

Islamophobia on Facebook: The Current „Migration Crisis“ and the Songs of the Czech Singers Critical of Islam, Muslims and Refugees

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Zusammenfassung

This article focuses on the Czech singers who sing songs critical of the „migration crisis“, and also on the related activities of these singers on Facebook. The main goal of the article is to introduce the texts of the songs that went viral on YouTube (i.e. reached between 8,000 and 500,000 thousand viewers), and to analyze how these singers imagine the contemporary „migration crisis“ and the related terms „Islam“ and „Muslim immigration“. The article is framed by two theoretical concepts – the celebrityization of politics, and post-truth politics. One song was excluded from the group of songs critical of Islam since it was directed rather at the smallness of the Czech nation. The remaining four texts of the songs analyzed here each has a critical attitude towards different aspects of the „migration crisis“, although these texts vary significantly. For example, one emphasizes the image of huge crowds of people entering the country; others stress either the threat of the future Islamicization of society or the need for people to mobilize at the European level; or, finally, one portrays an Arab from Syria as a dangerous woman chaser.

Introduction

Public debate in the Czech Republic over the past few years has been shaped by events revolving around the term „migration crisis“, a term that I place between quotation marks because the Czech Republic has long been far removed from the interests of migrants from the Middle East and North Africa.¹ The same applies to Europe generally. It is true that the old continent has contended with an unprecedented wave of migrants, but, in contrast to the high number of people across the

¹I could conduct the research and publish the article due to the Institutional Support for Long-term Conceptual Development of a Research Organization, 2018, of the Department of Political Science and International relations of the Faculty of Philosophy and Arts at the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen (the Czech Republic).

world who have had to leave their homes recently, the number of people arriving in Europe is still relatively low.

Unlike in the Western part of Europe, there was until recently very little academic research on Islamophobia in the Czech Republic and in Central and Eastern Europe generally.² Nevertheless, since the issue labelled a „migration crisis“ emerged and then gained ground in the politics, public discourse and media of Central and Eastern Europe, the situation has also influenced scholars in the social sciences, who have now begun to analyze the various manifestations of Islamophobia in regional politics and society.

The aim of this article is to analyze the forms and manifestations of Islamophobia in the Czech Republic. In particular, I will analyze the texts of songs critical of Islam, Muslims or migration within the wider context of the current migration crisis, and also examine what the singers of these songs posted on their Facebook accounts when these posts are directly related to the songs analyzed. I will take into account only the compositions created between the beginning of June 2015 and the end of June 2017 and sung by these singers. (I provide English translations of the songs). I analyze the following three elements of the texts of the songs: their image of³ the migration crisis,⁴ Islam, and⁵

²Premysl Rosulek, On Islamophobia in CEE Countries. Interview with Prof. Ivan Kalmar, URL: <https://ff.zcu.cz/export/sites/ff/research/edicni-cinnost/acta/archiv/2018/Acta-FF-c-1/po-kapitolach/5.-On-Islamophobia-in-CEE-Countries.-Interview-with-Prof.-Ivan-Kalmar-Premysl-Rosulek.pdf> [29.11.201].

³Jan Váně, Metodologické přístupy při zkoumání islámu v České republice, in: Rosulek Premysl (eds.), Sondy do studia (o) Islámu v období „migrační krize“, Prague 2017, pp. 19-69.

⁴Jakub Havlíček, Kritika islámu na českém internetu – možnosti interpretace. Případ facebookové stránky Islám v České republice nechceme, in: Lidé města, 17 (3) (2015), p. 475-511; Matouš Hrdina, Identita, aktivismus a nenávisť: Nenávisťné projevy proti migrantům na Facebooku v České republice v roce 2015, in: Naše společnost, 14 (2016) 1, pp. 38-47; Premysl Rosulek, The Czech Singers Critical of Islam and Refugees on Facebook in the Age of the „Migration Crisis“ (2015–2017), in: Politics in Central Europe. The Journal of the Central European Political Science Association, 14 (2018) 1, pp. 35-62.

⁵Iva Petrovová / Otto Eibl, Celebrities in Czech politics in 1996–2013, in: European Journal of Communication, 2018, p. 1-17; Mark Hannah, Democratizing & Debasing: A recent history of commercialization and political celebrityization in the Czech media, in:

Muslim refugees. I then place the resulting analysis in a theoretical framework based on the concepts of the celebritization of politics and of post-factual politics. In the era of mass media and social networks, the process of celebritization leaves the cultural domain and is instead often linked to the public sphere.⁶ Celebrities do not hesitate to engage with politics,⁷ a field that is now less ideological, but consequently more personalized and celebritized.⁸ The post-truth era – or, perhaps, post-factual world – is a phenomenon characterized by a focus on emotions as well as by the absence of people checking the sources of the information that they consume. Rational socio-economic issues are not attractive to the media and its recipients, but the easy slogans of populists flourish. Facebook commentaries posted by the singers are not quoted as endnotes in this text. Since there are too many Facebook posts under scrutiny readers can find quoting of the sources directly in the text in the feature of singer's surname and date of posting (e.g. Hejma 22.06.2015).

Song lyrics

The strong anti-immigration discourse which has resonated in Czech politics, society and culture in recent years found an outlet in many songs written between 2015 and 2017. It should be mentioned, however, that a band called Ortel became the first successful group to sing a

Journalism Studies, Jan. 17 (2018); Jan Křeček / Markéta Štěchová, Celebritizace české politické komunikace v posledních 20 letech – úvodní úvahy a zjištění, in: Sborník Národního muzea, 56 (2011) 3-4, pp. 65-70; See also Rosůlek, The Czech Singers Critical of Islam and Refugees on Facebook in the Age of the „Migration Crisis“ (2015–2017).

⁶Mark Wheeler, *Celebrity Politics. Image and Identity in Contemporary Political Communications*, Cambridge 2013, p. 6; John Street, *Celebrity Politicians: Popular Culture and Political Representation*, in: *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 6 (2004) 4, pp. 435-452, here p. 438.

⁷John Street, *Do Celebrity Politics and Celebrity Politicians Matter?*, in: *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 14 (2012) 3, pp. 346-356, here p. 350–351; Linda Piknerová / Eva Rybáková, *The „celebritization“ of development – Bono Vox and Angelina Jolie as actors in development*, in: *Development, Environment and Foresight*, 3 (2017) 1, pp. 20-35.

⁸Mark Wheeler, *Celebrity Politics. Image and Identity in Contemporary Political Communications*.

song criticizing Islam in as early as 2013. The main message of their track „The Mosque“ is: „For Allah's glory they chop off your head“. This seems to point only at radicals. However, the song also expresses scepticism towards ethnic pluralism („I'll only say a couple of words, I don't want a multi-culti world“), as well as religious pluralism („In the land of the Christians there stands a mosque / let one of you give me an answer / why don't they build a church in the Arab lands?“). Other passages in the text directly attack the very essence of Islam: „Where hatred is a virtue and murder is an act of obedience / where your wife can be stoned to death just like that / where truth is determined by explosives / there a black flower blooms and Mohamed is its name“.⁹ It is interesting that Ortel finished in second place (after Kabát) in the 'Music Group' category in the Czech Nightingale Mattoni Award during the period (2015-2016) studied here. Moreover, Tomáš Ortel, the band's frontman and someone who had previously played in the neo-Nazi band Conflict 88, came third in the 'Singer of the Year' category, and then second one year later. „The Mosque“ was the year's most-listened-to song and was, according to Ortel, a reaction to „the flow of orthodox Muslims to Europe and European cities, where they build their neighbourhoods, that is to say, in quotation marks, 'their ghettos'“. He continues: „We freaked out that it's gonna happen here as well and that's why 'The Mosque' and its controversial video were created“.¹⁰ It should be noted that „The Mosque“ (2013) was written before the period studied here (2015-2017). The same can be said for Daniel Landa's „Over Afghanistan“ (2009) and Ivan Mládek's „Mosques of Prague“ (2000), neither of which are critical of Islam. On the contrary, Mládek emphasized that his song was misunderstood and misused, that it was not meant as a criticism of refugees, and that it

⁹The Band Ortel, Mešita, URL: <http://www.ortel.cz/tvorba/text-skladby-ortel-mesita-mesita> [04.12.2018].

¹⁰Karen Mchitarjan / Barbora Koukalová, Exkluzivní rozhovor s Ortelem: Jak mi uprchlíci pomohli ke Slavíkovi, URL: https://www.expres.cz/ortel-rozhovor-cesky-slavik-dgl-/celebrity.aspx?c=A151129_173240_dx-celebrity_bk [30.11.2015].

pointed instead at the „littleness“ of the Czech nation.¹¹ With regard to Landa, we might recall that a song entitled „The Aryan“ appeared in the music world and on his Facebook page at the time of the migration crisis. He sings the song with Sediq Shahab in both the Czech and the Pashto language, and presents it as „help for cultured Afghans in the fight against goblins“. The song’s lyrics („We are born as Aryans and proud of our ancestors“, „We are one race, one race of Aryans“, „we are honest, cultured and united“) are in no way critical of Islam and are therefore not included in my analysis. It should also be mentioned that, for the purposes of our research, we do not deem it important whether the singer is the author of the song or whether he or she merely covers it. Moreover, as there have been altogether five songs aimed at refugee crisis which were composed between 2015–2017 and could be therefore considered for our research, it is important to say that the only Facebook account that did not have any of the below stated songs presented in any way was the Facebook account of Jarek Nohavica. These are the songs by Slávek Janoušek, Dominika Myslivcová, Vilém Čok, Jarek Nohavica, and Olivie Žižková that were released during the time period that I focus on (table 1):

Singer	Title of song	Presented on	No. of views on YouTube*
Slávek Janoušek	Tutti frutti ramadan	9/2015	7,916
Dominika Myslivcová	We want no change here	8/2016	332,102
Vilém Čok	Crowds of crowds	8/2016	38,226
Jarek Nohavica	Baraba is touching my woman	8/2016	85,381
Olivie Žižková	Breathe, Europe	8/2016	559,378

¹¹Ivan Mládek, *Píseň Pražská mešita byla zábavná. Dělán si v ní legraci Čechů, kteří se bojí islámu*, URL: http://www.rozhlas.cz/radiozurnal/host/_zprava/ivan-mladek-pisen-prazska-mesita-byla-zabavna-delam-si-v-ni-legraci-z-cechu-kteri-se-boji-islam-1586867 [24.02.2016].

Table 1

Slávek Janoušek, who muddied the waters of public discourse when he premiered his new song live on the Good Morning show on Česká televize on 11.9.2015, represents a special case. He sings about coming home from work and finding a refugee from North Africa munching on peppers from his greenhouse. Since he is a man with a humanitarian outlook, he decides to keep the little black refugee that looks like Barack Obama for a trial period, allowing him to stay for the time being with his dog Azor in the kennel. He also indicates what kind of a quid pro quo he expects from him: „You gonna take turns in guarding / Tutti frutti Ramadan / Take turns in guarding / There’s breakfast for both of you in a bowl / Tutti frutti Ramadan / Here’s your breakfast.“

A passage later in the text highlights the fact that it is quite normal today to have a black person at home; that having a refugee at home is better than having a pet budgie; and that he will in fact take in another two or three refugees from the shelter. In the last verse, he walks happily in his garden, feeling like Nicolas Winton, and by extension like a saviour.¹²

At the time of the migration crisis, this song became the first major media story in connection with Czech celebrities, and Slávek Janoušek is the only singer that dedicated most of his Facebook posts in September 2015 to explaining that the song is not actually racist and that he was misunderstood by some listeners and journalists. After sharing the song on his Facebook page on 11 September 2015, he responded to one of his critics by explaining that the song is sung „in role“, and that he took the part of a dunce, of „someone who behaves like a goon and yet feels he is being helpful ... I’m not a racist, I’m not ridiculing refugees“ (Janoušek commentary 12.9.2015 in: Janoušek 11.9.2015). He also argues with the authors of articles that criticize him, mainly with

¹²Winton is known for having organised for trainloads of Jewish children to be transported from the Czech lands into the UK just before the WWII. The entire song of Sláva Janoušek is available at <<http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ivysilani/10435049455-dobre-rano/315292320020088/obsah/422082-ukazka-slavek-janousek-a-kapela>>.

Petr Bittner, who wrote an article, „The Czech Perspective is Gone“, published in Denikreferendum.cz. To defend himself, Janoušek shared the full copy of an article published by Lidové noviny entitled „The Last Word ‘Refugees in the cupboard’“, written by Tomas Baldýnský (Janoušek 19.9.2015), and later sharing two quotes on his Facebook page from readers of Bittner’s article who understood the song „Tutti Frutti Ramadan“ as being an expression of irony and exaggeration. To this, Janoušek added: „Finally! Some people actually understood“ (Janoušek 15.9.2015). Thirdly, Janoušek takes issue with his critics in a YouTube video, stressing that we should not lose our sense of humour (Janoušek 17.9.2015).

In stark contrast, the lyrics of the songs sung by Olivie Žižková and Dominika Myslivcová express the fear of an influx of people and the Islamicization that might follow. Dominika Myslivcová links the question of mass migration and radical Islamism in the lyrics to her song appropriately entitled: „We Want No Change Here“ (Myslivcová 9.8.2016, Myslivcová 2016a): “(...) I don’t want to go out covered in a robe and scarf / why change my pink traditions because of someone else / I want to live this dream life for some time to come / don’t want to change it because of those who come to our republic / I speak for all women / who like to doll themselves up / who decide for themselves what to wear / who don’t want these changes / we want no changes here ... / it’s us who were born here / we want to decide what happens in our country / I voice my opinion and refuse to be mute / I want to peacefully drink my frappe on the beach wearing my bikini / and see one man with one woman only.”¹³

After impacting on the media with „We Want No Change Here“ (and likewise with the video-blog „A Walk Through Teplice“), Myslivcová published a post on Facebook where she strenuously denied that she was xenophobic (Myslivcová 10.8.2016): „I am absolutely tolerant of other cultures and just as I „sing“ in the song [„We Want No Change

¹³The full text version of the song in the Czech language is available at <<http://www.karaokektexty.cz/texty-pisni/myslivcovova-dominika/zmenu-tu-my-nehcem-770051>>.

Here“]. It should be up to us alone to decide how we dress, because if these „evil“ ones get here it might be that we will no longer be the ones deciding. Only a stupid and intolerant person would call this racism and xenophobia. Unfortunately you’re looking for racism absolutely everywhere, but I’m not even sure on which side the racism actually is ...“

Similarly, Olivie Žižková, in her song „Breathe, Europe“, calls the migration crisis an „invasion“, and demands through her lyrics the active defence of Europe against Islamicization (in: Žižková 3.8.2016): „There’s no time to wait, why be afraid of them. / Islamic burkas, Jihad pulling the strings. / Invasion is growing, we need to get stronger. / We’ll have to get up and start to fight hard. / Breathe, Europe and look into the future. Don’t let them thrash you, return of democracy! / We are strong and we have faith. / We can’t even laugh or fall asleep in peace. / Resist, Europe, don’t let them shoot you. / Their task is to go on a bloody trip. / We refuse to be mere sheep. / And to our own slaughter voluntarily march.”¹⁴

It is interesting that, immediately after the song’s release, Žižková shared a text on her Facebook account from the portal Boomba.cz entitled: „A Racist Recorded A Music Video in Which She Incites the Nation to Hatred. She’s Facing a Jail Sentence!“ Next to it, she writes a post poking fun at her sweet tooth, and asking her fans to send her donuts in jail (Žižková 3.8.2016).

The lyrics of a song presented and sung by Vilém Čok, „Crowds of Crowds“, recalls with apprehension the avalanche of immigrants coming to Europe, as is already obvious in the song’s title. He promoted the video clip on his Facebook page, writing: „I produced the video as conscientiously as I could, in light of the present situation not only in ČR [Czech Republic] but in the whole of Europe. In this day and

¹⁴Boomba.cz / Rasistka natočila hudební video, ve kterém podněcuje národ k nenávisti hrozí jí vězení, URL: <http://boomba.cz/clanek/565-rasistka-natocila-hudebni-video-ve-kterem-podnecuje-narod-k-nenavisti-hrozi-ji-vezeni> [02.08.2016]; Olivie Žižková, Evropo dýchej, URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=meXpKEhXKxw> [02.08.2016].

age, it is necessary for the people to realize where they are, who they are and what they want. From life, from their governments and from their countries“ (Čok 28.8.2016). The very name of the song, which evokes an enormous wave of immigrants, culminates in the chorus: „One, two, three, four, five / One, two, three, four hundred / One, two, three, four million / One, two, three, four millions / Crowds of laws / Crowds of fallacies / Crowds of offspring / Crowds of immigrants / Let’s keep our nation’s identity / Each spring will bring new patriots / The state is the proof and you know it / Let’s all the more get together / Let’s all the more get together / With the CROSS let’s get closer together (see Čok 29.8.2016).“

Finally, Jarek Nohavica’s song „Baraba Is Touching My Woman“ ridicules refugees, describing them as uncontrolled men that must be disposed of to protect men’s wives and girlfriends: „Shabadabada, shabadabada, shabadabada. / An Arab is touching my woman, / I might gouge out his eyes. / I’m gonna kill the Baraba, the Baraba, Alibaba from Syria. / An Arab is touching my woman, I might gouge out his eyes. / I’m gonna kill the Baraba, the Baraba, Alibaba, if he doesn’t kill me first.“¹⁵

Conclusion

Above, the theoretical concepts of the celebritization (of politics) in the era of post-factual politics have been discussed. In this context it is important to point out that all of the singers analyzed in this study have a status of a celebrity singer, except Myslicová. But, only a few of these celebrity singers are of first category in the Czech Republic (e.g. Jarek Nohavica). Others are rather generational celebrities for teenagers (e. g. Dominika Myslicová) or for the older generation of rock-music fans (e.g. Vilém Čok).

At the culmination of the debate surrounding the migration crisis in the Czech context (and not in the general context of the migration cri-

¹⁵The text of the song is available on the web page of Jaromír Nohavica <http://www.nohavica.cz/cz/jn/recen_konc/konc_cz_115.htm>.

sis), a total of five singers drew attention to themselves by introducing their own songs.

As we have found, however, Slávek Janoušek (just like Ivan Mládek and Daniel Landa) cannot be counted among the „critics“ of Islam, Muslims, or the present-day „migration crisis“. The question might be asked whether some parts of the text of his song „Tutti frutti ramadan“ is persuasive enough for critics of Islamophobic tendencies that it was composed as an ironic comment on the smallness of the Czech nation. In fact, the song „Mosques of Prague“ (2000), sung by Ivan Mládek in as early as 2000, has also been misunderstood at the time of the contemporary „migration crisis“, and has been misused by critics of Islam. Opposition to the song has come both from intellectuals and the wider public, for whom the idea of a link between the singer Janoušek and xenophobic discourse was quite unlikely. Interestingly, Janoušek had to make considerable efforts on his Facebook page to persuade the public that he is not a racist. Yet, there is a question as to why so many Czechs considered the text of this song as beyond the pale for joking about refugees from Africa.

As for the negative image of the migration crisis, Vilém Čok has written, in the „Crowds of Crowds“, the strongest of all the texts of the songs analyzed here, in invoking associations with a mass invasion. However, he hopes that „One, two, three, four millions/Crowds of laws/Crowds of fallacies/Crowds of offspring/Crowds of immigrants“ will result in a renaissance of our national identity and will bring new patriots to the fore. Also, the song „Breathe, Europe“, sung by Olivie Žižková, suggests a strong negative attitude towards the migration crisis because „invasion is growing“.

As for the negative image of Islam, it is explicitly mentioned only in Žižková’s song „Breathe, Europe“ (“... Islamic burkas, Jihad pulling the strings ...”); however, all the texts express implicitly a deep concern about contemporary immigration from countries with a predominantly Muslim population.

As for the negative image of refugees or immigrants who might

be – reading between the lines – considered mostly as Muslims, the strongest condemnation could be found in the song „Breathe, Europe“, in which Žižková warns that „Their task is to go on a bloody trip“, and appeals to people to mobilize at a European level: „Let’s reverse it, the animals have to go home“. Dominika Myslivcová points at the threat posed by Islamicization, which will demand a drastic change in our lifestyle: „I don’t want to go out covered in a robe and scarf/why change my pink traditions because of someone else?“ Similarly, Jarek Nohavica focuses in the song „Baraba is touching my woman“ on an Arab, „Alibaba from Syria“, who is a woman-chaser („is touching my woman“), and he suggests – apparently hyperbolically – that he is gonna kill the Baraba, the Baraba, Alibaba, if he doesn’t kill me first“.