

# **Whiteness in Question: The Anatomy of a Taxonomy across Transnational Contexts**

## **Introduction and Context**

Since 1988, when Peggy McIntosh introduced the term “white privilege” (McIntosh 1988), the notion of whiteness has rapidly entered everyday language, with the term being used in Anglo-American, middle-class liberal settings to denote group appurtenance on phenotypical and cultural grounds and to code such appurtenance as a universal marker of privilege that cuts across other differentiating social axes. Take the example of the Race2Dinner (2021) platform, a private enterprise that aims to dismantle whiteness and white supremacy by initiating dinner conversations about race and white privilege with white American women: White women defined phenotypically, mainly by skin colour, and culturally, as part of the majoritarian American culture. These dinners include up to eight participants and cost an average of \$2,500 in total divided among all the guests, which works out to about \$300 per person. They are hosted by a volunteer white woman and are facilitated by the founders of the Race2Dinner business, Regina Jackson, of African-American ancestry, and Saira Rao, who identifies as Indian American (Noor 2020). These dinners aim to educate their white participants about their day-to-day racism and teach them to confront micro-instances of racism witnessed in their life (Noor 2020). Such events also presume a binary relation between racialization and whiteness, where whiteness is viewed as de facto privileged and racialization as associated with the sort of oppression that one must learn about.

The idea of white privilege is so pervasive that entries for the term can now be found in Wikipedia and the *Oxford Dictionary*. Netflix has also created a *Dear White People* TV series and MTV has produced a documentary on the topic. “White people,” “white women” (Eddo-Lodge 2017), “white perspectives” (Dolezal and Reback 2017), “white-sounding

names,” “white feelings” (Eddo-Lodge 2017), “white fragility” (DiAngelo 2011), “white tears” (DiAngelo 2021) are all used in popular culture to denote a certain group affinity.

This same racial label has also been used in the academic world. Scholarly discussions of social privilege have spoken of “white ethnics,” “white identities,” “white way of being in the world,” “white turmoil,” “white reaction,” “white subjectivity” (Alcoff 2015), “white classrooms,” “white norms” (Bhuyan and Jeypal 2016), “white therapists” (Lee and Bhuyan 2013), “white neurosis” (Matias and DiAngelo 2013), and “white ignorance” (Baker 2018). In presuming racial sameness, whiteness as a classificatory scheme implicitly posits an essential trait that cuts across all national, class, cultural, and ethnic lines, one in virtue of which all who possess it are supposed to share the same habits, perspectives, feelings, and temperaments, and the same type of collective subjectivity, and which in turn determines one’s behavioural and emotional being in the world.

Whiteness seems conceptually resistant to intercategorical movement. There have been cases, historically, when people crossed the boundaries of racial taxonomies to navigate societal systems of power; Ellen Craft, for instance, escaped from slavery in 1845 in the US and fled to England by disguising herself as a disabled white man (Samuels, 2014). However, the idea that whiteness possesses an essential sameness leads to its potential intercategorical movement being interpreted as a mere exercise of privilege, as is shown by the case of Rachel Dolezal, a white-skinned American woman who was heavily criticized for self-identifying as black (Dolezal and Reback 2017). It is the immutability of racialist thinking which attributes fixed meanings to racial taxonomies. In the nineteenth century, racialist thinking bestowed cultural beliefs through what was named the discipline of scientific racism, according to which racial superiority and inferiority were grounded in genetics. Nowadays, it is again racialist thinking that attaches biological determinism to racial

categories by applying identarian descriptors to phenotype, through allusions to skin colour for example. This is why references to Dolezal's white race, were made in relation to phenotypic traits, such as her skin or the colour of her eyes (Dolezal and Reback 2017).

Whiteness and its privileged manifestation also appear to encompass and supersede class. As the Race2Dinner business model suggests, whiteness is assumed to be the main determinant of difference and the main factor in the differential distribution of advantages in American society—this despite that it is only well-off white, liberal women who can afford to pay three hundred dollars to participate in such dinners. Other times, race-based oppression becomes visible only because it misplaces interpretations of class. When British author Afua Hirsch (2018) points out that racialized community stakeholders are often asked to give school talks in poor neighbourhoods, because it is assumed that racialized stakeholders have attended schools in economically marginalized communities, she interprets such gestures as race-based oppression. Yet what Hirsch might tacitly communicate is her outrage for being mistaken as lower class. A public misrecognition of one's class could get inaccurately read as racial oppression.

Immigrants to Anglo-American multicultural societies have always been relegated to the margins of their host societies, often as a result of their precarious position in the labour market and their subsequent poor economic outcomes (Bejan 2011, 2012). The scholarly literature, however, has theorized immigrant exclusion in the Anglo-American world as resulting from a racial sameness-difference dialectic, such that immigrants are economically excluded primarily because they are racialized (Block and Galabuzi 2011; Ku, Bhuyan, Sakamoto, Jeyapal and Fang 2019; Satzewich 2015).

This paper argues against conflating racialization with immigration and whiteness with majoritarian privilege in interpretations of societal advantages and disadvantages. It

constructs a dialectical argument to compare and contrast the marginalization of two migrant populations—namely, skilled immigrants to Canada, and Eastern European immigrants to the United Kingdom (UK), in order to demonstrate that both categories of racialization and whiteness have limited explanatory currency in understanding immigrant exclusion. In doing so, this paper problematizes the assumption that whiteness has an essential sameness that universally cuts across other stratifying axes in society, and demonstrates that an essentialist understanding of whiteness disregards class-based explanations for the exclusion of immigrants from the labour market, which is often bound up with the global circulation of capital and the dominant economic position of the countries of the Global North.

Immigrants are differentially included in or excluded from host nations on the basis of the categories they fall into—skilled, unskilled, racialized as white or non-white—and how they are imagined to fit into the host society (Anderson 2013). In Canada, most immigrants are selected on the basis of their educational credentials, professional experience, language ability, and occupational suitability, and are often admitted on prearranged offers of employment (Bejan 2012; Omidvar and Richmond 2005; Oreopoulos 2009; Satzewich 2015). Skilled immigrants have access to permanent residency and eventual citizenship, unlike refugees and refugee claimants, undocumented migrants, and temporary foreign workers, who are generally employed as seasonal workers, as meat packers or fruit pickers. Yet despite their skills, skilled immigrants tend to be excluded from the labour market: their underemployment and unemployment rates are three times higher than those of Canadian-born citizens with similar credentials (Galabuzi and Teelucksingh 2010; Reitz et al. 2009).

The politics around immigrant labour in Canada has historically been shaped by racist thinking. Many scholars have reduced the stratification and exclusion experienced by skilled migrants to processes of racialization, arguing that discrepancies in employment

outcomes between skilled immigrants and Canadian-born citizens have increased since the 1970s, when Canada removed nationality-based restrictions from its immigration policies and shifted away from recruiting European migrants to selecting racialized individuals from the Global South (Block and Galabuzi 2011; Nichols and Tyyskä 2015). As Canada has become more diverse, racialized immigrant workers, despite being skilled, have become disproportionately represented in the lowest segments of the labour market (Block and Galabuzi 2011; George 2002; Nichols and Tyyskä 2015). Although the scholarly literature has implied that racial discrimination is the cause of their being in the lower segments of the labour market, this paper argues that such an argument is too simplistic.

In Europe, it is likewise in the labour market where inclusionary-exclusionary dynamics get played out. Unlike in Canada, however, the migrants in question in the UK are themselves white Europeans, largely from the former communist countries recently admitted in the European Union (EU). Yet despite embodying the white European racial type, Eastern European workers in the UK are excluded from the British labour market and relegated to its lower segments. For instance, even when the UK was still a member of the EU, it imposed transitional migrant curbs to restrict Romanian and Bulgarian migrant workers to seasonal contracts in the food processing, construction, and agricultural fields, despite the fact that they were EU citizens with the legal right to free movement within the EU, since Romania and Bulgaria had joined the Union in 2006. One could also argue that the Brexit vote was also a vote against migration from the Eastern Bloc, especially since former prime minister David Cameron's negotiations with the EU prior to the Brexit referendum were about limiting the number of Eastern European migrants in the UK and ending their right to social assistance (Bejan 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the UK's reluctance to extend rights to Eastern European migrants, given their value as cheap labour. Consider for example the fact that at the beginning of the pandemic in the spring of 2020,

when most countries had implemented national lockdowns and travel was halted, Eastern European workers were still being flown on charter flights to the UK to harvest fruits and vegetables during the summer season with little to no regard for the enforcement of public health protocols (O'Carrol 2020).

The two migrant populations, those in Canada and the UK, are employed as case studies here to discuss the politics of racialization of migrant workers. This paper is not concerned with the everyday experiences of inclusion and exclusion faced by immigrants, but with the *logic* that subjects them to exclusion. The two groups are presumably different based on who they represent as categories of immigrants (skilled or unskilled, racialized as white or non-white), yet their asymmetrical comparison rests on the similar *relation* they have with the state. In both Canada and the UK, there is—or in the case of the UK, used to be for the last two decades or so until Brexit—a state obligation to accept these migrants. In Canada, skilled migrants are recruited on a selective points system. They represent the best and the brightest, the type of immigrants who are likely to benefit Canadian society, and hence are publicly desired. Similarly, prior to Brexit, the British state was obliged to accept Eastern European migrants as subjects with rights of free movement within the EU. While the UK no longer has an obligation to accept Eastern European migrants, the UK's relation with Eastern European migrant labour did not cease with Brexit. Migrants from Eastern Europe are still in the country in considerable numbers and are still being recruited, post-pandemic, on seasonal contracts.

Thus, an inclusionary premise exists in both cases, either brought in as cheap labour (the British case) or for desired skills (the Canadian case). Nevertheless, both populations experience exclusion. Is this exclusion made on the basis of identitarian features? On the basis of some phenotypical attribute of the migrants? Or does it result from features of the

two national labour markets and consequential of a global capitalist network of production where rich nations must rely on a supply of foreign labour to satisfy their economic needs? Can racist explanations shed light on this exclusion, or is race a political-economic category that assigns lesser value to various migrants across national contexts? To answer these questions this paper first discusses the whiteness-racialization dialectic that entangles the politics of immigrant labour. It then uses empirical case material to evidence the labour market exclusion of both immigrant populations in the specific national contexts. It concludes by arguing that such explanations cannot be reduced to racist accounts but are rather related to the nation-building dynamics of two wealthy countries of the Global North which use immigration primarily as a tool of economic growth.

### **The Whiteness-Racialization Dialectic**

Whiteness is understood here as a racist classification that groups together subjects possessing light skin colour, and as an idea that attributes ontological significance to this phenotypical attribute, a classification that categorizes subjects, hierarchizes them by biological markers, and subsequently endows them with degrees of social dominance.

Racialization is likewise understood as a racist classification that groups together people as a result of a process that attributes meanings on phenotypical differences to those that possess a so-called commonality in the lack of whiteness and as a result of a process that describes those negatively affected by the consequences of these differentiating practices. Within this logic of classification, explanations of whiteness and racialization are relationally bounded by and mutually define each other. The dialectic manifests itself in an essentialist logic that conveys racist meanings to the binary categories of whiteness and race and that bestows meaning on these categories through biological presumptions.

The historical basis for current interpretations of racial categories, and the dialectical juxtaposition of whiteness and blackness, lies in the British colonization of North America. Colonization and the transport and trading of African people to North America, South America, and the Caribbean for the purposes of forced labour (Williams, 2014) created the conditions for the creation of racialist taxonomies, in which the colonizers were defined as white-skinned and the labourers as racialized slaves. The British Empire had been trading African slaves since 1562 and relied heavily on African labour to colonize what later became the United States of America (Williams 2014). During the sixteenth century, Britain created a slave-based commercial system that linked British ports to West Africa, West Africa to the eastern coast of North America and the West Indies, and North America back to Britain. By 1820, four times as many Africans as European colonizers were living in the new lands (Williams 2014). It was the involvement of the Anglo-American world in the slave trade from Africa (Alcoff 2015; Baca, 2005; Baker 2018; Eddo-Lodge 2017; Morgan 2007; Painter 2008; Williams 2014) then bounded the racial inventions of categorial whiteness and blackness closely to each other.

The category of whiteness came to describe the colonizers in relation to black slavery, distinguishing them from African blackness and negating any non-white differences within Africa (Alcoff 2015; Simon 2017): “Whiteness ‘at home’ was intimately and inextricably related to blackness abroad” (Anderson 2013, p. 36). The white-black dialectic persisted in the new continent and cemented the differences between the white and black populations, with race ultimately being interpreted as one of the major structuring axes of societal distribution of advantages and disadvantages in the United States and Canada (Block and Galabuzi 2011; Chaskin et al. 2019) and emerging as an international framework of taxonomic analysis (Baca 2005). With the rise of multiculturalism in North America, the white-black dialectic stretched to juxtapose whiteness to the idea of race more generally, and

thus to include both brown and black bodies in the racialized pole of the whiteness-race dyad (Alcoff 2015; Eddo-Lodge 2017). Nowadays, it is the white-racialized dichotomy that forms the conceptual ground on which racialist politics are regularly played out.

There are two ways in which racialist values are assigned: through biological interpretations or by a discursive logic.

In *biological interpretations*, race is commonly defined as the belief that certain categories of people are characterized by phenotypical differences—by skin colour, facial characteristics, or blood (Lee 2015; Lundström 2014). It was the Mendelian view that first influenced racialist thinking about groups in biological terms and served as the basis for developing a theory of racial essence (Appiah 2018). Johann Gregor Mendel (1822–1884) was a Czech Augustinian monk who investigated traits in cross-pollinated plants in the 1850s and whose theory was later applied to human heredity in Germany between 1913 and 1933 (Teicher 2020). Mendelian thinking assumed that hereditary factors are mutually independent and unmixable. Physical traits, intellectual capabilities, talents, and class divisions were all seen as resulting from hereditary factors. The skull's shape, length, or height, and the blood were “Mendelized” as dominant features in physical anthropology to explain the heredity of individual traits, to cement them as genuine racial markers, and to justify the study of racial classifications (Teicher 2020). Mendelian suppositions became key in determining an individual's racial origin. It was assumed, for example, that the supposed racial markers of Jewishness—brachycephalic skull, prominent nose, darker skin colour, etc.—would be inherited across generations and would contaminate pure German blood (Teicher 2020).

Despite the genetic variability within any racial group (Appiah 2018), essentialist ways of conceptualizing race on the basis of independent hereditary factors and taxonomic ways of categorizing such racialist thinking found fertile ground in the nineteenth century in

what has been called the discipline of scientific racism. In 1899, William Ripley published a book titled *The Races of Europe*, which secured him a professorship at Harvard University. Ripley used the cephalic index (i.e., the shape of one's head) to distinguish three white races: Teutonic, Alpine, and Mediterranean. Long-headed people had light hair and light eyes, whereas round-headed people had dark hair and dark eyes; the first group were classified as Teutonic and superior, the second as Alpine and inferior (Painter 2008). And in 1923, Carl Brigham published the results of a study on intelligence that was conducted for Princeton University in which he quantified "mental age" by race, using arithmetic and language tests administered to army and reserve soldiers. This study was a staple work in the former field of scientific racism. In Brigham's time, race was seen to encompass blood along with skin colour. Whiteness was divided along racial lines and was thought to comprise three types of biological races, which were based on blood lineage despite their geographical labels: Nordic (rather than Teutonic as in Ripley's case), Alpine, and Mediterranean. Sweden was the single country in Europe which was assigned 100 percent Nordic blood, followed by Norway (90%), Switzerland (85%), Denmark (85%), Scotland (85%) and England (80%); Northern European heritage was deemed equivalent to the ideal form of whiteness. Romania was classified as containing 0 percent Nordic blood, and Bulgaria was not even included in the list of European nations but was listed under Turkey, along with Serbia and Montenegro. Notwithstanding its proximity to England, Ireland was judged to be of 30 percent Nordic blood, with the rest of its lineage regarded as being of Alpine origins. North America was seen as comprising 60 percent Nordic blood (Brigham 1923).

Such genetic reductionism legitimized beliefs about the inferiority and superiority of races based on phenotypic differences. Race was treated as an objective reality and racialist thinking compared and attributed values to categories that ended up grouping together physical characteristics. The idea that Europe produced many types of races (Alpine,

Teutonic, etc.) with their traits inherited independently of each other, led to the racialization of Jewish people, and in turn to opposing anti-racist conceptualizations of race that aimed to deflect attention from the racialization of the Jews. Historian Nell Irving Painter has shown how one of the major figures in the field of anthropology, Franz Boas, who was of Jewish origin and approached the conversation from an anti-racist standpoint, was the primary proponent of a new racial classification that took off by the 1940s which posited only three races—White, Asian, and Black—with no subraces or subcategories (Painter 2015). In arguing that it is impossible to differentiate within the European people by race—since the races were only those “scientifically” identified as the Caucasian, the Mongoloid, and the Negroid, matching the continental ancestry of the European, Asian, and African regions—Boas set up a new racial taxonomy, which once again operated from the premise that there are three races, each with a fixed racial essence (McPherson 2015; Painter 2008).

The three-race classification represented for Boas a form of resisting the theoretical formations that racialized Jews (Alcoff, 2015; Painter, 2008). It is important to note, however, that an anti-racist stance, such as that of Boas, which was intended to contest processes of racialization, ended up racializing once again, but merely on different terrain and under newly defined taxonomies. This suggests that systems of racial classification always operate from the universal logic of racialist thinking, which attributes racial meanings to phenotypic grouping of people. The content of such grouping has changed historically, but the logic of classification remains the same.

In *discursive interpretations*, race is defined not as a valid biological category, but as a social and historical construction that produces racialized effects. Subjects enmeshed in racial processes and affected by the consequences of those processes become racialized subjects (Baker 2018; Glasgow 2010). Critical race theory, with its structural interrogation of

racial power, gained momentum in the 1980s as it pushed the discussion towards considering race as a discursive concept (Crenshaw 2010). It also insisted on the currency of race as an element of analysis for claiming institutional recognition rights (Crenshaw 2010). Race thus became not just a descriptor, but an explanatory category that has a fixed expression across space and time (Baker 2018; Crenshaw 2010).

Stuart Hall (2017) has referred to race as the “master concept” that organizes one of “the great classificatory systems of difference that operate in human societies” (p. 33). On this view, race differentiates between people by appending cultural values to their descriptive features. But the idea that “race is discursively constructed” (Stuart Hall 2017, p. 32) has done little to disrupt the attribution of racial descriptors to phenotypic differences. Since racist thinking is based on accepting race as part of a system of categorization, and operates on a white-racialized dialectic that ultimately groups people according to categories attributing racial meaning, it cannot escape from its biological trace (Hall 2017). And as long as racial categories group people on the basis of phenotypical traits such as the colour of one’s skin, and as long as these traits are biological in nature yet treated by the taxonomic system as culturally natural, as in being interpreted as signifying cultural traits and invested with racist meanings, which then differentially value according to biology, racial categories will continue to treat different groups of people as inherently inferior or superior. For even a logic of racial constructionism still attributes biology indirectly to cultural traits, by using an attributive classificatory system whose categorical blocks are still defined by identitarian reference points and still follow the very same essentialist taxonomies that cluster people on biological grounds such as phenotype. It is the a priori use of phenotype that posits race as a category to begin with and invests it with racist meanings; hence it invests it as a signifier of difference, irrespective of the fact that the category of race and its inherent attributive meanings are seen as socially constructed. When Stuart Hall (2017) mentions “the

biological trace that remains in racialized discourse today” (p. 36) he is referring to the fact that even if a discursive conception of race is bestowed as the organizing term in the classification of differences, these differences will still be conferred meanings that reflect a grouping that classifies on biological terms.

Despite scholarly views of race as socially constructed and of racialization processes as practices that transform subjects into racialized subjects, the category of whiteness is understood as unassailable, indisputable, and ontologically fixed. Ontology refers to being, to the nature of being, to the nature of what something is. The *raison d'être* of the categorical logic that sees whiteness as ontologically fixed and devoid of heterogeneity presumes a unified immutable essence which is expressed biologically by the epidermal marker of white skin. If a white person walks out on the street and asks a random person to identify their race, the stranger will most likely identify them as white based on phenotypical attributes. In the process of establishing such racial classification, no questions would be posed about ancestry blood, ethnicity nor cultural appurtenance, which are nevertheless inferred when establishing a racialized identity (Fields 2001). The person's skin tone would become the attributive marker in assigning the white racial identity. Light skin is constructed as the essence homogenizing people who would otherwise be unlike if other attributes are considered. An Albanian would be the same as an American, since they are both white, and likewise a CEO would be the same as a construction worker since they are both white. It is the presumed ontological fixedness of whiteness that allows it to cut across any other differentiating features.

Thus, both whiteness and racialization are racial categories, yet whiteness continues to be used, both in popular culture and in academic discourse, as deracialized. For instance, bestselling author and guru of racial sensitivity training Robin DiAngelo argues in *Nice*

*Racism* (2021)—her second book on the topic, following *White Fragility* (2018)— that it is “ok to generalize about white people” (DiAngelo, 2021, p. 19), since they share the experience of “white advantage” (p. 30), hence whiteness is not seen to contain the heterogeneity that DiAngelo (2021; 2018) points out to characterize the diverse cultures of racialized people. Ethnicity and culture are attributes that are missing from what is assumed to be the universal white essence. This thinking cements the logic that in the whiteness-race dialectic, whiteness is the strong pole devoid of heterogeneity, and the standard of comparison, which thus defines what is categorized as racialized. Generally speaking, white subjects are constructed as the dominant, non-racialized group; this construction “includes” them in society, while racialized subjects are “excluded” as a direct result of their racialized features. Racist thinking thus racializes as racial subordinated groups while marking dominant groups as the non-racial norm, as white. Examples of how whiteness is seen as a non-race that is devoid of racist elements and how it constitutes the comparative benchmark for what gets defined as raced are also reflected in the BIPOC and BAME acronyms which are widely used in activist circles. BIPOC is a North American term that refers to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color; BAME is generally used in the UK and refers to Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic. Both are labels denoting certain commonalities, but also a certain racial essence in those sharing the lack of whiteness, those sharing the lack of a de-racialized identitarian referential pole. BAME (or BIPOC) refers to “anyone of any race that isn’t white” (Eddo-Lodge, 2017, p. xvi). Such thinking implies that there is a racial essence shared by people who are quite different on other criteria, such as national or ethnic appurtenance. For example, Eritrea and Ethiopia have been adversarial for years, yet an Ethiopian and Eritrean would be deemed the same under such labels, and similar to an African-American living in New York. That an identitarian sameness can be constructed within the difference from whiteness and contained within one’s experience of being non-

white, reflects a racist reasoning that defines the kernel of racialization through the absence of whiteness. Such thinking in effect cements the desirability of whiteness and posits it as a deracialized marker. Yet such thinking also inscribes racial difference on the skin, and this inscription is the product of a biological logic.

Not only does the racist discourse fix itself in racial categories, but also of crucial importance is the fact that these categories continue to be defined in biological terms. That such logic is circulated discursively takes little away from the fact that it is still biologically bound in its manifestation. A perfect example can be found in the media reports about Rachel Dolezal, an American white woman who was heavily criticized because she self-identified as black. In a 2015 interview that exposed Dolezal as a white woman passing as black, the reporter asked her to self-identify in biological terms: he asked whether her father was of African-American origins (determined by blood) and whether she herself was African American (determined by skin colour) (Dolezal and Reback 2017). Such reasoning suggests that current societal understandings of whiteness and race, despite arguments that they are discursive constructions, are not far removed from the biologically essentialist understandings of race from the time of Brigham and Ripley, the difference being that it is no longer the shape of the head that is used to assign race, but either one's skin colour or one's ancestry (in other words, one's blood). The practice of classifying white and black subjects on the basis of skin colour or ancestry locates identity in the body and marks those deviating from an essentialized ideal of identitarian purity as different. The assumption that whiteness consists of observable natal marks is likewise evident in public discussions of Rachel Dolezal. Physical markers (e.g., that she is a blue-eyed blonde from western Montana) were referenced to attribute whiteness to her and to indicate her lack of blackness, since she was "dyeing her hair" and "darkening her skin" (Dolezal and Reback 2017). That Dolezal has been categorized in strictly biological terms and that her race-passing from a white to a

racialized identity was generally not accepted, suggests that it is still biological inheritance that renders racial categories impermeable. It is true that there have been cases of people transitioning from one racial category to another, specifically in order to navigate societal systems of power; however, these movements were historically unidirectional, from racialized to white. Ellen Craft, for instance, escaped from slavery in the US in 1845 and fled to England by disguising herself as a disabled white man (Samuels, 2014). Similarly, in an 1845 trial in New Orleans, Salome Müller claimed white immigrant status in order to escape her enslaved position (Samuels 2014).

Yet the main argument against transracial movement is framed around the idea of choice, or the impossibility of choice, since the concept of race remains biological. A racialized person possessing visible markers of racialization (e.g., black skin) cannot choose her racial taxonomy since it would be impossible to alter physical features such as skin colour to this extent. As the case of Rachel Dolezal has shown, it is much easier for a person racialized as white to embark on such transition. It is specifically on the presumption of exercising a privileged choice that Dolezal was faulted for racism. The difference between Craft and Müller on the one hand and Dolezal on the other is that Craft and Müller were escaping a marginalized situation while Dolezal was leaving behind a privileged position within whiteness to enter one of marginalization. Dolezal was accused of epitomizing the ultimate white privilege: it was through the advantage bestowed by her skin colour that she could choose (or not) to be black (Dolezal and Reback 2017). If Dolezal had been black and wanted to become white, she would not have had to encounter such public disapproval. By constructing an ideal image of whiteness as biologically fixed, the idea of whiteness gets invested with racial superiority. Seeing whiteness as superior and other races as inferior partially explains why society cannot accept that Dolezal wanted to change her race. Her whiteness was equally connected with fantasies of middle class. Dolezal was seen as

privileged also because she was middle-class. She had a graduate degree and was lecturer at Howard University, a renowned academic institution in Washington, DC. (Dolezal and Reback 2017). Yet such references to her class have been missing from the analyses pointing to her privileged racial status.

Racialized thinking is what deracializes whiteness and racializes race. There is no racial essence, philosophically speaking, but only racialist thinking, and any time we engage in racialist reasoning we assume that racial taxonomies reflect a certain racial essence, often attributing this essence on biological grounds. Racialist thinking also maintains an ideological belief in the explanatory currency of racial taxonomies and their effects; however, racial taxonomies have rarely been historically stable, and have failed to represent homogeneous identitarian features. Contemporary anti-racist approaches, both academic and popular, stress the importance of examining whiteness as a racial category that perpetuates oppression and protects white people from oppression. It is therefore worth considering whether such racialist claims hold across geopolitical spaces and whether the universality of whiteness and race as explanatory categories for exclusion can be applied to migrant populations in different national contexts.

### **Racialized Skilled Migrants to Canada**

Racialist thinking has been used to explain and describe why and how recent immigrants to the Anglo-American multicultural societies have been relegated to the lower economic segments of their host societies. In Canada, such thinking has been particularly prevalent. (Block and Galabuzi 2011; Ku, Bhuyan, Sakamoto, Jeyapal and Fang 2019; Satzewich 2015).

It is important to note that migration to Canada follows several pathways: the points system, which is a stream recruiting skilled migrants exclusively; the family class, which allows entry for relatives abroad of Canadian citizens and permanent residents, such as

spouses, parents, and grandparents; and a separate migration stream for refugees and asylum claimants. Skilled migration, however, is prioritized in Canada at the expense of humanitarian and family assistance applications. Selected on education, language proficiency (defined as speaking and writing in one or both of Canada's official languages of English and French), work experience, age, prearranged employment in Canada, and adaptability, skilled immigrants are seen as the right kind: younger, at the peak of their professional years, proficient in one of Canada's official languages, and best suited for yielding economic gains (Ley 2010; Omidvar and Richmond 2005; Oreopoulos 2009).

Despite these stringent entry requirements, labour market discrepancies between Canadian-born individuals and newly arrived skilled immigrants have been widely documented. Unemployment and underemployment affect about two-thirds of skilled immigrants. Many newcomers to Canada struggle to secure adequate work and find themselves employed in fields not commensurate with their education, such as manufacturing, construction, or the service industry, working as parking-lot attendants or taxi drivers (Bejan 2011, 2012; Boyd and Thomas 2001; Boyd and Vickers 2000; Elrick and Lightman 2014). For example, in 2012 the unemployment rate among landed immigrants with a university degree was 7.9 percent, versus 3.1 percent in the Canadian-born population with similar education (Statistics Canada 2013), and in 2017 it was 6.1 percent among university-educated immigrants versus 2.9 percent among university-educated Canadian-born citizens (Statistics Canada 2018).

Racialization has long been used as an analytical lens to explain the exclusion of skilled migrants from the higher end of the Canadian labour market. It is argued that discrepancies in employment outcomes between skilled immigrants and Canadian-born individuals were accentuated when Canada expanded its immigration policies to select higher

numbers of individuals from racialized countries in the Global South, such as the Philippines, China, India, and Pakistan (Hyman et al. 2011; Nichols and Tyyskä 2015). The use of racist thinking as an explanatory factor suggests that migrants are excluded because of their identitarian racial markers and the discriminatory ways in which these markers are perceived in Canadian workplace culture (Block and Galabuzi 2011; Nichols and Tyyskä 2015). In other words, the poor labour-market outcomes of skilled immigrants are attributed to their lack of whiteness. Lack of recognition of foreign credentials (George 2002), challenges related to reaccreditation (Boyd and Schellenberg 2008), and discriminatory demands on the part of employers for Canadian experience (Sakamoto et al. 2010) have all been viewed as examples of racial discrimination. The demand for Canadian experience has been characterized as a theoretically deracialized tool that in practice produces racialized effects, since the prerequisite of Canadian experience compels one to be proficient in English or French, a requirement that some have interpreted to demand familiarity with a “white” work culture (Bhuyan et al. 2017).

However, this reasoning hides issues of class. For second-language proficiency does not neatly align with being white but rather with being upper class. The skilled worker program requires proficiency in English or French at the application stage, thus constituting a requirement that precedes the demand for Canadian work experience and filters out from the start potential lower-class immigrants. An immigrant from Ukraine, Albania, or Spain, for example, will be in a similar situation to someone from Ghana or Hong Kong vis-à-vis the language abilities that would open opportunities to accumulate Canadian work experience, since all of these countries rank similarly on their levels of English proficiency (Education First 2021). Moreover, linguistic proficiency is by no means limited to countries perceived as white. English alone is spoken fluently by more than half of the population in forty-five countries, including nations with typically racialized subjects, such as Jamaica, the

Dominican Republic, the Philippines, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Ghana, Malaysia, and Nigeria. In any case, all skilled immigrants to Canada, whether white or non-white, are already proficient in English or French, since otherwise they would have been unable to enter through the skilled worker program. Another thing they have in common is that they were wealthy enough in their country of origin to have had the means to gain linguistic proficiency in at least one of Canada's official languages. Language proficiency is an elite privilege in the countries of origin of today's immigrants to Canada.

The fact that skilled migrants often end up in the lower segments of the labour market once they arrive in Canada has little to do with their being racialized migrants, and more to do with the fact that Canada has adapted its immigration policy into a tool for economic growth. Skilled migrants are merely fulfilling their anticipated role: to take on available jobs not wanted by the Canadian population—hence in the lower sectors of the labour market—and to grow the Canadian economy. Immigrants not only facilitate economic development as a source of labour for Canadian employers, but also pay taxes and expand the domestic market (Satzewich 2015). This is why private companies, such as the multinational consulting firm Deloitte, advocate for increased immigration to fuel economic growth (Deloitte 2011). The market impetus in Canadian immigration policy thus turns skilled migrants into “capital-bearing objects, rather than capital-accumulating subjects” (Lovell 2000, p. 20). Their ability to contribute to the market matters more than who they are as individuals. By serving Canadian economic interests more than those of the people immigrating, Canada's immigration policies deprive migration of its *raison d'être* from the point of view of immigrants—seeking a better standard of living. A report commissioned by the Government of Canada (2015) and drafted by the Panel on Employment Challenges of New Canadians on the basis of consultations with various immigrant-serving organizations, regulators, employers, and other community stakeholders, emphasized the economic role of

skilled migration, noting that “immigrants have been an important part of Canada’s labour supply over the past few decades” (p. 4); that immigrants have a critical role in “our workforce and the potential to strengthen Canada’s economy” (p. 5); that the skilled labour of immigrants is needed to “enhance our productivity”; and that “successful labour market integration of newcomers matters now more than ever,” since “Canada continues to be affected by large shifts in population composition (aging workforce), globalization and changing skill requirements,” and therefore “needs newcomers to remain competitive globally” (p. 20).

That immigrants are ushered into the country and then face lower employment outcomes compared with the Canadian-born population is merely a by-product of the fact that they are valued primarily as a commodity whose role is to yield high(er) returns for the Canadian economy. This is also evident in the Canadian government’s plan to support post-pandemic economic recovery through skilled migration. The Government of Canada announced in 2020 that for the country to experience future economic growth and fill its labour market gaps so that it can “remain competitive on the world stage, the 2021 to 2023 [immigration] levels aim to continue welcoming immigrants at a rate of about 1% of the population of Canada” per year (Government of Canada, 2020). These rates are now set to increase by an average of 25 percent: 401,000 new skilled migrants in 2021, 411,000 in 2022, and 421,000 in 2023, replacing the pre-pandemic targets of 351,000 in 2021 and 361,000 in 2022 (Government of Canada 2020).

That the Canadian government refuses to open paths to permanent residency for low-skilled migrant groups but speeds up recruitment for skilled workers, is indicative of the fact that the high-skilled recruitment process is based not on race but on social class. People with low human-capital skills, such as the temporary migrant workers who regularly enter the

country to harvest crops or to work in seafood processing plants (Bejan, Allain, Glynn, Wheatley and Soto Flores 2021), are wanted on a strictly temporary basis. High-skilled immigrants, whether racialized as white or non-white, are welcome as long as they benefit the country. Yet as the Canadian government's plan for a post-pandemic recovery clearly states, the new targets for skilled migration will "help the Canadian economy recover from COVID-19, drive future growth and create jobs for middle class Canadians."

Skilled workers end up in positions in the lower end of the labour market, yet their advantage of being skilled is particularly helpful for Canada, which now has a reserve army of educated and linguistically proficient workers who can be brought into the skilled labour market when needed. For instance, medically trained professionals have struggled in Canadian labour markets, especially because of obstacles to attaining Canadian accreditation (Boyd and Schellenberg 2008), yet as soon as the Omicron variant of COVID-19 caused another wave of illness and hospitals had to deal with staffing shortages, the province of Ontario announced that thousands of foreign-trained nurses would be added to the workforce (Fergusson 2022). While these nurses are yet to acquire accreditation, it is important to note that it is only now that there are staffing shortages that migrants (and their training) are being valued. Previously, when they were struggling in the labour market because their medical training was considered to be below Canadian standards, they received little consideration (Ogilvie et al. 2007).

Canada promotes itself as a global economic powerhouse and not as a white nation per se. In the globalized flow of capital, the racial composition of the nation matters little; what matters are the economic indicators. White and racialized populations are both contributing to Canadian economy and strengthening Canada as a global economic force. Skilled migrants are commodified by these very same dynamics. Canada cares little whether

skilled immigrants are racialized, as long as they contribute to the economy. The right type of immigrant is an economic one. For as long as immigrants share the capitalist ethos, including the primacy of the private market, the fantasy of owning property, the entrepreneurial business spirit, and economic efficiency and productivity, the Canadian state will consider such people model immigrants and model future citizens.

That skilled migration is primarily considered a tool for meeting Canada's economic needs is further reflected in what former Minister of Immigration Chris Alexander said to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration in 2013:

The demographic pressures, the skills deficit we see in a number of areas, mean that we are relying on immigration now more than ever just to meet the current needs of the Canadian economy, never mind the future needs. There was a time when it was 20% or 30% of our labour market needs that we were meeting with our annual immigration. Now some studies are saying it's already 65% and perhaps climbing to 75%. In other words, the job, the skills deficit, the inability to find the right skilled people to fill jobs across the country, in almost every region of the country, would be even more acute if it weren't for our economic immigration. (Parliament of Canada 2013)

Thus, when issues of immigrant unemployment and underemployment surface, the Canadian state aims to minimize them so that this skilled workforce does not cease to contribute to economic growth. An entire industry of mentoring and skills training programs, delivered both by the state and through private business networks, is aimed at integrating this skilled workforce into the Canadian labour market. Take for example the Edmonton Career Mentorship program, which involves over fifty Canadian employers, including Excel, the Royal Bank of Canada, Enbridge, and Telus, and is aimed at providing opportunities for skilled migrants to develop an understanding of "how to better integrate into the local labour market" (ERIEC 2014); or British Columbia's SUCCESS program, which provides microloans to internationally trained professionals to help them pay for upgrading of

credentials once in Canada and to assist them with labour market integration (Bejan and Lightman 2014); or the Profession to Profession Mentoring Immigrants Program developed by the City of Toronto’s Office of Equity, Diversity and Human Rights, which is similarly aimed at advancing the “economic inclusion” of internationally trained professionals (Bejan 2012). Many of these bridge-training, internship, and mentorship programs were designed in collaboration with private employers and community service partners, and are funded by the federal government through Canada Job Fund agreements (Government of Canada 2015).

Such programs, however, are meant primarily to serve the economy, and only secondarily the migrants themselves. The symptoms of late capitalism—high unemployment, underemployment, devaluation of human capital, and working below human capacity—are perceived to primarily hurt the Canadian economy and only secondarily the immigrants; this is why inclusionary strategies for skilled immigrants have been strongly supported by the private sector, and it is why Deloitte frames their imperative to integrate skilled immigrants in terms of the “significant cost” to the economy that results from immigrant underemployment: if foreign-born labour is underutilized, Canada loses out on economic growth (Deloitte 2011). Inclusion is thus promoted on behalf of the economy; hiring immigrants becomes a business imperative rather than a humanitarian one. Skilled migrants need to benefit the economy, and the state intervenes to maximize their potential to do so. They need to be mentored and retrained to improve their employability, since any welfare cost associated with their exclusion must not be the price paid by the state for their inability to generate anticipated economic returns.

### **Eastern European White Migrants to the UK**

Eastern European immigration post-1989 was the largest in the UK’s history. After the 2004 accession to the EU of the A8/EU8 countries—that is, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary,

Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia—the number of Eastern European citizens working in the UK is estimated to have risen to 658,000 by 2012 (Vargas-Silva 2013). By 2016, the highest numbers of migrants living in the UK were from Poland (1,002,000), followed by India (795,000), Pakistan (503,000), the Republic of Ireland (382,000), and Germany (286,000) (Office for National Statistics 2016). By 2019, however, the top two countries of nationality among migrants in the UK were Poland and Romania, accounting for 14.5 percent and 7.2 percent of the immigrant population respectively (Vargas-Silva and Rienzo 2020).

Workers from the Central and Eastern European countries that initially entered the EU were allowed to move and work freely within the UK. However, with the accession in 2006 to EU membership of the A2/EU2 countries, that is, Romania and Bulgaria, the UK announced that it would preventively limit access to the British labour market for workers from these two countries (Light and Young 2009). Transitional migration curbs were implemented on January 1 2007 to restrict work entries from Romania and Bulgaria to self-employed and seasonal contracts in the food processing and agricultural fields (Ivancheva 2007; Light and Young 2009; Vicol and Allen 2014). These curbs, which remained in effect until January 2014, were implemented despite the membership of these two countries in the European Union, and despite these migrants embodying the white, European type of subjects. These exclusionary policy measures relegated A2 migrants to a marginal and conditional residency status in the UK, transforming them into a group of precarious workers, allowed temporarily in the lowest sectors of the labour market but denied access to workplace rights and benefits.

Romanian and Bulgarian migrants thus did not have the same rights as other Europeans to access the British labour market, despite being EU citizens and despite higher

average education levels than the British population. In fact, Eastern European migrants have been more likely than British citizens to work below their skill levels (van der Wielen and Bijak 2015). In 2017, 61 percent of Romanian and Bulgarian nationals were employed in low-paying work such as the hospitality industry and the construction sector, compared to 43 percent of British citizens (Office of National Statistics 2017).

Even after the UK lifted the transitional labour curbs in 2014 and all Eastern Europeans secured the same formal rights as their fellow EU citizens, already existing forms of cultural discrimination persisted. Over the years, the British press has portrayed Romanians in particular as a threat to the British economy, to the British labour market (by stealing jobs), to the British state (by claiming welfare benefits), and to the British health care system (by draining resources from the National Health Service) (Balabanova and Balch 2010; Cheregi 2015; van der Wielen and Bijak 2015)—a very similar rhetoric to that used historically to justify the exclusion of racialized non-European immigrants to the UK (Anderson 2013). Eastern Europeans were also depicted as engaging in illegal activities and morally contaminating Britain with their cultural values (Light and Young 2009); Romanians were characterized as beggars, criminals, thieves, and squatters, and were accused of cashpoint fraud (Vicol and Allen 2014), pickpocketing, and other petty crimes (Cheregi 2015), were blamed for most ATM crimes (Light and Young 2009), and were represented as heavily involved in the criminal justice system (Briggs and Dobre 2014; Vicol and Allen 2014). Hate speech against migrants also helped the far-right UK Independence Party (UKIP) to reach four million votes in the 2015 general election. Former UKIP leader Nigel Farage claimed that Britain was experiencing a “Romanian crime wave” (Charleton 2013), that London was facing a “Romanian crime epidemic” (BBC News 2013), and that Romanians would cause an explosion in organized crime (Briggs and Dobre 2014) and said that he would never want “to live next door to a Romanian” (Wollaston 2014).

Once the transitional migration curbs were lifted in 2014, media accounts became increasingly xenophobic. Tabloids suggested that the entry of Romanians and Bulgarians would have negative consequences for the UK and would threaten the British identity and way of life (Briggs and Dobre 2014; Light and Young 2009). In 2013, the British government even considered launching a negative advertising campaign, entitled “Don’t Come to Britain,” targeted specifically at the Romanian nationals anticipated to enter Britain in 2014 (Cheregi 2015). Another example is Channel 4’s 2014 documentary *The Romanians Are Coming*. While the film aimed to subvert stereotypes of Romanian migrants rather than reinforce them, it brushed over the structural conditions that led to such stereotypes. A review of the film published in *The Guardian* described the socio-political context that prompted Romanian migration in clichéd terms: Romanians had the choice between living in an “urban arsehole,” dissolving their brain cells in solvents and paint thinner, and coming to the UK, where they could either work hard for a better life and boost the British economy, or “rob the locals blind, pick their pockets, steal their jobs, abuse their hospitality and drain their welfare state, most probably steal their women, too (once you’ve got your shitty teeth fixed for free on the NHS)” (Wollaston 2015).

Some have argued that the treatment of Romanian and Bulgarian migrants in the UK masked a racialized form of exclusion misplaced on Romanians and actually related to the high proportion of ethnic Roma (or “Gypsies”) in the Romanian population. Hence, the anti-Romanian response masked a racist anti-Roma sentiment. But this argument is not supported by empirical evidence, for the number of Romanians of Roma ethnicity in the UK following Romania’s entry into the EU was low, and at the time of the Brexit vote it was estimated to sit somewhere between five thousand and six thousand (Morris 2016). These estimates might not reflect the actual numbers due to undercounting, but even if the figure was ten times higher, it would still have been low compared to the almost half a million Romanians residing

in the UK at that time. Moreover, the Roma who left Romania were less likely to enter the UK under the self-employed work arrangements and more likely to seek refugee status, on the basis of discrimination, in other Western European countries such as Greece, Italy, Spain, and France (Cahn and Guild 2008). Finally, ethnic Romanian and Roma migrants from Romania settled in different parts of the UK. Most ethnic Romanians resided in northwest London, in Burnt Oak, which became something of a Little Romania (Clej 2016), while most Roma migrants from Romania lived in Govanhill, Glasgow, Sheffield, or Derby - areas with lower counts of Romanian nationals (Morris 2016).

With the 2016 Brexit vote, the UK finally halted its Eastern European influx. However, hate crimes against the Eastern European population continued; for example, an arson attack of a Romanian store in Norwich, the stoning of a Romanian woman in Northern England, the murder of a Polish man in Harlow, and a break-in at a Latvian home, whose residents were called “fucking immigrants” (Touma 2017; Weaver and Laville 2016). In September 2016, *The Guardian* contacted all EU embassies in London and inquired about their reported rates of racist and xenophobic incidents after the Brexit vote. Of the sixty incidents reported, all were perpetrated against Eastern Europeans. Three Western European embassies, those of Spain, France, and Germany, responded to the inquiry; they did not recount reports of abuse against their citizens. Most recorded incidents were against Polish people (Weaver and Laville 2016).

Public discussions about Brexit had primarily identified a loosely defined perception of “immigration” as the catalyst for the Brexit vote, though without naming the categories of immigrants that the vote was against. In a 2017 lecture at the Munk School of Global Affairs at the University of Toronto, Matthew J. Goodwin of Rutherford College, University of Kent, argued that public opinion in the UK had been against immigration since the 1970s (Goodwin

2018). Yet from the 1970s until Brexit, the UK did not vote to leave the EU because of immigration. Moreover, the UK was never opposed to migration from France, Italy, or Spain; otherwise it would have voted to leave the EU a long time ago. The ones that the UK never wanted anything to do with were Eastern Bloc migrants. In the late 1950s, there were signs in London that read “No Blacks, no dogs, no Irish” (Eddo-Lodge 2017); in late 2000s they read “No children, no dogs, no Eastern Europeans” (Taylor 2017). In the 1970s in London, mugging was thought of as a Black crime (Eddo-Lodge 2017); in the 2000s, it was thought of as a Romanian crime (BBC News 2013; Charlton 2013). The exclusion of immigrants in the UK seems to be not just historically related to phenotypically racialized subjects but also related to those racialized as white as well.

When Brexit finally came into effect in 2021, the UK was able to limit the entry of Eastern Europeans. Though they can still come to the UK for travel, they can now be halted at the border on suspicion of wanting to settle permanently in the country or of entering for the purpose of work. Out of the 3,294 EU citizens who were denied entry in the UK in the first quarter of 2021, more than two thousand were from Romania (Da Silva 2021). However, the UK had no issues with bringing in Romanian workers to work in its strawberry fields when international borders were officially closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic (Pencheva 2020). Some have argued that Eastern European migrants have been “experiencing the worst of both worlds: COVID-19 induced economic hardship and Brexit related discrimination” (Pencheva 2020). That Eastern Europeans migrants are good enough to work on British farms during a global pandemic but not good enough to permanently reside in the country and have access to welfare benefits suggests that their role to the British nation was always that of providing a pool of cheap labour.

Being racialized as white was of no obvious benefit to Eastern European workers in being accepted in the UK. Indeed, the UK had conducted systematic efforts to limit their mobility and to confine them to the lower segments of the labour market. The treatment of Eastern Europeans in the UK highlights that the exclusion of immigrants has little to do with their racial characteristics but more to do with the needs of national labour markets. In capitalist societies, migrants gain and lose different immigration statuses, since they need to “freely” relocate according to the demands of the market (Nail 2015). Markets expand and contract according to demand and supply. Labour oscillation is directly tied to capital migration (where capital migrates, workers follow) and capitalist maximization (capital migrates to where its return will be maximized, including areas with cheap labour) (Nail 2015). And within wealthy countries, predominantly of the Global North, immigration has always been a tool to mobilize a surplus of workers from poorer nations. Such workers are desired only for as long as they are needed to do the jobs that citizens are unwilling to undertake, but are unwanted as equals who will benefit from state protections and social rights: benefits are for citizens, and as the far-right politician Nigel Farage has repeatedly argued in the British media, free movement could no longer work once the EU extended its membership to countries that are poor (BBC Question Time 2013; BBC 2014). It is little surprise that Farage’s public statements on the issue centred on preventing Eastern European immigrants from receiving welfare benefits (BBC Question Time 2013; BBC 2014). In other words, the EU does not work for the underclass, even if this underclass is white.

Eastern Europeans were not the first migrant group whose labour was commodified for the benefit of British economy. In the 1950s, after the Second World War, many workers in lower-skilled industries, the textiles and automotive sectors, and public transport were brought from the West Indies (Ali 2015; Voicu 2009). The fact that different migrant groups have historically taken the position of lower-skilled immigrants whose worth is valued

strictly according to their contribution to the national economy, and that such subject positions have been occupied by different ethnic and national groups at different times, suggest that the racialist paradigm is of little or no use as an explanation for the exclusion of migrants from the British labour market. Migrants move from nation to nation, following global capital flows; a racialist logic merely deflects attention away from their status as commodities traded on the global market.

### **The Rubik's Cube**

The two case studies of Canada and the UK suggest that in different geopolitical contexts, different categories of migrants are excluded: high-skilled in one and low-skilled in the other, white in one and racialized in the other. In Canada, the excluded are high-skilled non-white migrants; in Britain, the excluded are low-skilled white migrants. In Canada, high skilled racialized migrants are often unable to find steady work and find themselves in precarious positions, concentrated at the low end of the labour market, despite high levels of education and professional credentials. In the UK, Eastern Europeans, migrants racialized as white, are unable to use their race to attain a privileged status position in British society, as they are excluded economically from the labour market and culturally from national belonging.

Racialization is often used to explain why distinct groups of migrants are excluded—because of their phenotypically visible racialized features, that is, their *lack of whiteness*, as in their lack of culturally de-racialized phenotypical attributes. However, reducing the explanation of exclusion solely to race does not work in these two contexts. Certain migrants are racialized as non-white, and their racialization contributes to their exclusion, but it is far-fetched to assume that racialization alone cuts across and supersedes all other stratifying axes of exclusion. In both contexts, the key dynamic that produces the exclusionary treatment of these two populations is rather a wealthy G7 country of the Global North using immigration

primarily as tool of economic advancement and competitive positioning in the global hierarchy of power. Foreign nationals are included or excluded based on how they are seen to contribute economically to the nation. In proposing that racialized migrants are excluded *because* they are racialized, racist explanations place the emphasis on whiteness as a marker of power. This proposition thus assumes that white migrants should be de facto included, and thus obfuscates the fact that the exclusion of migrants is a consequence of their being granted entry into the country merely as a means of meeting labour needs and supporting the national economy, regardless of whether they are racialized as white or non-white.

To represent the limited applicability of the whiteness-race dialectic in an analytical explanatory frame, let us use the Rubik's Cube as a metaphor. To "solve" the Rubik's Cube one needs to arrange its different colours by a criterion of sameness, so that each face of the cube contains only a single colour. One could say that the logic of attributing sameness of colour to each face of the cube makes an a priori ontological division of what is same and different for each face of the cube, a logic that divides the cube into coloured frames of reference; thus, the Rubik's Cube is solved when the heterogeneity of the squares on each face gets transformed into homogeneity. Now imagine that you are trying to solve the Cube and you encounter an impasse: there are two red squares on the blue face (and evidently two blue squares on the red face, but for the sake of the argument let us assume that you are considering just the blue face). Since that face should be coloured all blue, the red squares are regarded as different, and their difference becomes the main obstacle: if all the squares on that face were blue, the Cube would be already solved. But in virtue of their different colour, the reds are excluded from what constitutes homogeneous blue sameness. The red squares are deemed different simply because the logic of solving the Rubik's Cube requires that the squares on each face of the Cube all be of the same colour. The red squares are not excluded

*because* they are red, but based on a logic that holds that on the blue face all the squares should be blue.

Similarly, discussions of the inclusion and exclusion of migrant populations often use racialist identitarian markers of diverse groups, and the processes by which racial characteristics are attributed to them, to explain why certain subjects are included in society while others are excluded. Racialist explanations posit that race is the main determining factor of societal disadvantages (Reed 2018); such explanations are analogous to what makes the red squares red and explains how the colour red entails exclusion from the blue face of a Rubik's Cube. However, if it is because of race that immigrants in Canada are excluded, then similar exclusionary processes should not take place within a white migration context. Yet in the British context, it is Eastern European white migrants who are excluded. The fact that both categories of migrants, white as well as racialized, can be excluded demonstrates that exclusion is not determined by racialist identitarian features that subjects may happen to lack or possess, but rather by a logic that depends on the *type of subject* the state wants to include. In Canada, the state wants to include skilled migrants, since they have a valued economic role to fill; in the UK, the state rejects Eastern European as immigrants because they will be of the most benefit to the nation as temporary seasonal workers, doing the jobs not wanted by the British population. The exclusion of migrants depends on their commodification in specific national labour markets and on meeting the economic needs of the host nation. It has little to do with the identity of the migrants themselves.

## **Conclusion**

The logic of solving the Rubik's Cube—that is, the dialectical logic of positioning the *standard* of homogeneity and heterogeneity, by coloured squares in the case of the Cube—is universal. However, the squares making up the conceptual parameters of sameness and

difference are, metaphorically speaking, differentially prearranged in different socio-political contexts, and their status is contingent on contextual factors—economic factors in the cases presented—which themselves determine the valuation of the descriptive identitarian markers of the squares. That is, there is no universal colour that determines whether the squares belong to a specific face on a Rubik’s Cube; there are only particular instances which determine that a certain colour will define what constitutes a similar or dissimilar square on one face of the Cube. Analogously, treating whiteness as identical to the possession of privileged characteristics constructs whiteness as an essentially advantaged position. However, the differential treatment of Eastern European migrants in the UK suggests that whiteness and race do not necessarily entail societal privilege or disadvantage; on the contrary, it indicates that racial meanings are mediated through particular socio-political contexts where migrants are universally valued strictly for filling labour needs but otherwise excluded economically.

If you imagine a migrant, most likely you will imagine a racialized subject. Since the migrant is imagined as racialized and since processes of racialization categorize her first as a migrant and second as a subject excluded from full participation in the nation, orthodox explanations of exclusion get framed in terms of racist explanations that argue that migrants are excluded because of their lack of whiteness. Whiteness is the attribute par excellence that denotes the presence of something needed, desirable, or customary. When the imagined-as-present attribute becomes absent, the lack of whiteness becomes indirectly explanatory of why racialized migrants are excluded. This racist reasoning disregards the fact that the concepts of both “white” and “racialized” are produced by the same logic that dialectically binds them together. In the Rubik’s Cube, the red squares are deemed different because their colour is not blue; this has nothing to do with the squares per se, or with their

colour being red, but rather with the *logic* governing the Rubik's Cube, according to which the face in question should be blue.

Whiteness is oftentimes understood as the master attribute in the allocation of societal privilege. Yet extracting only the racist segment from the equation to invest it with the legitimacy of crossing all other stratifying structures in society constructs whiteness as a marker of universal explanatory applicability. The racist logic that places the whiteness-race dialectic on top of the pyramid to supersede all markers of prejudice disregards cases such as that of Eastern European migrants in the UK, whose exclusion relates to another markers of differentiation—namely, class.

*\*No declared conflict of interest. Raluca Bejan does not work for, consult, own shares from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.*

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