them in the past. The participants deliberately put themselves into the position of a victim in order to legitimise their anti-immigration mood. They thus reversed the power hierarchy: the "rightful citizens" rhetorically put themselves into a worse position than the socially vulnerable migrants. They talked with high modality about the fact that the "immigrants" wanted to assume the power in the state through violence (those practices are mostly ascribed to "Arabs"). This is the reason why instead of sympathy and the effort to empathise with the situation of the immigrants, they stylised themselves into the position of victims and saw migration more like an invasion:

> Well, and then, when they [people from former colonised countries] recover, they'll assassinate all of us white people here. Europe will come to this anyway. But if you take it like that... Well, the whites also used to occupy all of the countries.
>
> *Maxim, 72, worker*

Conclusion

It would be a mistake either to perceive Czech seniors as a generation of racists on the one hand, or as passive victims of historical developments, including xenophobic media and politicians, on the other. This study offers a more complex view, and points out more how perception frames of otherness are reproduced on the basis of the idea of a community claiming a rightful demand on an exclusively shared space. This imaginary of belonging comprises the dominance of the Czech – and in the wider perspective also the European and the white – national and cultural identity. Throughout the research, we were repeatedly surprised by the great level of cohesion among the individual accounts of our participants, who represent a sample of seniors from one Moravian town. The significant saturation of the sample and the minimal occurrence of different opinions can be interpreted as a consequence of a deeply rooted and widely shared belief of the superiority of an identity-defined nation and white race. This self-positioning as a member of western (white) civilisation in relation to the people of non-European origin is stronger than any differences between the participants in the sample.

The participants distance themselves from otherness through creating the "us" image as something deeply different than "them". In our paper, we focus on the underlying mechanisms in the participants' reasoning in which they take a predominantly negative attitude towards foreigners. It is of interest that although the majority of participants have no deeper contact with members of the three groups discussed above, these people nevertheless pose a problem for them. The reason may be found in the conceptualisation of otherness itself. The way in which the participants build the image of people of non-European "origin" obviously tempts them to, a priori, perceive "them" as an issue. Those labelled as the "racial other" have also little opportunity to leave this framework, because the distancing in the social praxis presents a trap from which they cannot escape.

In this respect, the participants' rhetorical strategies presented in the study are understood as a way of legitimising attitudes towards non-European immigrants, which are based on the requirement of separation and assimilation. Thanks to this legitimisation, the requirements for non-European migrants are presented as completely justified and natural: they obtain the implication of normality. The colour-blind approach through the emphasis on the imaginary neutrality of testimonies also helps to cover a significant power asymmetry between speakers and immigrants. Pressure in the form of the requirement for the assimilation of any otherness is not in any contradiction to the differentiation of attitudes to individual nationalities, because only those groups are accepted that are perceived as willing to accept the rules of the game set by the dominating natives. A field of interest for further research is the way in which the allocation of different racial and ethnic groups into the framework of the imagined racial hierarchy influences the particular social interactions of various actors by – even in the context of the generally inferior position – partially privileging some, while stigmatising, others.

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