Producing the Subject of Deportation.
Filtration Processes during the Russia-Ukraine War

Daria Getmanova [a]   Svitlana Matviyenko [* b]

[a]   Gender Studies Program, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (Ukraine)
[b]   School of Communication, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver (Canada)

Abstract

The essay theorizes the "filtration process" executed by the Russian forces on the temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories that Ukrainian citizens undergo prior to their forceful deportation to the territory of the Russian Federation. The essay broadens the timeframe of "filtration" from interrogation to various logistical steps, including the digital and biometric data collection in so-called "camps," for instrumentalization and reification of deported civilians as data subjects.

Keywords: deportation; Russia-Ukraine war; filtration; genocide; Mariupol.

*   ✉ smatviye@sfu.ca

Based on multiple witness accounts, governmental reports (Blinken, 2022), media reports and the reports by human rights organizations (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2022), international human rights law has been extensively violated "in the territory of Ukraine during the armed conflict triggered by the act of full-fledged aggression carried out by the Russian Federation against Ukraine on 24 February 2022" (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2022, p. 3). Among many violations, the reports list the large-scale deportations of Ukrainian civilians to the various regions of the Russian Federation, sometimes as far as Siberia[1] and Vladivostok, the Russian Federation's Far-East (Office of the Director of National Intelligence of the Russian Federation, 2022a). The OSCE second mission identified an alarming phenomenon, namely the establishment and use of so-called filtration centres during the process of forced deportation of Ukrainian civilians to Russia (Office of the Director of National Intelligence of the Russian Federation, 2022a). In particular, this process violates Article 49 (1) of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War stating the following:

> Individual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportations of protected persons from occupied territory to the territory of the Occupying Power or to that of any other country, occupied or not, are prohibited, regardless of their motive.

> Nevertheless, the Occupying Power may undertake total or partial evacuation of a given area if the security of the population or imperative military reasons so demand. Such evacuations may not involve the displacement of protected persons outside the bounds of the occupied territory except when for material reasons it is impossible to avoid such displacement. (Geneva Conventions, 1949, Art. 49-1)

This action of the Russian Federation is also identified as a breach of the ICC Rome statute on War Crimes that specifically names "the transfer, directly or indirectly, by the Occupying Power of parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies, or the deportation or transfer of all or parts of the population of the occupied territory within or outside this territory" a war crime (Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 1998, Art. 8, 2b, viii). By mid-May 2022, Ukraine's then human rights ombudswoman Lyudmyla Denisova spoke about more than 1.2 million Ukrainians deported to Russia against their will, including more than 210,000 children (Deutsch & van den Berg, 2002). Despite the differences in terms — "deportation" versus "evacuation", Russia's officials unofficially quoted somewhat similar numbers: "more than 1.55 million people who arrived from the territory of Ukraine and Donbas have crossed the border with the Russian Federation. Among them, more than 254,000 children," (Deutsch & van den Berg, 2002), whose parents have not passed the "filtration" process and are temporarily or permanently lost in the war chaos. On behalf of the Ukrainian side, as of August 1st, 2022, Daria Herasymchuk, the representative of the President of Ukraine for children's rights and child rehabilitation, reported the deported children are "waiting for adoption," while "the Russian Federation is preparing changes to the legislation that will allow Russians to adopt Ukrainian children according to a simplified procedure" (Krechetova, 2022). Article II of the United Nations' "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide" identifies "forcibly transferring children of the group to another group" as part of genocide (United Nations, 1948). The international law clearly defines such process of coerced, large-scale population movements across a country's borders not

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1.   Our ethnographic research about people who escaped the Russian Federation after deportation also shows this. Additionally, see Javaid (2022).

just as "deportation" but "mass deportation." (Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 1998)

This essay draws attention to this lawless activity of the Russian Federation by focusing on a case of a Ukrainian family forcedly deported from a village near the Ukrainian city Mariupol to Russia. The details of this case were reconstructed in a course of five interviews with a young woman who is now in a safe location in one of the European countries where she escaped with the help of the network of Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarus activists who have been assisting deported Ukrainians seeking the ways and means to leave the territory of the Russian Federation throughout the entire time of the invasion providing them with information, guidance, funds, and other resources necessary to reach the European country of their choice.[2] As we were reconstructing this case during two months' of regular zoom meetings with Natalia, our research participant, we were thinking *with* her by paying attention to the affective moments experienced by Natalia in order to theorize the effects of "filtration" on different levels — from the body to her overall perception of personhood and citizenship — that were all triggered and shattered by the filtration process. The essay concludes by broadening the timeframe of "filtration" from the hours of interrogation to the variety of logistical steps preceding and following the interrogation in so-called "camps" to suggest that "filtration" is a complex and prolonged process aiming to correlate the data collected from the subjects' inspected devices with biometric data collected during the inspection of their bodies to instrumentalize and reify deported civilians as data subjects. We begin by looking at how the information about so-called "filtration camps" was reported in media drawing on several witness accounts with our research participant being one of them. We proceed by reconstructing the details of Natalia's case, focusing on the nuances that do not usually belong in journalist reporting, but remain important for understanding both crudeness and subtlety of the filtration process.

1   In Media: Opacity and Transparency of Distant Reporting

On March 19th, a message appeared on the Mariupol City Council's official Telegram account: "Over the past week, several thousand Mariupol residents were taken to Russia. It is known that captured Mariupol residents were taken to filtration camps where their phones and documents were checked. After the check, some of the Mariupol residents were sent to remote Russian regions, while the fate of the rest remains unknown" (Mariupol City Council, 2022a). This information quickly spread through the international and Ukrainian media. On March 25th, the first published testimony of forced evacuation from Mariupol to Russia and passing through filtration camps was published in the Ukrainian media *Graty* — a monologue of Mariupol resident Natalia Yavorskaya (2022), which shortly afterward appeared in the international media. In fact, the beginning of forced evacuation could be seen even earlier when, in late February, the authorities of the self-proclaimed DPR and LPR announced "evacuations" from non-government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine to Russia. On February 18th, the self-proclaimed heads of the so-called DPR and LPR announced the mass "evacuation" of the population from the temporarily occupied territories in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts to Russia due to the "threat of attack from Ukraine." The "evacuation" involved transporting women, children, and elderly people to the Russian regions bordering

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2.   At the moment of writing this essay, revealing details of their important activity might endanger both people and the process. Our research of the scope and dynamics of this activism is ongoing and will be published when the situation allows.

the self-proclaimed republics. At this time, Western media referred to the transfer of residents of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts as "evacuation" (Walker & Roth, 2022; Dixon & Ilyushina 2022). At the same time, the Ukrainian media began to describe this "evacuation" as "forced" (NV, 2022; TSN, 2022) and in the Ukrainian legal field it was referred to as "deportation," and "illegal removal" (Prosecutor General's Office of Ukraine, 2022) — the Donetsk and Luhansk regional prosecutors' offices even opened criminal cases for illegal deportation. Next, the information related to "evacuations" in the Russian media appeared in Russian pro-Kremlin media outlets in the first week of March. At that time, some of the most visible media outlets with pro-governmental positions published articles with headlines like "About 2 Million Ukrainians Call On Russia to Evacuate Them from Ukraine" (Izvestia, 2022; RIA Novosti Crimea, 2022), quoting Russian Defence Ministry and Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova.

The transferring of Ukrainians to the Russian territories began in mid-March — just a week after the pro-Kremlin media introduced the narrative about "Ukrainians' pleas for evacuation." Although Ukrainians were also deported from Kharkiv and Kyiv regions, it was the wave of forced evacuations from Mariupol that received wide media coverage, possibly due to many reports by the Mariupol authorities and the residents of Mariupol who revealed the existence of "filtration camps," which attracted media attention to the fact of the removal of Ukrainian population was happening against their will. At first, journalists compared this process to deportations of Ukrainians carried out by the Soviet authorities that, according to historian Timothy Snyder, "began in 1918 and lasted for more than 30 years," which "affected over 6 million people representing various ethnic, social, and religious groups" (Snyder, 2022), or referred to filtration camps as an "echo of Russia's war in Chechnya" (Peter, 2022), as reported by the OCHA, HRW, and other organizations from the early 2000s, where the detainees faced torture, extortion, and rape (Hundreds, 2000) or were waiting for "extermination" (OCHA, 2001).

2 In Process: A Case Study

Since February 26th, 2022, Natalia's family — her mother, brother, her aunt, and uncle with two children, her grandmother — along with other sixty people from a small town near Mariupol were hiding in a bomb shelter for almost three weeks. This shelter, built in the 1950s by the German WWII captives, had no toilet. The building was damaged after shelling, so in order to get outside, people had to climb through the fallen tree trunks blocking the main entrance after the recent shelling. On March 13th, a man from this town was going around local shelters to inform people about a possibility of evacuation to Mariupol arranged by Ukrainian soldiers, since the town was already partly under the control of Russian troops and its infrastructure was damaged: the mobile internet disappeared first, followed by the disappearance of mobile signal on March 1st, the electricity was cut off on March 2nd, since March 3rd there was no water; gas disappeared last. People in Natalia's shelter chose to stay, but those from other town shelters who followed the man eventually gathered with hundreds of other civilians in the basement of the Mariupol Drama Theater, the largest shelter for local residents, that would soon become known to the world due to a deadly strike by a 500-kilogram bomb by Russian forces on March 16th. "At least a dozen people died in the attack," Amnesty International (2022) reported "at least a dozen people died in the attack," but according to the Mariupol City Council's Telegram channel, about 300 people were killed (Mariupol City Council, 2022b); and the evidence collected by the Associated Press' investigation pointed to up to 600 causalities (Hinnant et al., 2022; Ritzel & Hinnant, 2022). The iconic image made by Maxar satellite technology on

March 14th of the Mariupol Drama Theater's red roof with the Russian word "CHILDREN" painted in cap letters on the ground on two sides of the building, demonstrated how the target must have looked from a Russian warplane. Natalia learned about it the day it happened; it was the first news she read when they got the Internet connection. Everyone was shocked, they couldn't believe it.
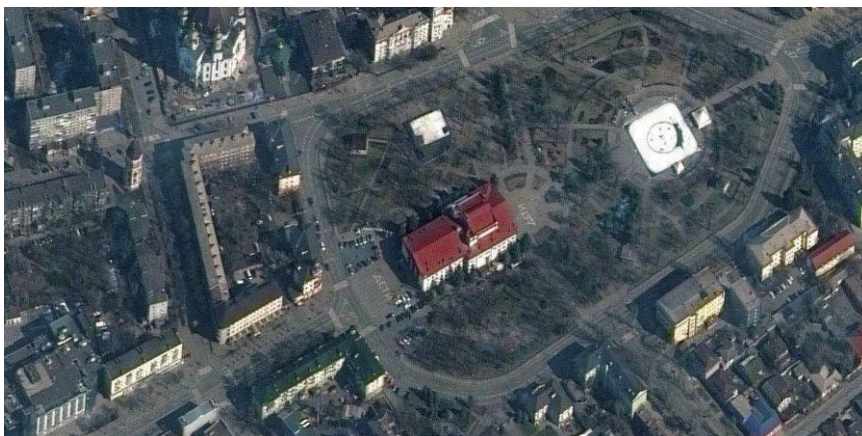
A satellite view of the Mariupol Drama Theater before bombing, Ukraine. March 14, 2022. Maxar Technologies.

Since March 2nd, people in the shelter were disconnected from the news and knew nothing about the shelling of Mariupol nor other developments of the war. When one day before March 4th, Natalia and another woman came out from the basement, the woman received a notification on her phone that read "You are now in the Russian Federation." Her phone could connect to the internet provider Phoenix (*Феникс*), known as "the first republican project in terms of GSM-connection in DPR," indicating that Ukrainian forces lost control over this territory. The appearance of the military with a "Z" on the town streets meant the town was at least partially under control of Russian soldiers, who did not come down to the shelter but communicated with people standing on the top of the stairs, invisible to most of the shelter inhabitants; people were allowed to come out and go to the well for water. There were chairs, benches, and rags on the floor, people had only their emergency bags on them. Natalia recalls: "In some way, I miss the shelter people, really. There were women with children. Small, very smart kids, I liked talking to them. In the mornings, I usually was with my family, but when shelling continued, I would join the family of my friend, to avoid seeing my relatives dying, if the rocket hits us deadly. The family of my friend was able to keep a positive spirit, which was very important for me."

On March 14th, Russian soldiers sent them down some food — canned meat and cookies, which, people, recognized, was produced in Kaliningrad. People were happy since the food was already scarce. The man who brought food was Natalia's uncle. When he came out of the shelter several hours earlier, Russian soldiers put a bag on his head, checked his phone, and detained him, sending for Natalia's mother so she could vouch for him. Then they put a white stripe on his arm, possibly, indicating that he passed verification, in other words, his identity was checked, he was searched and not identified as suspicious. Although this mark was mostly worn by soldiers, the Russian soldiers occasionally "marked" civilians by white stripes too, which certainly endangers them. People became more careful expressing their views: they already heard the talks about some sort of "zachistka" / "purge" of the Ukrainian citizens, although

the meaning of that was not clear at all by then.

On March 15th, Russian soldiers called Natalia's uncle again and he was told that the evacuation to Donetsk was about to begin. At first, Natalia thought that they should not agree, but apparently, refusing was not an option. It was not clear why it had to be Donetsk, since it was known that the situation there was similarly dangerous, and people were evacuated from Donetsk itself. By then, Natalia's family already read the media reports about so-called "concentration camps" on the occupied territories, so they felt caught between the danger of shelling and street combat, which already seemed like the worst that could happened to them, and a very confusing and scary destination where they were taken against their will.

Russian soldiers separated men from women, children and elderly people and ordered them to stay while others had to leave. Natalia's uncle was also left behind with the rest of the men, and the other group had to quickly move from point to point hiding from the ongoing street combat. Meanwhile, she noticed that many local buildings were destroyed by shelling. The group led by Russian soldiers was ordered to enter the school building, where Natalia encountered more Russian soldiers. Most of them were over forty, they did not look like what she imagined regular army soldier could look like — "these were the faces of drunks," which made her very scared. There were about ninety people altogether from theirs and other shelters, along with people from the town apartment buildings, who were brought for a forced evacuation. It was still hard to imagine that they were taken somewhere. At the same time, Natalia felt a complete loss of control over the situation, and her sense of self was lost, too, she felt carried away by the will of others, suppressing her own will. Just a body, not her body.

Soldiers ordered people to walk towards the main road. Natalia felt lucky: she was able to wipe all data from her notebook while the battery was only 2% charged; she also deleted all the information from her phone. Natalia was afraid that her hand-written diary that she began back in January might look suspicious; to part with it was not an option, she decided, so she had to take several pages out, but instead of throwing them away, she hid the pages in the folders of the blankets along with her Ukrainian sim card. She gave her diary to her grandmother, who was able to save it.

Natalia was afraid to go to Donetsk as she knew about Izolyatsia, a former industrial infrastructure turned art center by the Izolyatsia Arts Foundation and then in June 2014, turned, by Russia-backed separatists, into one of the darkest places known thus far — an illegal prison[3] often compared to a concentration camp,[4] where more than three thousand people were illegally held captive and subjected to torture and inhumane treatment since the beginning of the war eight years ago, and where many episodes of the after-torture confessions are filmed for the Russian state TV. The occupied Donbas has been a grey area since 2014, where all laws were lifted, and anything could be done to anyone.

Finally, by walking through the fields, the group reached the building of a former prison that Russian forces used as their base. Twenty minutes later, Russian artillery began shelling Mariupol from the town Natalia's group left earlier that day. Soon, people were ordered to get to the military Ural trucks stationed on the prison's yard and eventually, the trucks with people started moving. Seated on the floor among others, Natalia stopped feeling as a person and the sense of total indifference about the entire situation filled her up. Someone said they felt like captives or slaves. One of Natalia's truck neighbors was her mother's co-worker, a wife

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3. See the detailed plan here: https://izolyatsia.ui.org.ua/en/.

4. It was also described this way by its former prisoner, Donetsk-born Ukrainian writer and journalist Stanislav Aseyev, the author of *In Isolation: Dispatches from Occupied Donbas* (2021).

of a Ukrainian soldier. There are people, Natalia thought, who produce the impression that nothing can ever happen to them, that they cannot die; and this woman was certainly one of them. Her presence had a calming effect and Natalia tried to stick to this woman. Meanwhile, the truck reached another small town, but the driver did not know its name: most of the road signs were proactively removed by the Ukrainians, and the driver was clearly not local. Local people brought the deported some food.

In this small town where Natalia and others from her shelter were brought, they were stationed for a night in a school. The informational meeting took place, organized by the DPR police representatives, but no information about their destination or the situation at war was provided. Questions were not welcomed. Those who asked had to identify themselves, which was very uncomfortable, but the answers were not clear. Some people wanted to return to their towns, but they were not allowed. People were told that the "Ukrainian Nazis" shelled Donetsk, therefore the destination would be different, and meanwhile, people would be taken care by the DPR's Ministry of Emergency Situations, which remained a mere declaration. There were many children. It was impossible to sleep or rest, however, as Russian soldiers guarding the deported sitting behind their room doors were drinking and speaking loudly through the entire night. Everyone was scared. The building was very cold, and Natalia's family was freezing.

On March 16th, people were loaded on buses. The driver refused to tell them where they were going. The driver was clearly confused, and he kept getting lost on the way. Sometimes the road was destroyed by bombing and they had to search for the alternative routes. At some point near Novoazovsk, someone in the group suddenly received a text message that the evacuation of civilians towards Zaporizhzhia, organized by the Ukrainian side, took place the day before. Natalia felt tricked and got very upset that she did not know about this possibility. Closer to the evening, the military man on the road showed the driver a way to a "filtration camp." It was the first time Natalia heard that phrase, except those other historical cases of NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, the USSR's secret police) filtration camps in 1945-1950, set for the screening of Soviet soldiers returning home from enemy occupied territories, enemy imprisonment, or enemy encirclement, or those created by the Russian Federation in Chechnya. But it was very unclear what one could expect from the filtration camp in the village Bezimenne of the Novoazovskyi region. Upon arrival, the deported people were told that about 900 people came to the camp that day and await their "filtration." The Wi-Fi they were able to catch belonged to the DPR's Ministry of Emergency Situations, and it soon disappeared. Everyone was given sausage sandwiches, "a gift from Kadyrov," and people were asked if anyone needed any medication. Some people were crying in distress as heavy military vehicles passed by. The wait for "filtration" took about five hours. Later, after the escape, Natalia would see the Maxar satellite image of that filtration camp in the context of the Washington Post's reporting based on a witness account.

When the interrogation began, it was unclear if the representatives who conducted questioning were military or not — they did not have any insignia nor wore a uniform. Before entering the interrogation room, one had to give away her phone by revealing the password. The men would connect the phone to a computer by a cord and kept working on it for about twenty minutes. Upon entering the room, each person was photographed from different angles, and Natalia was particularly surprised by a photo from above, like in surveillance videos. Then one's finger and palm prints were taken. Everyone was asked their already-former postal addresses. The questioning lasted for about twenty — twenty-five minutes, after which one waited for the return of their phones. To avoid additional questions, Natalia left just some photos and generated fake exchanges with several friends via Whatsapp on her phone.

A satellite view of the filtration camp at Bezimenne, Ukraine. March 22, 2022. Maxar Technologies.

The questions were of this kind: Where do you work? What is your attitude towards Pravyi Sektor[5]? What is your attitude towards the Ukrainian government's politics? What is your attitude towards the actions of the Mariupol authorities? Do you have any relatives left in Ukraine? Do you have any relatives left in Mariupol? Do any of your close ones serve in the military forces of Ukraine? After the first round, the questioning continued by two different agents, one after another, who asked very similar questions and entered the information in databases with different computer interfaces, which could indicate they represented different governmental offices or institutions. Natalia's mother said she did not have the phone, which she hid, and they let it go. After this process was over, people were ordered to get on buses waiting to take them across the border of the Russian Federation.

3   In Theory: Broadening the Framework of Filtration

"The subject of deportation" is not a particular individual who is deported, but a *place* in the broad structure of filtration that an individual is forced to take under the Russian occupation. With every next individual who has been sent to pass through the filtration process prior to deportation, this place is reproduced by the infrastructural arrangements not only of a filtration facility alone, but the overall system of communication, transportation, and administration associated with this process. A filtration "camp" is not merely a gate of its own, but an important element of a *broader infrastructure*, and so, as Conflict Observatory concluded, "describing filtration as a system, rather than standalone camps, would be more accurate" (Conflict Observatory, 2022). In July 2022, the Russian filtration complex consists of approximately twenty one filtration "camps:" there are detected filtration facilities in Bezimenne,

5.   Pravyi Sektor (or Right Sector) is a right-wing to far-right Ukrainian nationalist organization.

Dokuchaevsk, Kozatske, Manhush, Novoazovsk, Olenivka, Starobeshevo and Volnovakha — all in the territory of the self-proclaimed DPR (Conflict Observatory, 2022). As reports demonstrate, there are at least "four types of facilities involved in filtration" within the system of filtration: "(1) registration, (2) holding, (3) secondary interrogation, and (4) detention" (Conflict Observatory, 2022). Such system of facilities is not static, as media reports and the mentioned Conflict Observatory's report demonstrate, if needed, any facility could be used for different purposes and the particular procedures associated with these facilities may vary.

Utterly problematic with its explicit fetishization of *purity* and driven by *purification* for the purposes of assimilation and subsumption of Ukrainian population under the RF's jurisdiction that sustains the entire Russian state's justification of this war,[6] the filtration process is key for producing the subject of deportation. It has been assumed in the reports by media and organizations that subjecting an individual to interrogation and search typically continues within one to several hours with a goal of establishing their political reliability and useful information for further exploitation after which a pass is issued with which an individual can either stay or move within a designated area of the operational enclosure, unless it is determined that an individual is identified as a subject of further detention and severe interrogation. The subjects at risk are activists, former and current military and security, journalists, or governmental officials; if detained, they may undergo so-called "denazification courses," after which they also pass "loyalty tests," that are often video-recorded and publicized, as well as physical and psychological torture, including electric shocks and staged mock executions of detainees which usually takes place in different facilities, but still belongs to the overall process of filtration (Paladino, 2022).

The spatiality and temporality of filtration is more complex and extends beyond the actual time and location of interrogation and screening in the "camps" or at the checkpoints. As our case demonstrates, an individual arrives to a filtration camp already suppressed, demonized and dehumanized by the power of the aggressor. The filtration process, thus, begins with the occupation of Ukrainian territories during the first days of the Russian invasion by creating the environment of multiple risks that, for most civilians, trouble their sense of self and severely damage their communal links. The entrapment of Ukrainian citizens in the underground environments of shelters and unequipped hiding places during shelling and shooting, with the lack of sanitation, food, and water, without electricity and gas, and within the prolonged informational blockades. The encounter with the military forces and the necessary subjection to their orders also plays a role in the ongoing suppression of the will, confusion, and disorientation of citizens under occupation. The case of our research participant, Natalia, demonstrates how filtration enables *reification* of people in the process of transportation which she experienced inside the military truck. Natalia indicated that for those who went through the process in March the process could have been different: her group, for example, found out about it after being delivered to a so-called "filtration camp," which caused fear and anxiety among people as they were unaware of such facility and what it meant for them. Later and currently (at the moment of writing this essay, the filtration processes leading to deportation are ongoing), Ukrainian citizens heard of this system and, for the most part, they know how to prepare, although, because the details of the process change, no one still cannot be sure about what one may encounter. By the time people arrive to the "camps" following orders and changing carrier vehicles, most of them seem to accept the loss of their formal membership in the political community of Ukraine, of which the transportation logistics gradually strips them prior

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6. Admittedly, this narrative has been changing throughout the course of the war from "purification for assimilation" to "erasure of Ukraine as nation altogether."

247

to their interrogation and screening. Doubt, uncertainty, fear, and disorientation caused by a possibility to be wrongly identified as "confused subjects for re-education and purification" or "bandits and fascists," which leads to further interrogation and torture, where people often confess what they are falsely accused of and are turned into "material" for propagandist "confessional videos" that are run on the Russian state TV and other state-run network Telegram and other channels (reports indicate the existence of "studios" at the premises of filtration facilities, where such content is produced on the spot).

Despite the systemic nature (Office of the Director of National Intelligence of the Russian Federation, 2022b) in the course of the Russian war in Ukraine, the filtration system and process may look rather disorganized, which endangers the subjects of deportation either less or more — depending on the time of filtration, and the local procedural variations, including the composition of processing teams of law enforcement and their collaborators with all sorts of their personal ambitions, fears, beliefs, prejudices, or desires. While our research participant recalled going through only one checkpoint on the way to the "camp," which, in the mid-March, went without a strict check of passengers, the procedure has been often reported to include verbal abuse and various forms of humiliation, such as strip searches. Ukrainian citizens are checked for "nationalist tattoos" and "marks caused by wearing or carrying military equipment" (Kottasová, 2022; Javaid, 2022) that would imply military links. It remains unclear what constitutes a tattoo as "nationalist" — whether it is a combination of colors, particular national symbols, or something else, and what bodily marks may carry the association with weapons. Having consulted with data and security specialists, we can speculate that the procedure of her phone inspection, reported by Natalia, when it was temporarily confiscated and connected to a computer for about twenty minutes, while the agent was working with it, could be a download of all phone data and, potentially, installing a surveillance program on her phone. Whether any of these steps are indeed sufficient in terms of determining one's alliance and ideology, to strategize their potential resourcification in the Russian Federation after deportation, is questionable. Noteworthy, there is no contradiction in describing this process at the same time as *systemic* and *disorganized* with a high degree of *randomness*. This randomness, as remembered from the Soviet system of purges in the 1930s and later, is key: it indicates the totality of the state's control over citizens' life and death where anyone could be picked by the NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs), and *processed* as an "enemy of the Soviet state" to the point of publicly confessing one's guilt before their execution, imprisonment, or labor camps.

To conclude, by highlighting our findings, a system of filtration facilities and logistics is similar to other infrastructures in how it simultaneously is a thing and also "the relation between things" (Larkin, 2013, p. 329), and as such, it reproduces the imperial relation embedded in the internal geopolitics of the Soviet Union by exercising the power to relocate big groups of people through the current Ukraine-RF sate border as even this border still marks a regional division of the Soviet times. The case we reconstructed brings forward the individual's affective responses to such enactment of power towards population as a state property, ranging from the sense of suppression and acute helplessness while deported people are moved from one location to another, threatened, and under- or misinformed about reasons and destinations, and about the overall situation at the front.

The subject of deportation, thus, is a subject of 1) the imperial political geography dismissing the current political realities (i.e., Ukraine as an independent post-Soviet state since 1991); 2) digital data, networked by platforms and stored on devices, and 3) biometric data as a concretization of the subject's being (as) a body — produced by several infrastructural assemblages.

A system of filtration facilities as operational enclosures, along with its overall infrastructure of communication, transportation, and administration of deportation here moves beyond representation to the "theatre of operations" by correlating the imperial political geography, digital data, and biometric data. This system sustains and reproduces itself as such correlation materialized by the passing of the subject of deportation through the system.

Although the use of Ukrainians in Russia for economic gain is certainly possible, as well as the use of filtration of the deported civilians as the Russian state's preemptive elimination of potential security threats on their territory (Hinton, 2022), the most plausible explanation for this disorganized and yet, robust and operational genocidal machine for displacement of Ukrainian population might be *falsification* for persuading, if not the world, then at least, their own citizens and governmental elites — with a typical theatricality, cynicism, and cruelty that echo the practices from the Soviet past. The question we ask by calling for further investigation: What if, indeed, the purpose of the massive filtration machine is merely to produce two *inexistent* groups of people, just like the Soviet state used to produce its inexistent internal enemies in the 1930s, by falsifying linkages between the *labels* propagated by Russian state media or governmental officials and people's physical *bodies*? First group are the proclaimed subjects of elimination — "Nazis" (that the Russian propaganda associates either narrowly with the Azov battalion or broadly with anyone Ukrainian, as it was explained by Russian political technologist Timofey Sergeytsev (2022) in the infamous manifesto published by a Russian major state-owned domestic news agency *РИА Новости*. Second group are "victims" or the Russian-speaking Ukrainians whom the Russian Federation allegedly came to protect and who now massively flee the points of their deportation — no matter how far-deep in the Russian territories they find themselves — surprisingly, to the NATO countries, and from where, again, some of these Ukrainians take all the risks to return back home.

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Daria Getmanova – Gender Studies Program, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (Ukraine)

Daria Getmanova is a researcher, pursuing a master's degree in the Gender Studies Program at the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine. Her interests include cultural and political dimensions of resource extraction, forced migration, and feminist and queer epistemologies.

Svitlana Matviyenko – School of Communication, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver (Canada)
✉ smatviye@sfu.ca

Svitlana Matviyenko is Assistant Professor of Critical Media Analysis in the School of Communication and Associate Director of the Digital Democracies Institute. Her research and teaching are focused on information and cyberwar; political economy of information; media and environment; infrastructure studies; STS.