“There’s been a lot of openly racist and divisive media reporting on the war and crisis in Ukraine that is focused on creating a hierarchy of who deserves our help and who doesn’t, much of it has focused on ‘deserving’ refugees based on the their skin colour and the fact that they’re “European”, the not so subtle subtext of course is that these refugees are white.

However, we know Ukraine has thousands of international students from across Africa, India, Pakistan and the Middle East. We also know from eyewitness testimonies and verified reporting that many Black and brown people fleeing war in Ukraine are not being met with openness across borders and in fact are being treated with suspicion and are facing extra hardship and harm.

There has been shameful media commentary about “civilised Europe and Ukraine” as opposed to “uncivilised” Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan where war is still raging as if these parts of the world have an inherent connection and relationship with war and suffering. We are seeing open and casual racism in a lot of media reporting. It’s disgraceful and unacceptable.

Not so long ago, European Muslims were being ethnically cleansed in Bosnia, in the heart of Europe. This devastating legacy of the failures of European states to protect them goes on until this day. This has been erased by the same commentators. How shameful.

I attended the protest for Ukraine on Sunday in Oxford. I was there to show solidarity with Ukrainians and everyday Russians also living under Putin’s tyranny. A young Syrian man draped in his country’s flag spoke very movingly of the immense suffering of Syrian people and why they understand Ukrainian peoples pain.

I have travelled and worked extensively across Russia and worked with Ukrainians. There is a lot of poverty and suffering in Russia, it’s not widely reported on.

I met people and groups working to feed hungry people and working to support communities in poverty. I visited homeless shelters, a women’s prison (a heartbreaking experience I will never forget), LGBQTIA+ activists and campaigners. They were all standing up for each other.

Journalists, members of the LGBQTIA+ community, anti-fascists and feminists in particular face extreme threats in a Russia under the control of Putin.

This is a time where anyone who believes in peace and justice must work harder than ever to bring people and communities together here in our own city of Oxford and beyond. This racist media reporting and commentary is designed to do the exact opposite and we must all be wiser to it.''