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# The Czech Islamophobic movement: beyond ‘populism’?

ONDŘEJ SLAČÁLEK AND EVA SVOBODOVÁ

**ABSTRACT** Slačálek and Svobodová’s paper focuses on the ideology of the Czech Islamophobic movement as seen during the 2015–16 migration crisis. In their analysis of interviews with demonstrators and speeches by leaders of the movement, they discuss first how the movement imagined its enemies, and then describe its vision of positive core values. They conclude that the movement’s key ideological features are: an emphasis on social and civilizational decline (declinism); a return to an assumed naturalness in economic and gender relationships (naturalization); and the open evocation of violence and severity (brutalization). In terms of Rogers Brubaker’s distinction between xenophobic ethno-nationalism in Eastern Europe, and the xenophobic defence of liberal values in the West, Slačálek and Svobodová find that the Czech case fits the allegedly western pattern better than the eastern one, which may cast doubt on the whole essentialization of distinctions between ‘western’ and ‘eastern’ populisms.

**KEYWORDS** brutalization, Czech Republic, declinism, Islamophobia, naturalization, populism, social movements

The aim of this article is to analyse the ideology of the Islamophobic movement in the Czech Republic, as it emerged during the migration crisis of 2015–16. At that time, the movement became an actor in a number of public demonstrations. It gained widespread media attention, since it was frequently viewed by the media as casting doubt on liberal democracy (and thus as a scandal) and, at the same time, as a representative of the majority viewpoint of Czech society, the greater part of which rejected the idea of accepting Muslim refugees.<sup>1</sup> The movement did not manage to enter party politics

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1 Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění (CVVM), ‘Postoj české veřejnosti k přijímání uprchlíků a kvótám na jejich přerozdělování—říjen 2017’, press release, October

(although the extreme-right Svoboda a přímá demokracie (SPD, Freedom and Direct Democracy) profitted from the Islamophobic wave) and its demonstrations were attended only by a few thousand people. Even so, it had a considerable impact on public debate, repeatedly gaining attention on the front pages of newspapers. The Czech president himself even gave a speech at one of the Islamophobic movement's events.

Czech Islamophobia is often lumped together with similar movements in a whole bloc of post-Communist Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries in which Islamophobia is connected with ethnic nationalism and conservative values. Rogers Brubaker, for example, in his article on xenophobic populism in Europe, includes the Czech Republic under the heading 'East Central European national populism', where the most striking examples are Hungary and Poland, countries that 'remain fundamentally nationalist' and that 'externalise liberalism'.<sup>2</sup> They stand, he writes, in opposition to Western European Islamophobic populism that is motivated by the xenophobic defence of liberal values.

This article points to the significance of 'small differences'. The Czech case has a number of characteristics in common with other CEE countries. These include, above all, the influence of an ethnic concept of the nation that reflects a considerable degree of ethnic homogeneity, as well as the absence of a significant Muslim population (according to various estimates, there are around 5,000–20,000 Muslims in the Czech Republic). Another feature it has in common with other CEE countries, compared to Western European ones, is the relative weakness of the *cordon sanitaire* dividing the political mainstream from racist attitudes. All these countries are relatively new members of the European Union (EU). In all of them, at the affective level, much of the public articulates a feeling of inferiority and uncertainty, connected with relatively widespread Euroscepticism in a part of the public and the political elite.<sup>3</sup>

However, there are also differences: the construction of Czech national identity is markedly different from that in Poland and Hungary. Its dominant form does not emphasize conservative values, but rather its own progressive, intellectual and liberal nature. It is infused with self-irony, particularly the idea of a 'small nation', a 'small people'.<sup>4</sup> Czechs are also among the least religious of nations, which leads to their fear of Islam *as a religion*, not *as a rival religion*. The relatively low level of antisemitism is connected to the fact that, ever

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2017, available on the CVVM website at [https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com\\_form2content/documents/c2/a4468/f9/pm171214.pdf](https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c2/a4468/f9/pm171214.pdf) (viewed 16 August 2018).

- 2 Rogers Brubaker, 'Between nationalism and civilizationism: the European populist moment in comparative perspective', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 40, no. 8, 2017, 1191–226 (1208).
- 3 See Agnes Gagyi, "'Coloniality of power" in East Central Europe: external penetration as internal force in post-socialist Hungarian politics', *Journal of World-Systems Research*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2016, 349–72.
- 4 Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and the Post-Communist Transformation of Society* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 1996).

since the time of the country's first president, Tomáš Garigue Masaryk's intervention against the (then predominant) antisemitism of the nineteenth century, it has been considered a sign of backwardness.

For all these reasons, Czech Islamophobia is much more similar to what Brubaker labels 'Northern and Western European' populism, found in Western Europe and anchored in the defence of liberal and secular values, than to the conservative Islamophobia of the Polish and Hungarian nationalists. However, it is differentiated from them by the absence of the need to take into account the more liberal and more strongly anti-racist public discourse of the western countries and, as a result, by a greater severity and ferocity.

The term 'populism' has become a key concept used in both academic and public discourse to describe contemporary Islamophobic movements and their associated political developments. For some authors (in particular Jan-Werner Müller and Rogers Brubaker), 'populism' is an adequate concept for understanding such movements, allowing us to describe not just their political style, but also their content, including the demand for strong-arm and protectionist solutions to perceived crises, their anti-democratic nature and rejection of pluralism).<sup>5</sup> According to other authors, the concept of populism is, on the contrary, problematic. Some followers of Chantal Mouffe and Ernest Laclau emphasize that the label of 'populism' is in fact a euphemism for extreme right-wing politics, and one that elides the significance of these right-wing forces' self-identification as such.<sup>6</sup> In those cases—which, in the words of Anton Pelinka, do 'not so much mobilize against the (perceived) enemy above but more against the (perceived) enemy from abroad'<sup>7</sup>—it would be more appropriate, according to Yannis Stavrakakis *et al.*, to use the term 'exclusionary (ethnic) nationalism'. Populism may form part of their discourse, but it does not define their ideology.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Gaspar Miklos Tamás considers populism an unhelpful tool that hides the fact that, at the core of these movements' ideology, is the naturalization of inequality and a denial of the legacy of the Enlightenment.<sup>9</sup>

According to Mark Elchardus and Bram Spruyt, the concept of populism focuses on political style, which belongs to the *supply side* of the political

5 Brubaker, 'Between nationalism and civilizationism'; Rogers Brubaker, 'Why populism?', *Theory and Society*, vol. 46, no. 5, 2017, 357–85; Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2016).

6 Yannis Stavrakakis, Giorgos Katsambekis, Nikos Nikisianis, Alexandros Kioupiolis and Thomas Siomos, 'Extreme right-wing populism in Europe: revisiting a reified association', *Critical Discourse Studies*, vol. 14, no. 4, 2017, 420–39.

7 Anton Pelinka, 'Right-wing populism: concept and typology', in Ruth Wodak, Majid KhosraviNik and Brigitte Mral (eds), *Right-wing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse* (London and New York: Bloomsbury 2013), 3–22 (8).

8 Stavrakakis, Katsambekis, Nikisianis, Kioupiolis and Siomos, 'Extreme right-wing populism in Europe'.

9 Gaspar Miklos Tamás, 'The mystery of "populism" finally unveiled', *openDemocracy*, 24 February 2017, available at [www.opendemocracy.net/wfd/can-europe-make-it/g-m-tam-s/mystery-of-populism-finally-unveiled](http://www.opendemocracy.net/wfd/can-europe-make-it/g-m-tam-s/mystery-of-populism-finally-unveiled) (viewed 16 August 2018).

game. It cannot explain the *demand* for populist solutions, based on widespread *declinism*, the belief that a decline of society must be reversed by radical measures.<sup>10</sup>

Our contribution remains agnostic with regard to these debates. We try to make use of the advantages of the analysis of populism as a starting point, but to go beyond it towards further concepts that allow us to capture more concretely the features of the ideology of Czech Islamophobia. Our analysis follows a plan drawn from the concept of populism as a thin ideology: we shall analyse the varied images of the enemy (which mostly overlap with the image of the 'elites'), as well as the concept of 'heartland' within Czech Islamophobia.<sup>11</sup> The larger framework of this description will be, above all, that of the dynamic relationship between a populism that claims to defend liberal values, and the values themselves. We shall show how, in the process of their alleged 'defence', the given 'liberal values' are taken, used and transformed by the Islamophobic movement.

First, we describe the context of the Islamophobic movement in the Czech Republic. We then briefly outline our data and methods. Finally, we focus our attention on the images of the most significant enemies identified by the Islamophobic movement: Islam, the EU, politicians, journalists and the so-called *sluníčkáři* or 'do-gooders'. We shall contrast this picture with the positive valuations of the movement's idealized heartland. A key role is played here by the concept of naturalness, whether at the level of the economy or of gender. In conclusion, we argue that the concept of populism describes a large part of the movement's style but that, in order to understand its deeper features, we need to follow much more closely the motif of the 'natural' and the idea of a deep internal and external crisis that declinism describes.

## The Czech context

Czech historical contact with Islam is minimal. To a certain extent, Czech historical memory does include belonging to a historical group of Danubian countries exposed to the Ottoman invasion.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, after 1989, a negative

10 Mark Elchardus and Bram Spruyt, 'Populism, persistent republicanism and declinism: an empirical analysis of populism as a thin ideology', *Government and Opposition*, vol. 51, no. 1, 2016, 111–33.

11 See Margareth Canovan, 'Trust the people! The populism and the two faces of democracy', *Political Studies*, vol. 47, no. 1, 1999, 2–16; Paul Taggart, *Populism* (Buckingham and Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press 2000); Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London and New York: Verso 2005); Vladimíra Dvořáková, Radek Buben and Jan Němec, *Que el pueblo mande! Levicové vlády, populismus a změny režimu v Latinské Americe* (Prague: Slon 2012); and Jan Bíba, 'Populismus a reprezentativní demokracie: k možnosti populismu jako emancipační strategie', *Politologická revue*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2013, 87–105.

12 See Andre Gingrich, 'Frontier myths of Orientalism: the Muslim world in public and popular cultures of Central Europe', in Bojan Baskar and Borut Brumen (eds), *MESS*:

attitude towards Islam appeared, partially in reaction to the official pro-Arab position of the previous Communist regime.<sup>13</sup>

The securitization of Islam was considerable even before the migration crisis, especially after 2001. Miloš Zeman—the former head of the *Česká strana sociálně demokratická* (ČSSD, Czech Social Democratic Party), which he subsequently left—who has been the Czech president since 2013, was photographed in 2011 for the cover of the weekly magazine *Reflex* wearing a t-shirt with a crossed-out mosque. ‘A moderate Muslim is a *contradictio in adjecto* ... just like a ... moderate Nazi’, was his commentary.<sup>14</sup> The media, as well as a section of the liberal elite, developed a fear of Islam particularly in the period following the terrorist attack in New York on 9/11, and in connection with episodes such as the Danish cartoons affair.<sup>15</sup>

During the migration crisis, the media reacted by securitizing and dehumanizing the the refugee ‘wave’.<sup>16</sup> According to some opinion polls, Czechs were the most hostile nation to refugees in the whole of the EU.<sup>17</sup> No parliamentary party adopted a pro-refugee stance, with quotas being firmly rejected even by many representatives of the liberal-conservative TOP 09, three (out of four) of whose MEPs supported the refugee quota proposal in the European Parliament. The Czech Republic joined with the other Visegrád Four countries in adopting a position against quotas.<sup>18</sup>

In 2015–16, there was a widespread wave of Islamophobic protests. The first event was a demonstration in reaction to the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre. The demonstration was organized by the online group *Islam v České republice nechceme* (We Don’t Want Islam in the Czech Republic), and this initiative later became the main organizing platform for demonstrations reacting to the migration crisis. However, despite the predominantly negative attitude of society towards refugees, not even the largest such demonstration, on 6

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*Mediterranean Ethnological Summer School, Piran/Pirano Slovenia 1996*, vol. 2 (Ljubljana: Inštitut za multikulturne raziskave 1998), 99–127; and Miloš Mendel, Bronislav Ostřanský and Tomáš Rataj, *Islám v srdci Evropy* (Prague: Academia 2007).

13 See Mendel, Ostřanský and Rataj, *Islám v srdci Evropy*.

14 Quoted in Viliam Buchert, ‘Umírněný muslim je stejný protimluv jako umírněný nacista, tvrdí expremiér Zeman’, *Reflex*, 3 August 2011, available at [www.reflex.cz/clanek/politika/42738/umirneny-muslim-je-stejny-protimluv-jako-umirneny-nacista-tvrdi-expremier-zeman.html](http://www.reflex.cz/clanek/politika/42738/umirneny-muslim-je-stejny-protimluv-jako-umirneny-nacista-tvrdi-expremier-zeman.html) (viewed 16 August 2018). Translations from the Czech are, unless otherwise stated, by the authors.

15 See Lucie Sedláčková, *Islám v médiích* (Liberec: Nakladatelství Bor 2010).

16 See Michal Tkaczyk, Pavel Pospěch and Jakub Macek, *Analýza mediálního pokrytí uprchlické krize (výzkumná zpráva)* (Brno: Mašarykova univerzita 2015).

17 ‘Veřejné mínění v zemích Evropské unie: Česká republika, podzim 2016’, Standard Eurobarometer 86, November 2016, available on the *European Commission* website at <https://ec.europa.eu/comfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/77217> (viewed 28 August 2018).

18 The Visegrád Group, also called the Visegrád Four or V4, is a cultural and political alliance of four Central European states: Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia.



February 2016, managed to exceed 10,000 people.<sup>19</sup> The movement originally took the form of a single-issue initiative. But, eventually, its leaders, Martin Konvička, Petr Hampl and Jana Volfová, founded the political association Blok proti islámu (BPI, Block against Islam). Attempts to found a political party like the German Alternative für Deutschland (AfD, Alternative for Germany), however, led to disputes, contributing to the decline of the wave of protests.

Supporters of the populist leader Tomio Okamura were also active in the protest movement. Okamura promoted 'direct democracy' and leaving the EU. Unlike the BPI, he did not reject cooperation with the extreme right, represented by the extra-parliamentary Národní demokracie (National Democracy) and the Dělnická strana sociální spravedlnosti (DSSS, Workers' Party of Social Justice). The leader of National Democracy, Adam B. Bartoš, notorious for his antisemitism, became a distinctive figure in the movement after he threatened 'traitors' in the government with hanging.

The extreme right also initiated the creation of the Národní Domobrana (National Home Guard), which declared that it had 2,500 members in ninety branches. Journalists who infiltrated the group, however, believed that these figures were exaggerated, and that most branches were not actually active.<sup>20</sup>

## Data and methods

We used two sources for our analysis. The first involved observation of Islamophobic demonstrations, carried out by one of the present authors between 18 August 2015 and 1 May 2016, including observing, and conducting interviews at the demonstrations (fifty) and longer semi-structured interviews with demonstration participants (eleven). Of fourteen demonstrations, three were jointly organized by the far-right National Democracy. Others were meetings of the main Islamophobic current, represented by the BPI.

The second source for our analysis consisted of articles on the online tabloid *Parlamentní listy*. *Parlamentní listy*, sometimes compared with Breitbart News, is a tabloid news website that has given a large amount of space and sympathy to Islamophobic mobilization, and has itself contributed to it to a considerable extent.<sup>21</sup> We examined articles focusing on Martin Konvička (535 articles) and Petr Hampl (405 articles). Martin Konvička is an associate professor of biology, while Petr Hampl is a commercial sociologist who has become a significant

19 See also the article in this issue by Farid Hafez.

20 Štěpán Malát, 'Národní domobrana se chystá na partyzánské boje proti NATO a migrantům', *Svobodné fórum*, 10 February 2017, available on the *Forum24* website at <http://forum24.cz/pripravte-plany-postupu-narodni-domobrana-se-chysta-na-partyzanske-boje-proti-nato-a-migrantum> (viewed 16 August 2018).

21 See Václav Štětka, *Between Instrumentalization and Para-Journalism: Current Challenges to Democratic Roles of the Media in the Czech Republic* (Budapest: Center for European Neighborhood Studies, Central European University 2016), available on the *Central European University* website at [publications.ceu.edu/sites/default/files/publications/fod-stetka.pdf](http://publications.ceu.edu/sites/default/files/publications/fod-stetka.pdf) (viewed 16 August 2018).

figure in the movement and, in *Parlamentní listy*, he functions as a commentator or expert. We followed Konvička and Hampl from January 2015 to August 2016.

We loosely based our work on critical discourse methodology and the discourse theory of the Essex school, as well as on the Geertzian tradition in cultural anthropology. In the analysed material, we try to reconstruct general and shared topoi but, unlike critical discourse analysis, we do not focus much on the linguistic aspect of the discourse.<sup>22</sup> It was our ambition, in reconstructing the individual topoi, to offer a Geertzian 'thick description' of the 'webs of significance' of the Czech Islamophobic movement; it is from Geertz that we also take a non-evaluative approach to the concept of ideology.<sup>23</sup>

## Enemies

We selected images of negatively evaluated Others, first, who were markedly present in the rhetoric of the movement and, second, about whom there was a considerable degree of consensus. These two criteria coincided most notably in the case of Islam, politicians and 'do-gooders'. The EU was also perceived very negatively although there were variations. A negative attitude towards journalists was not as strong as it was in the case of other Others, but it was displayed here with considerable intensity, including verbal and violent attacks.

## Islam

The primary Other of Islamophobic discourse is, of course, Islam. A negative essentialization of Islam is connected with a mobilizing emphasis on some of its characteristics. Chief among these is the *irrational violence* of terrorist attacks against western targets, and the outbreaks of violence in western cities. Islam is also depicted as an *alternative civilization* and a *totalitarian ideology*, and doubt is cast on its status as a religion. Descriptions of Islam stress its cruelty, irrationality, restrictions in the sexual arena and the subjugation of women. It is portrayed as essentially expansive, aiming to recruit unbelievers, and as a religion that allows lying if it serves a purpose. In this essentialized image of Islam, individual believers are irrelevant, being perceived as thoughtless followers or even victims. 'I get the feeling that the Muslim view is some kind of

22 See Ruth Wodak, 'The discourse-historical approach', in Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (eds), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi: Sage 2001), 63–93; and Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-wing Populist Discourses Mean* (London, Thousand Oaks, CA, New Delhi and Singapore: Sage 2015), 51–3.

23 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books 1973); see also Hilary Pilkington, *Loud and Proud: Passion and Politics in the English Defence League* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2016).



virus with which they're artificially vaccinated, that they really do have this evil deeply rooted inside them. They seem to have raped minds, raped souls ...' (interview with demonstrator 4).

The key structuring metaphor for the relation of Islam to liberal values is the image of the decadent Roman Empire. Analogous to the West today, it is rich and powerful, but losing its vitality and perishing as a result of its over-refinement. Moreover, it is gradually opening its gates to barbarians who in the end will subjugate it.<sup>24</sup>

The rivalry with Islam is underlined by an important gendered and biological element. Of key significance to the image of Islam is the image of Muslims as rapists, and also the image of Czech or western women in their relationships with Muslims. The stories related on this theme are meant to indicate not only the incompatibility of civilizational norms, but also one of the battlefields of Islamization. Few speeches at demonstrations pass without mention of the violation of the rights of Muslim women or the protection of 'our women'. In this narrative, Czech women are not just a group of distinct persons with their own agency. They become a national treasure that has to be protected. Muslim women, on the other hand, have to be 'liberated', which frequently means 'liberation' from Islam and Muslim men.

As conceived by Martin Konvička, the leader of the movement, who ostentatiously emphasizes his masculine sexuality, the 'liberation' of Muslim women is also their 'de-Muslimification', and is at the same time difficult to distinguish from sexual conquest. For Konvička, a biologist, sexuality is a key theme for the analysis of Islam as a whole. He sees Islam much more as a strategy for 'reproductive usurpation', rather than as a religious and cultural system. As a result, in his opinion, a 'biologist or ecologist can understand Islam more easily than an Orientalist', and can diagnose in it, apart from anything else, biological degeneration or 'evolutional descent into imbecility as a result of the elimination of sexual selection'.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the strong enmity that is articulated against Islam, however, it cannot be said that Islam is perceived as a *political* enemy. In the Islamophobic imagination, it occupies a place somewhere among the Nazis, the 'barbarian hordes' from the Migration Period of the first millennium CE, and a natural disaster. It represents absolute moral evil but is also seen as similar to a natural catastrophe: a tidal wave, an alien, destructive force, depersonalized hordes. There is no sharing of political community with it; indeed, the ultimate aim of the movement's campaign is to ensure that the political community is not shared with it. The real political enemy of the movement consists of

24 See Walter Pohl and Ruth Wodak, 'The discursive construction of "migrants and migration"', in Micha Messer, Renée Schroeder and Ruth Wodak (eds), *Migrations: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Vienna and New York: Springer 2012), 205–12.

25 Martin Konvička, 'Proč biolog či ekolog pochopí islám snáze, než orientalista', *Parlamentní listy*, 15 February 2016, available at [www.parlamentnilisty.cz/profily/Doc-Martin-Konvicka-Ph-D-104562/clanek/Proc-biolog-ci-ekolog-pochopi-islam-snaze-nez-orientalista-67367](http://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/profily/Doc-Martin-Konvicka-Ph-D-104562/clanek/Proc-biolog-ci-ekolog-pochopi-islam-snaze-nez-orientalista-67367) (viewed 16 August 2018).

those who refuse to behave in a suitable manner towards this catastrophic force. It is this opponent with which the Islamophobic actor shares liberal democratic institutions and engages in a dispute over their meaning. In these clashes, Islam acts as more of a litmus test that allows allies to be distinguished from enemies, dysfunctional institutions and collaborators.

### *The EU/Western Europe*

As opposed to the violence, aggression and vitality ascribed to Islam, the EU is depicted consistently as naive, enfeebled and incapable of taking action. Part of this description focuses on the bureaucracy and the idea of an alienated centre ('Brussels'). In relation to Western Europe, two key grievances are raised: (1) it has failed in integrating its Muslim communities and it is now forcing the countries of CEE into the same failure; and (2) Czechs are playing a long-term role of second-class Europeans who are meant to 'learn democracy and the market economy' from the western countries. These two grievances converge: it is because (according to the Islamophobes) the EU has failed to integrate its own Muslim minorities that it has changed from a model into a cautionary example.

Here is an extract from a speech given at a demonstration on 1 May 2016, addressed to the 'old' EU:

Given that some of your inhabitants might consider us a threat, we [shortly after accession to the EU] accepted the following regulations prescribed by you ... We entered the EU with all the carefulness you wished for, and only in order to dispel your fears ... Can you imagine our feeling of humiliation? Can you imagine how a citizen of a V4 country must feel when today he sees people, from goodness knows where, unidentifiable, with no proof of identity, coming to you, to Mummy Merkel, in endless streams, with no allowance or respect for any of our rules ... and totally at odds with the laws on proper asylum procedures? Do you know how humiliated we feel when they are immediately granted benefit payments much higher than the pay of a 'hardworking Polish plumber'?<sup>26</sup>

Issues relating to Muslim minorities and the refugee crisis provided the first opportunities for the Eastern EU countries to take on an oppositional role *vis-à-vis* the countries that were previously their examples and sources of power and normality. They were able to depict themselves as countries capable of learning from the failings of the West, able to avoid similar problems themselves and able to lecture western states from a position of superiority. 'The reason why we want to go into politics is so that what is happening in

26 Speech at a demonstration organized by National Democracy, Prague, 6 February 2016.

Western Europe doesn't happen here', Konvička says.<sup>27</sup> Former Czech president Václav Klaus has described the refugee crisis itself as a deliberate policy devised by the liberal left establishment in order to implement a 'people exchange': gaining voters who will be grateful to the liberal left and who will help to change the ethnic composition of Europe.<sup>28</sup> Konvička has reacted negatively to this conspiracy theory, claiming that the refugee crisis is the result and proof of the incompetence of the European elites, rather than a deliberate strategy.

The relationship to Europe is ambivalent here. If Europe is being represented by 'Brussels' and Merkel, the attitude of Islamophobes is strictly negative, and they respond by advocating isolation and national sovereignty. On the other hand, however, the Czech Islamophobic movement is actually strongly 'European', partly because it takes most of its arguments and images from its western counterparts, and partly because it sees its struggle as part of the struggle for the preservation of the whole of western civilization, and Europe in particular.

### *Politicians*

With a few important exceptions, such as the president, the political class is perceived in the Islamophobic discourse that we studied as consisting of traitors to their own society, and as essentially the obedient long arm of 'Brussels'. The radical gesture that featured a gallows for 'traitors' being held aloft outside government offices (1 July 2015) may have taken place at a demonstration of the extreme right, but the idea of treason committed by politicians is common to the whole movement. Just as Islam is perceived as a threat equal to Nazism, so politicians are frequently depicted using the rhetoric that features the words 'appeasement' and 'collaboration', even though a number of politicians themselves have strong Islamophobic attitudes.

Behind the anti-political and populist rhetoric of the movement there lies, in many cases, notions of political force, national sovereignty and control over territory, population and borders as a condition for success and prosperity:

They [Saudi Arabia] are the richest ... they don't let any refugees in. Switzerland is one of the richest countries in the world. They don't let anyone in either. Or only a small number. You'll never get citizenship there. Japan ... (interview with demonstrator 2).

27 'Konvička promluvil nejen o koncentračních táborech pro muslimy: Když to řeknu pateticky', *Parlamentní listy*, 12 August 2015, available at [www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/monitor/Konvicka-promluvil-nejen-o-koncentracnich-taborech-pro-muslimy-Kdyz-to-reknu-pateticky-394958](http://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/monitor/Konvicka-promluvil-nejen-o-koncentracnich-taborech-pro-muslimy-Kdyz-to-reknu-pateticky-394958) (viewed 17 August 2018).

28 Václav Klaus and Jiří Weigel, *Stěhování národů S.R.O.: Stručný manuál k pochopení současné migrační krize* (Prague: Olympia 2015).

## Journalists

Journalists are becoming the object of much attention and criticism. The background of the anger towards the media is evident in the words of a participant from the Islamophobic movement in a discussion on Islam on 3 November 2015: 'Why doesn't the media write what 90 per cent of the nation thinks?' The media are perceived as a powerful filter that controls the picture of the movement and its issues, and that is, at the same time, dominated by the elite, although it should represent the interests of the people. Islamophobes demand that journalists reflect better the logic of the citizen–politician relationship in a representative democracy and, thus, they are ultimately denying the critical function of the media. Their resentment is brought to bear most strongly on the public media that are 'paid for out of our taxes'.

Journalists fail because their framing of Islam and the Islamophobic movement does not correspond to what the movement considers to be self-evident. The movement's explanation for this is the omnipresent regime of 'political correctness'. 'Political correctness' does not relate only to journalists but it is its use by the media that is its most important role. It is perceived as an ideology and a collection of prohibitions. At the same time it is clearly of western origin, and so also forms part of the colonial narrative regarding the EU.

'Political correctness' is the distinguishing mark of the elite and, at the same time, an explanation for and proof of its incompetence, one of the key sources of its delegitimization. In attacking 'political correctness', one can accuse the elite of squandering a key liberal value—freedom of speech (that is, the freedom to defame)—and, at the same time, portray it in the role of those who suppress, or cannot know, the truth. Given that 'political correctness' is frequently connected with a softening of reality, as an inability to state the 'harsh' and 'cruel' truth (such as racial inferiority), criticism of it is simultaneously a demand for the brutalization of public debate.

## 'Do-gooders'

Some journalists and a small number of politicians (left-wing, human-rights-oriented liberals, including certain bearers of Václav Havel's legacy) coincide with another object of enmity. The elastic concept of the do-gooder (*sluníčkář*, sometimes *sluníčka*, literally a 'sunny person' or 'little sun') embraces human rights and anti-racist activists, liberal politicians and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). For the Islamophobes, *sluníčkáři* are 'people who see everything as rosy, in quotation marks, [and] they are convinced that ... everyone can understand each other. But they can't, it's against nature.' They are 'people who ... try to do good things more for ... a good feeling than for a good result', and they are characterized by 'superficial, limited ways of seeing things' (interviews with demonstrators 1 and 4).

The image of 'do-gooding' is strongly gendered. While, in the imagination of Islamophobes, male do-gooders have lost a fundamental part of their

masculinity, the female do-gooder corresponds to the idea of the naive girl. Her image is often evoked together with that of violent Muslim youths, a link that is evident in the common trope of the rape of female do-gooders as a fate that they deserve.

In addition to the naturally conflict-prone order of the world, 'do-gooders' also represent a provocation with regard to the 'natural order' of productive work. Their engagement in the study of 'unnecessary' humanities and social sciences or their work in non-profit organizations is viewed as being parasitic on society. In some cases, do-gooders are even perceived as people who have a material interest in further flows of refugees so they can draw on grants meant to benefit the migrants. The existence of grants and subsidies is taken as proof that 'do-gooders' do not participate in productive work, and that their lives are immoral. 'The intellectuals have set things up nicely for themselves, just like Czech Roma. But the money for you is going to run out soon': this headline in *Parlamentní listy* summarizes Petr Hampl's ideas.<sup>29</sup> Being a *sluníčkář* is also frequently seen as proof of having ties to foreign powers and foreign interests. Foreign donors, in the movement's imagination, cause activists to be estranged from the Czech people, if not directly corrupted by being in the service of foreign interests.

### Core values

Czech flags are often present at anti-Muslim demonstrations, and these demonstrations often call for the restitution of national sovereignty. The symbol of sovereignty is sometimes the border, seen as serving to protect against danger from without (Muslim migrants) and as an energetic response to the powerful above ('Brussels'). The defence of 'our values' eventually became the central idea of the whole movement.<sup>30</sup> When asked what the national values were that they wanted to defend, respondents' answers tended towards vague descriptions of history as taught in the school curriculum, significant historical figures or a description of the necessity of protecting national property (even to the point of returning to nationalized ownership). Martin Konvička believes that some elements of Czech identity can be a source of success where Western Europe has, in his eyes, failed:

'We're secular, sceptical, free-thinking, healthily cynical ... [with] experience of totalitarian government. I hoped that resistance would come from the whole of

29 Jakub Vosáhlo, 'Humanitní intelektuálové si to zařídili podobně, jako čeští Romové. Jenže za chvíli na vás dojdou prachy, varuje Petr Hampl. A jestli se nevzpamatujeme, bude opravdu zle', *Parlamentní listy*, 9 August 2015, available at [www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/rozhovory/Humanitni-intelektualove-si-to-zaridili-podobne-jako-cesti-Romove-Jenze-za-chvili-na-vas-dojdou-prachy-varuje-Petr-Hampl-A-jestli-se-nevzpamatujeme-bude-opravdu-zle-391529](http://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/rozhovory/Humanitni-intelektualove-si-to-zaridili-podobne-jako-cesti-Romove-Jenze-za-chvili-na-vas-dojdou-prachy-varuje-Petr-Hampl-A-jestli-se-nevzpamatujeme-bude-opravdu-zle-391529) (viewed 17 August 2018).

30 I conceive of core values in the context of Taggart's writing on the 'heartland'; see Taggart, *Populism*, 95–8.

society, all its classes ... I relied on making fun of Islam in the media and culture ... I hoped that tricky Czech businessmen would manage to fracture the local financial base for jihad. I trusted that solidarity between people would prevent them from buying up property here, that officials would engage in small-scale bullying on all fronts, to make it hard for them to move here, and I believed in Czech humour...’, Konvička said.<sup>31</sup>

Nonetheless, to the extent that Islamophobes feel there is a specifically Czech ‘heartland’, it is more of a local variant of the general European or western variety.

The extreme right connects European values with a return to open nationalism and a clear rejection of liberal society. The majority current in the Islamophobic movement, however, corresponds more to Brubaker’s description of Western European populism. Its starting point is the *defence* of liberal values: freedom of speech, equality of men and women and so on. However, it is in this very act of self-defence that some liberal values and actual liberal society are subjected to *criticism* by Islamophobes. For some Islamophobes, it was in confrontation with the Muslim Other that they first realized the (imagined) foundational values of the West. As Konvička said in an interview:

*You are an atheist, although—I am guessing—you recognize some sort of Christian traditions, values ...*

Yes, but it is significant that I started to recognize them only at the moment when ...

*... when you started to study Islam?*

Yes. It was only when I started to come to grips with Islam that I realized that a diametrically opposed system could exist, and how much we are influenced by Christian tradition ...<sup>32</sup>

Christian heritage thus becomes a steady cultural framework for a movement inspired by liberal values. It is at the moment when these values seem to

31 Quoted in Luš, ‘Ubožák, křivák a perverzák prorok Mohamed: Opravdu drsný projev, který předvedl Martin Konvička na akci proti islámu’, *Parlamentní listy*, 19 January 2015, available at [www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/monitor/Ubozak-krivak-a-perverza-k-prorok-Mohamed-Opravdu-drsny-projev-ktery-predvedl-Martin-Konvicka-na-akci-proti-islam-354809](http://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/monitor/Ubozak-krivak-a-perverza-k-prorok-Mohamed-Opravdu-drsny-projev-ktery-predvedl-Martin-Konvicka-na-akci-proti-islam-354809) (viewed 17 August 2018).

32 Lucie Bartoš, ‘Chcete vše, na čem stojí civilizace, nahradit tmářstvím, otrokářstvím a podřízeností? Chcete být jen zrnkem prachu? Docent Konvička skutečně podrobně rozebral nebezpečí islámu’, *Parlamentní listy*, 25 January 2015, available at [www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/rozhovory/Chcete-vse-na-cem-stoji-civilizace-nahradit-tmarstvím-otrokarstvím-a-podrizenosti-Chcete-byt-jen-zrnkem-prachu-Docent-Konvicka-skutecne-podrobne-rozebral-nebezpeci-islam-355752](http://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/rozhovory/Chcete-vse-na-cem-stoji-civilizace-nahradit-tmarstvím-otrokarstvím-a-podrizenosti-Chcete-byt-jen-zrnkem-prachu-Docent-Konvicka-skutecne-podrobne-rozebral-nebezpeci-islam-355752) (viewed 17 August 2018).



be threatened that the power of the framework increases. At the same time, these values grow from civic participation, the family and institutions that, in calmer times, have been perceived as a burden to liberal individuals. Again, in Konvička's words:

I'll tell you what people should do: have children. And look after them well. Get to know and come closer to their geographic neighbours. If anything bad happens, the most important people will be the ones that are closest. They should cooperate with their neighbours in their houses or blocks of flats, do things together, look after each other's children and so on, all those little neighbourly things. And then just—vote for politicians who speak their language, and not insincere ones. Demand that politicians face responsibility. Work a lot on the civil society that Václav Havel used to talk about so much—get together, go to the pub together, discuss things, educate themselves—I'm serious. And if the worst comes to the worst, [turn to] the Bible and some cartridges, dry powder ...<sup>33</sup>

Civil society, even evoked with a partially ironic reference to Havel, here becomes not the activity of a peaceful society, but the basis of preparations for a possible catastrophe. However, participation becomes an important value in itself. Involvement in a new collective movement, the driving force of which is the defence of something that is seen as a priority interest of the people as a whole, is something that can overcome previous disputes and divisions. At demonstrations, the division between left and right ceases to be valid. Among the leaders of the movement, Petr Hampl, a former member of the right-wing libertarian *Strana svobodných občanů* (Party of Free Citizens), meets former social democrat Jana Volfová. The crisis situation also offers a new welcome for rejected and condemned persons. During one demonstration, Jiří Jiskra addressed the unemployed thus: 'Show you deserve your welfare benefits, for which we have to work every day, show you deserve them by fighting against the acceptance of refugees ...' And this is how he addressed former prisoners: 'Pay your debt to society. Pay it by becoming involved, too.'

One of the key elements of the 'heartland', as the location of the positive values evoked by the movement, seems to be an adherence to rules. If the movement defends freedom, it is a freedom limited by clearly defined norms. If it criticizes elites, do-gooders or refugees, at the core of its criticism is a violation of rules. According to this logic, migrants are not keeping to the rules because they belong to a group of privileged people who are treated better than ordinary citizens. This adherence to the rules transforms itself, at the next level, into one of the greatest civic virtues. Obedience to the rules stands in opposition to the nonchalance of the 'do-gooders' who, thanks to their privileges, are allowed, as the Islamophobes see it, to ignore some of the rules.

One of the speakers at a demonstration recounted, for example, how, as an expatriate in Japan, he had not dared to ask for time off at Christmas, although he loved Christmas. He contrasted his behaviour with that of Muslims who in Western Europe ask for time off at Ramadan. Another respondent, who as a nineteen-year-old single mother had drawn benefits, excused herself during the interview by saying that she had 'definitely paid back the benefits in taxes'. Once again, in this story it was the eternally dissatisfied Muslims who were the enemy.

The emphasis on rules was not just about legal norms. On a deeper level, the emphasis on rules corresponded to an idea of naturalness, whether this reflected social Darwinian ideas regarding the 'natural' dominance of the stronger (or 'natural' xenophobia towards the foreign) or neoliberal ideas regarding the 'natural' functioning of the market (shared by a number of Islamophobes, scandalized by the idea of NGOs and academics living off grants and thus outside the framework of market exchange). These rules also included ideas of the 'natural world' of productive work or the 'natural' gender order. This imagined naturalness is also an image of decline: contemporary societies are losing vitality because their male populations are incapable of defending their territory against foreigners, and their female populations do not want to reproduce the necessary numbers of inhabitants. Liberal tolerance makes society vulnerable to its enemies (Islam, neo-Marxists), and liberal criticism and irony deprive the society of the necessary self-love, giving discursive and financial resources to those who criticize, reject or have a pathological hatred of their own society.

Islam thus becomes a symptom of a deeper problem, the roots of which lie *within* western liberal societies. The Islamophobic movements call on themselves not only to address Islam, but also to focus on the general transformation of society: above all, its simplification and its return to 'natural' values and orders. These include some liberal freedoms (freedom of speech, freedom to do business), but those freedoms that do not deny their preconditions, which are above all the 'natural' gender order and loyalty to their own society. Naturalness is understood here to be, to a considerable extent, sociobiological, and takes precedence over the values of liberal democracy.

For Hampl, the basis of the 'natural' order is the total dominance of the market and the removal of redistribution, especially when it supports other than majority values. For the biologist Konvička in particular, the mainstay of the 'natural' order is the 'natural' gender order. He sees the romantic relationships between Muslim men and Czech women as the failure of western liberal masculinity: 'Czech women ... even at the age of thirty can find no understanding among those immature guys at home ... with Islamic men they are maybe looking for the sham certainty of a large family.'<sup>34</sup> Men

34 Olga Böhmová, 'Muslim od Jílkové pokračuje ve výkladu: Ženy jsou nevyrovnané, a naše víra jim vychází vstříc. Ne my, ale vy jste netolerantní', *Parlamentní listy*, 22 November 2014, available at [www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/monitor/Muslim-od-](http://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/monitor/Muslim-od-)

who are incapable of making money in the competitive market, defending their country or attracting women have to change their way of life, and the society that consistently produces such men has to change, otherwise it will lose in the Darwinian duel with Islam. According to Islamophobes, democracy cannot be legitimized by liberal democratic values (which have been perverted in the hands of liberal elites), but only by an understanding of 'natural' given realities and 'necessities' for self-preservation. A system that compromises 'naturalness' and 'self-preservation' cannot, in their view, make any demands on loyalty.

### **Beyond populism? Brutalism, declinism, naturalism**

As we have seen, the ideology of the movement may be easily described as Islamophobic and populist, but this definition does not exhaust it. If we are to build on Anton Pelinka's distinctions, we have to state that the movement may define itself in terms of the enemy *abroad* (Islam), but it fights with the same intensity against the enemy *above* (EU, liberal elites) and sometimes even with enemies who are on the same level (liberals, do-gooders). The enemy abroad cannot be considered to be a political enemy in the proper sense of the word: it is rather something between a natural catastrophe and pure evil. It is the enemy above and those who are on the same level that constitute the real political enemy.

The movement certainly mobilizes 'ordinary people' against the elites but its key message is nevertheless a widespread feeling of decline: *declinism*. The description of decline and the demand that it be evoked 'truthfully', 'without political correctness', is meanwhile directly connected with the *brutalization* of public discourse and the demand for extraordinary measures. These demands come partly from the feeling of crisis, and partly from the frequently evoked '*natural state of things*'. The latter has a number of meanings, most frequently a relatively conservative concept of the gender order (with the restoration of a dominant role for men), and the evocation of the free-market order (with an emphasis on the role of productive work as opposed to 'parasites' living off benefits and various forms of redistribution, whether they are the unemployed, politicians or humanities students). While the concept of populism may be useful in describing the ideology of the Islamophobic movement, it is also too vague. We have to put the main emphasis on something we might call the 'unholy trinity' of declinism, brutalization and naturalization.

We also see that the desire to defend 'freedom' and 'liberal values' is extremely ambivalent in the case of the Islamophobic movement. It acts as a strong motivation but, at the same time, leads to a correction of these

values: in the name of their own 'defence' they are meant to submit to a range of illiberal changes dictated both by the need for 'extraordinary measures' in an 'extraordinary situation' and by the values of naturalness, which are meant to bring about social correction. In the name of the defence of 'liberal values', these values are denied on several levels.

We cannot fully evaluate Brubaker's essentialization of the difference between the East and the West as a whole here. A number of the features in the Czech case, however, seem to replicate, albeit with greater intensity and aggression, the 'civilizational' discourse that he describes as being inspired by the defence of 'secularism' and 'liberal values', which, according to Brubaker, is characteristic of Western European populism.

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