Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The normalisation of Islamophobia in Czechia through mainstream political discourse and its effects on post-2015 Czech public opinion regarding ‘Muslims’

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2024

I, Carlos Gómez del Tronco, confirm that the work presented in my thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

In 2015, around the time of the so-called refugee crisis, there was a relatively unexpected and extreme shift in Czech public discourse and opinion against 'Muslims'. Although anti-Muslim prejudice in the country is often attributed to the influence of negative representations in public discourse, systematic analyses of this effect are lacking. This interdisciplinary dissertation addresses this gap by focusing, particularly, on the role of mainstream political discourse by proposing three main arguments. First, that mainstream politicians normalised Islamophobic rhetoric between 2014 and 2015, thus providing content and legitimacy to Islamophobic prejudice. Second, that they opted to articulate an Islamophobic programme because of their own motivations and interests, rather than being pushed to radicalise by far-right challengers or an illiberal public. Third, that the change in public opinion and influence of politicians becomes more evident through a social constructionist understanding of Islamophobic prejudice. The first two empirical chapters present the results of a critical realist thematic analysis of 31 semi-structured interviews with non-Muslim ethnic Czechs and Muslims living in Czechia conducted in 2020/2021. Additionally, two chapters set forth the outcome of a critical discourse analysis of strategies for representing social actors and argumentation employed by mainstream political figures in televised debates between 2014 and 2015. The analysis reveals that mainstream politicians had a pivotal role in shaping the contents of Islamophobic prejudice, as well as opening the window to more uncivil forms of discourse and delegitimising actors warning against fearmongering and Islamophobic discrimination. Furthermore, their normalisation of Islamophobic rhetoric intensified already in 2014, before the 'refugee crisis' crystallised as a topic and far-right actors began to capitalise on Islamophobic politics. Finally, the analysis discusses the motivations from politicians and why they were effective at shaping public opinion regarding 'Muslims'.

Impact statement

Academic Impact

This dissertation mostly contributes to advances in the literature on Islamophobia in Czechia (for a list of contributions, see 9.b.) and, by extension, the relatively new scholarship on Islamophobia in Central and Eastern Europe. The results enrich our understanding of the Islamophobic shift in politics and society which took place in around 2015 in the region. Secondarily, the findings can inform future analyses of Czech society (for instance, regarding other forms of ethnicity- or race-based prejudice) and politics (such as the study of populism or Euroscepticism). Empirically, this project offers, to my knowledge, the first qualitative analysis of interviews with non-Muslim ethnic Czechs dealing with anti-Muslim attitudes (although interviews with smaller samples have featured in Bachelor's theses). Furthermore, despite being extremely popular tools in critical discourse studies, the analysis of strategies for representing social actors and topoi in political discourse from chapters seven and eight is a relatively novel addition to Czech Islamophobia studies. Theoretically, the interdisciplinary framework employed is unusual in analyses of Islamophobia, more generally, since I had to grapple with studying a national context of high anti-Muslim attitudes and small Muslim presence. My psychologization of the social construction of 'Muslims' emphasises that anti-Muslim attitudes rely on contingent stereotypes of 'Muslims' which vary across contexts (with the results revealing relevant stereotype contents in Czechia). My development of this proposition carries a substantial impact for Islamophobia studies, particularly the comparative literature. For example, that survey methodology should consider this variability in stereotypes to recalibrate measuring instruments or philosophically tilt towards cognitive social constructionism. Finally, this study contributes to the development of curricula in modules on Islamophobia, or Central and East European politics and society.

Impact outside of academia

This dissertation sheds light on the nature, causes and history of anti-Muslim attitudes and Islamophobic rhetoric in Czechia. Consequently, it is extremely informative for (re-)designing actions to tackle anti-Muslim discrimination and to raise awareness about Islamophobia. This agenda might be of interest to a myriad of actors: news editors and writers; political parties; state agencies (for instance, in the judiciary, the police, local administration or at the Ministry of Interior, which implements most migration policy); NGOS; IGOs; Islamic institutions; media regulators and watchdogs; activists; teachers; churches of various denominations; or human resources departments. While the findings remain sociopolitically relevant, they can also feed into communication strategies, anti-discrimination workshops, party programmes, institutional communications, media analyses, public opinion surveys, activist campaigns, court decisions, social media content moderation, speeches in parliament, fiction writing, travel documentaries, or trainings and codes of ethics for journalists. Furthermore, I registered a considerable curiosity on the topical subject of my dissertation among

Czech citizens. Although not every citizen will agree with the assessment that there is problematic level of Islamophobic prejudice and rhetoric in Czechia, hopefully my diagnosis serves to remedy and determine the origins of this situation of discrimination.

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This project is part of the FATIGUE programme. FATIGUE: Delayed Transformational Fatigue in Central and Eastern Europe: Responding to the Rise of Illiberalism/Populism is an EU funded Marie Skłodowska-Curie Innovative Training Network designed to study the rise of illiberalism and populism in post-communist Europe. As part of this programme, my project has received funding from the EU Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No. 765224.

1. Introduction

1.1. The research problem of Islamophobia in Czechia in the context of this dissertation

In 2015, during the European humanitarian crisis (henceforth, following the vernacular, ‘refugee crisis’), Czech public opinion and discourse became highly hostile to both Muslims and refugees. The same development occurred in other EU member states. However, the Czech Islamophobic turn was particularly extreme and relatively unexpected. Although several factors and actors contributed to this shift, this dissertation wants to focus on the role of mainstream political discourse in shaping public opinion and normalising prejudice. The dissertation has three research objectives. First, it aims at understanding the nature, history and causes of recent negative attitudes towards ‘Muslims’ among Czechs. Second, it wants to explain the nature of and motivations behind discursive strategies to represent ‘Muslims’ in mainstream political discourse between 2014 and 2015, and explain why many of these might be Islamophobic. Third, it extends our understanding of the influence of Czech political discourse over public opinion on ‘Muslims’. Overall, I argue that a) mainstream politicians normalised Islamophobic rhetoric before and during 2015, providing content and legitimacy to Islamophobic prejudice; b) that they opted to articulate an Islamophobic programme because of their own motivations and interests, rather than being pushed to radicalise by far-right challengers or an illiberal public; and c) that ‘Muslim’ needs to be understood as a socially constructed category of practice to appreciate the public opinion shift and influence of political discourse over Islamophobic prejudice. Most of this research was undertook within the framework of the FATIGUE programme,[1] a Marie Skłodowska-Curie action which trained a network of fifteen early stage researchers to conduct multidisciplinary research on the rise of populism in Central and Eastern Europe. This dissertation is substantially informed by the many insights developed within this programme and a preoccupation with the conditions which fostered populism in Czechia within its regional context. As it will become evident, populism is linked to the rise of Czech Islamophobic politics.

The Czech shift was extreme because of how widespread prejudice became. At around 2015, several cross-national surveys demonstrated that Czechs held the most negative attitudes towards ‘Muslims’[2] in the EU (Bell et al., 2021; Heath & Richards, 2019; Linek, 2014; Marfouk, 2019; Pew Research Center, 2018b). For example, a 2015 Eurobarometer survey (fieldwork from May to June 2015) found that Czechs were the least comfortable about their children potentially dating a Muslim person, with just 12% feeling comfortable against the EU average of 50% (TNS Opinion & Social, 2015a, pp. 35–36).[3] The shift was also extreme because Czech politics went from a

[1] For more information on FATIGUE, see https://populism-europe.com/fatigue.
[2] My use of inverted commas signals that the word refers to subjective stereotypes or the social category rather than the actual social actor.
[3] Prokop (2019, p. 93) criticised the methodology employed by Czech agencies for this and other similar surveys. However, not only did Czech respondents consistently rank as the most biased against Muslims across surveys run by different agencies in different years but, when a different agency incorporated Prokop’s recommendation on how to translate the question about respondents’ children

general lack of interest in Muslim migration to arguments against accepting Muslim refugees on a daily basis (Wondreys, 2020). Analysing party programmes for the October 2017 parliamentary elections, the first after 2015, Naxera and Krčál (2018, p. 493) found that almost half of the thirty-one parties running "built their program solely upon the refusal of immigration or, alternatively, it was one of their strongest programmatic points". The authors estimated that for each beneficiary of Czech international protection in 2017, there were eighteen candidates from these migration-opposing parties. Besides this, by 2015, thousands of anti-Islam protesters were regularly taking to the streets (Prokůpková, 2019); mainstream elites, including journalists, public intellectuals and artists, unashamedly embraced Islamophobic rhetoric (Hesová, 2016b; Rosůlek, 2018); the Facebook page 'We Don't Want Islam in the Czech Republic' reached 160,000 followers by the end of the year, or around seven followers for each Muslim estimated to reside in Czechia (Topinka, 2015, pp. 34–38); hate speech and crimes against Muslims increased considerably (In Iustitia, 2016; P. Kučera, 2015); across news media platforms, refugees were overwhelmingly represented as security threats (see sub-section 4.4.4.); and anti-Islam activists became visible at public events, with their messages platformed by news media or endorsed by mainstream political figures, infamously including the Czech head of state. Meanwhile, NGOs working with migrants, voices advocating for hosting refugees or those condemning their public scapegoating became widely dismissed as do-gooders or, worse, publicly vilified (Luptáková, 2016), including by the President, who lambasted pro-refugee activism even in his 2015 Christmas address to the nation (Česká televize, 2015).

Why would this shift be unexpected? In 2015, Muslim migration was far from being a relevant political issue to Czechs. Czechia had a tiny and well-integrated Muslim population and was an unlikely destination for migrants from Muslim-majority countries. Furthermore, the country had become home to refugees from the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s, many of them Muslim, without any public stir. Post-1989 Czech foreign policy had strategically prioritised the protection of human rights (Bílková, 2016; Zemanová, 2015); so not effectively safeguarding the rights of its Muslim population or potential Muslim refugees seemed inconsistent (see Dostál et al., 2015). Besides, even if anti-Islam activism had been growing in previous years (Ministry of the Interior, 2015), by early 2014, the electoral threat from far-right actors or their interest in Islamophobic politics (Mareš, 2014) remained marginal. The Czech far right had been fragmented and weak for years (Mareš, 2011), with the most infamous extreme right party becoming banned in court in an act of militant democracy[4] (Mareš, 2012). As recently as 2009, the Czech Senate had forbidden Dutch anti-Islam politician Geert Wilders from appearing at an event on its premises (Richter, 2009). Regarding public opinion, although attitudes towards 'Muslims' and Muslim-majority groups had been worsening in Czechia over the course of the 21st century, no cross-national surveys had suggested that Czech respondents would hold the most negative

dating Muslims in the 2019 wave (Kantar, 2019a), the results for Czechia and the EU average remained identical to those of 2015 (Kantar, 2019b, p. 155).

[4] According to Müller (2012, p. 1254), militant democracy "refers to the idea of a democratic regime which is willing to adopt pre-emptive, prima facie illiberal measures to prevent those aiming at subverting democracy with democratic means from destroying the democratic regime".

attitudes in the EU before 2014-2015 (see 4.2.2.a.) Additionally, Czechia was a largely secular and atheistic country (Furstova et al., 2021). Narratives celebrating a national Christian heritage had been developed in highly secular European countries before to support Islamophobic positions (Vollaard, 2013). However, in Czechia, these narratives remained far from hegemonic (Lužný, 2022) and being Christian was largely irrelevant to Czech ethnicity (Vlachová, 2019a). Thus, unlike in neighbouring Poland or Slovakia, it was unnatural for Czech ethnonationalism to resort to the defence of Christianity. Furthermore, given the low influence of religion on public morality, Czechs were relatively liberal in areas concerning sexuality or sexual orientation (see 4.2.). The sociopsychological generalised prejudice thesis suggested that individuals tolerant of sexual minorities might also tolerate other minorities, like Muslims (see 2.1.2.). Finally, refugees could have hardly been expected to be perceived as an economic threat to Czechs since, by 2015, the country enjoyed markedly low unemployment and income inequality rates and was among the EU's fastest-growing economies.[5]

On the other hand, some observers might have been unsurprised by the fact that Czech parties and large sections of society turned against Muslims in 2015. In mainstream politics, the Czech centre right and incumbent president Zeman had already been experimenting with Islamophobic rhetoric since the beginning of the decade (see 4.2.2.b.), and mainstream politicians regularly got away with blatant anti-Roma speeches (ČT24, 2013; Steuer, 2019). Furthermore, following historical trends (Slačálek, 2021), there was a significant base of ethnonationalism and social conservatism across the post-1989 political spectrum (Dawson & Hanley, 2019) that could coherently accommodate Islamophobic narratives. Regarding public opinion, Czech surveys had been measuring relatively high levels of xenophobic, racist and anti-Roma attitudes for some time (see 4.2.). Additionally, despite widespread scepticism towards organised religion, there was a general lack of awareness about religious discrimination, with Czech respondents being the most likely in the EU to indicate that this was rare or non-existent in the country: 87% against the EU average of 56% (TNS Opinion & Social, 2012, p. 49). Finally, institutional resistance to Muslim refugees during the 'crisis' was consistent with the highly restrictive legacy of Czech migration and asylum policies, a restrictiveness which became even more pronounced during the 2015 'crisis' (Stojanov et al., 2022; Stojarová, 2019).

The reasons for this Islamophobic turn and the angles from which to study it are manifold. However, this dissertation focuses on the role of mainstream politicians in normalising Islamophobia in public discourse and, hence, informing the public's prejudice against 'Muslims'. To address this research problem, I have narrowed the scope of the project to the content of citizens' attitudes towards 'Muslims' in 2020-2021, when I conducted fieldwork, and mediatised mainstream political discourse between 2014 and 2015, when the discursive shift took place. Since Czechs had few contact opportunities with actual Muslims, something which according to the Contact

[5] However, these macroeconomic indicators are far less relevant to intergroup threat perceptions than subjective measures of deprivation. According to a 2014-2015 survey, Czechs were among the most likely in the EU to perceive that migrants were being treated better by the state than people born in Czechia. A study showed that this item significantly predicted perceptions of threat by immigrants (Meuleman et al., 2020).

Hypothesis reduces prejudice (Pettigrew, 1998), the content of their attitudes was mostly informed by public discourse (Bell & Strabac, 2020). In fact, Czechs reporting personally knowing Muslims showed more positive attitudes towards ‘Muslims’ and more accurate knowledge of Czech Muslim communities (MEDIAN, 2018). During the ‘refugee crisis’, when the volume of representations of ‘Muslims’ in public discourse increased considerably, Czech politicians became the most important actors in framing the debate (see 4.4.4.). Although the salience of refugees has led to multiple analyses of Czech anti-migrant or anti-refugee rhetoric, I focus on the representations of ‘Muslims’. This is because Islamophobic rhetoric initially featured in discourse on ‘Muslims’ before shifting, in 2015, to discourse on ‘refugees’, who were mostly opposed due to their Muslim identity. Therefore, my study of Islamophobia often includes representations of actors falling under related categories like ‘refugee’ or ‘migrant’. (For more on the differences and overlaps between the discourses on ‘Muslims’ and ‘refugees’, see 8.1.)

My approach presents some limitations which, I believe, are amply offset by its contributions. One major challenge concerns causality, particularly in corroborating the extent to which political discourse influenced stereotypes of ‘Muslims’. While participants had different sources of information on ‘Muslims’, politicians significantly shaped public discourse on refugees in 2015 (see 4.4.4.), laying out the key themes, frames or attributes associated with ‘Muslims’ in subsequent years. Second, my methods and epistemological stance prevent me from accessing the actual motivations or deep-seated beliefs of the analysed actors, a common limitation in interpretivist approaches. However, I can abductively and retroductively infer the reasons behind politicians’ use of discursive strategies by situating their utterances in the historical context (as detailed in chapter 4) and in relation to theory (chapter 2). Likewise, observing participants’ actual mental structures is hampered by self-editing or self-presentation biases, and the fact that expressing attitudes is, in itself, a discursive act with a fuzzy relation to what psychologists analytically conceptualise as attitudes (McVittie & McKinlay, 2017). Nevertheless, the analysis identifies clear patterns in the representation of ‘Muslims’ that likely mirror prevalent stereotypes among Czechs. Another limitation is that the broad scope of the project tends to oversimplify social actors, although it is important to recognise the inherent diversity of views within groups like Czech citizens or mainstream politicians. Lastly, although some might be sceptical of an analysis of Czech realities in Czech language by someone who acquired knowledge of both as an adult, my perspective contributes partially new sensibilities and original takes on realities that might be sometimes taken for granted by Czech researchers. Nevertheless, I appreciate that, at times, I might be inadvertently overinterpreting common linguistic uses or interdiscursive references that might appear relatively foreign to me.

1.2. Contribution to the existing literature

The concept of Islamophobia began featuring recurrently in analyses of Czech society and politics in around 2015, marking a shift towards a more consistent exploration of the topic. Over the span of five years dedicated to this project, I extensively reviewed academic literature in English and Czech, along with a myriad of related sources such

as reports, surveys, journalistic pieces, blogs, theses, and political communications. I also surveyed materials concerning other European countries, exploring the phenomena of Islamophobia, populism and far-right politics. Additionally, for this dissertation, I have drawn from various disciplines including social psychology, discourse studies, migration studies, sociology, political science and philosophy of science. These readings shaped my understanding of the research problem and helped me identify gaps and areas of the literature on Islamophobia in Czechia (and, broadly, Central and Eastern Europe) to which my project aims to contribute.

First, to bridge an existing gap, I focus on the qualitative aspects of ethnic Czechs' attitudes towards 'Muslims' which, to my knowledge, had not been addressed in prior publications (see also Gómez del Tronco, 2023, forthcoming).[6] Existing survey data on Czechs' attitudes towards 'Muslims' present considerable limitations (see 4.2.2.a.). Notably, surveys have revealed little about the contents of anti-Muslim attitudes, the meanings associated with the category 'Muslim' and, consequently, the drivers of Islamophobic prejudice. Second, my study seeks to highlight the significant influence of mainstream Czech political discourse in normalising Islamophobic rhetoric and influencing public attitudes. While previous research often attributes the promotion of Islamophobia to far-right and populist figures, it overlooks the pivotal role of mainstream political elites in shaping public opinion (Brown et al., 2021). By placing the spotlight on mainstream political actors, I offer a critical analysis of their impact on public perceptions of Islam and Muslims. Furthermore, previous analyses have tended to frame Islamophobia as an issue confined to or pushed from the political fringes, while focusing on the mainstream's securitisation of 'refugees'. Conversely, I argue that Islamophobia is entrenched in mainstream politics, partly through securitisation, and serves as the ideological foundation for much of the anti-refugee rhetoric.

Third, my work is a response to an expression widely used in public and even academic discourse to explain Czechs' negative attitudes towards 'Muslims' – namely, "fear of the unknown". This expression condenses the hypothesis that Czechs harbour Islamophobic biases due to limited interactions, leading to perceptions of Muslims as disproportionately threatening. However, this characterization oversimplifies the complex dynamics of anti-Muslim attitudes and risks downplaying the role of Islamophobia. Anti-Muslim attitudes are not merely reactive responses to threat-inducing stimuli. They are often rooted in ideological (i.e. Islamophobic) beliefs about Muslims' social position, their exclusion from that which they threaten (for example, a European identity) or assumptions about their problematic behaviours. Furthermore, these attitudes encompass emotions beyond fear, including hatred or disgust. On the other hand, focusing on the lack of intergroup contact (or 'the unknown' bit) overlooks the large amount of knowledge feeding into Czechs' stereotypes of 'Muslims'. Unlike Czechs' attitudes towards other uncontacted groups, like the Bhutanese or Zoroastrians, 'Muslims' evoke negative attitudes largely due to underlying

[6] Nevertheless, some publications based on interviews with Muslims have addressed experiences of discrimination (Čermáková, Janků, Linhartová, et al., 2016; Tungul, 2020b). Likewise, focus groups with non-Muslim Czechs have explored attitudes towards 'refugees' (Brožová et al., 2018; Glopolis, 2016) and, recently, publications within The Thirteenth Immigrant project (muni.cz, 2023) have explored qualitative aspects of attitudes towards 'migrants', 'refugees' or 'foreigners' (e.g. Božič et al., 2023; or Jaworsky et al., 2022).

Islamophobic beliefs that have been regularly promoted in and learned from public discourse.

Fourth, my discourse analysis will contribute to the few methodologically systematic works that have attended to the historicity of Czech political discourse on 'Muslims' and 'refugees' (such as Kluknavská et al., 2019; Krotký, 2019; Prokůpková, 2019). Specifically, I will elaborate on the motivations and discursive strategies employed by mainstream politicians as the events of 2014 and 2015 unfolded.

Fifth, this dissertation also problematises the common belief that Czech Islamophobia largely replicates that of Western Europe, even to a larger extent than in other East European countries (Slačálek & Svobodová, 2018). Despite its unquestionable unoriginality, Czech Islamophobic rhetoric still presents its preferred themes, argumentation patterns, interdiscursive references and positions regarding West European realities. Chapters 5 and 6 show how Czech anti-Muslim attitudes reflect specific understandings of race or religiosity which differ from those in, for instance, the United Kingdom – from where dominant conceptualisations of Islamophobia originate. Furthermore, I emphasise the transnational nature of interdiscursive and intertextual references in Czech political discourse. Political leaders' speeches in core European cities like London or Berlin often influence Islamophobic rhetoric in semi-peripheral Prague, creating a one-sided exchange of ideas. Similarly, while French far-right leader Marine Le Pen (Hanuš, 2015) or American anti-Islam writer Bill Warner (Škampa, 2014) are interviewed on Czech public television, the French or American media do not show the same interest towards Czech far-right leaders or anti-Islam activists.

1.3. Structure of the dissertation

The following three chapters lay the groundwork for the subsequent empirical analysis, each focusing on theory, design and context, respectively. Chapter 2 establishes a theoretical framework through a multidisciplinary literature review split into five sections. In section 2.1., I delve into the sociopsychological underpinnings of prejudice and stereotypes. Section 2.2. addresses key politico-philosophical areas of inquiry prevalent in European public debates about Muslim migrants by drawing on the literatures of citizenship and multiculturalism. Section 2.3. tackles the conceptualisation of Islamophobia by engaging with ongoing debates within the literature regarding its ontology, its relationship to racism or its historical origins. Section 2.4. outlines my understanding of discourse and ideology, while 2.5. elaborates on the interrelated processes of normalisation, legitimisation and securitisation. The chapter's concluding section integrates the key concepts into a coherent theoretical framework. Chapter 3 is dedicated to elucidating the research design, clarifying questions of epistemology, the analytical process and methodology. Moving on to chapter 4, I provide essential context by identifying the dynamics, events or actors which situate the Islamophobic turn of 2015. This includes examining key political and socio-historical factors which plausibly pushed mainstream Czech politics towards Islamophobia; negative attitudes and politics towards the Czech Roma and Muslims; the post-War history of international immigration to Czechoslovakia and,

then, Czechia; and a detailed analysis of the political and communicative landscape surrounding ‘Muslims’ and ‘refugees’ in 2015.

Chapters 5 and 6 are dedicated to exploring public opinion on ‘Muslims’ in contemporary Czechia, drawing on findings from a thematic analysis of 31 semi-structured interviews conducted with both ethnic Czechs and Muslims living in Czechia in 2020 and 2021. The first of these chapters provides an overview of the characteristics and historical developments regarding these attitudes, as well as an analysis of the main themes present in the representations of Muslims, Czechs, the West, Muslim-majority countries, Czech Muslim communities and Muslim women. Following this overview, chapter 6 delves into a deeper analysis based on two questions from the theoretical framework: the extent to which ‘Muslims’ are perceived to threaten material or symbolic resources, and whether Islamophobic prejudice should primarily be understood as a form of racism or also encompasses anti-religious bigotry. This chapter also explores the influence of intergroup contact over stereotypes of ‘Muslims’ and discusses the solutions proposed by participants to tackle Islamophobic prejudice in Czechia.

Chapters 7 and 8 present the findings of a comprehensive discourse analysis of televised political speeches on ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslims’ aired between 2014 and 2015. Employing methodologies from critical discourse studies, I scrutinise the strategies for representing social actors based on van Leeuwen’s (2013) inventory and the topoi employed in argumentation by relying on categories from Reisigl and Wodak (2005). The corpus consists of transcripts from two informative shows aired by the Czech public broadcaster in which activists or politicians participated. Chapter 7 covers the period between January 2014, when mentions of ‘Muslims’ in public discourse were relatively sparse, and February 2015, when anti-Islam protests gained momentum. Here, the chapter investigates how ‘Muslims’ became a prominent topic in Czech public discourse and the representational strategies through which politicians normalised Islamophobic rhetoric. Then, chapter 8 covers the rest of 2015, which was dominated by the ‘refugee crisis’ and argumentation on the, in the vernacular, ‘refugee quotas’. Here, I analyse how previously normalised Islamophobic rhetoric allowed politicians to legitimately advocate for what would have been an uncivil position before, namely refusing to welcome migrants based on their religion. Finally, chapter 9 synthesises the findings from chapters 4 to 8, facilitating a comprehensive reflection on the degree to which Islamophobic political rhetoric influenced Islamophobic prejudice within the country. This chapter serves as a juncture for examining the broader implications of political discourse on societal attitudes towards ‘Muslims’ and ‘Islam’.

2. Reviewing literature to understand Islamophobia(s) in Europe and developing a theoretical framework for this case study

This chapter reviews key concepts essential to the study and concludes with an outline of the theoretical framework. The framework, along with the broader investigation, is structured around a set of guiding assumptions intended to orient the reader and provide a foundation for the analysis that follows. First, it is assumed that Czech mainstream politicians normalised Islamophobia in public discourse through their reiterated use and justification of Islamophobic rhetoric in 2014-2015. This constitutes a social problem, since, in the contemporary EU context, Islamophobia functions to deny Muslims citizenship and cultural rights (see 2.2.). At the time, Czechia was a consolidated liberal democracy (Kopeček, 2016), whose dominant norms should have, a priori, conflicted with the exclusionary and illiberal character of Islamophobia (for the antecedents to Islamophobia in the country, see chapter 4). I contend that the authoritative mainstream parties should have stood and been perceived as guarantors of those liberal-democratic norms, formally enshrined in the Constitution (referencing the Czech Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms) and the anti-Discrimination Act, but also conventionally reproduced across mainstream practices and institutions. Instead, politicians promulgated Islamophobia as a largely acceptable ideology, while representing anti-Islamophobic attitudes as illegitimate and even dangerous (see 7.3, 8.3.).

Second, this so-called radicalisation of the mainstream was not motivated by an electoral threat from the Czech far right (see Minkenberg, 2017; Wondreys, 2020), but by a combination of contextual factors (see 4.1.). Without ignoring other sociological or geopolitical variables, I will highlight how Euroscepticism and populism pushed Czech party politics towards Islamophobia. Throughout this study, the political mainstream will be regarded critically, emphasising its agency in forming policy positions, legitimising ideologies and representing social actors, rather than being fatalistically framed as reacting to illiberal popular preferences and the actions of the far right (Brown et al., 2021). If anything, the analysis reveals that the representation of ‘fears’ and far-right ‘extremists’ often served to justify mainstream Islamophobic rhetoric.

Third, the normalisation of Islamophobia in public discourse contributed to shaping public opinion by quantitatively and qualitatively fostering Islamophobic prejudice. On the one hand, Islamophobic rhetoric exposed the public to representations that heightened the perceived intergroup differences with and threat from (securitised) ‘Muslims’ (see 7.1.). On the other hand, the change in normativity around Islamophobia encouraged the expression and reproduction of prejudice (see 2.5.). Fourth, discourse is interpreted as a key social practice which carries ideological meanings and transforms social reality (Fairclough, 1992). Nonetheless, given the socio-cognitive interface between discourse and society (van Dijk, 1990), my analysis

assumes the considerable potential of mainstream political discourse to influence socio-cognitive structures like stereotypes or prejudice. Therefore, with the first introduction of a public discourse about 'Muslims' in contemporary Czechia in 2014/2015, politicians had a decisive effect in shaping the prejudice of a population with a relatively weak prior exposure to this discourse and limited contact opportunities with Muslims, which could have mitigated prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

This multidisciplinary review is composed of five sections which explore distinct theoretical aspects that inform the framework presented in the concluding section. The first section concentrates on the sociopsychological aspects of prejudice and stereotyping. It conceptualises both phenomena, as well as exploring the literature on the causes of these forms of intergroup bias and on the positive effects of intergroup contact – largely lacking in Czechia but relevant to understand differences across participants in this study. Throughout this section, I also review empirical studies on Islamophobic and anti-migrant prejudice in contemporary Europe. The second section situates the EU resistance to welcoming (Muslim) migrants in the context of the restrictiveness of citizenship regimes, particularly from a global perspective, and opposition to multiculturalism, which became a trend in EU public discourse that accommodated Islamophobia. A third section systematically dissects the concept of Islamophobia to better understand the history of the concept, its nature, targets, its contemporary contents and its interplay with other political ideologies in Europe. Here, I argue for a conceptualisation of Islamophobia as a racist ideology that informs and is informed by both perceptions and practices. The fourth and fifth sections define key analytical concepts, namely discourse and ideology, and normalisation and securitisation, respectively. The last synthesises my understanding of basic concepts while integrating them into a coherent framework which will guide the analysis.

This review, together with the research design (chapter 3) and the context presented in chapter 4, will convey to the reader the broad interdisciplinary framework and theoretical preoccupations with which I approached my analysis in chapters 5 to 8.

2.1. The social psychology of prejudice and stereotyping

The sociopsychological study of prejudice is often nested within the areas of intergroup bias or intergroup relations, whose century-long literature undergoes regular reviews (Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick, & Esses, 2013; Fiske, 1998; Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002; Nelson, 2009; Stangor, 2009). While the first studies of prejudice are often traced back to the late 1920s in the United States (US) (Bogardus, 1928; Katz & Braly, 1933), most scholars regard the landmark publication of Gordon Allport's *The nature of prejudice* (1954) as the keystone which set the foundations for many of the lines of research followed up until today (Dovidio et al., 2008). Since its inception, social psychology and, by extension, the study of intergroup bias, was overwhelmingly dominated by US academia, with several reviewers pointing to its individualistic, cognitivist or positivistic inclinations (Burr & Dick, 2017; Farr, 1996; Oishi et al., 2009). Some have labelled this mainstream approach as psychological social psychology to differentiate it from other schools relying more heavily on sociological theories (Rohall et al., 2021; Tileagă et al., 2022) or adopting critical perspectives (Gough, 2017). In this section, I will mostly engage with the richer and, despite the criticisms and

caricaturing, varied mainstream approach. In the dissertation's empirical chapters, analytical attention to the role of discourse, social construction and social structure will also be informed by other disciplines introduced in this and the following two chapters.

'Mainstream' social psychology has favoured the concept of 'intergroup bias', which can be broadly defined as "the systematic tendency to evaluate one's own membership group (the in-group) or its members more favorably than a nonmembership group (the out-group) or its members" (Hewstone et al., 2002, p. 576). The consensus is that three interrelated phenomena fall under this umbrella term, namely prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination. While the former two are conceived as intrapsychic realities (i.e. occurring within the mind), the latter is manifested through outward behaviour (Dovidio et al., 2010a, pp. 5–10). As this dissertation focuses mostly on the circulation of representations and their effects on the mind, the present section is restricted to the conceptualisation, causes and ways to reduce prejudice and stereotyping, while largely ignoring the rich sociopsychological literature on discrimination.

2.1.1. Conceptualising prejudice and stereotypes

2.1.1.a. Prejudice

Selecting a conceptualisation of prejudice forces researchers to navigate a myriad of theoretical tensions that the literature has been grappling with throughout its history. Three questions stood out for me: namely, prejudice's ontology (as captured in operational definitions); whether non-negative evaluations of outgroups are constitutive of prejudice; and how researchers paid greater attention to less overt and explicit forms of prejudice.

Regarding ontology, following the influence of Allport's (1954) seminal work, conceptualisations of prejudice as an attitude are practically part of the discipline's common sense. The suitability of attitude as a concept is not always ideal and some authors complement definitions of prejudice with terms like emotion, evaluation, feeling, judgement or behaviour. Reflecting a long-standing tripartite classification of mental activities (Hilgard, 1980), a dominant understanding of attitudes, the so-called ABC model, compartmentalises these into their cognitive, affective [i.e. emotion-based] and conative components. In an integrative view, "stereotyping is taken as the most cognitive component, prejudice as the most affective component, and discrimination as the most behavioural component of category-based reactions" (Fiske, 1998, p. 357). Consequently, stereotypes can be understood as one of the main (Esses et al., 1993) or only (Fiske & Taylor, 2021, Chapter 12) sources of cognitive information within prejudice. In other words, even if we speak of prejudice as an ABC attitude, stereotypes are responsible for the C while prejudice manifests mostly as an emotional response (Ibidem).

As an attitude, prejudice is an evaluative response (Correll et al., 2010). Despite a long-standing dominant interpretation of prejudice as a negative evaluation, many researchers nowadays accept that prejudice can also be expressed through neutral and positive evaluations. Allport (1954, p. 9) famously defined prejudice as "an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization", concentrating on its "avertive or hostile" nature (p.7) at the expense of positive or neutral intergroup

evaluations, which he did not consider a ‘social problem’ (p.25). This negativity principle, which informed most of the research in subsequent decades, was unable to explain why forms of sexism, an ideology largely overlooked by Allport (Eagly & Diekman, 2005, p. 20), manifested sometimes through positive evaluations of women (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2011). Likewise, while Allport identified the importance of ingroup favouritism (i.e. the natural tendency to favour our ingroup over other groups), the discrimination that favouritism produces does not necessarily correspond with hostile attitudes towards outgroups (Brewer, 1999). Some have lamented that by abandoning the principle of negativity, the concept of prejudice risks losing its essence (Stangor, 2009, pp. 2–3). Indeed, this loss requires researchers to endow ‘prejudice’ with new requirements, like a relation to social structure (Reicher, 2007). Therefore, prejudice is an ideologically shaped attitude directed towards entire “groups and their members” (or, in cognitivist terms, a social category) whose main function is “creat[ing] or maintain[ing] hierarchical status relations between groups” (Dovidio et al., 2010a, p. 7). Consequently, the aspirations or claims to power by the ingroup relative to the outgroup matter more for identifying prejudice than examining the positivity or negativity of evaluations (Reicher, 2007).

Finally, over time, the study of prejudice has placed greater interest in prejudice’s more implicit and covert manifestations. For decades, the interests and contexts of US social psychologists shaped the research agenda and paradigms of the discipline, often motivated by a distinctive perspective on issues of racial and ethnic discrimination (cf. Miles & Torres, 1996). At different times, prejudice was largely seen as either irrational, a pathology of certain personality types, a sociocultural phenomenon, or a natural consequence of universal cognitive processes (Duckitt, 2010). According to Duckitt (2010), by the 1970s, there was a realisation that, despite ‘Whites’’ withdrawal of support for discriminatory policies towards ‘Blacks’, measures in prejudice and forms of discrimination were not declining. A similar phenomenon was observed in Europe. As the hegemonic ideologies of contemporary liberal societies nominally committed to ethnoracial toleration and publicly shamed older modes of discrimination, biases were also becoming subtler. Scholars of racism started to develop new social theories about these new expressions: New Racism in the UK (Barker, 1981), Everyday Racism in the Netherlands (Essed, 1991) or Differentialist Racism in France (Taguieff, 1990). In parallel, psychologists were also developing theories of racism that included scales to measure more indirect expressions of prejudice, such as Symbolic (McConahay & Hough, 1976; Sears, 1988) or Aversive (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) Racisms.

By the 1980s, to explain the pervasiveness of prejudice, social psychology sought to understand the universal cognitive processes, such as social categorisation and social identity, from which prejudice naturally emanated (Duckitt, 2010). The universality of prejudice created the need for measuring both its covert and subtle manifestations. For the former, many started to distinguish between explicit bias (i.e. that which individuals are aware of holding, and can deliberately control and express), and implicit bias (i.e. of which individuals lack awareness and which is unintentionally activated) (Dovidio et al., 2010a, p. 10). The study of the much more widespread and, from the US academic standpoint, socially impactful implicit biases occupied the top of the agenda. Progress on this inquiry was aided by methodological advances. For much of the twentieth century, social psychology had relied on self-report scales (Maio et al.,

2010) and other measures which were subject to social desirability biases (Edwards, 1957; Nederhof, 1985). However, by the 1990s and 2000s, new methods were measuring participants' response latency, physiological reactions or responses to cognitive priming (Correll et al., 2010). As reported by Dovidio and colleagues (2019), existing evidence suggests that explicit prejudice largely predicts discriminatory behaviour, while the relationship between implicit prejudice and discrimination seems much weaker. Finally, some authors have proposed ways of differentiating forms of prejudice according to their subtlety. Notably, Pettigrew and Meertens (1995) distinguished between blatant and subtle prejudice. Blatant prejudice involves perceiving the outgroup as a threat, rejecting it and opposing intimate contact with its members. Subtle prejudices might be expressed by upholding the ingroup's traditional values, exaggerating cultural differences among groups or denying positive emotions to members of the outgroup.

2.1.1.b. Stereotypes

Our minds subsume information about social categories, such as 'Muslims', under schemata of mental representations which most social psychologists conceptualise as stereotypes – namely, the collection of "knowledge, beliefs, and expectations we hold about human groups" (Sherman et al., 2013, p. 549). The content of stereotypes guides our affective evaluations (i.e. emotional prejudices) of hypothetical or perceived actual group members (Cuddy et al., 2007), inter alia, by conditioning our intergroup threat perceptions (Riek et al., 2006). Superordinate categories, such as 'Muslims', can cognitively nest subgroups (Richards & Hewstone, 2001) or be combined with other typically overarching categories (like gender or age). For instance, Brown et al. (2017) showed that US schoolchildren have already been socialised into holding stereotypes of 'Arab Muslim men' as angry and un-American and of 'Arab Muslim women' as oppressed. Though largely socially learned and motivated, stereotypes are also informed by intergroup contact experiences. However, when face-to-face encounters are scarce, the media's influence on stereotype formation becomes greater (Fujioka, 1999; Ramasubramanian, 2013).[7]

Even if the current consensus is that stereotypes are universal cognitive phenomena which, inter alia, facilitate an efficient (Macrae et al., 1994; Sherman et al., 2000) and, sometimes, even accurate (Ryan, 2003; Wolsko et al., 2000) processing of social reality, they have attracted much scholarly attention in so far as they are socially problematic. According to Stangor (2009, p. 2), what motivated early works was stereotypes' inaccurate, negative and overgeneralising qualities. Stereotypes can favour the essentialisation (Prentice & Miller, 2006), perceived homogeneity (Ostrom & Sedikides, 1992) or dehumanisation (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014) of outgroup members, as well as justifying ideologically-inflicted social hierarchies (Glick & Fiske, 1996) or impacting the mental health and self-conscious behaviours of those who are stereotyped (Spencer et al., 1999).

Different socio-cognitive models theorise stereotypes' representational structure within the mind, with implications for understanding their formation, situational

[7] This paragraph is reproduced from Gómez del Tronco (2023, p. 319).

activation or modification potential (Fiske & Taylor, 2021, pp. 120–130; Hilton & von Hippel, 1996). Acknowledging their existence and in order not to steer this project excessively towards social cognition, I consider other sociopsychological models which better capture the relationship between social structure and the content of stereotypes. The Stereotype Content Model (SCM) (Fiske et al., 2002) is the most popular of its kind, with its behavioural extension being the BIAS map (Cuddy et al., 2007). The SCM's backing theory posits that stereotyping occurs in response to two fundamental questions about a group, namely "friend or foe?" (i.e. competition for resources or threat) and "able or unable [to enact their intentions]?" (i.e. status) (Fiske & Taylor, 2021, p. 335). Based on the answers, stereotypes of (sub-)groups are classified in an analytical matrix according to perceptions of their warmth (positive or negative intent) and competence ("possession of skills, talents, and capability" to potentially or actually act) (Fiske et al., 2002, pp. 65–66). The position of stereotypes in the matrix predicts the emotions which members of the category are likely to elicit: pity (high warmth and low competence), disgust (low warmth and low competence), pride (high warmth and high competence) or envy (low warmth and high competence) (Fiske & Taylor, 2021, p. 352). The authors recognise that, particularly for groups who elicit paternalistic emotions like pity, there is room for ambivalence (Fiske et al., 2002, p. 880). This ambivalence responds to ingroup expectations about the subversive ambitions of the outgroup. So, in the case of Ambivalent Sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996), historically, the paternalistic "[Benevolent Sexism] was the carrot aimed at enticing women to enact traditional roles and [Hostile Sexism] was the stick used to punish them when they resisted" (Glick & Fiske, 2011, p. 532). In his political commentary on the War on Terror, Mamdani (2002) makes a similar differentiation between the normative stereotypes of the 'good Muslim', who adapts to a globalist project by welcoming the protection of Western forces, and the 'bad Muslim', a political radical who is willing to take up arms even against his own people and, thus, deserves punishment by the corrective Westernising forces.

Although they have been exported to other contexts, the SCM and other stereotype content models were conceived to understand intergroup relations *within* the US and, therefore, excluded the cruder forms of animosity which permeate stereotypes of hostile nations with whom there is, often, a shortage of contact. To build the (far less utilised) sociopsychological Image Theory, Alexander and colleagues (1999) compellingly draw from the concept of 'image' (i.e. sets of cognitive attributes), which international relations had traditionally employed to understand how symbolic constructions of the enemy justified hostile behaviours towards rivalling nations. This theory posits the existence of five outgroup images according to their perceived relative (material and political) power, (cultural) status, goal compatibility, and the perceiver's individual motivations, such as those provided by the salience of their social identities (Alexander et al., 2005). The images are those of the ally (the only one with compatible goals), the enemy, the barbarian, the dependant and the imperialist. Two images are relevant for analysing European negative stereotypes of 'Muslims' (Alexander et al., 1999, pp. 79–81):

- The enemy: with relatively lower status but equal power capabilities. This image leads to inclinations to eliminate the threat by attacking this outgroup, perceived as "hostile, untrustworthy, monolithic, and opportunistic".

- The dependant: with relatively lower status and power. It evokes inclinations to exploit this group, regarded as “childish, incompetent, and divided”.

While the SCM and Image Theory place intergroup relations at the centre of stereotype formation (hence accounting for the possible influence of ideology), Koenig and Eagly (2019) have demonstrated that the frequency of observed social roles which members of the target category occupy are equally powerful in shaping stereotypes. This means that by observing members of a group regularly occupying a social role (for example, a particular profession or being a carer), observers tend to generalise the behaviours associated with that role to traits characteristic of the outgroup (2014).

2.1.2. Why are individuals and groups biased?

Broadly speaking, we can distinguish three major strands in the sociopsychological literature exploring the causes of intergroup bias (Dovidio et al., 2010a, 2019), which I explore in this sub-section. Each of these focuses on the influences of individual differences, among which personality and ideology are most often explored (although I also briefly discuss some of the individual differences relevant to anti-migrant and anti-Muslim attitudes in Europe); perceptions of intergroup competition and threat; and processes of social categorisation and identification.

Studies highlighting the role of personality in fostering prejudice were popular in the early literature, which often drew from psychodynamic theories (Öğretir & Özçelık, 2008) to explain prejudice as a pathology developed in early socialisation. In their foundational *The authoritarian personality*, Adorno and colleagues (1950) proposed that individuals showing “intolerance of ambiguity, rigidity, concreteness (poor abstract reasoning), and over-generalization” (Dovidio et al., 2010a, p. 13) were more likely to hold prejudice. Hodson and Dhont (2015, pp. 3–6) observe that, after waning interest by the 1960s, literature on personality-based explanations of prejudice rebounded in the 2000s driven by robust findings, renewed theoretical interest on individual differences (for instance, genetic, cognitive or in values), and the consistent pattern of individuals showing generalised prejudice towards various groups at once.

Despite the growing popularity and validation of the so-called generalised prejudice thesis, there are factors that bias individuals against some groups but not others. For instance, in a study with Belgian participants, Meuleman and colleagues (2018) measured the influence of perceived intergroup threat in shaping differentiated prejudices. They found that higher relative deprivation correlated positively with Islamophobic prejudice (surprisingly, as ‘Muslims’ were expected to be perceived as cultural threats rather than resource competitors) but not with homonegativity, while greater gender traditionalism correlated negatively with Islamophobia (allegedly, because of patriarchal attributes in stereotypes of ‘Muslims’) but positively with homonegativity. With these results, the authors reminded researchers of generalised prejudice that perceived intergroup relations and contexts are paramount to understanding the geneses of discrete prejudices.

Drawing on the personality literature, measures of ideological beliefs have reliably and consistently shown effects on prejudice and ethnocentrism. The two most popular tools are the scales of Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) (Altemeyer, 1988, 1998,

2006) and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) (Ho et al., 2015; Pratto et al., 2006). Although these tools are commonly presented as measures of ideologies, according to Hing and Zanna (2010), different scholars understand them as dispositions, manifestations of conservatism (an ideology which some differentiate from RWA) or indicators for broader sociopolitical ideologies. Broadly speaking, the RWA scale measures individuals' submission to authority, aggressivity in their support for norms sanctioned by authorities and conventionalism (Altemeyer, 2006, pp. 10–29). The SDO scale, on the other hand, measures individual support for the maintenance of oppressive social hierarchies and opposition to intergroup equality (Ho et al., 2015, pp. 6–7). According to Asbrock and collaborators (2010), those scoring high on RWA are more likely to be prejudiced towards apparently dangerous groups, since they perceive the world as threatening and are motivated towards social order and security. Conversely, those scoring high on the SDO scale show greater prejudice towards subordinate non-threatening groups, since they perceive the world as competitive and strive to exert dominance and superiority over others.

Despite their popularity, SDO and RWA are tools developed in and for a particular US sociopolitical context, and, therefore, not universally valid. Chylíková and Buchtík (2016) offer a sound discreditation of the RWA scale's fit to the Czech national context, at least in their adapted translation of a recent version by Altemeyer (2006). The authors found that Czech 2013 respondents scored high on measures of both authoritarianism and liberalism, so that "Czechs often demand traditional values, morality, good old values, and established authorities, but apparently for them this is not in contradiction with tolerance of homosexuality and nudity, religious freedom, and abortion rights" (p.20). Chylíková and Buchtík offer two possible explanations for this discrepancy (pp. 20-21). First, that the North American RWA does not consider the norms and attitudes of 'authoritarians' in Czechia, where: 'Christian morality' barely conditions societal views, authoritarianism is still related to preference for features of the Communist socio-economic system and conservatism holds a 'non-conformist' edge. Second, although this would seem contradictory within the North American context, most Czech respondents held liberal attitudes *while also* expressing preference for a strong leader and order in society. Despite this criticism, iterations of the RWA scale have indeed correlated with anti-immigrant prejudice in post-2015 Europe, for instance, in the UK (Peresman et al., 2023), the Netherlands (Onraet et al., 2021), Croatia (Šram, 2020) and, modestly, in Czechia (Farkač et al., 2020). More specifically, for Dangubić and colleagues (2021), it is 'authoritarian' Dutch respondents' desire for uniformity and conformity that explains both their aversion to Muslims and opposition to Islamic (and other minorities') practices. Conversely, respondents scoring high in conservatism but not so markedly in authoritarianism feel more neutral towards Muslims while opposing Islamic practices out of anxieties about social change.

In addition to personality and ideology, other individual factors have correlated consistently with anti-migrant attitudes in the EU, with the most recurrent being low interpersonal trust, low educational attainment and being older (Card et al., 2005; Hampshire, 2013, p. 22; Rustenbach, 2010). While three decades ago, the educational factor did not seem relevant in post-communist countries (Coenders & Scheepers, 2003), more recently, it has shown moderate effects on attitudes towards Muslim migrants (Marfouk, 2019). For immigrants of a different race or from poorer countries,

Dennison and Dražanová (2018, pp. 49–56) found as predictors of positive attitudes being a woman and living in urban areas, as well as reporting: higher levels of interpersonal and institutional trust, economic satisfaction and a general feeling of safety. Although individual levels of religiosity could seem, a priori, relevant to predict anti-Muslim attitudes, the literature is not always conclusive on its role; yet, there are two particularly relevant findings. First, national legacies can confer a meaning to social religious identities in ways that condition the accommodation of 'Muslims'. For instance, while, in highly secular Czechia, religiosity has correlated with positive attitudes towards 'Muslims', in neighbouring Poland, where Catholicism is connected to certain identitarian nationalist discourses, its effects have been the opposite (Bell & Strabac, 2020; c.f. Topinka, 2016a, p. 242, who finds no such correlation for the Czech case). A similarly positive effect to that in Czechia was measured in France (Ogan et al., 2014), where public expressions of religiosity also face obstacles. Second, different dimensions and variants of religiosity show distinct effects on attitudes towards 'Muslims'. Across Europe, Doebler (2014) found that, in 2010, believing in a traditional monotheistic God or another higher power favoured tolerance towards 'Muslims'. However, the opposite was true for 'fundamentalist' believers, i.e. those thinking that theirs is 'the only true religion'. Church attendance and denomination did not show significant effects – except for Protestants who did not attend church, who were more likely to report intolerance, perhaps out of an exclusivist Christian identitariansim (see Brubaker, 2017; Vollaard, 2013). In the post-2015 context, a West European survey found that, overall, those identifying as 'Christian', whether non-practising or church-going, were more likely to exhibit negative attitudes towards 'Muslims' (Pew Research Center, 2018a). However, the authors, who did not account for 'fundamentalist' beliefs, speculated that Christian self-identification might have increased in the aftermath of the 'refugee crisis'. In short, these results could reflect an uptick in Christianist identitarianism.

A second strand explores the role of perceived intergroup threat and competition in fostering bias. The contested or threatened resources can be tangible and limited (for example, jobs, welfare, physical security, infrastructure), as studied by proponents of the Realistic Group Conflict Theory (see Campbell, 1965; LeVine & Campbell, 1972; Sherif et al., 1961), or symbolic (identity, norms, rituals, tastes, ideologies, symbols). Intergroup threat theory (Stephan et al., 2016; Stephan & Stephan, 1996; Stephan & Stephan, 2000) distinguishes "concern about physical harm or a loss of resources as realistic threat, and a concern about the integrity or validity of the ingroup's meaning system as symbolic threat" (Stephan et al., 2009, pp. 43–44). Initially, the theory also considered as types of threat negative stereotypes and intergroup anxiety, which is experienced "when anticipating or engaging in intergroup interaction" (Stephan, 2014, p. 240). However, negative stereotypes are now considered a predictor of perceived threat and intergroup anxiety is now a separate subtype of threat particularly related to interactions (Stephan et al., 2016) – both of them are strong predictors of prejudice, nonetheless (Riek et al., 2006). In different contexts, the nature of the perceived threats coming from different groups might vary. As stated by Helbert Blumer in the 1950s, "[f]eelings of competition and hostility emerge from historically and collectively developed judgments about the positions in the social order that in-group members should rightfully occupy relative to members of an out-group" (quoted in Bobo & Hutchings, 1996, p. 955).

Intergroup Threat Theory also distinguishes between perceptions of threat to the individual and to their ingroup, with European anti-migrant attitudes most frequently explained through the latter (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014). According to Landmann and colleagues (2019), intergroup threat theory generally concentrates on threats coming 'directly' from the outgroup to the ingroup while ignoring the perceived 'extended' threats which, allegedly, result from the presence of the outgroup but affect the broader society. In Germany, they identified the influence on anti-refugee attitudes of fears about: decreasing social cohesion (for example, 'ghettos'), rising xenophobia or refugees suffering from shortages in supporting resources. However, the 'extended' threat construct largely ignores the fact that, ultimately, the ingroup is likely to be perceived to suffer the consequences of such threats and the outgroup is the one initially causing them. This explains why, in their study, reported concerns for 'refugees'' wellbeing and social cohesion also correlated with negative attitudes towards 'refugees'.

Considering that European public discourse on immigration and Islam tends to overemphasize threats, it is unsurprising that Islamophobic prejudice is often predicted by perceived symbolic and, to a lesser extent, material threats (for a review, see Verkuyten, 2021). As 'Muslims' are repeatedly represented as threats to national identity and values, symbolic threat has been shown to mediate the relationship between Islamophobic prejudice and identification with the national group (Velasco González et al., 2008). It has also been observed to mediate the effects on Islamophobic conspiracy stereotypes coming from, inter alia, degree of in-group identification, clash-of-civilisations beliefs or intolerance of ambiguity (Uenal, 2016). Likewise, Croucher (2013) finds that West European ethnic majorities who perceived material and, particularly, symbolic threat coming from 'Muslims' were more inclined towards the belief that 'Muslims' do not want to assimilate. He concludes that the public pressure for 'Muslims' to assimilate is partly driven by the wish to eliminate the sources of perceived threat. Even if symbolic threat shows more significant results more consistently, some, like Pickel (2020), find that material threat, particularly grounded on security concerns and the economic impact of immigration, has a greater explanatory power for Islamophobic prejudice. Terrorist threat perceptions are the most frequently studied. Fear of terrorism has been shown to result from Islamophobic attitudes (Andersen & Mayerl, 2018). Conversely, mediatised terrorist attacks with an Islamist background in Europe have led to increases in anti-Muslim attitudes among some individuals (Das et al., 2009), although these increases are not always observable across countries and might have a short-lasting impact (Savelkoul et al., 2022). Most notably, in the absence of positive contact experiences with Muslims, news texts that associate most Muslims with terrorists result in heightened fear of terrorism which, in turn, leads to hostile attitudes towards 'Muslims' (von Sikorski et al., 2020). Having positive contact experiences prevented fear of terrorism from increasing, as did reading texts that explicitly differentiated most Muslims from terrorists (Ibid.)

In the context of the European 'refugee crisis' of 2015 and later, intergroup threat has proven predictive of anti-refugee attitudes (Landmann et al., 2019; Vala & Pereira, 2020) and support for anti-refugee actions (Gootjes et al., 2021; Wyszynski et al., 2020). Although not adopting the frames of intergroup threat theory, Bansak and

colleagues (2016) offered respondents from 15 EU states a series of traits that would make a refugee more acceptable. Accordingly, the ideal refugee was the person who feared persecution, belonged to a high-skilled profession, spoke fluently the language of the host-country, was not a Muslim, had a consistent application and had suffered torture. These results were consistent across sociodemographic and ideological positions, with one exception. Left-wing respondents were more likely to stress humanitarian concerns and half as likely as right-wing respondents to express anti-Muslim bias. Although the general belief is that the category 'refugees' evokes a lesser threat than 'migrants', perceived threat ultimately depends on traits attributed to the actor, such as ethnicity or class (Coninck, 2020). In fact, Graf and colleagues (2023) found that respondents from across eight EU countries indicated greater social distance towards 'refugees' (probably interpreted by respondents through public discourse frames) than 'migrants'. Although, to their surprise, their method did not capture the effect of intergroup threat on this differentiated preference but revealed that 'migrants' were perceived to bring more benefits (economic, cultural) to their host countries.

Finally, the third strand relates to the impact of social categorisation and social identity. Categorising the social world allows us to optimally organise and operationalise information, and guiding our interpersonal behaviour in safe and trustworthy ways (Gaertner et al., 2010, p. 526). We inscribe ourselves into relational social categories, and extensive evidence demonstrates that we tend to favour members of our ingroup, reserve distinctively positive emotions towards them (Leyens et al., 2000) and process information about them in a more detailed way (Gaertner et al., 2010, p. 529). From an early age, we already attach evaluative judgements to these categories (Tajfel, 1969, pp. 182–185) as well as displaying a tendency towards essentializing (i.e. attributing a common biological or cultural essence to) category members (Gelman, 2003) and perceiving them as entitative (i.e. naturally occurring) (Haslam et al., 2000). Degrees of essentialisation vary across cultures (Kashima et al., 2005), are affected by family socialization (Rhodes et al., 2012), relate to support for multiculturalist policies (Verkuyten & Brug, 2004) and significantly affect outgroup dehumanization (Holtz & Wagner, 2009; Leyens et al., 2001).

The most popular theories adopting the framework of social categorisation have been Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and, its continuation, Self-Categorisation Theory (SCT) (Turner et al., 1987) – together known as the Social Identity Approach (SIA) (Reicher et al., 2010). The SIA assumes that individuals place at an intermediate level of abstraction (somewhere between their identification as human beings and as individuals) their identity as part of a collective ('us') which informs their behaviour and vision of the social world as members of that group. While SIT is mostly concerned with how discrimination comes into being, SCT concerns itself with the processes that move individuals to behave as perceived members of a group larger than themselves (Haslam & Reicher, 2015, p. 455). While SIT posits that group inscription is driven by a search for positive identification, the SCT similarly characterises the motivation as a search for distinctiveness and a positive concept of the self (Hornsey, 2008, pp. 214–215).

The SIA explains how individuals act according to either their individual or social identities, as well as under which situations they might be tempted or allowed to

change their social identities (Tajfel, 1974, p. 78). According to SCT, when social categories become salient, individuals tend to see themselves as prototypes of the category with which they identify and to which a certain normative ideal is assigned (Hornsey, 2008, pp. 208–209). This is what Turner and colleagues (1987) termed 'depersonalization', a process through which "an individual will redefine his or her self-concept according to the needs, peculiarities, and norms of the in-group" (Trepte & Loy, 2017, p. 7).

Although, in some regards, categorisation and social identity can be quantified, they are most helpful as frameworks from which bias can be understood. After all, "[t]o have intergroup conflict, people have to perceive themselves and other people as members of distinct groups." (Fiske & Taylor, 2021, p. 510). Importantly, the way in which categories and identities are represented in public discourse affect the formation and activation of stereotypes and prejudices. As previously advanced, the shifting dynamics in the media's categorisation of people on the move during the European 'refugee crisis' (Goodman et al., 2017) have led respondents across contexts to hold differing attitudes towards 'immigrants' and 'refugees' (Coninck, 2020; Graf et al., 2023). The traits of the actors understood as being behind those categories (such as their race or ethnicity) are also shaped by public discourse (Gómez del Tronco, 2023). Nevertheless, by simply altering categories in the reporting of migration, it is possible to see how the stigmatised and culturally distant groups trigger greater anxieties than those elicited by categories of groups with higher status and more culturally proximate (Brader et al., 2008). Making such categories salient contributes to the process of Othering, as when a 'European' or 'Christian' identity was made salient to oppose refugees (Brubaker, 2017; Özoflu, 2019). Additionally, Czech respondents have been more likely to express negative intergroup attitudes after reading texts that placed the essence of groups in nouns (i.e. defending German) instead of adjectives (i.e. German defender) (Graf et al., 2013).

2.1.3. The positive effects of intergroup contact on prejudice and stereotypes

Strategies that reduce bias are generally classified into individual-oriented techniques (like exposing participants to inconsistencies behind their biases) or those which require intergroup contact (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1999; Hewstone et al., 2002, pp. 587–593). For decades, intergroup contact has reliably proven effectiveness at reducing bias (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew et al., 2011). It is also a mediator in preventing, for example, anti-migrant attitudes resulting from the overestimation of threat from migrants' presence in the country (Schneider, 2007) or Islamophobic prejudice resulting from increased threat perceptions after jihadist terrorist attacks (Abrams et al., 2017). The fact that the actual relative size of a Muslim population has predicted cross-country variations in anti-Muslim attitudes has been explained as the positive result of intergroup contact experiences (Schlueter et al., 2020). Conversely, some argue that, since contact with ethnically diverse migrants in the Eastern EU is scarce, the negative representations of 'Muslims' in public discourse have affected the perceptions of and prejudice towards this group to a larger extent (Pickel & Öztürk, 2018).

Importantly, contact is most likely to alter our emotions about an out-group (i.e. prejudice) than modifying the underlying stereotypes. Prejudice reduction resulting

from contact is mediated by many affective and cognitive processes (Boin et al., 2021) – notably, by reductions in both the anxiety experienced in intergroup interactions and perceived intergroup threat (Aberson, 20190304; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Importantly, contact produces stronger effects on the affective than on the cognitive dimension of prejudice (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). Stereotype change can also result from contact, albeit less frequently. Stereotypes are more likely to change when the contact person is perceived as a typical group member who exhibits a stereotype-disconfirming behaviour (Wolsko et al., 2003). According to a hierarchical model of stereotype representation, contacts can be cognitively registered into subtypes or subgroups under a superordinate stereotype (Maurer et al., 1996; Richards & Hewstone, 2001). Subtyping occurs when disconfirming members are clustered together into a subtype, which is not easily associated with the superordinate category – that is, they become exceptions to the rule. Conversely, subgroups aggregate a diversity of confirming and disconfirming members who share certain attributes and, to a larger extent, are seen as representative of the superordinate category (Hinzman & Maddox, 2017). While subtyping is believed to hinder stereotype change, subgroups are believed to modify the superordinate stereotype by heightening the perceived variability within it (Richards & Hewstone, 2001).[8]

To a certain extent, the characteristics of the contact experience matter for its effects on prejudice. First, it has been repeatedly shown that, while statistically rarer, negative or stressful contacts are more effective at fostering prejudice (Graf & Paolini, 2016; Landmann et al., 2019, pp. 1410–1412; Pettigrew et al., 2011, p. 277). Second, Allport (1954), often credited as the first theorist of an Intergroup Contact Theory, hypothesised that contact would be more effective at reducing prejudice under a series of optimal conditions (such as equal group status, work towards common goals achievable through intergroup cooperation or being supervised by authorities). A famous meta-analysis showed that, although facilitating, these optimal conditions were not necessary for contacts to be effective at reducing prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Third, the most effective contacts seem to be those which are more personal and intimate (McLaren, 2003; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Fourth, prejudice-reducing contacts need not to be face to face, as they have shown effects even when imagined (Turner et al., 2007) or, vicariously, read/heard about (Zhou et al., 2019). Finally, contact can reduce prejudice towards particular group members, entire outgroups or, even, other outgroups whose members are not part of the contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). However, contact tends to reduce prejudice towards the entire outgroup when the contact person is perceived as a typical representative of that group and their group membership is salient (Brown & Hewstone, 2005)

2.2. Citizenship and multiculturalism as sites for contention in Europe

After the Second World War (for Northwestern Europe), by the late 1970s (Southern Europe) and in the 1990s (Eastern Europe), countries of the present EU regularly received, inter alia, migrants who were neither Christian nor racialised as 'White' or 'European' (De Haas et al., 2019, Chapter 6). Drawing from the literature on citizenship

[8] Most of this paragraph is reproduced from Gómez del Tronco (2023, p. 320)

and multiculturalism, this section deals with two of the fundamental questions brought by the latter phenomenon to European nation-states, namely who should belong to the polity and how cultural differences should be accommodated.

2.2.1. The resistance of European citizenship regimes to legally, physically and culturally accommodate (some) non-European migrants

Transnational migration, particularly from the Global South to the richer EU, has become an inevitable feature of globalisation (Castles et al., 2014). Although migration does and is recognised to bring many benefits, it has also generated tensions for the nation-state. Offering citizenship rights to those perceived as Others can challenge ideas of national cohesion and identity, as well as adding a sense of competition over tangible resources (Castles, 2005, p. 207). Hampshire (2013, p. 12) observes how representative politics and exclusivist nationhood conceptions push liberal democracies towards more restrictive migration policies, while their constitutionalist character and capitalist economies demand the opposite. For Brubaker (2010), international migration upsets some of the congruencies premised in the low-mobility principles assumed in the nation-state ideal. These congruencies are expected matches between the imagined community and the state's territorial borders; the polity and a 'national' culture; permanent residence and citizenry; and cultural nationality and citizenry. Although a broad generalisation, there is truth to the insight by Barša (2002, pp. 247–248) that European nationalisms tilt towards conservatism, as they "tend to believe in the continuity of one culturally distinct people living on the same territory and having rights to that territory".

Much of the resistance to international migrants in European countries relates to the perceived worthiness or suitability of particular groups to settle and, eventually, access citizenship. Modern states claim sovereignty over a territory while providing, through citizenship, membership in a distinct political community. Citizenship is multifaceted, with Bloemraad and colleagues (2008) identifying four dimensions analysed in Western scholarship: its formal legal status, the citizen-state contract defining rights and duties, its conferral of access to political participation, and its provision of a sense of belonging. European states offer several paths to citizenship, including birth within the territory of a state (forms of *jus soli*); ethno-national descent (forms of *jus sanguinis*); marriage or civil partnership with a citizen of the target state; following voluntary processes of naturalisation; or through economic investment. Before becoming EU citizens, non-EU nationals in the EU enjoy some citizenship rights (generally excluding active political ones) and are subject to duties as per their respective legal statuses. This 'in-between' status of non-citizen residents is generally understood by the literature as denizenship (Hammar, 1990). Nevertheless, before becoming residents, aliens will need to access the territory of the state either in accordance with or in breach of relevant migration and asylum legislation.

Considering international migration, global perspectives on citizenship have critically problematised traditional methodologically nationalist approaches. From this perspective, citizenship serves the state to limit its obligations towards different groups of foreigners and, most importantly, influence who gets to come or is expelled (Bauböck, 2006; Bosniak, 2006). It is a fact that not all citizenships are worth the same

in terms of the rights and benefits they confer, both internationally and at home (nationalityindex.com, 2023). The international citizenship regime tries to limit the right to migrate for holders of less valuable citizenships who aim to acquire more desirable ones, thus perpetuating global inequalities based on the lottery of birth (Owen, 2020). With the violence of the War on Terror probably in mind, Castles (2005) theorised a hierarchy of national citizenships, shaped by international patterns of domination, by tiers, with the US at the top. States and citizens higher in the hierarchy get to impose their power downwards, regularly compromising the citizenship quality in the lowest tiers. Exclusionary and racist discourses, in turn, serve to justify the curtailment of the right to migrate for those lowest in the hierarchy, and to legitimise the precarity of their socioeconomic and legal statuses when they settle in top tier countries. Both EU member states' and their subsidiary EU citizenships are among the world's most sought-after. Therefore, a complex system of visas, and publicly funded and multi-nationally implemented technologies, collectively known as 'Fortress Europe' (Walia, 2021, Chapter 6), ensure the exclusion of some nationalities. As Kochenov writes (2019, p. 44):

> Erecting impenetrable walls shutting out the citizens of the neediest and most poorly governed nations explains why the rubber boats cross the Mediterranean in one direction only.

In addition to nationality, Van Hear (2014) suggests considering class as a further determinant of emigration and its outcomes. Individually, following Bourdieu (1987), Van Hear argues that the accumulation of capitals (i.e. economic, cultural, social and symbolic) facilitate migration. What he does not emphasise enough is that migration policy and nationality law also cater to holders of specific forms of capital, for example through special visa regimes for highly skilled professionals or awarding citizenship by investment.

Besides the conception of citizenship as a formal relationship between the state and groups or individuals, many anthropologists and sociologists are interested in how shared understandings about belonging within a polity shape practices of inclusion and exclusion. Regardless of legal status, at an informal level, citizenship is administered "by ordinary people in the course of everyday life, using tacit understandings of who belongs and who does not" (Brubaker, 2010, p. 65). Furthermore, these ideas ultimately inform the practices and legislation of state institutions. Anderson (2013) famously conceptualised the polity as a community of value. Members of such a community agree in that they "share common ideals and (exemplary) patterns of behaviour" (p. 3) - their value. Likewise, their community is also valued, requiring protection, both from within and without, from those who could endanger or seriously devalue it. Those who do not possess the necessary merits to be welcomed into the community are the undeserving poor. At present, these are, globally, the non-citizens (for example, irregular migrants) and, nationally, the failed citizens (i.e. those incapable of living up to the liberal ideals of the community, like the paedophile or the rioter). Anderson underscores that outsiders who want to gain the right to become part of the community of value need to prove themselves to be extraordinarily exemplary at upholding its values, in the eyes of both state institutions

(for example by passing civic citizenship tests) and members of the community (pp. 5–7, 109).

A considerable portion of the state-centred literature on citizenship seeks to understand the origins, nature and outcomes of different, and differently conceptualised, citizenship regimes. According to Vink (2017, p. 226), these typologies usually evaluate the inclusivity or exclusivity of the regime based on the facilities that the state offers to access citizenship status and, sometimes, also on the number of rights to which non-citizens are entitled within its jurisdiction. As ideal types (French/civic, German/ethno-exclusivist or Dutch/multiculturalist), they are imperfect generalisations and, in practice, contemporary national regimes mix elements from across varieties. Nevertheless, they remain analytically useful. Most importantly, given the breadth of the concept of citizenship, comparative literature has also factored into typologies a state's approach towards the accommodation of etnhocultural diversity and the political demands of minorities (Favell, 1998; Koopmans et al., 2005). Consequently, the models of citizenship became intertwined with and sometimes almost indistinguishable from those of migrant integration (Bertossi, 2011; Modood, 2012) or multiculturalism (Rattansi, 2011).

The most influential tradition in political science and sociology for explaining variations across models of citizenship has been a historical-institutional account highlighting the role that legacies of nation-building, together with experiences with immigration, had in shaping national citizenship models (Castles et al., 2014, pp. 66–68; Joppke, 1999; Koopmans et al., 2005). This interest followed an influential work by Brubaker (1992), in which he argued that French civic nationalism had inspired a legal tradition favouring assimilationism towards migrants and more seamless naturalisation policies, whereas the more particularistic German ethnocultural understanding of the nation had favoured more differentialist blood-based policies.

Some argue that the normative distaste for ethnic national identities in 20th century Western sociology reflected a post-war liberal cosmopolitan bias (McCrone & Kiely, 2000). This alleged liberal suspicion is in tension with the acceptance of ethnocultural diversity. Brubaker (1998, pp. 298–301) retrospectively problematised the Manichean differentiation between an inclusive 'civic' versus an exclusivist 'ethnic' nationalism in his and others' studies which, inter alia, ignored the diverse historical realities of East European nationalisms. Instead, Brubaker, acknowledged that exclusivism, rather than being intrinsic to ethnic nationalism, was a product of the character of nation-building policies and the coercion with which these were implemented by the state (Ibid., p.300). As a case in point, French republicanism, once praised for turning ethnically diverse migrants into French citizens, is regularly decried by multiculturalists for falling to accommodate cultural and religious diversity. Koopmans and colleagues (2005, pp. 7–16) offer a model of varieties of citizenship reflecting strategies for the accommodation of ethnocultural diversity. Their matrix considers two factors, namely the principle for configuring the polity (either ethnic or civic-territorial) and the conception of the national culture (either culturally monist or pluralist). It produces four conceptions of citizenship: segregationist, assimilationist, universalist and multiculturalist, the conception promoting both cultural pluralism and civic nationalism.

2.2.2. Multiculturalist principles and how multiculturalism died in European public discourse to accommodate Islamophobia

Multiculturalism is frequently at the heart of the European public debate about Muslims in Europe, yet the concept has different descriptive and normative uses. According to Bloemraad et al. (2008, p. 159), the term can describe a sociodemographic composition, and policies or programmes aimed at accommodating cultural diversity; or invoke an ideology that upholds the celebration of diversity; and, notably, a normative political theory establishing the principles for the governance of cultural diversity. Chin (2017, pp. 8–18) finds that 'multiculturalism' entered European, initially British, public discourse in the 1970s as an import from North America to describe some of the Northwest European policies towards the inclusion of post-war immigrants from the colonies and guest workers. However, she contends that the term became salient in continental Europe only after becoming a buzzword in the aftermath of the 1989 so-called Rushdie Affair. Even if marred by controversy as a category of practice, many of the policies in Europe, particularly in the Netherlands and the UK, approximated normative multiculturalist ideals. Furthermore, despite the normalisation of an anti-multiculturalist discourse (see below) and a European preference, since the 1990s, for civic integration, multiculturalist policies and programmes continued to apply across Europe, especially at the local level (Joppke, 2017; Korteweg & Triadafilopoulos, 2015; Kymlicka, 2012, pp. 16–23).

As a political theory, there are competing approaches to multiculturalism which, nonetheless, present a roughly common programme. As a minimalist definition, Crowder (2013, pp. 13–14) posits that advocates of multiculturalism are those who recognise the existence of different 'cultures' in contemporary societies, approve of this diversity, and champion the positive recognition of these 'cultures' in public policy and social institutions. Heywood (2012, pp. 313–324) goes further by identifying four core themes of convergence for multiculturalists: the defence of a politics of recognition that goes beyond liberal toleration to support the public recognition of minorities' cultural claims; an understanding of culture as rooting individuals socially and historically; a defence of minorities' group, rather than merely individual, rights; and a belief that cultural diversity does not naturally challenge political cohesion. On her part, Song (2020) emphasises how different approaches to multiculturalism ultimately pursue social justice remedies through principles drawn from liberalism (equality, freedom from domination), communitarianism (politics of recognition) or post-colonialist critique (addressing historical injustices). To achieve such ideals of justice, partly complementary and divergent propositions indeed draw most markedly from elements of liberal pluralism (Kymlicka, 1995), communitarianism (Taylor et al., 1994), cosmopolitanism (Waldron, 1992), universalist pluralism (Parekh, 2005) or nationalism (Modood, 2020).

Despite regularly drawing from liberal theories and accepting liberal democracy as a framework, many multiculturalist theories critique liberal standpoints or make efforts at reconciling the latter with multiculturalism (see Crowder, 2013). First, multiculturalists' focus on collective rights challenges a liberal universalism that posits that individuals within the polity deserve identical protections (Bloemraad et al., 2008, p. 159). Consequently, many liberal critics have emphasised how multicultural group rights conflict with equality among individuals (Barry, 2001) or foster intergroup political

conflicts (Kukathas, 2003). In post-1989 Czechia, several authors pointed to the dominance of individualistic and market-oriented forms of liberalism (M. Kopeček, 2011; Sima & Nikodym, 2015), which, in combination with contextual factors, have planted the seed for a political tendency towards cultural assimilationism (Csergő & Deegan-Krause, 2011). Second, against liberal aspirations to form culture-blind national communities around abstract ideals of justice (Kymlicka, 2017, pp. 473–475), multiculturalists argue that nation-states can never be ethnoculturally neutral (Kymlicka, 2002, pp. 16–21), and, in the EU case, nor are they religiously neutral (Parekh, 2008, pp. 20–24). Furthermore, some critical multiculturalists openly challenge the claims for neutrality and universality of liberalism as ethnocentric by exposing the historical contingencies informing the philosophy (see Parekh, 1992). Third, multiculturalism can be seen as accommodating of some groups' illiberal practices, like patriarchal discrimination against women and children (Okin, 1999). Even liberal pluralists have been divided over whether the relatively illiberal practices of cultural or religious groups should be a) tolerated (emphasising individual freedom of conscience and the right to exit one's group) or, b) restricted in order to protect the individual autonomy of their members (Crowder, 2007; Kymlicka, 1992). To solve this sort of paradox of tolerance, Kymlicka's (pro-autonomy) liberal multiculturalism advocated for limiting group rights to protect the freedom of individuals within the group (Kymlicka, 2002, pp. 27–28), something which the toleration camp still found too intrusive (Kukathas, 1992). Several feminist pro-multiculturalist responses to the challenge of patriarchy within minority groups have been offered. According to Song (2020), these have advocated against cultural essentialisation, and for acknowledging the agency and voice of those directly affected.

Besides the academic critiques that ran parallel to the development of multiculturalist theories, in Northwestern Europe, public discourse against multiculturalism has proliferated, particularly since the 2000s, and became integral to anti-migrant politics. Sporadic criticisms had been expressed in national politics, activism and media since the inception of multicultural policies in the 1970s but, by most accounts, the 1989 so-called Rushdie (UK) and Veil (France) Affairs placed Muslims in Europe under the microscope. According to Chin (2017, p. 240), critics of multiculturalism went from charging Muslim culture with being illiberal in the 1990s to, after 9/11, rejecting multiculturalism as the social blueprint for Europe - although Parekh (2008, p. 5) contended that Muslims remained the main discursive targets. According to Vertovec and Wessendorf (2010a), by the 2000s, anti-multiculturalist voices from across the political spectrum became more visible in public debate while transnationally referencing ideas and events. According to them (Ibid., pp. 6-12)., the most recurrent accusations charged multiculturalism with being a 'single doctrine' imposed by liberals and minorities; stifling debate through political correctness; fostering separateness among communities; refusing common values and identities; denying the existence of problems; supporting reprehensible practices through its cultural relativism; and providing a haven for terrorists. Many of these critics had initially come from the political fringes, but this discourse was eventually co-opted and adapted by the mainstream. In the span of some months, in 2010, the German chancellor (Angela Merkel), the British Prime Minister (David Cameron) and the French President (Nicolas Sarkozy, deceivingly acting as if multiculturalism had been official state policy) sounded the "death knell for multiculturalism" (Chin, 2017, pp. 281–286) by delivering

speeches signalling the failure of ‘multiculturalism’, a term which each of these centre-right leaders understood differently. Nevertheless, these politicians all called for migrants’ cultural assimilation and the defence of liberal values, and all three were to serve as legitimate authorities for future critics of multiculturalism.

2.3. Islamophobia: conceptual considerations

2.3.1. Brief literature overview

The literature on Islamophobia written in English has come largely from the experiences of the US and the EU, predominantly the United Kingdom. Most of the widely-cited contributions were written by political scientists and sociologists, but also anthropologists, social psychologists, and scholars of religion or area studies. In relative terms, the richest body of literature comes from British academia and the term ‘Islamophobia’ was for quite some time more prevalent in British than in other countries’ newspapers (Cesari, 2011; Kozaric, 2023). While Anglo-American academia has shaped the theoretical foundations of the discipline, the geographical scope of empirical studies has always been wider. Since the late 2010s, the contexts under analysis have exceeded the traditional ‘West’, to recurrently include Eastern Europe (Kalmar, 2018), South/East Asia (Çaksu, 2020; Nawab & Osman, 2019; Thompson et al., 2019) or Muslim-majority societies (Bayraklı & Hafez, 2018). From these ‘newer’ contexts and adopting more global perspectives, challenges to the Western-centric earlier conceptualisations are starting to emerge (Ejiofor, 2023; Frydenlund, 2023; Hafez, 2020).

Compared to the US, the theoretical literatures from the UK and European contexts present a few differences driven by contextual preoccupations. The first relates to migration. Unlike Europe, the US, which has a long and particular tradition of accommodating diverse migrants, is geographically removed from Muslim-majority countries, so that any Muslim presence is relatively much less significant (Mandelbaum, 2018). In Europe, the integration of Muslims and migration policy towards Muslim-majority countries has been hotly debated topic since the late 20th century. Furthermore, unlike in the US, the average European Muslim has a socioeconomically disadvantaged position (Cesari, 2011). This practical relevance is why the European literature is highly sensitive to national and communitarian (i.e. EU) issues of socioeconomic exclusion, the migratory experience, the accommodation of Islam, frequent Islamophobic public discourse, anti-migrant politics, European identities, or national racialisation patterns. Second, the US geopolitical interests in and power projection onto the Middle East makes the US literature significantly more likely to frame the phenomenon as part of US imperialism (Kumar, 2012, 2014; Lean & Esposito, 2017; Kundnani in Massoumi et al., 2017b, Chapter 2; Haşimi in Sayyid & Vakil, 2010, Chapter 13). Finally, while both literatures frequently engage with the concept of racism, there are subtle differences in how this is done. Unlike in continental Europe, the UK and US understandings of race are more closely connected to the concept of colour (Miles & Torres, 1996). In the US, studies of Islamophobia regularly employ the analytical concept of whiteness (Feldman, 2019), although the latter is not entirely absent from European analyses. Some have argued that, in the UK, the initial weight of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi experiences of discrimination and political

organisation contributed to shape the understanding of Islamophobia as a form of ethnic/racial discrimination targeting racialised 'Muslims' (Allen, 2010). Nevertheless, as I show below, the experiences have proved relatable for other Muslims in Western Europe. Overall, as we will see below, the trend has been for writings on British and continental Islamophobia to converge on an understanding of the phenomenon as a form of cultural racism (Meer & Modood, 2019).

2.3.2. Imperfect but resilient: origins of the term 'Islamophobia'

Bravo López (2011) traced what might be, to this date, the earliest known use of Islamophobia to two French works published in 1910 addressing France's colonial rule in West Africa. According to his analysis, these authors challenged French authorities' perceptions of Islam as antagonistic, unfairly blaming this religion for different ills that complicated colonial rule. Furthermore, although not employing the 'Islamophobia' term, Bravo López identifies a European scholarly tradition that, since the second half of the 19th century and until the present, has denounced Europeans' uncritical antagonisations and misrepresentations of Islam. Going back to the actual term, some also attributed the use of Islamophobia to Mullahs who, during the Iranian Revolution, spoke out against Muslim feminists, liberals and women who refused to wear the hijab (Allen, 2010, p. 5). However, its contemporary use is most often associated with European Muslims' late 20th century discrimination experiences.

Undoubtedly, the groundbreaking document for contemporary scholarship on Islamophobia was a 1997 report published by the British race equality think tank, the Runnymede Trust, entitled *Islamophobia: A challenge for us all* (Conway & Runnymede Trust, 1997). This publication followed the commission of a consultation paper the year before, for which Runnymede had formed the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia (CBMI). The final report incorporated comments and recommendations from, among others, government officials, young Muslims, Muslim organisations and community leaders. Allen (2010, pp. 52–54) stressed that the CBMI adopted the framework of interfaith dialogue, and favoured mainstream voices of particular faith groups at the expense of anti-racist or dissenting religious positions.

The CBMI stuck to the term 'Islamophobia', which, allegedly, British Muslim communities had employed since the 1980s. Representativeness came at the expense of the term's imperfections, mainly its etymological implications (i.e. that the religion of Islam could be interpreted as the sole or main target of discrimination, and that the stem 'phobia' evoked only fear or a psychiatric pathology). Despite the nominal adoption, throughout the report, 'Islamophobia' is interchangeably used with 'anti-Muslim prejudice'. The report recognises that "there [was] a new reality which need[ed] naming" (1997, p. 4) and 'Islamophobia' seemed a very fitting choice.

The report's definition was the following:

> Islamophobia refers to unfounded hostility towards Islam […] also to the practical consequences of such hostility in unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities, and to the exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social affairs (1997, p. 4).

The definition captures three different phenomena: unfounded hostility, its practical consequences and the resulting situation of exclusion. In other words, prejudice, discrimination and exclusion, respectively. In this first report (although follow-up documents were published), special efforts are dedicated to clarifying the first aspect, that is, what distinguishes “legitimate criticism and disagreement” from “unfounded prejudice and hostility”. For this purpose, the CBMI relied on a distinction between ‘closed’ and ‘open’ views of Islam, succinctly defined as those reflecting “phobic dread of Islam” or “appreciation and respect”, respectively (Ibid., p. 4). These differing views were structured along eight dichotomies,[9] which were widely criticised by academics and civil society, and are only half-heartedly cited as vague theoretical reference points in more recent publications. These views controversially reduced Islam to what the open views normatively prescribed: cooperative, interacting, sincere and so on. Echoing what Shryock (2010, p. 9) described as the trap of Islamophilia, by challenging the “essentialising and universalizing quality” of Islamophobia, the report offered an image that presented all Muslims as ‘our friends’. Some argued that this essentialisation of Islam reflected the voices of the ’mainstream’ actors consulted, leaving many Muslims outside of this ‘Islam’ and, thus, the analytical framework of Islamophobia (Allen, 2010, pp. 74–80).

Despite its flaws, the basic tenets of the pioneering document are still accepted by many academics and practitioners. Furthermore, the report pre-emptively addressed two common criticisms that would be levelled against the concept. First, it contested the criticism that the term might be used as a weapon of political correctness which stifled criticisms of Islam or Muslims by introducing the closed and open views dichotomy. Second, it was clarified that the stem ‘-phobia’ was not to be interpreted as a pathology. The Runnymede report equalled ‘-phobia’ to dread, hatred, fear or dislike when displayed within the frame of closed views, while allowing for dissension within the frame of open views (1997, p. 4).

After two decades processing different criticisms (see Allen, 2010, pp. 51–120), the Runnymede Trust refined its definition in its 20th anniversary report. In contrast to the previous focus on prejudice, this second definition concentrates on discrimination and exclusion. Basing it on the United Nations definition of racism, Runnymede’s members Farah Elahi and Omar Khan propose:

> Islamophobia is any distinction, exclusion, or restriction towards, or preference against, Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslims) that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life. (Runnymede Trust, 2017, p. 7)

[9] 1) Islam seen as monolithic or diverse, 2) Islam seen as separate or interacting, 3) Islam seen as inferior or different, 4) Islam seen as enemy or partner, 5) Islam seen as manipulative or sincere, 6) Criticisms of ‘the West’ made by Islam considered or rejected, 7) Discriminatory behaviour against Muslims defended or opposed, 8) Anti-Muslim discourse seen as natural or problematic (Conway & Runnymede Trust, 1997, pp. 4–5).

This shift reveals the influence exerted by race scholarship in pushing for a conceptualisation that sees Islamophobia as "anti-Muslim racism" (Ibid.) This means that, akin to anti-Semitism, Muslims as the victims of Islamophobia are conceived by many of the dominant writings as an ethno-religious group (Meer & Modood, 2012).

The 2017 report also self-consciously shifted from the previous controversial emphasis on 'Islam' to 'Muslims'. As a consequence, and ignoring previous criticisms (for instance, Carr, 2016, p. 35), this new definition continues to assert that Islamophobia happens to Muslims and those perceived to be Muslims regardless of whether discriminatory actions target their actual or perceived Muslimness. The report openly acknowledges that over half of the British Muslim population is of Bangladeshi and Pakistani descent and, historically, these national categories have acted as proxies for 'Muslims'. Consequently, it asserts that because of 'anti-Muslim racism', "Muslims experience disadvantage and discrimination" such as "many Black and minority ethnic groups" do (Runnymede Trust, 2017, p. 9). That, is, 'Muslims' are analytically ethnicised as a protected group such as but distinct from 'Black groups'. This understanding, somehow a product of the British Race Relations framework, is aimed at guiding institutions and policies to redress a particular social situation in the British context. Therefore, and despite its seemingly universal ambition, analytically, this definition is far from exhaustive. On the one hand, British Muslims, many of whom are not ethnicised as Bangladeshis or Pakistanis, also experience acts of discrimination on grounds that are independent of their Muslimness (like gender, class, race). On the other, the definition's assimilation of 'Muslims' who experience their religiosity diversely and blindness to understandings of Muslimness obfuscates the fact that symbols of perceived Muslim religiosity attract greater street-level hate crime (Allen, 2020, Chapters 5–7; Tell MAMA, 2023, p. 75) and that there are stereotypes about Islam driving differential forms of discrimination (c.f. Alexander, 2017).

Despite its resilience, the term 'Islamophobia' has recurrently been challenged (Richardson, 2013; Rosón, 2010). Alternatives, whose backing arguments will be considered in the sub-sections below, include anti-Muslimism (Halliday, 1999, p. 898), anti-Islamic discourses (Zúquete, 2008, p. 323) or Muslimophobia (Cheng, 2015). Lexicological critiques generally take issue with either the word's root ('Islam'), the stem ('-phobia') or both, criticising the term's inadequacy to capture the relevant social phenomenon. Consequently, the following two sections will clarify what each of these units stand for in my conceptualisation.

My exploration of the literature leads me to conclude that not only is every term imperfect but also that each discipline or project adapts their definitions and conceptualisations to their needs and limits. My adoption of the term partly responds to political reasons (see 2.3.3.). As Vakil (2010, pp. 23–24) argues, the historical importance of the term Islamophobia lies not in *what* it names but *that* it names, thus providing a tool for contestation and setting "the political vocabulary and legal ground of recognition and redress". 'Islamophobia' comes from a community of practice who has employed this term to articulate historically situated demands against and challenges to the (in this case, European) discrimination of Muslims. This community includes many across the social sciences, notably critical scholars, who conceptualise 'Islamophobia' for rigorous academic analyses. However, convergence around the

term does neither mean uniformity across conceptualisations nor perfect consensus around the term's demands (see Allen, 2010, Part 3). Currently, the term 'Islamophobia' enjoys a rich scholarly tradition, with theoretically sophisticated and functional conceptualisations; boasting institutional, intellectual and societal recognition; and, most importantly, serving as a powerful, unifying and relatively consensually accepted device for Muslim and anti-racist civil society to challenge discrimination. As a non-Muslim Spaniard without a deep involvement in anti-Islamophobia movements, I assess that proposing an alternative term would cause more harm than good. Nevertheless, as an academic, I do not feel the need to find an alternative term for my case study since there are perfectly valid and fitting theoretical solutions for a conceptualisation addressing the points raised by lexicological critiques. Thus, for lack of a better term (Allen, 2010, p. 138; Green, 2015, p. 32), and honouring its emic (albeit context-specific) origin and historical scholarly and political legacy, the term 'Islamophobia' seems most appropriate as a category of analysis.

Finally, throughout the thesis, the terms anti-Muslim, Islamophobic and anti-Islam will coexist. As an ideology based on a series of essentialisations, differentiations and so on (see 2.3.3., 2.4, 7.1.), Islamophobia can inform attitudes towards 'Muslims' and, indeed, this is a very significant phenomenon in this case study (see 2.6.). Hence, I refer to *Islamophobic* behaviours, prejudice or rhetoric when these have been clearly shaped by the ideology. However, inferring that Islamophobia mostly or exclusively explains all negative attitudes towards 'Muslims' might not only be inaccurate but counterproductively inflate the concept. Therefore, across the dissertation, I regularly refer to *anti-Muslim* attitudes, policies or votes when the influence of the ideology remains unclear. This cautious qualification is particularly relevant for public opinion data, with surveys rarely demonstrating whether different participants marked an answer influenced by Islamophobia. Although, under certain conditions, we could suspect that an uptick in anti-Muslim attitudes is plausibly driven by Islamophobia. Hopefully, any possible inconsistencies in my use of the terminology are outweighed by the theoretical relevance of this point. Finally, I will refer to *anti-Islam* groups or protests when the declared central (Islamophobic) aim of these is opposing Islam.

2.3.3. What is the '-phobia' in Islamophobia?

Before addressing the target(s) of Islamophobia in the next section, I clarify my understanding of what the concept describes. Characterising Islamophobia as a 'contested term' is a cliché in the literature. Yet, I do not find this dispute problematic if we philosophically accept that conceptualisations tend to be self-serving, despite their claims to describe actual phenomena. The coexistence of various conceptualisations is a legitimate consequence of the study of a complex multidimensional reality which has become relevant to various disciplines and research agendas with their own interests, goals, normativity, or constraints derived from epistemologies, methods or scope (see also Klug, 2012). Most markedly, as I argue below, conceptualisations bend to the ontic dimension of the phenomenon which is of disciplinary interest and the nature of the goals (for instance, sociopolitical, of intradisciplinary concern) that the research pursues.

First, there is the matter of dimension. Sociopsychological approaches are frequently interested in Islamophobia as an intrapsychic phenomenon, which can be measured through the discipline's preferred methods as attitudes, emotions or beliefs (Bleich, 2011; Helbling, 2012), including through comprehensive Islamophobia scales (Imhoff & Recker, 2012; Lee et al., 2013). Discourse analysts might opt for framing Islamophobia as an ideology that informs discourse (Cheng, 2015; Mondon & Winter, 2017), while many sociological and political works interested in the effects of Islamophobia on its targets might include forms of discriminatory practices into their conceptualisations (Abbas, 2018; Choudhury & Open Society Institute, 2010; Kaya, 2015). These dimensions might be hierarchised, so that, for instance, ideology (Allen, 2020) or intrapsychic phenomena (Saeed, 2018) are antecedents informing discriminatory practices.

Second, the goals of each project or programme inform conceptualisations. As Sayyid (2014, pp. 11–12) points out, disagreements about what Islamophobia actually names do not only have a philosophical/theoretical source, but also a political one. In other words, conceptualisations also influence the extent to which they seek to remedy a social and political problem, and the chosen strategies for doing so. Documents addressing state institutions, calling on protecting the rights and freedoms of Muslim citizens, will probably centre on discriminatory practices and/or exclusion (at the expense of 'attitudes' or 'ideology'), using broad definitions that can raise public awareness (Conway & Runnymede Trust, 1997; Ingham-Barrow, 2018). Conceptualising Islamophobia as racism, for instance, serves to politically prioritise urgently and comprehensively tackling the actual phenomenon (APPG on British Muslims, 2018). In the UK, some consider that Islamophobia targets a population which, echoing a race relations paradigm, has been historically racialised as 'Muslim' (Meer & Modood, 2019), whereas others believe that for behaviours to be Islamophobic, they need to specifically target the 'Muslimness' of their Muslim victims (Allen, 2020). In short, conceptualisations accommodate the particularities of academic disciplines and research agendas. These are reflected in the dimensions of interest (for example. intrapsychic, discourse or world-systems dynamics) and the nature of the goals of the study (for example, reverting policies or understanding the cognitive processes underlying prejudice formation).

As this dissertation is ultimately concerned with the drivers behind the circulation of social representations in elite discourse and their effects on citizens' bias, I hereby adopt a conceptualisation of Islamophobia as a racist ideology that informs and is informed by both intrapsychic phenomena (such as prejudice) and practices (such as discourse). I will further elaborate on the conceptualisation of ideology in the following chapter, whereas the next sub-section illustrates how Islamophobia works as a form of cultural racism.

Before concluding this sub-section, I would like to make a few remarks about the emotional dimension implicit in the phobic stem. First, although, since the early days it was clear that '-phobia' did not describe a psychiatric condition (Conway & Runnymede Trust, 1997, p. 4; Richardson, 2013), following its Greek etymology, many definitions have included 'fear' or 'anxiety' (resulting from the anticipation of threat or danger). Social psychologists have favoured measuring fear-related emotions. Lee

and colleagues (2009, 2013) theoretically differentiate affective-behavioural measures related to individuals' intended avoidance of or expected discomfort near Muslims (for instance, 'I would avoid contact with Muslims'), from a cognitive sub-set of perceptions of Muslims as a threat (such as 'Islam is a religion of hate'). Many other sociopsychological studies have relied on threat perceptions (for a review, see Verkuyten, 2021), while mentions of 'threat' or 'moral panic' also permeate the literature.

However, 'fear' is only half of the story, as many definitions also include 'hatred', 'animosity' or 'hostility'. Allen (2020, pp. 119–120) dismisses fear-based definitions since they risk expiating the perpetrators of Islamophobic acts as passively 'fearful'. Instead, he favours definitions placing hatred at the forefront, which better captures victims' subjectivities and experiences. From a functionalist perspective, Fischer et al. (2018) propose that intergroup hate is a self-defence mechanism in reaction to an outgroup that has been constructed as threatening our social identity. Consequently, spreading this hate serves to strengthen ties with our ingroup in search of a collective defence against outside threat. In this light, threat perception, together with processes of social categorisation and identification, is presented as an antecedent to and enabler of hate-based emotions. Therefore, against critiques of the stem '-phobia' as pathologising (Reisigl & Wodak, 2005, pp. 5–6; Richardson, 2013), I adhere to a conceptualisation of Islamophobia as an ideology whose goals are strategically stigmatised by this stem and that informs phenomena (like Islamophobic behaviours, prejudice or rhetoric) rather than essentialising individuals as 'Islamophobes'. Furthermore, contrary to a literalist interpretation of the stem, my conceptualisation, partly grounded in sociopsychological theory (see 2.1.1.a), acknowledges a breadth of emotions beyond fear or anxiety which contribute to justify unequal power relations.

2.3.4. What is the 'Islam-' in Islamophobia?

One of the thorniest debates in the literature concerns the extent to which Islamophobia targets Muslims or Islam, and whether both realities could and should be captured by the same concept. As the literature moved away from the study of attacks on Islam to adopt the frames of race studies, understandings of Islamophobia as a form of racism targeting racialised 'Muslims' became dominant (Hafez, 2018). However, the most difficult question for the Islamophobia-as-racism school remained whether there are non-racist forms of Islamophobia, particularly those allegedly targeting Islam rather than Muslims. In this sub-section, I consider separately claims for the study of Islamophobia as, mainly, a form of cultural racism; then, after presenting what I believe are theoretical sources of miscommunication, I problematise some of the demands for giving centrality to non-racist religious bigotry in the study of Islamophobia. Finally, I will provide a few guidelines from the literature on how to identify non-Islamophobic criticisms of Islam and Muslims.

It is a truism that actual Muslims are targeted and affected by Islamophobia, although less self-evident are the questions of the identity of actual or imagined Muslims targeted by Islamophobia(s) and whether Islamophobia is a form of racism. Ideationally, Islamophobia requires stereotypes of a 'Muslim' social group to exist, even if through proxy social categories. The characteristics (for example, ethnoracial

or sociodemographic) of the mental representations of ‘Muslims’ in Islamophobia(s) differ from context to context (Gómez del Tronco, 2023). Thus, when expressing a claim against ‘Muslims’ (like ‘I never want to have Muslim neighbours’), a hypothetical Iranian Armenian in Muslim-majority Isfahan, an Eritrean Christian in Christian-majority Asmara or an ethnic Czech living in an ethnically homogenous region might hold distinct (and common) beliefs about who these ‘Muslims’ are and why they are undesirable neighbours. From an EU perspective, national legacies and prospects of immigration, and the geopolitical relevance of the Middle East inform mental representations of ‘Muslims’. Global Muslim identities have favoured the targeting of Muslims as ‘Muslims’ (see sub-section below), however, within the EU, one can find local traditions of racialisation and Islamophobic discourse against ‘Moors’, ‘Turks’, Pakistanis and so on. So, while actual Muslims and transnational Muslim identities exist, local Islamophobias present their own concerns. After all, the realities of Uyghur or Thai Muslims are not too informative for EU Islamophobias, while stereotypes of Arabs (about a fifth of the world’s Muslims) tend to saturate representations. As a result, there are dominant understandings about the somatic traits of those racialised as ‘Muslims’ which tend to exclude groups of Muslims who are historically racialised differently (like Black Muslim Americans, see Husain, 2021). Thus, across most of Europe, a hypothetical Muslim Nigerian who does not look conspicuously Muslim is more likely to be racialised as ‘African’ or ‘Black’ than ‘Muslim’; and if facing discrimination, the meanings associated with the former categories might be the ones cognitively activated. On the other hand, the racialisation of a target as ‘Muslim’ does not need to rely on somatic characteristics but can be guided through other ‘markers of Muslimness’ such as clothing, Islamic names, having an accent or speaking Arabic (Allen, 2020; Allen & Nielsen, 2002; Kozaric, 2023; Zempi & Awan, 2016). As a result, white European converts are also often racialised as ‘Muslim’ and discriminated against on Islamophobic grounds (Moosavi, 2015).

Considering what I have just described, many conceptualise Islamophobia as or very similar to racism. For that, Muslims need to have been racialised into something analytically akin to a race through a historical process (see sub-section below). British authors recurrently draw on the Marxist theorisation of racism by Robert Miles and collaborators to explain why somatic characteristics are a convenient but non-essential basis for racialising a group and rely on their conceptualisation of racism as an ideology based on historical processes of signification (Miles, 1987; Miles & Brown, 2003; Miles & Torres, 1996). However, Miles and Brown (2003, pp. 163–168) did not categorise Islamophobia as racism but as interacting with the latter only in so far as Islamophobia drew from Orientalising meanings attributed to ‘Muslims’. Building on Miles’ work, some argue that, already in the Middle Ages, European Christians picked on religious difference to racialise Muslims as a naturally occurring and self-reproducing group (Meer, 2013), with some considering biological racism a historical anomaly of modern Europe (Garner & Selod, 2015). More recently, the religious difference of Jews, in the context of modern European anti-Semitism, or Bosniaks, in the context of the 1992-1995 War, became essentialised as biological (Meer & Modood, 2012, pp. 38–39). Furthermore, as argued in the previous paragraph, there are somatic markers that are used to identify ‘Muslims’ regardless of the targets’ religiosity (for instance, those born into a ‘Muslim’ household) or, even, confession

(like those ‘appearing’ ‘Muslim’) (Meer & Modood, 2010). Consequently, the racialised ‘Muslim’ group self-reproduces biologically.

Given the ethnoracial diversity across Muslims, the complex dynamics of racialisation of ‘Muslims’ and the fact that religious confession can be, to a certain extent, hidden or chosen, most authors have favoured treating Islamophobia as cultural racism (Balibar, 2007; Barker, 1981; Taguieff, 1990). Theories of cultural racism acknowledge that, while cultural or religious attributes can be enough for racialisation, these are usually interrelated with biological markers. For Modood (2018, p. 3):

> While biological racism is the antipathy, exclusion and unequal treatment of people on the basis of their physical appearance or other imputed physical differences, saliently in Britain their non 'whiteness', cultural racism builds on biological racism a further discourse which evokes cultural differences from an alleged British, 'civilised' norm to vilify, marginalise or demand cultural assimilation from groups who may also suffer from biological racism.

This double-‘suffering’ means that culturalised social categories are often imbued with somatic attributes and vice versa. For instance, Moosavi (2015) finds that White British converts to Islam are seen by non-Muslim White Brits as having lost Whiteness or face slurs that ethnicise them as, locally relevant, Pakistanis or Arabs. As Miles and Brown (2003) note, racism is dialectical in its requirement of an oppositional identity to that of the racialised group. In the case of European Islamophobia, ‘Muslims’ are defined against the attributes of the ‘Christian’, ‘White’, ‘European’, ‘Native’ and/or ‘Western’. Furthermore, as Taras (2013, p. 422) writes, anti-immigration, anti-minority and anti-terrorist narratives are built into the racialisation of ‘Muslims’.

Sealy (2021) complained that the broad, yet incomplete (see Allen, 2020, Chapter 3), consensus in British academia around treating Islamophobia as cultural racism against racialised ‘Muslims’ leaves certain forms of intolerance towards Islam unattended. I believe that Sealey’s legitimate protestation corresponds to two sources of miscommunication within the literature. First, Islamophobia scholars tend naturally to shift between the ideational and the actual aspects of the phenomenon, potentially leading to confusion. Through abstraction, we can imagine decontextualised and deracialised negative blanket views on Islam. This exercise is contentious, on the one hand, because social cognitions of ‘Islam’ are likely to be inextricably linked to those of ‘Muslims’. On the other, because once ideas are put into practice, they are most likely to target actual Muslims, whose “[physical bodies] are the ultimate site of racism” (Garner & Selod, 2015, p. 12). As Klug (2012, p. 676) writes, “[t]he swords of the crusaders in Jerusalem and of the Christian armies in Al-Andalus were wielded against Saracens and Moors, not an abstract idea”. Furthermore, authors theorising Islamophobia as racism are more concerned with addressing an actual historical sociopolitical problem than about the abstract extension of the concept. While it is possible to find expressions strictly against Islam, these are minoritarian (Bravo López, 2017) and, consequently, not the main concern for social research. After all, empirical studies confirm that victims of Islamophobic discrimination in the West largely understand their experiences as motivated by racism (Kozaric, 2023). The second

source of miscommunication is that those who argue that religious bigotry should or is not captured by a conception of Islamophobia as racism tend to employ conceptualisations of race, religion or secularism which theorists of the other camp might find problematic.

Some writers have proposed arguments for treating anti-Islam views and anti-Muslim racism as separable phenomena. Halliday (1999) famously opposed understanding Islamophobia as targeting Islam on the grounds that the religion is lived in diverse ways across the world and, thus, the concept would risk universalising 'Islam' as a monolith. However, here, he was conflating Islam, as a category of analysis (i.e. as understood by social researchers), and 'Islam' as a category of practice (i.e. as understood by Islamophobes) (see Brubaker, 2002), with the latter being most relevant to Islamophobia scholars. Others proposed two concepts for differentiating anti-Muslim racism from a religious intolerance that essentialises Islam, while not taking issue with Muslims or, at least, those willing to abandon their religion (Bravo López, 2017; Cheng, 2015; Lauwers, 2019). However, these differentiations tend to analytically treat 'Islam', as targeted in the vernacular, as an ahistorical entity disconnected from its actual practitioners, something which, materially speaking, seems impossible (Miles & Brown, 2003, p. 166). Furthermore, most of these analyses concluded that discursive references to 'Islam' usually serve as a façade for racism. Alexander (2017, pp. 13–15) warns of the disingenuity of de-racing Islamophobia as a form of prejudice against Islamic 'culture' or 'religion' rather than a racialised 'Muslim' group. She argues that avoiding recognising the racial dimension of Islamophobia serves to promote a narrow conception of racism that strictly considers biology; denies that 'Muslim' acts as an ethnic category; establishes 'Muslim' as a category of contingent and voluntary ascription; and (as Halliday argued) further essentialises a homogeneous Islamic 'culture' or 'religion'. Similarly, attempts at disambiguating Islamophobia from legitimate secular critique of Islam (Imhoff & Recker, 2012) have essentialised Islam through problematic attributions to the religion while ignoring that Western understandings of secularism are culturally and historically contingent (Mahmood, 2009).

Far from stifling debate, adopting the term Islamophobia leaves room for acknowledging legitimate criticisms of Muslims and Islam. The more sceptical anti-foundational view, which is perhaps the most accurate, posits that an "Islamophobic act is one behind which there is Islamophobic intent", which cannot be easily ascertained but interpreted within its context (Sayyid, 2014, p. 20). Although systematically criticised, I still believe that the original Runnymede report's (Conway & Runnymede Trust, 1997) closed views serve as a useful tool for intuitively problematising assimilations of Islam as an inferior static monolith, essentially different from and inimical to 'us'. For discourses portraying Islam in such light, Zúquete (2008, pp. 323–324) proposed the term anti-Islamic so as not to irrationalise Western discussions on Islam as phobic. Perhaps the most clarifying test is put forward by Modood (2018, p. 5) in the form of five questions against which claims about Muslims and Islam should be examined:

1. Does it stereotype Muslims by assuming they all think the same?

2. Is it about Muslims or a dialogue with Muslims, which they would wish to join in?
3. Is mutual learning possible?
4. Is the language civil and contextually appropriate?
5. [Is it] insincere criticism for ulterior motives?

In short, an understanding of Islamophobia as cultural racism acknowledges that: Islamophobia is premised on the existence of a discretely racialised 'Muslim' group; somatic and cultural elements inform this racialisation; religion can be raced and, thus, biologised; attacks on Islam mostly and ultimately target Muslims. To be clear, I believe that for practices to reflect an Islamophobic ideology, they need to target the actual or perceived 'Muslimness' of their victims (Allen, 2020; Carr, 2016), which might be subject to context. Thus, British Pakistanis are more likely to be discriminated on Islamophobic grounds at home than while on holidays in Spain, where they might be racialised differently and become discriminated against on grounds unrelated to their Muslimness. Things might be more difficult when ascertaining the extent to which policies provoking the socioeconomic exclusion of certain Muslim-majority groups in Europe reflect an Islamophobic ideology or are rooted elsewhere. As chapters 7 and 8 illustrate, in the Czech 2015 context, anti-refugee policy did present a marked Islamophobic rationale.

2.3.5. Contemporary and (a)historical roots of West European Islamophobia

It is important to consider contemporary Islamophobia in its context, even if informed by the past. The literature often cautions against assuming a Western-centric history of a 'Western' or 'Christian' interaction with 'Islam' that essentialises both as perennially antagonistic (Halliday, 1999; Meer, 2014). This is the main ahistorical premise under which the 'clash of civilisations' or 'eternal crusade' frameworks are sustained (Qureshi & Sells, 2003). In contrast, accounts that acknowledge the complexity of interactions across contexts and actors are often favoured in Islamophobia studies (Tolan et al., 2013). However – although this is not a highly contentious cleavage in the literature – scholars present a diversity of opinions about the extent to which Islamophobia, in the history of ideas, presents a coherent development or whether it is rather marked by discontinuities. For instance, Mastnak (2003, 2010) finds that the fight against the Turk became central to the intellectual construction of the idea of 'Europe' from the late Middle Ages, with this Islamophobic bias reverberating into the idea of a European polity, in the form of the EU. On the other hand, Kumar (2012) highlights that Western elites, at different historical junctures, (re-)articulated versions of Islamophobia to serve context-specific historical projects.

Without losing sight of the historical legacies of Western Islamophobia (for example, how contents are repurposed or continuity in its geopolitical drivers), I believe that discontinuities remain far more informative. First, excessive historicism tends to give rise to essentialisations. This observation lies behind Halliday's (1999) repudiation of the term 'Islamophobia' on the grounds that it inaccurately places an essentialised 'Islam', instead of contingent factors such as politics, as the perennial target. The nature of and accusations against the imagined social actors in Islamophobia(s) have

changed across contexts. The 'Moriscos', 'Sarracens', 'Mohammedans', 'Ottoman Turks' or 'Muslims in Europe' have been targeted on different grounds (such as race, morals, heresy, perceived political goals or illiberalism). Furthermore, beyond Western Europe, other nations have participated in Islamophobic projects, not exclusively borrowing from the West, sometimes intermittently, and with other 'Muslims' in mind. Second, historicism tends to focus on the hegemony of the Islamophobic project while downplaying more nuanced and neutral/positive forms of interaction. From Christians living under Muslim rule in medieval Spain (O'Brien & Zgourides, 2018), to modern European writings (Green, 2015, Chapters 2 & 3) or ambivalent Orientalists (Lemmen, 2013), there were innumerable examples of Christian admiration, respect, alliance and identification vis-à-vis Muslim peoples. Casting Islamophobia as the default mode of engagement with Muslims and the Islamicate by an assimilated 'West' might serve analytical frameworks but remains historically inaccurate or partial. In short, much like great ideologies, Islamophobia(s) are highly context-dependent, articulated in particular contexts and at particular levels, even if finding points of confluence and translation across time and place (see Iqbal, 2019).

Since the late 20th century, three domains became successively important to contemporary European Islamophobic discourse, namely geopolitics, culture and security. My categorisation mirrors to a great extent the insightful framework proposed by Hesová (2018). According to her, a Western Orientalist discourse warning against a Muslim 'civilisation' (since the 1979 Iranian Revolution), morphed into one of incompatibility with a Muslim 'culture' (after 9/11), and, eventually, a discourse against Islam as a political 'ideology' (concerned with the backlash from Islamic fundamentalists in the wake of the 2010s Arab Springs). Green (2015, Chapters 3–5) puts forward a similar classification. While these authors propose a chronological thematic divide, given the thematic pollination across phases and (dis)continuities, I find it more analytically useful to think of them as domains.

The contested geopolitics of Muslim-majority regions of importance to Western interest (i.e. the Levant, Arabian Peninsula, Iran or Afghanistan) during the last decades of the Cold War informed an increase in Islamophobic discourse. Western Islamophobia at the time echoed previous Orientalist discourses (such as attributions of backwardness, fanaticism, irrationality or anger) but took issue with 'Islam' largely because of new Muslim subjectivities. During the 20th century, Arab anti-Imperialist resistance, particularly in the Levant, was notably formulated by Arab nationalists and Islamists (Gerges, 2018). The Arab defeat by Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War is often identified as a turning point at which disappointment with (pan-)Arab nationalism paved the way for the resurgence of Islamism, transnational Islamic identities and, facilitated by the processes of globalisation, the actors promoting programmes of global Islam (Green, 2020; Green, 2015, Chapter 4; Gürel, 2017; Rock-Singer, 2021). Against this backdrop, events like the OPEC oil embargo on the US in 1973 or the 1979 hostage crisis at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran fuelled a discourse in the West about "Muslims" being hostile towards "us Westerners". At the other end, according to Parekh (2008), from a sense of humiliation resulting from Western (neo)colonialism and (neo)Imperialism, Muslims across the world became emboldened by the Iranian Revolution's power to topple a Western-supported regime or the Western dependence

on Arab oil, and found common causes in supporting Palestinians or redressing the humiliating scramble to dismantle the Ottoman Empire by European powers. The most famous Western narrative addressing geopolitical grievances and anxieties was Samuel Huntington's *Clash of civilisations*, which would later inform the 'War on Terror' frames (Kumar, 2012). In the 1990s, despite its culturalist façade, much Islamophobic discourse did not explicitly take issue with the religion of Islam but rather with the politics and attitudes of Muslim-majority states towards 'the West', even those of more secular Arab nationalists (Green, 2015, p. 92; Halliday, 1999).

As identified by Hesová (2018), culture is a domain that mainly informed suspicion and rejection of Muslims migrants in the wake of early 2000s jihadist attacks on 'Western' soil (i.e. 9/11, and the Madrid 2004 and London 2005 bombings); although it was a continuity of the anti-multiculturalist discourse of the 1990s and, in many respects, echoed racist discourses against colonial migrants and guest-workers in the post-war years (Gatrell, 2019). Muslim 'culture' was cast as threatening liberal 'European' values like secularism, gender equality or freedom of expression, as well as visually imposing itself in the public space. Furthermore, the War on Terror narratives promoted a vision of Islam as violent, antidemocratic and misogynistic (Green, 2015, Chapter 4). The popular Eurabia conspiracy theory postulated that, slowly, Muslim migrants in Europe would progressively displace 'its' culture and tyrannise 'its' peoples (Carr, 2006). European Islamophobic culturalism needs to be understood as targeting a newly emerged social actor. In light of the new Muslim subjectivities mentioned above, by the 1980s, Muslims in Europe also began self-identifying and being identified as 'Muslims', rather than through ethnic or racial affiliations (Allen, 2010, Chapters 1, 3; Bobako, 2015; Parekh, 2008). Overall, second-generation migrants from different ethnicities started to politicise themselves within their nation-states as 'Muslims' while feeling a weaker attachment to the more distant ethnonational identities of their parents. Also in the 1980s, Muslim parents, for instance, in the UK, began fighting for the introduction of halal options or Islamic education in schools (Lewis, 1993). Importantly, events like the 1989 so-called Rushdie or Veil Affairs, or the 2005 Jyllands-Posten Muhammad cartoons controversy, often perceived as yet another humiliation from the West (Parekh, 2008), pushed many Muslims to organise collective demands as 'Muslims' alongside Muslims from across the globe. Additionally, in the absence of local competitors, foreign actors promoting global Islamic programmes found a fertile soil in Europe (Green, 2020, Chapter 4). By the 1990s, the West European far right began clearly turning against Islam (Kallis, 2018) and, by the 2008 economic 'crisis', with the rise of right-wing populists (Funke & Trebesch, 2017), the far right coordinated internationally to place Islamophobia at the core of their programmes (Betz, 2013; Hafez, 2014).

Finally, Islamophobic concerns around security responded to the rise of jihadism since the 1990s which, inter alia, had resulted in groups like al-Qaeda establishing cells in Europe (Klausen, 2021). In this domain, most Muslims are charged as potential fundamentalists, extremists or jihadists. Particularly since 9/11, Islam had already been highly securitised in Europe, subjecting Muslims to profiling, surveillance, attribution of collective responsibility for the actions of terrorists, and state efforts at domesticating worrying Islamic and Muslim practices (Fekete, 2009, Chapter 2;

Renton, 2018). By 2014, these dynamics became exacerbated by the rise of IS and similar militarised jihadist groups, jihadist terrorist attacks targeting civilians on European territory and fears about terrorists infiltrating among the refugees entering Europe. For the European public, as already advanced, fear of terrorism fostered anti-Muslim attitudes (Das et al., 2009; Savelkoul et al., 2022) but previously held anti-Muslim attitudes also favoured fear of terrorism (Andersen & Mayerl, 2018).

In the V4 countries, 'Muslims' were not a very much contemporarily politicised category until the European 'refugee crisis' of 2014+, as attested by a surge in Islamophobia literature on the region only following this event. By 1989, apart from Poland, where Tatar Muslims were largely considered part of the nation (Narkowicz & Pędziwiatr, 2017), Muslim communities did not have a relevant presence. Although contemporary Islamophobia largely penetrated the region after 9/11 by borrowing from foreign ideologues and perceived experiences from abroad, it was coherent with previous national legacies of racist, Orientalist and anti-Ottoman/Arab discourses. Some, like Kalmar (2018, 2019) argue that the contents of East European Islamophobias do not significantly differ from those of its Western counterpart. However, others find that East European Islamophobias function to either resist West European hegemony or to inscribe Eastern Europe into the hegemonic West to oppose 'Muslims'. From the first perspective, looking at (substantially Islamophobic) 'nationalist populist' discourses, Brubaker (2017) contrasts the civilisationist discourse of Northwest European actors – which upholds Christian identitarianism, secularism and liberalism – with the Polish and Hungarian nationalist versions – which are hostile towards the 'Western-imposed' liberalism and concerned with the security threat from an 'invasion' of Muslims through the historical 'gates of Christendom'. Likewise, Barša and colleagues (2021, pp. 19–20) see the rise of East European Islamophobia as part of a particularistic ethnonationalist challenge to the EU's temporary imposition of liberal universalism from 1989 until the 2010s. In this light, V4 Islamophobia(s) responded to the perceived crumbling of Western civilisation and threats to ethnocultural homogeneity in the region. Conversely, through a post-colonialist lens, some see the adoption of Islamophobia in this European semi-periphery as a declaration, through the exclusion of the anti-'Western' Other, of belonging to the European and White core (Sayyid, 2018). Both perspectives, rather than being irreconcilable, respond respectively to different perspectives, Eurocentric or global. Elements from both accounts seem fitting to different discourses in the region. However, the main conclusion is that compared to Western Islamophobias, the actor 'Western Europe' is of high relevance to V4 Islamophobias.

2.3.6. A Brief note on political ideology and Islamophobia

Finally, it should be noted that Islamophobia appears across political ideologies, albeit with varying inflections, agendas and intensities. For instance, in the early 20th century, Islamophobia was espoused by both racists and those nominally opposing biological racism (Bravo López, 2011, p. 569) and, a century later, some Neo-Nazi groups found allies for their anti-Semitic causes in Islamist organisations (Mareš, 2014). In 2010s Europe, Islamophobia was far from exclusively the domain of the far right (Ansari & Hafez, 2012; Kallis, 2015b), being articulated, inter alia, by conservatives, Christian

democrats or liberals (Fekete, 2009, Chapter 3) and, to a lesser extent, by actors on the left (Massoumi et al., 2017a; Peace, 2019). To be clear, none of these grand ideologies is inherently Islamophobic, with arguments for accommodating Muslims into European societies available even in traditions of conservatism (Beckstein & Rampton, 2018). However, although the politization of migration by the European far right drives the attention of mainstream parties to the issue, it seems that the mainstream right is not more likely to adopt the anti-migrant positions of the far right as a result (Gessler & Hunger, 2022; van Spanje, 2010).

Several authors find that, in mainstream European politics, Islamophobia has often been accommodated through appeals to liberalism. Indeed, strands of European liberalism have articulated anxieties about Muslim integration (Parekh, 2008) and the sociopsychological relationship between liberal views and attitudes towards Muslims is a complex one (Verkuyten, 2021, pp. 123–124). Critical Islamophobia scholarship has particularly taken issue with liberal hegemony by denouncing the ideological contradictions in some of its actors' discourses on Muslims and Islam (Choudhury, 2015; Kundnani, 2012). For example, Mondon and Winter (2017, see also 2020, Chapter 2) characterised liberal articulations of Islamophobia as ethnocentric and culturalist, justified by arguments for the protection of liberal values while distancing itself from reactionary racism. Liberal Islamophobia allegedly distinguishes itself by emphasising support for ethno-religious groups traditionally vilified by the far right and for allowing distinctions between the 'good' and 'bad' Muslim based on their loyalty to Islamists (see Mamdani, 2002). This characterisation is, however, applicable to many of the Islamophobic discourses of the far right. According to Brubaker (2017), against the alleged threat of Islam in the 21st century, the Northwest European far right partially moved away from nationalism to adopt what he labels civilisationism. The latter ideology securitises European civilisation and is characterised by "an identitarian 'Christianism', a secularist posture, a philosemitic stance, and an ostensibly liberal defence of gender equality, gay rights, and freedom of speech" (p.1193). This description roughly matches Mondon and Winter's, as well as others' descriptions of liberal Islamohpobia (Poynting & Briskman, 2018). In a context in which anti-migrant and Islamophobic discourses have become the domain of mainstream party politics, differences with the far right are most clearly a matter of degree than themes. Since liberalism, in its different forms, traverses European party families, it is unsurprising that it is employed to defend anti-Muslim positions.

2.4. Ideology and discourse

As advanced, Islamophobia is understood here as a racist ideology. My understanding of ideology follows van Dijk's (2006) socio-cognitive conceptualisation as a socially shared and relatively stable system of fundamental beliefs which underlie the representation of social groups. As such, ideologies inform other socio-cognitive structures (for example, attitudes or knowledge) and ad-hoc personal cognitive models that speakers situationally rely on to process and produce talk (van Dijk, 2012, pp. 18–29). Ideologies condition how we understand and engage with the social world (Ostrowski, 2022, Chapter 3). They are formulated from a sense of socially-constructed groupness (Van Dijk, 1998, Chapter 15), but they are not necessarily

restricted to a section of society, potentially becoming widespread or part of a community's 'common sense' without analytically losing their ideological character (Hamilton, 1987, pp. 23–24). Even if ideologies are not "necessarily misleading, illusory or aligned with the interests of any particular group", their critical study is concerned with "the ways in which meaning serves to establish and sustain relations of domination" (Thompson, 1990, pp. 53, 56). Discourse is one of the key social practices through which ideological meanings are conveyed, and thus, discursive acts can generate, restore, maintain or transform existing power relations in society (Wodak et al., 2009, p. 8).

For Reisigl and Wodak (2015, p. 27), discourse is a "cluster of context-dependent semiotic practices that are situated within specific fields of social action", it is socially constitutive/constituted, analytically delimited to a macrotopic, and relies on argumentation to support claims about the points of view of different actors. First, this definition proposes that language is mostly meaningful in context (Blommaert, 2005, Chapter 3). Reisigl and Wodak (2005, pp. 40–41) consider four levels of context for a text from the micro to macro level. At the lowest level of abstraction, we find the internal context of the text (for example, the meaning acquired by an utterance only in the company of others within the text or situational pragmatics) and its intertextual and interdiscursive references (such as referencing a speech by David Cameron or borrowing elements from a discourse on pandemics to speak about migration). At a higher level, a text is situated in relation to social/sociological variables and institutional frames (for example, an utterance in a televised inaugural speech to the nation by the president or in an informal conversation at a Czech pub by a male agnostic ethnic Czech to a young female Muslim international tourist), and the broader sociopolitical and historical context in which a text is produced (such as the history of political talk on ethnic minorities in contemporary Czechia). Central to the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) is the study of recontextualization, that is, how texts, discourses or genres travel across spatial or temporal contexts while experiencing transformations (Wodak & Fairclough, 2010). As we will later see, Czech politicians recontextualised elements of the West European discourse on the death of multiculturalism (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010b) to argue, in 2015, against a multiethnic society. The term 'field of social action' (similar to but unlike Bourdieu's, see Forchtner & Schneickert, 2016, pp. 26–297) refers to "a segment of social reality that constitutes a (partial) 'frame' of a discourse" characterised by its discursive function (Reisigl & Wodak, 2015, p. 28). For instance, my discourse analysis considers the domain of politics and, specifically, the genre of televised debates and interviews with politicians. In Reisigl and Wodak's (2015, Figure 2.1.) classification, this genre mostly functions to 'form public attitudes, opinions and will'. However, individual texts can have multiple functions. For instance, an interview can serve for 'political advertising' for a new political leader (i.e. another field) or enable a public official to criticise a damaging international organisation's report, thus aiming 'to shape international relations'. The point is that certain types of rhetoric (for instance, Islamophobic) tend to appear more in specific fields of action (like political advertising) than others (lawmaking), and their linguistic realisation (for instance, through lexicon) is tailored to the discrete field while potentially borrowing from others.

The second element of the definition of discourse above is that discourse is both constitutive of and rooted in social structures in a dialectical way (Fairclough, 1992), so that the practices, which constitute social structures, “are partly discursive […], but they are also discursively represented” (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 37) . This dialectical relationship takes place “between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s), which frame it” (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 6). For instance, state authorities, from their authoritative position, can legitimise the endorsement of controversial practices against migrants by discursively appealing to the moral order of society (such as preserving national security or enforcing citizenship laws) while delegitimising alternative solutions proposed by other actors (Martín Rojo & van Dijk, 1997), as was the case with the criminalisation of NGO rescue missions in the Mediterranean Sea after the European ‘refugee crisis’ (Mancuso & Signorelli, 2022). Third, Reisigl and Wodak above understand discourse as restricted to a macrotopic (such as ‘climate change’ or ‘immigration’). Hence, a discourse on ‘Muslims’ can be the site for multiple actors’ perspectives, ideologies and so on (Reisigl, 2017, p. 49). The analytical interest is thus on how and why some topics were historically constructed, mostly in the public sphere, in problematic ways by some or most actors, in some fields, genres or styles.

Among the multiple ways in which the ideology of Islamophobia could manifest discursively, I am most interested in how, across time, its relevant social actors have been represented and on what grounds a particular social order has been argued for. According to van Dijk (2012, pp. 16–18), the content of ideological beliefs define groups’ criteria for belonging, their activities, aims, norms, values, status or entitlement to resources. Formally, these beliefs are propositions about social groups (such as ‘they do not respect our norms’ or ‘we are tolerant’) and the values/resources that groups stand for (such as civilisation or intolerance) in the context of intergroup conflict (Van Dijk, 1998, pp. 67–73). Van Dijk (Ibid.) famously proposed that these beliefs are largely Manichean in that they favour a positive representation of the ingroup and negative representation of the outgroup. However, as sub-section 2.1. illustrated, prejudice and stereotyping can be expressed through benevolent propositions (like ‘ethnic minority X is docile’). Thus, as argued in 2.1.1.a., the focus should not be so much on the valence of the proposition but rather on how, in context, it contributes to shape or perpetuate relations of domination. Furthermore, ideologies propose visions of social order. Hence, theoretically-consolidated political ideologies contain: “a representational model of what a society looks like”, “a visionary model of what a society should look like” and “a programmatic model of how the society desired could be achieved” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2015, p. 25).

Czech mainstream Islamophobia has four protagonists that are central to my analyses:

- ‘Czechs’/‘Europeans’: the ingroup.
- ‘Western Europe’: a referent for its experience with ‘Muslims’.
- ‘Muslims’/‘Islam’/‘refugees’: an external Other (although Czech Muslim communities are often differentiated from Muslims abroad).
- ‘[far-right] extremists’/‘populists’: a domestic Other which attempts to corrupt the ingroup.

2.5. Political mainstreaming, normalisation and securitisation

Recently, the processes of political mainstreaming and (discursive) normalisation have been largely synthesised theoretically (Brown et al., 2021; Krzyżanowski et al., 2023). From this perspective, the embrace of Islamophobia by mainstream parties largely contributes to its normalisation. This sub-section clarifies aspects of both processes to offer a more nuanced view of such theoretical synthesis and how the concept of normalisation functions within this dissertation.

The normative drive behind choosing 'the embrace of Islamophobia by the mainstream' as a research problem lies in the belief that exclusionary ideologies ought not to belong to contemporary Western liberal democracies. After the Second World War, the European far right presented the most hostile challenges to the principle of respect for minority rights (Mudde, 2019). During the post-war years, the dominant liberal reading retrospectively regarded interwar fascism as a regrettable anomaly which had been largely resolved but should be constantly kept in check (Kallis, 2015a). Despite its initial marginalisation, or because of it (van Donselaar, 1993), far-right groups adapted to become more socially acceptable. Their popularity increased since the 1980s and, by the early 21st century, they were entering several governing coalitions (Mudde, 2015). Hence, scholars began analysing the effects of the interaction between the mainstream and the far-right (Feischmidt & Hervik, 2015; Pelinka, 2013, pp. 17–21), including, but not limited to, the mainstream's adoption of far-right rhetoric (Wodak, 2015a). However, an increasingly popular thesis suggested that, rather than introducing exogenous ideas, the far right was largely offering a more radical version of mainstream ideologies while boosting existing anxieties and discursively breaking down taboos (Kallis, 2013; Mudde, 2010).

Following the terminology proposed by Mudde (2019, p. 7), far-right actors are understood to be ideologically inimical to liberal democracy. Within the far right, Mudde distinguishes a (revolutionary) extreme right, which rejects the essence of democracy, from a (reformist) radical right, which opposes some liberal principles (like minority rights or rule of law tenets) but not democracy. Since the 2000s, 'populism' emerged as an increasingly relevant category tied to anti-migrant politics. However, while 'the far right' encapsulates a historical collection of actors animated by its revisionism of hegemonic liberal-democratic principles who share ideological credos (such as heightened nativism and authoritarianism), 'populism' is a more elusive term. For populism, I adhere to Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser's (2017, p. 6) definition as a thin ideology pitting a homogeneous 'pure people' against a 'corrupt elite', and which argues for politics as an expression of popular will. As a thin ideology, populism has been embraced to different degrees by actors across the political spectrum by incorporating elements from other ideologies into the representational schema described above. Although, through nativism, the 'pure (native) people' can become antagonised with non-natives (Kotwas & Kubik, 2019), this is not a requirement for populism to be articulated and far-right actors do not always rely particularly on populism. Hence, analytically I speak of populist actors or discursive strategies, but not of 'populists' (except in its vernacular/emic understanding).

Despite political scientists classifying parties as part of the 'mainstream', this labelling exercise is not always straightforward. According to Moffitt (2021), some parties become understood to belong to the mainstream while others are regarded as pariahs – that is, to be excluded or isolated because of their perceived illegitimacy or danger to the system – based on a dialectical process largely enacted by national parties and the media. In 2014-2015 Czechia, far-right actors were regarded as the main pariahs, whereas popular non-far-right 'populists' like president Miloš Zeman or Andrej Babiš (ANO) not clearly so.[10] Although both leaders increasingly self-styled as outside conventional politics, big Czech media outlets did not present a coherent position on these actors as dangerous or illegitimate throughout this period – notwithstanding, big Western newspapers tended to be less forgiving. Additionally, most Czech political scientists and the Ministry of Interior's reports on extremism did not consider Zeman, Babiš or the controversial former president Václav Klaus as part of the far right but sometimes were explicitly differentiated from the latter as part of the mainstream or centre (Charvát et al., 2023; Havlík & Voda, 2018; Vejvodová, 2016). Following this interpretation, I am often including Zeman and Babiš when I speak of mainstream actors, and, given that the literature does not classify them as 'far right', neither do I. In my corpus, the main far-right actors are the movement We Don't Want Islam in the Czech Republic (IvČRN), and the parties Dawn; No to Brussels – National Democracy (NB-ND); and the Party of Common Sense (SZR).

The concept of political mainstreaming often falls short in explaining why mainstream parties promote illiberal ideologies. Moffitt (2021) identifies two dominant conceptualisations of mainstreaming in the party literature. One examines how so-called pariah parties become regarded as mainstream and vice versa, while the other attends to how "the ideology, policies, discourse or style of populist, extremist or pariah parties are adopted by mainstream political actors […] usually […] to compete with or neutralize a potential electoral threat from such parties" (Ibid., p.6). This latter conceptualisation presents two important limitations. First, by relying on the 'mainstream' vs 'pariah'/'extreme'/'far-right' dialectic, it stresses that presumably illiberal elements enter the mainstream from outside (Kallis, 2013). This makes the process contingent on, sometimes fuzzy, party classifications and downplays existing illiberal tendencies within the mainstream. For instance, some argue that mainstream CEE post-1989 parties (including Czech ones) espouse higher degrees of ethnic nationalism and Islamophobia than their West European counterparts (Dawson & Hanley, 2019; Kalmar, 2018, p. 389; Minkenberg, 2017). Thus, when a Czech party that is domestically regarded to belong to the mainstream right 'forces' other mainstream parties to use Islamophobia, we could not speak of mainstreaming. The second limitation relates to agency. Theoretical characterisations of illiberal actions by the mainstream as *re*actions to 'extremists' allocate blame to the latter while obfuscating mainstream agency. Mainstream actors have alternative strategies to cope with far-right challengers (Herman & Muldoon, 2018; Pelinka, 2013, pp. 17–21)

[10] During the analysed period (January 2014 to October 2021), Zeman was a controversial figure from which most centrist parties tried to distance themselves, while hostility to Babiš (first, Minister of Finance, and, after October 2017, Prime Minister) grew only progressively until centrist parties ran into blocs to isolate him in the October 2021 elections.

and might decide whether to articulate illiberal ideologies based on their own motivations, traditions and moral compasses, regardless of ‘extremists’.

Largely addressing these tensions, Brown and colleagues (2021) criticise the heuristics commonly employed in explaining mainstreaming as a reaction by the mainstream to a metaphorical contagion from citizens’ illiberal attitudes or the far right’s actions. They argue, instead, that the agency and initiative of mainstream elites (like politicians, academics and journalists), who hold greater access to resources that effectively shape public opinion, should not be downplayed. Therefore, these authors borrow from Krzyżanowski’s (2020b, p. 432) concept of normalisation, defined as the process by which, in order to change commonly accepted social norms, a set of “discursive strategies […] gradually introduce and/or perpetuate in public discourse some new – and in most cases often uncivil or untrue – patterns of representing social actors, processes and issues”. Informed by this concept, and agnostic on issues of party classification, Brown and colleagues (2021, p. 9) propose a critical but broad definition of mainstreaming as:

> [T]he process by which parties/actors, discourses and/or attitudes move from marginal positions on the political spectrum or public sphere to more central ones, shifting what is deemed to be acceptable or legitimate in political, media and public circles and contexts.

This definition reflects my understanding of *normalisation* for this dissertation. However, the literature on normalisation, on which Brown and colleagues drew, has a different tradition and describes a slightly dissimilar process than that of political mainstreaming. Some of its preoccupations are still relevant for this project.

The theorisation of normalisation presents a diverse and long history (Canguilhem, 1978; Foucault, 1978, 1979; Heitmeyer, 2018; Klemperer, 2006; Link, 2014; Woodly, 2015). Despite most authors referencing Michel Foucault, eventually, his work became concerned with two different processes. On the one hand, Foucault saw *normation* – initially formulated as normalisation throughout most of his oeuvre – as the “disciplinary process of bringing subjects into conformity with a pre-determined norm” (Taylor, 2009, p. 51). For Foucault (2009, p. 57), norms are a modern phenomenon that serve institutions (like asylums and prisons) and disciplines (like medicine and pedagogy) as guiding prescriptions which differentiate the normal from the abnormal. These norms are often established and reproduced through discourses (Foucault, 1978, pp. 5–18), but normation refers to the specific process of (self-)disciplining cases and behaviours to fit the norm, often alternating gratification and punishment (see Foucault, 1979, pp. 191–197). *Normalisation*, on the other hand, eventually became reserved for the process of bringing abnormal/unfavourable cases in line with ‘normalities’, as defined by statistical distribution curves rather than pre-established norms (Foucault, 2009, p. 63). Here, data (for example, obesity rates) prescribe favourable (i.e. ‘normal’) distributions and identify which cases fall outside ‘normality’. Although some authors explore these specific data-driven constructions of ‘normality’ (for example, Link, 2014), most discourse analysts studying normalisation are interested in the discursive introduction and reproduction of norms, and their social effects.

Different understandings of the phenomenon of normalisation coexist in critical discourse studies. While some look at how ideological representations become hegemonic and, hence, part of 'common sense' (see "naturalisation" in Fairclough, 2013, Chapter 1), others focus on how institutional actors attempt to legitimise certain practices by representing them as 'normal' or 'natural' (Van Leeuwen, 2007, pp. 98–99). The conceptualisation of normalisation that approximates the literature on political mainstreaming was largely theorised from the DHA in response to the growing popularity of far-right actors and illiberal rhetoric in Europe since the late 20th century (Krzyżanowski, 2020b; Wodak, 2015a). However, while Foucault's normation concentrated on disciplining behaviour, DHA authors largely focus on the process of establishing norms. Furthermore, grounded in liberal-democratic normativity rather than a Foucauldian scepticism towards normativity (Taylor, 2009), they study how illiberal rhetoric (i.e. the abnormality) erodes liberal democracy by making its style and/or contents acceptable or (progressively) dominant. For Krzyżanowski and Ledin (2017), normalisation should explain how, within liberal democracies, previously 'uncivil' (in their own words, anti-pluralist, anti-democratic or unacceptable) discourses become socially acceptable in public discourse. For Krzyżanowski and colleagues (2023, p. 418), analyses of normalisation are interested in post-democratic action, defined as:

> political activity which is formally located within the realm of democratic procedures yet effectively – and often progressively – undermines liberal democracy's key values by normalising uncivil, illiberal thinking and action in the wider sociopolitical domain.

The quotation demonstrates that these scholars retain the Foucauldian interest in the regulatory effect that the introduction of a new normative order has over the wider society, especially as these new ideas become part of 'common sense' (Krzyżanowski, 2020b). Uncivil discourses can be reproduced across fields by different actors, including the general public, for example, on social media (Ekman, 2019; Krzyżanowski & Ledin, 2017), or drive uncivil action, like hate crimes (Allen, 2021; Frost, 2008; Karsten Müller & Schwarz, 2021).

Moreover, given the normative character of ideologies, actors defending ideological beliefs which enjoy or aim at enjoying a certain legitimacy might try to regulate the behaviours and thoughts of others – i.e. what Foucault eventually termed normation. According to Elster (2011, p. 196), social norms "are maintained by the sanctions that others impose on norm violators and because they are shared—and known to be shared—with others". Furthermore, Elster argues that norms are enforced through "contempt in the observer of a norm violation and shame in the norm violator". Consequently, actors who threaten the norm are rhetorically antagonised, for example, in anti-multiculturalist talk, as "irrational, overly emotional and […] even inhuman" (Nortio et al., 2021, p. 450).

The normative change can also affect self-regulation. Whereas individuals tend to supress prejudices that are unacceptable within their ingroup, this suppression is lifted once newly accepted norms justify this prejudice (Crandall et al., 2002; Crandall & Eshleman, 2003). The normalisation of European anti-migrant and Islamophobic

politics might then contribute to erode anti-racist beliefs which exist across European societies (Ivarsflaten et al., 2010). Once ideologies become ingrained into certain communities' 'common sense', their speakers rely on them for social representations and to interpret social roles within communicative events (Fairclough, 2013, Chapter 1). In short, normalisation is a two-phase intersubjective process describing a) how new norms (or ideas, attitudes, etc.) are effectively legitimised in public and b) how these norms become socially accepted or hegemonic, earning the power to considerably shape social psychology, action and structure.

Normalising speech alternates between the introduction and legitimisation of norms. For Krzyżanowski (2020a), normalisation works as a three-step discursive shift. First, a relatively new discourse (for instance, 'on Muslims') is enacted in public discourse, by both recontextualising and introducing new discursive elements. Second, through gradation/perpetuation, a collection of discursive elements, recontextualised across fields and genres, consolidate the new discourse. Third, an uncivil discourse is finally normalised when its introduction has resulted in a substantial change in the norms of public discourse. At this stage, we note the emergence of a 'borderline discourse' (Krzyżanowski & Ledin, 2017), which seamlessly combines civil and uncivil ideas and serves to pre-/legitimise exclusionary practices.

Legitimisation refers to the process through which speakers discursively justify social practices (and actors), often by representing these as being "consistent with the moral order of society" (Martín Rojo & van Dijk, 1997, p. 528). Legitimisation relies on discursive strategies of social representation and argumentation to appeal to authorities (like laws or experts), morality (i.e., by ascribing positive/negative values to represented action/actors), reason (using instrumental rationality or by reference to a natural order) or stories (like moral tales) (Van Leeuwen, 2007; van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999); and by appealing to emotions (like fear) or a hypothetical future (like the speculative growth of domestic jihadism) (Reyes, 2011). European politicians rely on a broad repertoire of legitimising strategies to justify harsh measures against migrants (Martín Rojo & van Dijk, 1997; Rheindorf & Wodak, 2018; van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999) and their advocates. They might speak of the (moral) imperative to protect national identity, the (rational) need to reduce arrivals to avoid overburdening the state, the (authoritative) laws allegedly permitting pushbacks or the cautionary tale of 'the failure of multiculturalism'.

The breeding ground for legitimising a new normative order of anti-immigrant actions in 2014-2015 had been the decades-long securitisation of migration and Islam across Europe (Bigo, 2002; Cesari, 2012; Fox & Akbaba, 2015; Huysmans, 2006). In their seminal work, Buzan and colleagues (1998, pp. 23–24) define securitisation as a speech act through which an "issue is presented as an existential threat [by the securitising actors], requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure". Like normalisation, securitisation is regarded as an intersubjective process requiring consent from the targeted public to legitimise breaking free of rules. For Buzan and colleagues, securitisation represents the failure of normal politics, since the construction of existential threats aims at circumventing democratic deliberation in favour of decisive actions by top leaders (Ibid., p.29). Since Islamophobia represents 'Muslims' as a multifaceted threat (see 2.3.5.), anti-migrant

and anti-multiculturalist politics have regularly manifested through securitisation. Here, in the language of securitisation, 'Muslims'/'Islam' are constructed as the existential threat, with the state, the nation or another politico-cultural community (like 'Judeo-Christian civilisation') commonly being the so-called referent object of security.

During the analysed 'refugee crisis', Muslim migrants were repeatedly constructed as a (quasi-)existential threat (for example, to the Schengen border regime, national culture and welfare) across Europe by diverse media and political actors. In some national contexts, left-wing humanitarianism and right-wing securitisation came together in a dominant rationalisation of exclusion (Colombo, 2018; Triandafyllidou, 2018). In the following years, this synthesis, which implied the securitisation of Muslim migrants, largely entered European 'common sense'. It informed EU and member states' migration policies which called on 'European values', like respect for human rights, while externalising migration management and obstructing paths for (African and Asian) asylum-seekers and irregular migrants through (often life-threatening and illegal) extraordinary measures (Léonard & Kaunert, 2023; Mlambo, 2020; Reyhani et al., 2018; Stępka, 2023). In the V4 countries, generally, and Czechia, specifically, the securitisation of Muslim migrants intensified particularly during the 'crisis' (Bečka et al., 2017; Kluknavská et al., 2019; Kovář, 2022a; Vallo et al., 2020). Thus, the alleged threat posed by (Muslim) migrants has been used by some of these states' governments to justify not complying with the relocation of refugees (Gómez del Tronco, 2020), building fences to divert migration flows (Cantat & Rajaram, 2019) or subjecting migrants to abusive detention (Amnesty International, 2017). Additionally, the securitisation of Muslim migrants became a recurrent feature of mainstream political campaigning in the region, including in Czechia (Krčál & Naxera, 2018; Krotký, 2019; Stulík & Krčál, 2019).

2.6. Theoretical framework

Before synthesising and bringing concepts together into a cohesive framework, I shall roughly delimit the process under study. In 2014, 'Muslims' became regularly discussed in Czech public discourse (chapter 7). Although there was a previous Islamophobic bias in media reporting, public opinion and politics, since 2014, mainstream politicians increasingly employed and justified Islamophobic rhetoric. Socio-historical and political mechanisms in the country (outlined in 4.1., 4.1.1.), notably the rising Euroscepticism and populism, favoured this strategy (see 4.2.2.b.) and pre-conditioned the public to accept this rhetoric. Together with the securitising role of mainstream media (see 4.4.4.), Czech politicians substantially contributed to normalise Islamophobia by saturating public discourse with Islamophobic representations and by legitimising Islamophobic beliefs. Normalisation affected public opinion by sanctioning the acceptability of Islamophobic attitudes and (further) crystallising Islamophobic stereotypes which a) increased the salience of clashing social identities and b) heightened perceived intergroup threat. The events of 2014 accelerated and intensified previous Islamophobic impulses in Czech politics, media and society (see 4.2.2.). (These dynamics occurred within a context of growing Islamophobic hostility across the EU, rooted in processes which began in the 1970s – see 2.2.2., 2.3.5.)

In this dissertation, Islamophobia is conceptualised as a racist ideology targeting actual or perceived Muslimness. It is racist in so far as, through a historical process of signification based on relations of domination, a racialised group is represented to share an inherent and negatively evaluated difference posing negative consequences for other groups (Miles & Brown, 2003, pp. 103–104). Islamophobia is a form of cultural racism since the racialisation of 'Muslims' does not necessarily rely on perceived somatic signs but, also, other markers of Muslimness (Carr, 2006, pp. 37–44), which essentialise 'Muslims' as sharing an inferior and/or threatening culture (Modood, 2018). Perpetrators of Islamophobic hate crimes interpret these markers of Muslimness as signs that symbolically represent the negative meanings attributed to 'Muslims' and 'Islam' in the ideology (Allen, 2020). Put differently, exclusionary practices (such as hate crimes or legislation) can be informed by the ideology of Islamophobia but are not Islamophobia in and of themselves (Miles & Brown, 2003). Therefore, I speak of *Islamophobic* stereotypes or policy to indicate instances likely and/or largely shaped by the ideology, and of *anti-Muslim* attitudes or votes when the role of the ideology is less evident or marked.

As an ideology, Islamophobia presents a shared and relatively stable system of fundamental beliefs informing the representation of social groups (van Dijk, 2006). In the 2015 Czech context, these groups were 'Czechs'/'Europeans'; 'Western Europe'; 'Muslims'/'Islam'/'refugees'; '[far-right] extremists'/'populists'. Since discourse is one of the fundamental practices through which ideological meanings are conveyed and social power relations are configurated (Wodak et al., 2009, p. 8), I analyse the discursive representation of and argumentation related to these categories (see 3.3.). In the context of contemporary EU migration policy, Islamophobia functions to exclude Muslims from citizenship and cultural rights (see 2.2.). To justify this exclusion, I argue that Islamophobic discursive representations seek, and often manage, to augment the socio-cognitive perception of 'Muslims' as different and threatening, which triggers the prejudice against 'Muslims' measured in public opinion surveys.

Prejudice is understood as an ideologically-inflicted emotional response towards an outgroup or corresponding social category which "creates or maintains hierarchical status relations between groups" (Dovidio et al., 2010a, p. 7). This response is guided by stereotypes – the cognitive component of prejudice (Fiske & Taylor, 2021, Chapter 12) –, which contain the "knowledge, beliefs, and expectations we hold about human groups" (Sherman et al., 2013, p. 549). Thus, the fundamental beliefs of Islamophobia foster and rely on stereotypes of the relevant social actors (like 'Muslims' or 'Europeans') to justify a hierarchical social order (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Jost & Banaji, 1994). Perceived intergroup threat, to both material and (for Islamophobia, particularly) symbolic resources (Stephan et al., 2016), and the emphasis on differentiated social identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) largely explain prejudice. Islamophobic rhetoric taps into these two processes through discursive representations (see 7.1.).

Moreover, individual factors like personality, ideology, and other attitudinal and sociodemographic traits can explain discrete prejudices. From this perspective, the propensity of Czechs to hold prejudices towards 'Muslims' could respond to the dominance of certain features of the so-called authoritarian personality among Czechs (Chylíková & Buchtík, 2016), low levels of religiosity (Doebler, 2014) and, specially,

limited contact opportunities with Muslims, which would significantly ameliorate prejudice (see 2.1.3.). Indeed, since 2014, Czech surveys reveal that prejudice towards 'Muslims' correlates positively with lower formal educational attainment, not having contact with Muslims, distrusting politicians, living in rural areas, voting for the radical right SPD, holding Eurosceptic beliefs, and being a woman, older or a non-Christian (Bell & Strabac, 2020; Marfouk, 2019; MEDIAN, 2018; Öztürk & Pickel, 2019; Pickel & Öztürk, 2018, 2021).

My study highlights the role of the Czech political mainstream in normalising Islamophobia and the influence of normalisation over public opinion. My understanding of normalisation comes from a synthesis of the political mainstreaming and normalisation literatures (Brown et al., 2021; Krzyżanowski et al., 2023). Normalisation is understood as an intersubjective discursive process through which previously uncivil attitudes, rhetoric or actors become promoted and largely regarded as acceptable. This theoretical synthesis highlights the agency of the political mainstream in promoting uncivil ideas, regardless of the actions of 'extremists'. Additionally, the synthesis stresses that normalisation is completed once the targeted audience accepts the legitimacy of these new ideas, which might become hegemonic or ingrained into 'common sense'. The newly normalised ideas will, then, become normative, guiding social psychology, action and structures. Speakers attempting to normalise Islamophobia will, through a series of discursive shifts, introduce and legitimise – through appeals to, for example, authorities, rationality or storytelling (van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999) – these new representations (Krzyżanowski, 2020b). Eventually, particularly through a populistic frame relying on an *argumentum ad populum*, politicians might reference the (actual or alleged) popular acceptance of new uncivil ideas for further legitimisation. This cycle is represented in Figure 1 below.

This work analyses normalisation at two levels. First, it explores how and why the Czech political mainstream normalised Islamophobia in public discourse in 2014-2015. At this level, normalisation is considered effective when Islamophobic rhetoric is consistently employed and justified by most mainstream politicians. This rhetoric, which emphasises intergroup difference and threat (see 7.1.), is analysed by looking at the discursive strategies for representing (van Leeuwen, 2013) and arguing about (Reisigl & Wodak, 2005) social actors. The logic of and potential motivations for this rhetoric are interpreted in relation to mechanisms and events that contextually circumscribe this discourse (see chapter 4). Second, the acceptance of Islamophobic representations by the Czech public (which are intimately related to prejudice and stereotypes) and its correspondence to political influence is assessed through a thematic analysis of interviews with Muslim and non-Muslim participants. Furthermore, to better understand the causes and internal logic of Czech prejudice, I look at previously understudied socio-cognitive mechanisms like stereotype contents, types of perceived intergroup threat or the role of race.

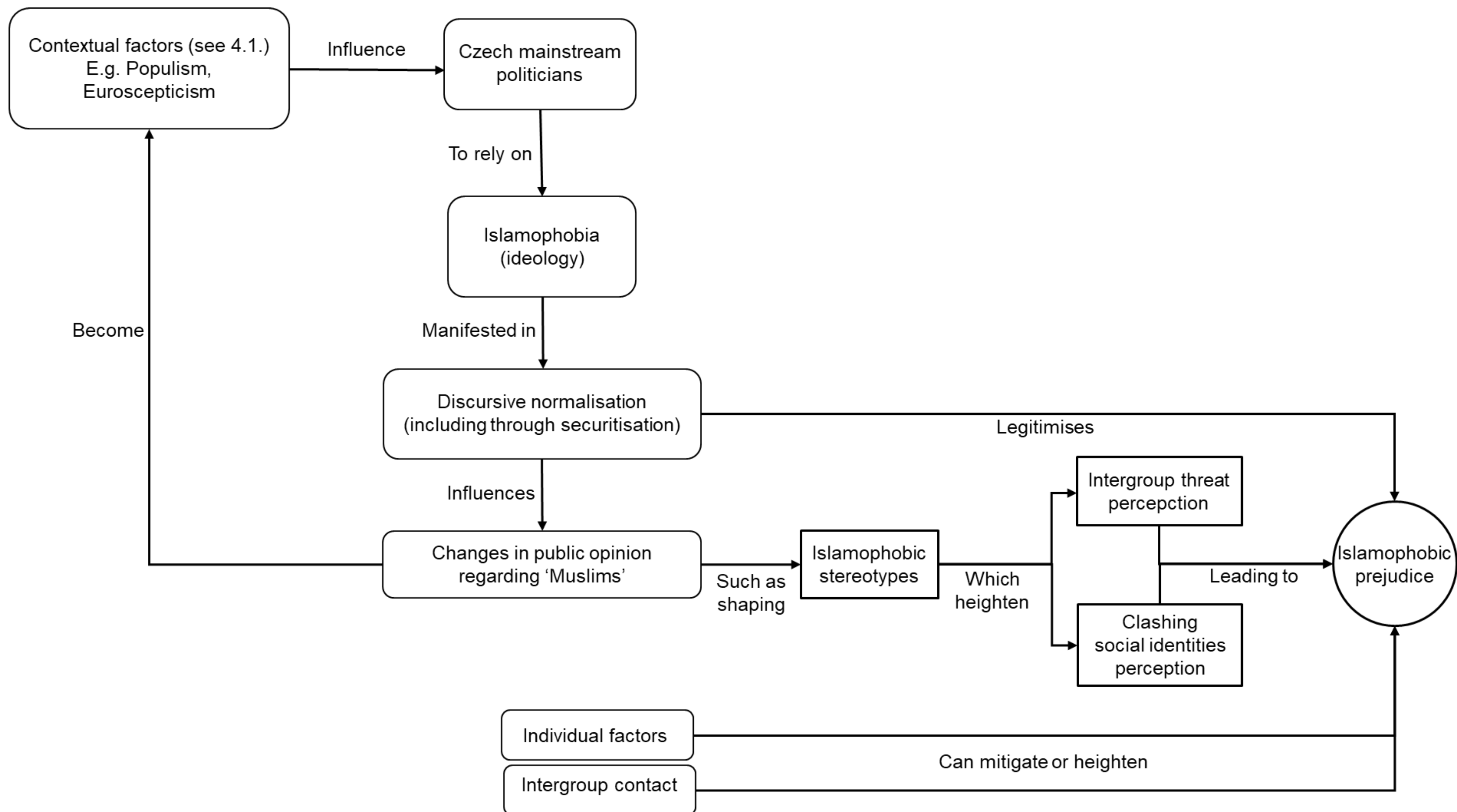

Figure 1. Theoretical framework diagram.

3. Research design

3.1. Research questions

The **overall aim** of my project is:

- To understand why Czech society and politics turned against Muslims, particularly, from 2015.

The **primary goals** are:

- Understanding the nature, history and causes of recent negative attitudes towards ‘Muslims’ among Czechs.
- Understanding the nature of and potential motivations behind discursive strategies employed by Czech politicians to represent ‘Muslims’ in public discourse between 2014 and 2015, and how these strategies may be connected to negative attitudes towards ‘Muslims’ among Czechs.

The analysis was led by the following **exploratory research questions** which I intended to answer both abductively and inductively by identifying relevant themes and strategies emerging from the data, and their links to the theory, to the existing literature and among themselves.

1. What are the nature, history and causes of recent negative attitudes towards ‘Muslims’ in Czech society according to ethnic Czech non-Muslims and Muslims living in Czechia interviewed in 2020 and 2021?

    a. How do participants believe that Czech society thinks about and feels towards ‘Muslims’?

        i. Do participants perceive differences in bias across sectors of society?
        ii. When and why were attitudes perceived to have changed?

    b. Which actors, according to participants, and which socio-cognitive mechanisms, according to their representations of social actors, contributed to boost prejudice against ‘Muslims’?

        i. According to participants, what effect did politicians, or other actors, have over public opinion regarding ‘Muslims’?

        ii. How are the representations of ‘Czechs’, ‘Muslims’ and ‘Western Europe’ which participants employ or attribute to other Czechs reflective of Islamophobia?

        iii. What kind of threat (symbolic/material), if any, are ‘Muslims’ self-reportedly or reportedly perceived to pose for ‘Czechs’?

        iv. Based on expressions and attributions of Islamophobic prejudice by participants, how, if at all, does Islamophobic prejudice in

Czechia distinctively target ethnocultural/-racial and religious difference?

c. Based on participants' testimonies, which effects did intergroup contact experiences have over their attitudes towards and stereotypes of 'Muslims'?

i. Which socio-cognitive processes can plausibly explain stereotype change resulting from intergroup contact?

d. What are the proposed solutions for countering anti-Muslim attitudes?

2. How did Czech mainstream politicians (and activists) normalise Islamophobic rhetoric in two popular political debate shows broadcast on public TV between 2014 and 2015?
   a. Which strategies were employed to represent 'Muslims', 'Europe', 'Czechs' and '[far-right] extremists'?
   b. Which argumentative strategies (*topoi)* were used to justify Islamophobic rhetoric and policies?
   c. Why, if at all, are these strategies reflective of Islamophobia and its normalisation?

In parallel, based on the theory and context, I retroductively sought to answer these **explanatory research questions**:

3. Based on the results of both analyses (i.e. interviews and political discourse), what effect did the normalisation of Islamophobia by Czech politicians plausibly had over citizens' public opinion regarding 'Muslims'?

4. Based on both analyses and a selection of political and social factors (see 4.1.), which causal mechanisms plausibly contributed to the normalisation of Islamophobia by Czech politicians?
   a. What effect did the rising populism and Euroscepticism have over political discourse?

The scope of these questions is limited to what the chosen methods (see 3.4.) and overall research design can answer in relation to the proposed theoretical framework (see 2.6.). This caution aims at ensuring that readers can transparently trace back my textual analysis, and the resulting inferences, to the theory, existing literature and context (Kendall, 2007, para. 38).

The exploratory questions are addressed through both inductive and abductive reasoning. While qualitative induction seeks to identify generalisable qualities in a sample of cases that is (probably) representative of a larger one, abduction is the process of discovering (plausible) explanations emerging from the data, even beyond what the theoretical framework could anticipate (Reichertz, 2004). The initial analyses presuppose that certain expressions in the data which fit theorised attributes are

reflective of Islamophobia. Inductively, the analysis makes inferences about certain properties of these expressions to claim their generalisability. For instance, since most participants report fears of ‘Muslims’ creating threatening ‘ghettos’, this fear is probably widespread across Czech society and can explain high levels of prejudice, which is theoretically mediated by intergroup threat perceptions. Abductively, the exploration of the data reveals new rules about how Islamophobia might function within its local context. For instance, by observing how Czech politicians represented ‘problems in Western Europe’ (7.3.) or popular ‘fears’ (8.3.), I realised that there was systematic process for linguistically realising these strategies to justify politicians’ Islamophobic rhetoric that, to my knowledge, had not been previously theorised. Similarly surprising revelations came regarding how certain racialisation patterns (6.2.1.), aporophobia (6.1.2.b.) or conceptions of religiosity (6.2.2.) fed into prejudice. These plausible explanations often expand on existing theories, which are often referenced *a posteriori*. These discoveries stand as theoretical contributions which future studies might deductively confirm or refute.

The first set of questions seeks to illustrate underexplored key aspects of Islamophobic prejudice in Czechia. Moreover, it delves into the multifaceted causes of prejudice. On the one hand, participants will report their perceptions of when, how and because of whom attitudes changed. This helps to assess the impact of the discursive shift of 2014/2015 and the role of political discourse. On the other hand, participants’ representations of social actors, which are assumed to resemble stereotypes, shed light on the perceived intergroup threat driving prejudice, the themes that relate to common stereotype contents (such as ‘Muslims’ forming ‘ghettos’), and the roles that aspects of race and religiosity might have in dominant forms of Czech Islamophobic prejudice. Across chapters 5 and 6, I indicate whether participants employ these representations to articulate their own views or, conversely, report these representations as socially shared by others. Analysing the effects of intergroup contact over stereotypes (RQ1.f) aims at showing that these experiences challenge the socio-cognitive effects of the normalisation of Islamophobia in public discourse. Furthermore, together with the recommendations to combat prejudice, the analysis of intergroup contact experiences has a prescriptive impetus, seeking to identify processes and actors which could contribute to reducing prejudice in Czechia.

The second set of questions equally seeks to reveal underexplored key strategies in politicians’ linguistic realisation of Islamophobia. Furthermore, the analysis of argumentation is interested in the (self-)justifications for the use of Islamophobic rhetoric, since this legitimising exercise contributes to normalisation. Since some discursive strategies might be regarded as part of ‘common sense’, I also highlight why, in relation to the theory on Islamophobia, certain strategies are reflective of Islamophobia.

Explanatory questions are answered retroductively. According to Gorski (2018, p. 28), retroduction is an “explanatory reconstruction” used by critical realists to “describe the how and what of a change – how it occurred (process) and what set it in motion (structure and powers)”. Hence, it involves the postulation and identification of causal mechanisms which explain the occurrence of an event (Easton, 2010, p. 124; Sayer, 2010, p. 72). These causal mechanisms are often hypothesised *a priori* in the

theoretical framework, so that retroductive inference involves retrospectively confirming the explanatory power of a theory in relation to an event (Meyer & Lunnay, 2013).

Only a complex combination of structures and mechanisms could effectively explain why Islamophobic prejudice grew in Czechia or why mainstream politicians promoted Islamophobic rhetoric. Rather than exhausting multiple explanations, my study focuses on confirming the extent to which the exploratory analysis showcases the effects of political discourse on prejudice (RQ3); and that a series of contextual factors (see 4.1.), notably the rise of populism and Euroscepticism in domestic politics, plausibly (and partially) caused politicians' use of Islamophobic rhetoric in 2014/2015 (RQ4). Throughout the empirical chapters, I indicate instances in which there is evidence for the plausibility of these effects. For instance, I stress which discursive elements from political discourse are replicated or echoed by participants, and pinpoint how populist and Eurosceptic beliefs are integrated into Islamophobic rhetoric. The resulting explanations are, nonetheless, only partial and plausible, with limitations about the explanatory power of my methods acknowledged in 1.1. and 9.3.

3.2. Ontological and epistemological position

The position which I take for this project resembles critical social constructionism (see Elder-Vass, 2012), as I rely on a critical realist ontology, a hybrid interpretivist-realist epistemology and the normative impetus of critical theory. Common to all social constructionism is a belief that, in practice, most social reality is intersubjectively constructed (and, hence, situationally interpreted) through socially shared meanings. Despite being often dismissed by critics as ontological relativists, most constructionists avoid positioning themselves as full relativists, remaining instead somewhere in between relativism and realism or else uninterested about ontological questions (Andrews, 2012). Similarly, as shown by Gralewski (2011), the social constructionism in critical discourse studies has been often tempered by approaches emphasising either a critical realist ontology (for example, Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999) or anti-foundationalism (see Torfing, 2003).

To inform my ontological position I turned to critical realism, a philosophy of science developed by Roy Bhaskar (2008) and, subsequently, by others (see Archer et al., 2013). Critical realists are foundationalists since they believe social structures to exist independently of our knowledge of them, to precede social action and be the products of both discursive and material relations (Frauley & Pearce, 2007, pp. 4–5). Axiomatically, Bhaskar (2013) differentiates three levels of reality: the empirical (i.e. the limited *experiences* of reality apprehended through the senses by individuals); the actual (i.e. the manifestation of the causal laws of nature through discrete *events*, independently of our knowledge of them); and the real (i.e. the invisible generative *mechanisms* with which things or structures act in the world). For critical realists, the ultimate goal is achieving an understanding of the real dimension of reality by relying on theories about causal mechanisms.

The three levels interact, so that real mechanisms (such as the dominant conceptions of ethnicity or religiosity fostering Islamophobia) partially shape actual events (such as

Islamophobic political speeches), which shape and evoke responses based on experiences of these events (for instance, citizens understanding Islamophobic political speeches as legitimising the rejection of 'refugee quotas'). Conversely, conditioned by these experiences, actors can produce discursive events which, eventually, transform real social structures – hence, the discursive mediation between agency and structure (Fairclough et al., 2001, p. 5). Critical realists see social structures as relatively intransient across time and space, while human experiences of these are more transient because they are conditioned by the individual and social factors through which they are interpreted in context. In discourse analysis, beyond attending to social structures (for example, the EU citizenship regime), we can take into consideration their interaction with discursive structures (for example, metaphors abstracting social actors) and socio-cognitive structures (for example, stereotypes) (van Dijk, 2014, 2018). Thus, intrapsychic structures remain as an interface between discourse experience and production:

> It is the plasticity of the human brain, the ways in which its neural structures are constantly reshaped by our experiences, whether discursive or practical, that makes it possible for prior discursive acts to influence subsequent discursive structures. (Elder-Vass, 2012, p. 18)

Given its admission of both the transcendental and socially constructed quality of real structures, critical realism does not dogmatically prescribe an epistemological position (Frauley & Pearce, 2007, pp. 15–16). For Elder-Vass (2012, p. 12), social constructionists tend to rely on interpretive methods (cf. Schwandt, 1994) to understand how meaning has been constructed by a community but often shy away from the scientific realist task of relating that meaning to its causal forces. In his view, realist social constructionists can adopt both positions, given that they acknowledge a social ontology that can identify the "entities, powers and mechanisms at work" (Ibid.). Thus, the socially constructed (for example Czechs often have 'Arabs' in mind when speaking about 'Muslims') can be caused by the ontologically real (for example, most Czechs get their information about 'Muslims' through Czech news, which mostly cover events in Arab countries), and vice versa. Consequently, in my analysis of interviews, I understand that what participants report are their subjective experiences (which are linked to intrapsychic structures), but, at my discretion, I interpret some of their reports of events as insightful about reality (such as Muslim participants reporting that at some point in time Islamophobic aggression rose in Czechia) or other citizens' experiences (for example, these participants recalled becoming associated with the securitised 'refugees').

Throughout my analysis, I pay attention to how participants and politicians employ and construct social categories. Following Brubaker (2002), I differentiate categories of analysis, those employed by researchers to refer to a relatively bounded substantial social group, from categories of practice, contingently used in the vernacular to cognitively invoke a group. This epistemological differentiation resonates with a critical realist ontology, as groups are treated in sociological analysis as real entities in the world, while the social constructionist or sociocognitive perspective acknowledges that social categories do not name real groups but interpretations thereof. Therefore, when

possible, I have marked categories of practice between single quotation marks to emphasise the relevance of social construction in that use of the category.

Finally, my epistemological ambition is not objectively to unearth most of what there is to know about particular phenomena. Instead, my perspective is partial, motivated by a critical agenda which seeks out and denounces how unjust forms of domination are reproduced. As argued by Wodak and colleagues (2009, p. 9), the mission for critical discourse analysts is “to unmask ideologically permeated and often obscured structures of power, political control, and dominance, as well as strategies of discriminatory inclusion and exclusion in language use”. Hence, my inquiry starts from a normative position that believes that Muslims and, most egregiously, refugees during the ‘refugee crisis’ have been subjected to practices of domination. At a macro level, this discrimination has been partly motivated by the (past and present) interests of rich Western countries in the Greater Middle East; European racist legacies; the classist logic behind a ‘Fortress Europe’ that excludes the world’s poor, hence perpetuating the inequalities created by global capitalism which partly motivated their migration (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2018; Khiabany, 2016); or a self-serving mobilisation of anti-migrant racism in European neo-liberal politics to avoid addressing urgent challenges like increasing socioeconomic inequalities or climate change. Therefore, my analysis seeks explanation and description through critique. Reisigl and Wodak (2005, pp. 32–34) identify three levels of critique in their approach to discourse analysis, which I keep in mind throughout the analysis of political discourse. First, there is a text or discourse immanent critique which is conducted through relatively unpolitical hermeneutics that look at aspects of a text or discourse’s internal coherence. Then, there is a socio-diagnostic critique which aims at

> detecting problematic […] social and political goals and functions of discursive practices, at uncovering the responsibilities and the speakers’ – sometimes – disguised, contradictory, opposing, ambivalent or ‘polyphonic’ intentions, claims and interests, which are either inferable from the (spoken or written) discourse itself or from contextual, social, historical and political knowledge. (Ibid., pp.32-33)

Finally, a prospective critique seeks to elaborate and prescribe ethical practices that could reduce or eliminate the social problem if adopted by its addressed actors. In this regard, I will be frequently contrasting what a politician or participant said with what they failed to share. Furthermore, the analysis of interviews offers various suggestions on how to reduce Islamophobic prejudice, for instance, by analysing the mediators between intergroup contact and prejudice reduction, or by recognising Muslim participants’ concerns about the problematic practices of representation of ‘Muslims’ in public discourse. (For a list of recommendations, see 9.4.)

3.3. Analytical framework

This is a case study whose main unit of analysis is Islamophobia in Czechia. Nested within this unit, the embedded units of analysis (see Yin, 2009, pp. 42–45) are a) citizens’ prejudices towards and stereotypes of ‘Muslims’, and b) political discourse on

‘Islam’ and ‘Muslims’. The empirical units of inquiry (see Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 16) are, for a), semi-structured interviews with non-Muslim Czechs and Muslims living in Czechia, and, for b), blocs from two popular TV shows where politicians are interviewed and engage in debate. The considered variables are linguistic indicators for the representation of relevant social actors (such as ‘Muslims’ or ‘Western Europe’) employed by (a) interviewees or (b) by politicians, activists and moderators. The methods for analysing these indicators are, for a), a critical realist thematic analysis (Terry et al., 2017), and, for b), an analysis of the strategies for representing social actors (van Leeuwen, 2013) and argumentation (Reisigl & Wodak, 2005).

The analysis is mostly contextualised within a series of sociopolitical processes initiated after 1989 (cf. Barša et al., 2021). However, the timeframe of analysis is, for a), July–August 2020 and September–October 2021; and, for b), January 2014 to February 2015 (Chapter 7) and March to December 2015 (Chapter 8). This timeframe for political discourse was chosen because it captured a discursive change, i.e. how Islamophobia went from irrelevant to Czech politics around early 2014 (Mareš, 2014) to, by mid-2015, informing most mainstream parties’ positions against ‘refugees’. While, in the 6-to-7-year gap between the research interviews and analysed televised shows Islamophobia further consolidated as a prominent feature of national politics, many of the themes and events recalled by participants in the interviews went back to 2015. The main hypothesis is that various socio-cognitive processes (see Figure 1 in 2.6.), including those discovered through abduction, have mediated between (mainstream) political discourse and the formation of negative attitudes towards ‘Muslims’ among non-Muslim Czech citizens.

3.4. Methodology and methods

Chapters 5 and 6: Interviews and thematic analysis

Because of my interest in shared stereotypes and public perceptions, I decided to interview lay citizens rather than experts, who might have held relatively liberal views and sophisticated theories about the rise of Islamophobic prejudice and politics. Some degree of representativeness was included in the sample design (see below) to ensure a diversity of views. I favoured the one-on-one interview format over, for example, focus groups because the former allowed me to carefully explore socio-cognitive aspects of prejudice without the interference of social dynamics, which fell outside my main interest. Furthermore, I assessed that with my competence in the Czech language, I could lead one-on-one interviews more effectively.

Between July and August 2020, and September and October 2021, I conducted thirty-one semi-structured interviews with non-Muslim Czech citizens (N= 23; indicated by ‘n’) and, regardless of citizenship and ethnicity, Muslims living in Czechia (N= 8; indicated by ‘M’) to understand the nature, history and causes of anti-Muslim attitudes in the country. Sampling took place through my personal networks in the country, with individual contacts never referring me to more than two people from each cohort. To find participants, I began by asking friends from different regions to connect me with people who met pre-defined criteria (see below). Participants were often the referrers’ relatives, friends or acquaintances. Sometimes, snowball sampling would also take

place, with referrals coming from either participants or referees who could not participate in the research. Based on scripted questionnaires (shaped by my research questions and two pilot interviews), from which the interviews also departed, participants were asked to comment on their perceptions of other Czechs' attitudes and behaviours, express their own attitudes and recall personal experiences. The discussion guides, included in Annex 5, reflect the initial goals of the project, which became refined during the analysis. Because of the sensitive topic and exploratory character of the interviews, some questions are relatively indirect. For instance, a bloc of questions about participants' views on the actual or potential integration of Muslims in Czechia aimed at opening discussions about ethnicity, religiosity or perceived intergroup threat. These interviews lasted 45–75 minutes, and were conducted mostly face-to-face in public spaces, except for six interviews conducted via videoconference because of logistical complications. Czech was the language used in all but five interviews, in which English was preferred.

The sample followed pre-defined criteria and identified relevant cohorts (see Table 1 below for cohort design, and Annex 1 for a pseudonymised list of participants and their characteristics). The non-Muslim cohorts sought to represent a diversity of lay views on 'Muslims' by considering a sociodemographic balance; participants' likely degree of contact with actual Muslims (for instance, by including participants who had been to Egypt); and varied social geographies of their localities (see below). This diverse sample did not aim to statistically represent *all* Czechs. Non-Muslim Czech participants could not be elected officials, journalists or university researchers. They were individuals who could be ascribed Czech ethnicity (Czech, Moravian or Czech-Silesian) with relative confidence.[11]

Five non-Muslim cohorts were pre-defined and, in four of those, I sought sociodemographic variation based on gender, age, education and employment status (see Table 1). Therefore, among non-Muslim participants, there was a balance between male (n = 11) and female (n = 12) participants and between those with (n = 11) and without (n = 12) a university degree. Three cohorts were drawn from chosen localities that varied in size, presence of Muslim migrants and share of vote for parties whose support is correlated to anti-Muslim attitudes.[12] The selected localities were Prague, Ostrava and a small (anonymised) town in Moravia. In addition, two other cohorts were pre-defined based on participants' likelihood of interaction with Muslims, namely participants from the city of Teplice (a spa town with a relatively high Muslim

[11] In the final sample, one participant self-identified as an ethnic Slovak who had mostly lived in Czechia.
[12] A Czech survey on attitudes towards 'Muslims' showed that voting for certain parties (SPD, KSČM, ANO, in this order) had a significant negative correlation with positive attitudes towards Muslims (MEDIAN, 2018). In the 2017 parliamentary elections ANO received 29.64% of the vote, SPD, 10.64%, and KSČM, 7.76%. Also, in the second round of the 2018 presidential election, Miloš Zeman (representative of Islamophobic politics) won with 51.36% of the vote against his more liberal opponent Jiří Drahoš. In Prague, Zeman obtained 20.11% less support than the national average, whereas ANO, SPD and KSČM obtained respectively 9.29%, 4.83%, 3.16% below the national average. In Ostrava, vote for these actors was above the national average, with Zeman obtaining 10.61% above the average, and ANO, SPD and KSČM scoring relative wins of, respectively, 5.98%, 3.68% and 0.8%. The small Moravian town had a more average political behaviour, with the variation of support for the three parties moving between -1%/+2.5% with respect to the national average, although Zeman scored around 6% above the national average. To consult results, see iRozhlas (2017, 2018).

presence and tourists from Arab countries) and those who had been to Egypt since 2015 (as these travels could explain why Czechs' attitudes towards 'Egyptians' are, according to surveys, twice as warm as towards 'Arabs' – see 4.2.2.a.), two of which came from a small (anonymised) Moravian city (not to be confused with the smaller Moravian town). Four to five participants from each non-Muslim cohort were interviewed.

Table 1. Sample design
• Areas with <u>different political behaviours</u>: ○ Large industrial city with higher anti-Muslim vote rates (Ostrava)[i] ○ Small town with average voting behaviour (Small Moravian Town)[i] ○ Large multicultural city with lower anti-Muslim vote rates (Prague)[i]
• Groups of non-Muslim Czechs who are likely to have had (different types and levels of) <u>contact with Muslims</u>: ○ Spa town with a high presence of Arab tourist and Muslim, mostly Arab, residents (Teplice)[i] ○ Czechs who have been on holiday in Egypt since 2015[ii]
• <u>Muslims</u> who have been living in Czechia since before 2015[ii]
[i] *In each city, sampling followed quotas to ensure a balanced mix by gender, age group (18-25; 26-35; 36-49; 50-69) and education (non-/university studies). At least one interviewee in each city was either retired, unemployed or working part-time.* [ii] *Due to the unknown demographic profile of these two cohorts, quotas were not followed. Nevertheless, I tried to control as much as possible for some degree of variation in these samples.*

The only criteria for Muslim participants were self-identification as Muslim and having lived in Czechia since before 2015. Eventually, I included one participant who had moved to the country in 2016. Overall, I struggled to find Muslim participants. My network personally knew very few Muslims and, additionally, after reaching out to potential participants, I frequently found reluctance to speak about Islamophobia with a stranger in the semi-formal setting of a research interview. Nevertheless, several people generously agreed to speak to me informally rather than becoming research participants. Furthermore, it was difficult to fulfil my goal of finding varied sociodemographic profiles, which led me to discard some referrals to continue searching for alternatives. To solve this, after having interviewed five Muslim participants through referrals, I managed to speak to three additional participants replying to my messages on relevant Facebook groups. As a result of sampling complications, and the sociodemographic and geographic particularities of Czech Muslim communities, most Muslim participants lived in Prague (five out of eight), with all being university graduates, except for one, who was a university student.

Interviews in Czech were transcribed by a native professional with whom a data processing agreement to protect participants' data was signed, whereas I transcribed interviews conducted in English. The resulting data was coded and analysed in NVivo

2020 following a critical realist thematic analysis that treats participants' statements as reports of a socially constituted reality mediated by socio-cultural meanings and interlocutors' interpretations (Terry et al., 2017). Considering these mediators, I inferred causal mechanisms from social and socio-cognitive structures. I understand themes as recurrent "patterns of meaning" which are "important in relation to the particular topic and research question being explored" (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57). Following a first reading, I generated 19 codes corresponding to theoretically relevant issues (for instance, 'Muslims as symbolic threat' and 'representations of Western Europe'). During the coding phase, some of these codes were broken down into subcodes (such as 'intergroup contact': in Egypt, Teplice and so on). For a codebook, see Annex 6. Finally, the information within (sub)codes was sorted and analysed along themes (for example, 'they should respect our laws' or 'media brainwashing is responsible for prejudice'). Chapters 5 and 6 present these themes in relation to each other, the theory and the findings of the political discourse analysis from chapters 7 and 8. Since this analysis is not concerned with quantitative induction (Reichertz, 2004), I have not rigorously computed the occurrence of phenomena. Instead, vague quantifiers (from 'few' to 'some', 'many' or 'most') roughly indicate the intensity of occurrence. Additionally, this vagueness results from the complications of classification (for example, some statements might not clearly count towards the final computation of occurrences) and the ambiguous relationship between quantity and qualitative relevance (for instance, one participant might say a uniquely insightful thing while ten participants might repeat something relatively uninteresting for the analysis).

Chapters 7 and 8: Televised political discourse and discourse analysis

I analyse political discourse from two flagship television debate shows aired by the public broadcaster, namely *Události, komentáře* or 'Events, commentary' (henceforth, UK), aired every weekday, and the weekly *Otázky Václava Moravce* or 'The questions of Václav Moravec' (OVM). The public broadcaster, Czech Television (ČT), was chosen for several reasons. First, ČT shows from this period can be streamed online, unlike those from its private competitors. This availability allowed me to check the accuracy of existing transcripts, better contextualise statements or access relevant visual information. Second, ČT's information has a wide diffusion and enjoys a high level of authority. ČT's news shows were the most watched and trusted by 2015 (Česká televize, 2016), and, self-reportedly, are citizens' most frequent source of information on 'Muslims' (MEDIAN, 2018). Third, ČT news shows are sites for politically mainstream ideas in two senses. In the first sense, this institution has privileged access to the most (institutionally) powerful and notable speakers, the symbolic elites with the power to prescribe and reproduce acceptable ideas. In the second sense, ČT is generally considered to champion liberal democratic values,[13] a public service function and ethical reporting, frequently becoming a target for far-right and populist actors. As a result of this double mainstream character, in 2015, ČT was a platform favouring mainstream elites and a relatively liberal zeitgeist. Thus, politicians' agency for introducing Islamophobic rhetoric into these shows was

[13] ČT lists among its primary goals the "preservation and development of civil society and democracy" (Česká televize, 2016).

relatively high, and so was the power of this rhetoric to change public perceptions of which ideas were being sanctioned as acceptable.

Regarding the nature of these programmes, both examine current events in greater depth than conventional news shows, with a moderator interviewing or chairing a round table with expert guests (for example, academics, state officials). Additionally, they rely on a myriad of complementary news genres (such as in-studio graphics, or stories with voice-over or anchors). Both formats rely on and are relied upon by other information shows from ČT, and their debates are regularly picked up by other news media across platforms.

To build the corpus, transcripts containing words derived from 'Muslim' or 'Islam' were searched for on the Newton Media's monitoring database from January 2014 to December 2015. (Their transcripts, on which I performed the analysis, use a clean verbatim method of transcription.) The Newton database archives these shows' transcripts by bloc. Bloc here refers to the thematic sections under a distinctive headline comprising a day's show. (For a list of blocs, their headlines and date of emission, see Annexes 3-4.) Within each bloc, speakers move to seemingly adjacent (sub-)topics either at the behest of moderators or autonomously. For instance, in the bloc 'Europe seeks a solution for the refugee crisis' speakers bring up topics like the dysfunction of the EU, xenophobia in Czech society or the undeservingness of 'refugees'. I analysed only those blocs in which politicians or activists spoke. Occasionally, I decided to unsystematically add to the corpus complementary texts beyond these two shows for several reasons: mainly, their intertextual reference and having been produced elsewhere by the same actor and in relation to the same event.

The analysis was split into two periods. Between January 2014 and February 2015, covered by Chapter 7, mainstream politicians began regularly featuring in these shows to react to different events involving 'Muslims'. This period is taken as a prelude to the 'refugee crisis' (see 4.4.2.) to show that, from the outset, mainstream political discourse displayed a clear Islamophobic bias. Chapter 8 covers the period from March to December 2015, when the 'refugee crisis' became the dominant topic, and the EU relocation and resettlement mechanisms for refugees (hereafter, 'quotas' or 'refugee quotas', following the vernacular terminology) were the most discussed pieces of legislation. Here, mainstream politicians relied on their previous Islamophobic rhetoric to build the new discourse on 'refugees'. Given the exponential increase on coverage of 'Muslims' and 'Islam' during this second period, two decisions were made regarding data collection. First, I only analysed blocs from the daily UK show, in which the broadcasted hours on topics related to the 'refugee crisis' went up by 400% from 2014 to 2015 (Česká televize, 2016, p. 40). Second, I considered as political activists high-profile conservative intellectuals whose role in disseminating anti-refugee or Islamophobic rhetoric is highlighted in the literature and was informally

indicated to me by Czech researchers. These include Roman Joch,[14] Václav Cílek,[15] Alexander Tomský[16] or Petr Robejšek,[17] most of whom have had formal links to political parties.

For the analysis of the transcripts, I used NVivo 2020, considering the talk of politicians, activists and moderators, as the latter have significant power over agenda setting, framing and the priming of topics (for instance, connecting news about IS with unrelated questions about Muslim communities in Czechia). The shows' supporting images were considered for context but not coded.

The analysis followed three steps. First, each bloc's transcript was carefully read on NVivo along its corresponding video streamed on the ČT website. The primary goal was identifying recurrent themes in relation to the representation of each of four actors (i.e. 'Muslims'; 'Czechs'; 'Western Europe'/'Europeans'; 'the far right'/'populists') and, secondarily, to register relevant visual information. While reading and watching each bloc, I coded mentions to the social actors and took notes on the topics discussed, identifying emerging themes and insights which would guide my second reading and analysis. Some themes already identified recurrent discursive strategies (for instance, 'impersonalisations of 'Muslims' as water phenomena or policy objects'), while others simply captured the topics discussed (for instance, 'references to multiculturalism'). These themes became NVivo codes. The second step aimed at coding for the relevant discursive strategies. This process involved re-reading each bloc on NVivo (alongside my notes), coding extracts which represented a theme, and selecting additional extracts beyond the themes which were representative of Islamophobic talk. The analysis of the latter extracts would reveal new themes, which were added to the codebook (for the resulting codebook, see Annex 7).

The selected extracts were analysed for their strategies for representing social actors and argumentation. For the former, I relied on the sociosemantic analytical categories of van Leeuwen (2013). These categories ultimately seek to discover how social actors' agency is realised in the text, including without being given linguistic agency. Thus, in a sentence like 'we face an influx of migrants', linguistically, 'we' is the grammatical agent, but what is sociosemantically relevant is that migrants are the performers of the 'inflowing' action. The most relevant categories for my analysis are:

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[14] Conservative intellectual identified by anti-Islam activist Martin Konvička (Islám v ČR nechceme, 2015, min. 6:22) and then Muslim activist Lukáš Lhoťan (Romanov, 2010, min. 29:25) as one of the earliest Czech public figures charging against Islam. Joch's extensive commentary on Islam presents nuances, generally appealing to ostensibly liberal principles for tolerating Islamic practices and limited institutionalisation while opposing the construction of mosques or publicly wearing the niqab (Joch, 2014a, 2015; Odstrčil, 2011). As director of the Civic Institute, this think-tank cooperated with Bill Warner, founder of the infamous Czech-based Center for the Study of Political Islam (Občanský Institut, 2014).

[15] Geologist, science communicator and public commentator. He was one of the leading figures of the technocratic 2080 Institute, a think-tank and lobbying group pushing for deregulation or Eurosceptic sovereigntism, and against 'political correctness' (Pergler, 2015; USPCZ.cz, 2023).

[16] Political scientist, translator and public commentator. Former member of ODS, the Party of Free Citizens and the Realists.

[17] Economist and political scientist. Founder of the national conservative Realists party in 2016 and co-initiator of the 2080 Institute.

- Exclusion: which social actors are left out from the representation of the action. Their agency can be either supressed in full or backgrounded (i.e. deemphasised).
- Role allocation: who is represented as the patient or agent of an action. Actors can be activated or passivised.
- Assimilation: when actors are, rather than individuated, represented as groups. They can be aggregated (i.e. quantified through statistics) or collectivised (i.e. without quantification).
- Association: when several groups are represented as acting or receiving an action together. Conversely, their lack of association can be emphasised through dissociation.
- Indetermination: actors are represented as unspecified or anonymous (for example, 'someone says'). Conversely, identity can also be clearly determined.
- Impersonalisation: social actors are not represented as human. They can be abstracted through a quality attributed to the actor (for example, 'Let's fight the Islamisation of Europe') or objectivised as a thing. The forms of objectivation relevant to my study are: spatialisation, i.e. representation as a place (for example, 'Brussels tells us what to do'); utterance autonomisation, i.e. actors' utterances are represented as the agent (for example, 'the declaration says'); and instrumentalization, i.e. representation as instruments through which actors' carry action (for example, 'boats arrive every day').

Additionally, I analyse argumentation about the inclusion or exclusion of the relevant social actors following categories of topoi, a relatively controversial concept rooted in Aristotelian argumentation theory,[18] from Reisigl and Wodak (2005, pp. 74–80). Wodak (2017, pp. 36–37, 2018, p. 35) regards topoi as argumentative schemata which appeal to commonly held beliefs and knowledge which originate from a combination of formal logic, culture, human relations and their recurrence within certain discourses. They function as rhetorical devices to appeal to common sense, often bypassing the need to provide detailed evidence or reasoning. Topoi define, specifically, the content-related warrants connecting an argument (i.e. the reasons for or against an opinion (Kienpointner, 1992, p. 179)) to its conclusion (Reisigl & Wodak, 2005, pp. 74–75). According to Wodak (2017, p. 37), topoi "can be made explicit as conditional or causal paraphrases such as 'if x, then y' or 'y, because x'". An example of the topos of history would be:

- Topos/warrant: "If history teaches us that certain actions bring certain consequences, we should act accordingly".
- Argument: "History teaches us that Muslim migrants to Western Europe have not been able to integrate and create problems for ethnic majorities".
- Conclusion: "Czechs, as fellow Europeans, should not accept Muslim migrants into the country to avoid a population that does not integrate and creates problems for the ethnic majority".

From Reisigl and Wodak's (2005, pp. 74–80) repertoire of topoi for analysing discriminatory rhetoric, the most relevant for this work are:

[18] The DHA's use of the concept of topoi has been criticised for its allegedly simplistic and inconsistent application, and its distance from both its classical and contemporary theorisations (Žagar, 2010).

- Topoi of advantage or usefulness: if an action is advantageous or useful it should be taken. It can benefit 'us', 'them' or both. Conversely, we speak of the topoi of uselessness or disadvantage.
- Topoi of danger or threat: if an action is dangerous or threatening, it should not be taken. It is often performed through an *argumentum ad populum*, that is, an argumentative fallacy positing that something is good when most people believe so (for example, 'citizens fear migrants, hence the state should stop migrants from coming').
- Topos of humanitarianism: if an action upholds human rights or humanitarian values, it should be taken.
- Topos of justice: if an action treats everyone/everything equally, it should be taken; and vice versa if not.
- Topos or responsibility: if an actor is responsible for a situation, they should take responsibility for it; and vice versa if not.
- Topos of burdening: if an actor is burdened by a situation, someone should act to diminish such burdens.
- Topos of reality: because reality is as it is, a specific action should be taken.
- Topos of numbers: if numbers support the argument made through other topoi, then a related action should or should not be taken (for example, 'because 40% of arrivals are economic migrants, member states should stop migrants from coming').
- Topoi of law or right: if a law or norm prohibits/prescribes an action, that action should or should not be taken.
- Topos of authority: if an authority says something is right or needs to be done, so be it.
- Topos of history: because history teaches that specific actions bring specific consequences, we should act accordingly.
- Topos of culture: because the culture of a social group is as it is, problems are expected to arise.

Additionally, Reisigl and Wodak (2005, pp. 69–74) identify fallacies as violations of rhetorical rules of engagement into rational argument (like the obligation to offer reasons or correctly paraphrasing interlocutors). According to their criteria, classifying an argument as fallacious often depends on context. Hence, Wodak (2021, pp. 74–76) has recently recognised that some strategies which formerly qualified as fallacies could also be topoi. Although my project is not particularly concerned with fallacies, a few of those identified in the original classification (Reisigl & Wodak, 2005, pp. 69–74) appeared recurrently. The *argumentum ad populum* appeals to popular opinions and emotions rather than offering valid arguments. The fallacy of 'hasty generalisation' uses unrepresentative samples to establish broad generalisations. Similarly, the 'slippery slope' fallacy (see Čada & Frantová, 2017) relies on a narrative that, based on an event, projects a string of future, ostensibly related, events with greater consequences (for instance, "first, it will be a mosque, and then they will want to introduce Sharia").

Wodak and Meyer (2016, p. 20) have been critical of analysts who opt for the representation of social actors and topoi only because these categories seem methodologically easy to apply for those lacking a background in linguistics. I shall clarify that, although I mostly fit within that description, I make no secret of my limited

background in linguistics. Hence, my linguistic analysis beyond these categories might often appear superficial, limited or unintentionally misguided. This is certainly a limitation of my analysis but, I believe, not enough to challenge my choice of methods. Those with a better understanding of linguistics may find how I overlook important evidence. My initial analysis will be useful for scholars of linguistics wishing to take this case study further.

The third step of the analysis is to organise the findings from the previous steps into thematic sections and offer a critique of the use of these discursive strategies. For instance, several strategies were relevant to the discourse on the subtopics of 'political correctness' or 'protecting our borders'. I subject some of these strategies to a three-level critique (Reisigl & Wodak, 2005, pp. 32–34), aiming at exposing texts' and actors' inconsistencies, how these strategies support socially problematic goals and, in some instances, which alternative discursive practices could reduce the reproduction of Islamophobia. Findings were organised into sections mostly corresponding to how each of the four social actors was discussed, although sometimes, the recurrent use of some strategies merited a section of their own. Occasionally, within sections, small case studies in the form of vignettes focus on particular discursive strategies or their consequences, as in Wodak (2015b). (For a list of vignettes, refer to the Table of Vignettes above.)

3.5. Ethical considerations and positionality

The design of this study and data processing procedures received approval from the UCL Research Ethics Committee (UCL REC) as a low-risk project, Project ID 16761/001, thus being recognised as compliant with the body's guidelines. Several safeguards were put in place to protect participants' safety, comfort and rights during and after the interviews. For instance, all participants were adults; we agreed on a maximum duration for the interviews, which was scrupulously observed and only extended with participants' explicit agreement; and interviews were conducted at locations chosen by participants. Before the interview, participants became informed about the nature of the project through a participant information sheet and a data protection privacy notice, as well as being encouraged to ask any questions. Additionally, interviewees were given a consent form to tick and sign to ensure that they understood their rights, the technical aspects of the interviews and the processing of their data. Both forms had been approved by the UCL REC and contained contact details for the relevant UCL authorities should have been any problem. No participant expressed their desire to withdraw their consent or complained about the interviews.

During fieldwork, no significant ethical issues arose. Being aware of the sensitivity of the research topic for Czech Muslims, I was cautious to minimise any possible distress that Muslim participants could experience. During recruitment, Muslim referees and referrers were offered ample detail about the nature of the project, my background and the university. Whenever potential Muslim participants hesitated about joining the project or felt uncomfortable about the format of the interviews, we agreed on not conducting these. However, a Muslim participant and a few off-the-record informants preferred online calls without video, to which I agreed. When participants shared difficult stories of Islamophobic discrimination, I tried communicating my genuine empathy and avoiding discomforting details.

Conversely, a few times, I felt unsettled by expressions of prejudice (not only towards ‘Muslims’), particularly by some non-Muslim participants. Looking at my paper copy of the interview schedule, which allowed me to dispassionately jump onto the next question, was always a good way to regulate discomfort. Furthermore, as a foreigner and young researcher, I felt entitled to some degree of awkwardness in my communication, so I did not feel pushed to validate or engage with expressions of prejudice. Nevertheless, the tone of the interviews was remarkably friendly and, usually, we continued chatting informally afterwards, sometimes for one or more hours. Non-Muslim participants very often felt surprised that they had so much to contribute about the topics discussed and many said that the exercise had been interesting for them. However, the declared effects of the interviews over these participants varied. While a participant thanked me for having offered them the unusual space for expressing politically incorrect views (without this necessarily meaning that these views had become solidified), a few expressed surprise at discovering their own prejudice and some became aware of their frustration at other Czechs for holding prejudice. Some Muslim participants reported that verbalising their answers had been insightful or healing. Finally, as interviews took place during the Covid-19 pandemic, we always kept the appropriate safety and distance measures, often meeting outdoors, to ensure that nobody felt unsafe.

Regarding my positionality, I am neither Muslim nor Czech, but an ethnic Spaniard. My sympathies for some of the plights of Muslims or migrants have multiple sources, influenced by my biography, interests and political beliefs. In 2015, I became interested on the backlash against refugees while living in Prague as a Spanish migrant with a Czech partner, being a tour guide and international relations student. At the time, I had to reconcile my deep admiration for most things Czech, and growing identification with the country, with an anti-refugee reaction which conflicted with my worldview and immigrant identity. During my masters studies (2015-2017) and afterwards, I became highly interested in migration, Islamophobic discrimination, the Middle East, and growing nationalism and authoritarianism in Western politics. Therefore, when a posting for the FATIGUE programme sought a researcher on “anti-migrant feeling” with a pre-arranged exchange with Charles University Prague, the topic of my proposal became evident.

Participants might have assigned me some identities perceived to be relevant for our interaction. Only from my e-mail or telephone introduction, most participants probably assumed that I was male, a Spaniard, a young student at an English university (which relates to expectations about class and, probably, liberal values), probably non-Muslim and somehow familiar with Czechia. These factors conditioned many aspects of our interviews. Even my gender, to which I sadly paid little attention at the time, allowed me to meet strangers in new towns without feeling vulnerable, probably conditioning answers (for instance, non-Muslim men did not remark that Muslim migrants might be threatening to non-Muslim women), the hesitancy of some Muslim women to join the project or the fact that some male non-Muslim participants chose a pub for our interview. However, I was most self-conscious about being a foreigner, and often anxious about my Czech language skills. Nevertheless, my position as an outsider allowed me to ask innocent questions to which participants felt that I might lack

background such as 'how do you think that Czech society feels towards Muslims nowadays?' or 'to whom does the label 'smoky person' (*čmoud*') apply?' Coming from a London university, and being perceived as an ethnic Spaniard, probably made participants assume that my attitudes towards 'Muslims' were relatively liberal. However, many surely racialised me as (a fellow) 'white' or 'European', and expected our shared position vis-à-vis other ethnicised groups. Nonetheless, some of the racialisation dynamics that are common in Czechia felt foreign to me (for instance, in Spain, Muslims are often racialised as Moors but not blacks) while some categorising labels felt offensive (for instance, *cikáni* for Romanies – which many Czechs also find offensive). For better or worse, not being a Czech citizen afforded me some distance from reacting to issues which I knew were politicised differently in the UK, Czechia or Spain.

My analysis is conditioned by similar identities to those attributed to me by participants. Additionally, my political beliefs and solidarities, and personal experiences during my PhD further conditioned my interpretations. For example, the longer I have been away from Czechia and closely following Czech politics, the harsher my verdict on Czech politicians has turned. Furthermore, while I initially felt more self-conscious about coming through as another young Western liberal lambasting East Europeans for being 'racists', my experiences during the PhD largely erased this insecurity and further convinced me of the importance of calling out the racist dimension of attitudes. Along the way, I have continued to challenge my own racist beliefs and stereotypes, whose trajectories also drove and informed my analysis. However, my commentary on racism goes only as far as my readings, limited experiences and position allow me to. Furthermore, although I was raised Catholic, I do not currently follow a religion and my interpretations are influenced by a particular understanding of secularism. Muslim researchers or scholars of religion might bring different sensibilities to their analyses.

Conclusions

This chapter delineated the design of this project. Fundamentally, the dissertation seeks to comprehend the reasons behind the widespread adoption of anti-Muslim attitudes among Czech citizens around 2015. The primary hypothesis posits that Czech political discourse played a significant role in shaping citizens' anti-Muslim attitudes through various socio-cognitive mechanisms, identified in the theoretical framework but about which further insights will be collected abductively. Relying on an understanding of normalisation that emphasises the role of the political mainstream in propagating uncivil discourses and ideas (Brown et al., 2021), I illustrate that the Czech political mainstream, independent of any substantial pressure from the national far right, played a pivotal role in promoting Islamophobia between 2014 and 2015. While interviews with citizens were scheduled for 2020 and 2021, I anticipated that their testimonies would still bear the imprint of the discursive shift in political discourse which occurred five to six years earlier. Once more, Islamophobia is conceptualised as a racist ideology informing the representations of social groups, which is transmitted primarily through discourse (van Dijk, 2006). The relevant groups for Czech Islamophobia which structure the analysis are 'Czechs'/'Europeans', 'Western Europe', 'Muslims'/'refugees', and the 'far right'/'populists'.

The project presents two sets of exploratory research questions regarding citizens and politicians, each requiring a different methodological approach. In chapters 5 and 6, I elucidate the nature, history and causes of recent negative attitudes towards ‘Muslims’ among Czechs. This is accomplished through a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted in 2020 and 2021 with non-Muslim Czech citizens and Muslims living in Czechia. The analytical emphasis in these chapters lies in examining the prejudices and stereotypes implied in the themes articulated by participants, as well as those attributed to others. Conversely, chapters 7 and 8 investigate how and why Czech politicians and activists, particularly within mainstream politics, employed Islamophobic rhetoric between 2014 and 2015. Through the examination of two information shows televised by the public broadcaster, the analysis seeks to uncover the strategies for representing social actors (van Leeuwen, 2013) and argumentation (Reisigl & Wodak, 2005) used by politicians, activists and the shows’ moderators. Despite this apparent segmentation, the overarching question concerning the influence of political discourse on the formation of anti-Muslim attitudes remains central throughout the analysis, which frequently revisits sociopsychological theories on intergroup bias formation.

4. The Czech context (2004-2015): the road to mainstream Islamophobia

The academic study of Islamophobic and anti-refugee discourses in Czechia is relatively new, as Muslim migration was not perceived as a significant social or political issue until relatively recently. As late as 2013, Miroslav Mareš, one of the biggest experts on the Czech far right, predicted that Islamophobia was unlikely to become important for far-right actors in the V4 countries (2014, p. 220). Likewise, he believed until a few days before the January 2015 Paris attacks that Islamophobia remained largely unable to mobilise the average Czech voter (Trachtová, 2015). However, Mareš always recognised that "something extraordinary", like "an Islamist terrorist attack in the area" (2014, p. 220) could invalidate his initial prediction. Extraordinary things did indeed take place in 2014, with the rise of the Islamic State (IS), and, by 2015, a string of jihadist terrorist attacks on West European soil and the European 'refugee crisis'. Two years after Mareš' article, the country went from a general lack of interest in Islam to Czechs holding the most negative attitudes towards 'Muslims' in the EU (Pew Research Center, 2018b, pp. 3–5), the highest concern about terrorism as a threat to EU security (TNS Opinion & Social, 2015b), and, intermittently, the strongest opposition to their country helping (Muslim) 'refugees' (TNS Opinion & Social, 2015c, p. 227). Meanwhile, most Czech political parties relied on Islamophobic rhetoric to oppose the so-called refugee quotas (Krčál & Naxera, 2018). These social and political changes did not occur in a vacuum but were facilitated by previous mechanisms, events, perceptions and actors.

This chapter serves two purposes. The first three sections present the sociological and political historical phenomena which influenced the changes of 2014 and 2015. These sections attend to key developments in Czech politics between 2004 and 2014; the discrimination against ethnic minorities since 1989, with a focus on the Roma and, especially, Muslims; and the dynamics in migration to the country since 1945 understood from a regional and EU context. The second goal is to provide a detailed picture of national events related to the 'refugee crisis' to contextualise the discourse analysis of chapters 7 and 8, as well as references made to these events by participants in chapters 5 and 6.

4.1. Euroscepticism, populism and other factors enabling the incursion of Islamophobia into Czech politics in the 2010s

The first segment of this section presents key developments in Czech institutional politics which explain the rise of Euroscepticism and populism in the country, two factors which I relate to the use of Islamophobic rhetoric by mainstream politicians in the 2010s more explicitly in 4.2.2.b. A sub-section highlights important socio-historical factors which contribute to understand and situate Islamophobic political discourse in Czechia.

Right after the EU accession, political scientists warned of the erosion of liberal democracy in post-communist countries.[19] Nevertheless, Czech democracy remained comparatively robust, with scholars' main concern being Czech parties' inability to sustain durable coalition governments (Greskovits, 2015; Hanley, 2014). However, between 1989 and 2010, the Czech party system remained relatively stable. The four actors consistently receiving most votes had been the liberal-conservative Civic Democratic Party (ODS), the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD), the Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL) and the, marginalised and relatively unreformed, Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) (Havlík, 2015a). (Annex 2 at the end of this chapter lists and explains party abbreviations.) The far right, which had only obtained significant parliamentary representation in the 1990s through the populist radical-right Republicans (SPR–RSČ) (Hanley, 2012), remained weak and fragmented between 2004 and 2014 – particularly the neo-Nazi scene, which had been strong in the 1990s (BIS, 2005, 2015). Only by 2013 did the newly created radical-right Dawn enter the lower house with almost 7% of the vote (see below).[20]

Until 2010, the Czech party system had been mostly defined by a socioeconomic cleavage which produced an alternation of governments led by either the liberal-conservative ODS or the social-democratic ČSSD (Casal Bértoa, 2014). However, as a result of corruption, government instability and the 2008 economic crisis, party volatility increased in the crucial 2010 and 2013 parliamentary elections (Charvát, 2014) as new populist parties, ironically embedded in and structured as businesses (Hloušek et al., 2020, Chapters 3, 5), entered governing coalitions.

In 2014, Euroscepticism and populism were shaping Czech politics in important ways, including by favouring the introduction or intensification of Islamophobia. Euroscepticism had been pushed by political leaders and intellectuals. It promoted, inter alia, beliefs about a declining West marred by interethnic conflict with 'Muslims' while seeking a corrective in conservative and reactionary solutions (Slačálek, 2021). Since the 1990s, ODS, KSČM and SPR–RSČ had put forward Eurosceptic ideas. ODS had been an influential actor in this regard. After suffering an internal debacle, by 1997, the party reoriented towards national interests and sovereignty, as a Eurosceptic wing took control (Cabada, 2023; Hanley, 2004). Against the backdrop of accession, the party promoted an anti-colonial discourse against the EU meddling with national interests that would become adopted across ideologies to articulate anti-refugee positions in 2015 (Slačálek & Šitera, 2022).

By the late 2000s, ODS' founding leader and Czech president Václav Klaus, together with public intellectuals close to Klaus and his party turned to hard Euroscepticism (i.e. entirely rejecting European integration and/or advocating leaving the EU) (Havlík et al., 2017, Chapter 6). Their charges against the Euro, multiculturalism or the EU's threat to national sovereignty penetrated public discourse. Meanwhile, ODS co-founded the soft-Eurosceptic European Conservatives and Reformists Party and, for

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[19] The often-cited October 2007 *Journal of Democracy*, 18(4) edited by Marc F. Plattner and Larry J. Diamond, offers a good overview.

[20] Additionally, two candidates from the regionalist anti-Romani Severočeši.cz became senators in 2010.

the 2009 EP elections, former party members established the relatively marginal hard-Eurosceptic Party of Free Citizens. Klaus vocally opposed the Lisbon Treaty, managing to get an opt-out protocol from the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights as a condition to sign. He argued that the Charter would allow previously-expelled Sudeten Germans to raise property claims before the EU Court of Justice (Klaus, 2010). Klaus was not only the last EU leader to sign the Lisbon Treaty, but also his veto, eventually overturned by parliament in 2009 under the threat of EU sanctions, made Czechia the last country to pass an Anti-Discrimination Act in compliance with the EU Equality Directive (Equal Rights Trust, 2009). Relative to other V4 countries, party-based Euroscepticism remained markedly mainstream and recurrent in Czech politics at this point (Dúró, 2014).

Additionally, Czech public opinion towards EU membership considerably worsened following the 2008 European economic crisis (Havlík et al., 2017, Chapter 4; Haydanka, 2020). After a period of growth, the 2008 crisis sent a short-lived shock across most Czech regions between late-2008 and mid-2009 (Mazurek, 2011) largely because of the economy's interdependence with the rest of the EU (Tvrdoň, 2010). Despite Czechia not being severely impacted by the crisis, at least immediately (Prokop, 2019, Chapter 1), the then centre-right government discursively relied on the 'crisis' frame to justify its previously outlined austerity programme (Saxonberg et al., 2024). The citizenry felt that the country's economy had been hit hard, although, at the individual level, people recognised that the effect on their lives was only moderate (Červenka, 2011). Between April 2009 and April 2011, opposition to adopting the Euro went from around 47% to 75%, where it remained by 2019 (Červenka, 2019). Moreover, participation for the second-order European parliament elections went down from 28% in 2004 and 2009 to 18% in 2014 – the second lowest in the EU.[21]

The rise of populism in party politics was even more transformational. In the 2010s, I argue, mainstream parties veered towards Islamophobia as they felt punished by the electorate, particularly the centre-right, and embraced elements of populistic rhetoric to rival challengers. Populism shook the Czech party system in 2010, following years of corruption scandals and government instability, which shaped a preference for technocracy, and in the context of an economic crisis.

In the decade after EU accession, there were nine different prime ministers. Most of them were forced to resign due to corruption scandals. In addition to the toxicity of corruption, even if ODS and ČSSD alternated as increasingly bitter coalition leaders, party fragmentation and the exclusion of the KSČM complicated forming and sustaining majorities. Notably, after a technical draw between left and right blocs, it took parliament seven months to accept a minority coalition (ODS+KDU-ČSL+SZ[22]) led by ODS in January 2006. This government fell after a fifth vote of confidence proposed by the ČSSD. The timing was particularly embarrassing for Czechs, as they then held the EU presidency – the first post-communist country to do so –, creating the feeling that party interests were being put before those of the state (Druker, 2010). A leading economist from the Czech statistics office, Jan Fischer, was selected to lead

[21] The low 2014 turnout has been explained as resulting from a combination of declining trust in EU institutions after the financial crisis (Vlčková, 2019) and voter fatigue, as this vote came after two presidential rounds and the parliamentary elections of October 2013.
[22] Green Party.

the caretaker government. The new cabinet was strictly technocratic in sprit, refusing to get involved in decisions which it deemed ideological. Trust in the government increased to levels not seen since 1991, going up from 20.4% in April 2009 to 72.5% in April 2010 (CVVM, 2024a). This popularity reflected “a combination of aversion to the political parties, faith in the professionalism of the government, and […] the likable personality of the premier” (Hloušek & Kopeček, 2014, p. 1345).

The high public perceptions of corruption would mar the image of established parties in favour of anti-corruption populist and alternative right-wing newcomers founded since 2010. After Fischer’s technocratic government, in the May 2010 elections, ČSSD and ODS lost around 10% of their 2006 vote share while two new parties, TOP 09 (16.7%) and the Public Affairs party or VV (10.9%), entered the lower house for the first time. The former was a pro-EU liberal-conservative splinter party from KDU-ČSL (and, until 2016, often in common lists with the centrist Mayors and Independents, STAN). VV was an anti-corruption centrist populist party (Havlík & Hloušek, 2014, p. 558) which promised to dispense with ‘political dinosaurs’ and was structurally connected to a powerful security firm. ODS, TOP 09 and VV entered a governing coalition led by prime minister Petr Nečas (ODS). However, during the first two years, a string of progressively more intricate corruption scandals affecting VV (Just & Charvát, 2016, pp. 93–96) and particularly outrageous ones affecting ODS (Kupka & Mochťak, 2014) damaged trust in the government. A fractured coalition, about a dozen ministerial resignations and the arrest of high-level public servants and politicians, brought down the government by June 2013. Serious scandals equally implicated the opposition and the president during this period.[23]

Research shows that between 2009-2012 there was a record increase in national press coverage of corruption, without this necessarily meaning that actual corruption was more frequent (Naxera, 2015). Compounding the harm, an increased public perception of corruption (Hanzlová, 2018) coincided with the austerity measures proposed by the Nečas (ODS) government (2010-2013). By December 2012, 79.4% of respondents were dissatisfied with the political situation (CVVM, 2024c). The ensuing presidential and parliamentary elections would see the further incursion of populism.

In January 2013, Miloš Zeman, a former social-democratic prime minister turned populist, was elected in the country's first direct presidential election (see below). His propagation of blatant Islamophobic rhetoric since 2010 is well documented (Naxera & Krčál, 2018, 2020). During his first months in office and amid the vacuum left by the dissolution of the centre-right government, Zeman tried to aggrandise the presidential powers, unsuccessfully.[24] In the October 2013 parliamentary elections, the right-wing

[23] Other revelations concerned bribery of a ČSSD governor in 2012 (Válková et al., 2012). Additionally, President Klaus sanctioned an amnesty which exonerated individuals connected to corruption events dating back to Klaus’ premiership in the 1990s (The Economist, 2013). The Senate impeached Klaus three days before his tenure ended and unsuccessfully attempted to charge the then unpopular president with high treason.

[24] Newly elected President Zeman accepted Nečas’s resignation in June 2013, leading to the dissolution of the government. While the formerly governing right-wing coalition wanted to constitute a new

parties of the previous unpopular coalition received together 19.8% of the vote (a 28% decrease), with ODS winning only 2.7% over the 5% threshold (Havlík, 2014, p. 46). Nonetheless, the most notable feature of this election was the entry into parliament of two new populist movements led by businessmen: the Action of Dissatisfied Citizens or ANO (18.7%) and Dawn (6.9%). Their structure more resembled a private firm than any type of traditional party (Just & Charvát, 2016). While Bohuslav Sobotka (ČSSD) tried to assemble a cabinet, former party member Miloš Zeman exploited ČSSD's internal divisions to challenge Sobotka's leadership and unsuccessfully tried to veto Sobotka's proposed ministers. Eventually, after accepting Zeman's condition of including Andrej Babiš (ANO) as part of the cabinet, despite his failing to present a lustration certificate, Sobotka's proposed coalition (ČSSD+ANO+KDU-ČSL) passed the vote of confidence in February 2014 (Havlík, 2014, pp. 48–49).

With the advent of social media and fast news cycles, in the 2010s, institutional politics were becoming increasingly geared towards seeking attention and staging ideological conflict (Krzyżanowski et al., 2018). In Czechia, three populist mavericks started to re-define political communication over the period, adding pressure on mainstream parties to adapt. The first of these was Zeman, who, before his 2013 election as president, had founded the unsuccessful Party of Civic Rights (SPOZ) party in 2009. In his 2010s re-incarnation, Zeman was a populist candidate appealing to regional, older and poorer voters, often unafraid of cavalier offensive or vulgar remarks. He won the presidential race through a negative campaign which associated his opponent, the prince and former minister Karel Schwarzenberg, with German collaborationists, the Prague progressive elites (which enthusiastically supported Schwarzenberg) and the reviled aristocracy (Hospodářské noviny, 2013; Novinky.cz, 2013). Anti-German xenophobia greatly contributed to the negative reframing of Schwarzenberg in the media (Jeřábek et al., 2013), with Václav Klaus' family contributing along the way (Golis, 2013). By contrast, the negative attributes associated to Zeman (i.e. alcohol drinking and smoking) were not particularly disturbing for his potential voters (IPM, 2015). Zeman would become a highly polarising politician who, during his first term, would recurrently level accusations against the media, corrupt politicians or Muslims (Naxera & Krčál, 2020).

The second figure was unable to gather enough valid signatures to become a candidate for the 2013 presidential race but his party, Dawn, entered parliament that year. Tomio Okamura was a charismatic businessman and senator of Japanese-Czech-Korean origin who tightly controlled Dawn, a populist radical-right movement upholding direct democracy, individual responsibility, nationalism, anti-Roma discourse, the fight against corruption and strengthening law and order (Havlík, 2015b, pp. 21–24; Šárovec, 2018, pp. 93–100). Since the 1990s, no other far-right party had gained representation in the Chamber of Deputies. In just a few years, Okamura had gone from countering racist stereotypes in cooperation with an NGO fighting anti-

government, Zeman refused to accept the legitimacy of the latter and advocated, instead, for a government of experts headed by his old-time collaborator and economist Jiří Rusnok. Zeman was asserting his desire to concentrate greater powers in the presidential office. However, he was eventually kept in check by the Chamber of Deputies, which refused to accept Rusnok's government and voted to dissolve itself in August 2013 (Hloušek, 2014, pp. 107–111).

Roma discrimination (Romea, 2009) to lambasting the Roma and homosexuals (Zeman, 2011). He framed social conflict as concerning the defenceless "decent" and "hardworking" (*slušní a pracující*) citizens (i.e. non-Roma) against the "parasitic and maladapted" (*parazitující a nepřizpůsobiví*) ones (i.e. often, Roma) (Okamura, 2013). The labelling of Roma as maladapted (*nepřizpůsobiví*) had been for a long time present in mainstream media (Burgetová & Černá, 2007, pp. 95–100) and the rhetoric of major conservative parties like ODS or KDU-ČSL (Hejnal, 2012) but was now being articulated more aggressively by Dawn. Furthermore, by late 2013 Dawn started expanding the label to include 'maladapted migrants' (Čaněk, 2013).

By September 2013, Zeman and Okamura were the most trusted political leaders in the country (Kunštát, 2013), but a few months later they were toppled by another businessman turned party-leader (Kunštát, 2014). The billionaire of Slovak origin Andrej Babiš founded the ANO movement (an abbreviation for 'Action of Dissatisfied Citizens'), which has been labelled technocratic populist (Buštíková & Guasti, 2019; Hanley & Vachudova, 2018; Havlík, 2019b), centrist (managerial) populist (Císař, 2017) or anti-elitist populist (Císař & Štětka, 2016). The party promised to clampdown on corruption and bringing efficient technocratic expertise 'to run the state as a firm' (Buštíková & Guasti, 2019). Unlike Dawn, ANO did not advocate for greater civic participation but a concentration of power into the executive (Hanley & Vachudova, 2018, p. 286; Havlík, 2015b, p. 20). The origin of Babiš' fortune was opaque and murky, yet he tried to co-opt anti-corruption NGOs, notably Transparency International, into his movement (Hanley & Vachudova, 2018, p. 286).[25] Importantly, after the 2008 crisis, the ownership of Czech media shifted from Western corporations to a concentration in the hands of national oligarchs (Hanley & Vachudova, 2018, p. 287; Newman et al., 2019, pp. 78–79; Zatloukal, 2014, pp. 19–22). In June 2013, Babiš bought the powerful MAFRA media group, which included two of the country's most read dailies *Lidové Noviny* and *Mladá Fronta Dnes*, with the latter's revelations having been fundamental to the 2011 VV downfall (Havlík & Hloušek, 2014, p. 563). ANO introduced a more professional and effective political marketing campaigning. The budget for their memorable 2013 campaign was as high as the following two most expensive campaigns (ČSSD, TOP 09) combined (Čeřovský, 2016).

4.1.1 Other factors explaining Islamophobic politics

Few authors have presented a synthetic enumeration of socio-historical drivers of Czech Islamophobia. Notably, Ostřanský (2017, p. 80) identifies the effects of socio-cognitive and geopolitical isolationism during the Cold War; a marked diplomatic reorientation towards Israel (largely built on a broad elite consensus (Daniel & Záhora, 2020; Kalhousová, 2019) rather than particularly positive attitudes towards Israel (Hanzlová, 2022)) and against previously close Arab secular regimes in the 1990s; a strong opposition towards organised religion; and distrust in traditional authorities pushing citizens towards so-called alternative sources of information. Bitterly reflecting on the events of 2015, Ostřanský (2016, pp. 51–52) pointed to Czechs' high tolerance

[25] Under pressure from the latter organisation, Babiš was eventually prosecuted for corruption and conflicts of interest (see Transparency International, 2024), and was sued by them for defamation (Horák, 2019).

for xenophobic attitudes and expressions; the legitimising role of a president – Zeman – publicly sanctioning blatant Islamophobia; a disproportionately high number of anti-Islam online activists relative to actual Muslims in the country; an endorsement of Islamophobia across the political spectrum; a journalistic equidistance between the opinions of experts and of anti-Islam activists; and the success of anti-Islam movements in both presenting themselves as mainstream and gaining allies among mainstream elites. Other authors point to the lack of representation of Muslim migrants in public discourse, where 'Muslims' is a new topic (Topinka, 2016b, p. 12); the influence of negative public discourse on the stereotypes of a population with minimal contact experiences with actual Muslims (Pickel & Öztürk, 2018); the legacies of anti-Ottoman historiography (Pirický, 2013); conservative perceptions among elites of a West European decline (Slačálek, 2021); or a recurrent othering of Islam and Muslims in mainstream news media (Ayan Musil, 2015; Křížková, 2006).

More immediate factors could have contributed to the mainstream's use of Islamophobia during, specifically, the 'refugee crisis'. First, many anti-Islam protests capitalised on public anxieties during 2015 and after. The protests were partly the result of far-right fragmentation, without a strong parliamentary actor who could embody their positions (Navrátil & Kluknavská, 2023; Wondreys, 2020). Second, following a political conflict about the role of civil society during the transformation years (Myant, 2005), by the 2010s, the Czech public and civil advocacy groups remained considerably distrustful of each other (Navrátil & Pospíšil, 2014). During the 'refugee crisis', NGOs fighting for migrants' rights often became the targets of public vitriol. Third, Czechia did not act alone in its diplomatic crusade against the 'refugee quotas' but was emboldened by the Visegrad Group's shared position. Fourth, in addition to the domestic political crises, rising inequalities (for instance, interregional, debt-based or in purchasing power) after 2008 had fostered political dissatisfaction, authoritarian beliefs and support for Zeman among some social strata (Chylíková & Buchtík, 2016, p. 21; Prokop, 2019, pp. 49–50, 100). This became a new fertile ground for declinist and xenophobic beliefs (Ibid., p.100).

Additionally, three macro or long-term factors merit particular attention to understand the surge of Islamophobia in Czechia. The first factor relates to dominant conceptions of Czech nationhood and citizenship. Like in other CEE nationalisms, in Czechia, the idea of an ethnically defined nation (in a political struggle with the ethnic Germans in Bohemia) predates that of the state (Suda, 2001). After the creation of Czechoslovakia in 1918, an intensive process of ethnic homogenisation that began after 1945 (see 4.3.) culminated with the creation of a *Czech* Republic in 1993. Constitutionally, the Czech ethnic group was implicitly understood as the titular nation of this Republic (Marušiak, 2017; Priban, 2003). With around 95% of the population declaring Czech ethnicity, the public understood Czech citizenship and nationhood almost interchangeably (Nedomová & Koštelecký, 1997). The dominant vision of Czechs as a *kulturnation* and Czechia as a monoethnic state fostered ethnopolitics, initially against the Czech Roma and ethnic Germans whose ancestors had been forcefully expelled in 1945, and, eventually, migrants (Dawson & Hanley, 2019; Nagle, 1997).

During Communism and after, xenophobic attitudes (Burjanek, 2001) and a laxity towards racism were fuelled by historical narratives that ignored Czechs' participation

in the Holocaust (Sniegon, 2014) and in the project of European colonialism (Herza, 2020), while justifying animosity towards ethnic Germans and, later, Russians (Pekárková, 1995). Moreover, after 1989, the dominant strands of Czech liberalism defended visions of the citizenry that championed cultural assimilationism (see 2.2.2.). The nominal early support for multiculturalist solutions in left-wing programmes (Hejnal, 2012) and integration policies (Baršová & Barša, 2005) were easily dropped during the 'refugee crisis' since they never enjoyed a solid party support.

The second factor relates to Czechs' estrangement from religion. Unlike in other V4 countries, contemporary Czechs are often uninterested, suspicious or hostile towards institutionalised, rather than individual expressions of, religion (Nešpor, 2020; Václavík et al., 2018). Czechs are, self-reportedly, among Europe's most atheistic nations (Evans, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2018b; Vido et al., 2016). Czech national identity was built in opposition to the Catholic church because of its ascribed complicity with imperialist powers during the modern era. Additionally, Christian churches had a relatively negligible role in anti-Communist dissidence, with Communists promoting atheism and church repression (Froese, 2005; Grzymała-Busse, 2015, p. 343). These factors contributed to break Czechs' ties to Christian churches (Nešporová & Nešpor, 2009). (Consequently, some argue that Czechs are relatively liberal in areas traditionally claimed by Christian ethics (Chylíková & Buchtík, 2016).)[26] The suspicion towards institutionalised religion extends to Islam, with much lower tolerance for practices involving visible symbols (like headscarves) and conferring power to Islamic institutions than for more private affairs (like weddings) (see 4.2.2.). However, the degree of distrust that Islam elicits must be understood symbolically and within its European context, since other non-Christian religions do not face the same hostility.

Despite Czechs' considering being Christian as relatively unimportant for national identity (Vlachová & Hamplová, 2023), Christianity is complexly intermeshed with the ostensibly secular Czech national identity, institutions and culture. Previous appeals to Christian values from the Czech right (Hanley, 2007, 2009; Nešpor, 2004) and the penetration of the Clash of Civilisations thesis (Daniel, 2020, p. 110; Mendel, 2014, pp. 31, 46) propelled right-wing inscriptions into a 'Christian civilisation' during the 'refugee crisis' (see 8.2.1.).

Third, Czechia's geopolitical context during the 'refugee crisis' should be considered. From the start, the 'crisis' was politically perceived as touching upon the country's sovereignty. First, because of its geographical position, Czechia was unlikely to be examining an unprecedented number of applications for international protection. As a landlocked country surrounded by other Schengen Area states and with very few refugees able to arrive by plane, the Dublin III regulation (2013, §13(1)) legally allocated this responsibility to frontline states like Greece or Italy instead. Second,

[26] Notably, Czechs are indifferent (Kirchick, 2011) or tolerant towards same-sex marriage (Jsme fér, 2019; cf. Spurný, 2019), reaching levels of support similar to those in older EU member states (Diamant & Gardner, 2018; Kantar, 2019b, pp. 114–134). However, attitudes towards other LGBTI groups (like transgender or transexual people) are not particularly positive (TNS Opinion & Social, 2015a, pp. 61–65), there are many legal shortcomings in the protection of LGBTI rights (Herczeg, 2017, p. 66; Valfort, 2017, pp. 52, 57) and, after years of frustratingly trying to pass a bill, the politicisation of same-sex marriage has eventually led many Czechs to believe that future same-sex marriages should not be labelled 'marriages' (Smith, 2023).

because of its historical migratory patterns, migrants from Muslim-majority countries were seldomly interested in Czechia as a destination country. Czechia lacked significant diasporas from the refugee sending states which could have either attracted co-nationals or exert pressure for a more accommodating policy. Hence, since 2013, Czech politicians expected that Muslim refugees would enter Czechia under an EU-coordinated mechanism, often turning discussions about abstract 'refugees' (heading West) into a dispute about sovereignty vis-à-vis Europe. In contrast, Italian or Greek politicians, who had to offer solutions for the continuous arrivals, framed the 'refugee crisis' as a national issue which needed to be resolved through appeals to European unity (Boukala & Dimitrakopoulou, 2018; Colombo, 2018).

Additionally, the Czech Minister of Interior, from a socially conservative wing within the ČSSD, proposed an alternative geopolitical role for Czechia regarding asylum, namely its readiness to accept Ukrainian refugees. Whether genuinely or not, the Ministry expressed expecting large numbers of Ukrainians fleeing the conflict which had started in 2014. Given the deeper history of migration from Ukraine and a general sense of closer cultural proximity, Czechia could postulate itself as a destination for these refugees in line with its traditional foreign policy orientation towards championing human rights (Bílková, 2016). Finally, the actions of Czech politicians demonstrated a relative disregard for the potential of political Islamophobia to impinge on its diplomatic relations with Muslim-majority states. This could reflect relatively weak partnerships, misperceptions or careful calculations unlike those from other European states with much closer ties with these countries. Despite multiple Muslim-majority states (ČTK, 2014, 2015a; Mazancová, 2016; Richter, 2014) or the United Nations (ČTK, 2015c) formally protesting the worrying increase of Islamophobia in Czech politics, national politicians failed to tackle Islamophobic rhetoric or dismissed the transcendence of doing so. In parallel, Czechia retained a unique diplomatic ambivalence towards the al-Assad regime in Syria, whose civil war had provoked the exodus of millions of refugees (Dostál & Jermanová, 2016, pp. 40–41).

4.2. Discrimination against ethnic minorities in Czechia (2004-2014)

Until 2014, Czech Romani citizens had been the most salient ethnicised target of public, institutional or everyday forms of discrimination, as well as hate crimes. Other ethnicised or national groups in the country faced discrimination too, although they were targeted with less viciousness in public rhetoric and attitudes. A 2010 survey commissioned by the Ministry of Interior identified 'Muslims' and 'the Roma' as the groups towards which most respondents felt a clear aversion, whereas the prejudice towards 'Blacks', 'Ukrainians' or 'Vietnamese' was not as markedly negative (STEM, 2010). This section provides a social and political context of discrimination towards these two groups in the country.

Before discussing discrimination against both minorities, it is worth noting that, since at least the early 2000s, Czechs' attitudes towards ethno-racial diversity had been markedly negative relative to the EU average (EUMC, 2005), and became even more negative by 2014 (Heath & Richards, 2016, 2019). In 2018, the European Social Survey reported that Czech respondents held the most restrictive attitudes in the EU towards migrants from a different ethnicity or race (Figure 2) and, in 2014, the highest

support for the claim that some races or ethnic groups are more intelligent than others (Figure 3) (ESS ERIC, 2023b, 2023a). For interpreting the latter question, it is important to note that participants could have been thinking about Roma children, who, for years, have been segregated into so-called special schools or classrooms (edu.cz, 2023) – according to 44% of respondents to a 2016 survey Roma children should not be studying in 'regular' classrooms (Tuček, 2016). Additionally, even in the 2010s, some Czech high-schools still taught students race theory as part of their curriculum (for instance, in Kočvarová, 2012), contributing to the rather superficial understanding of questions of race and racism in the public sphere.

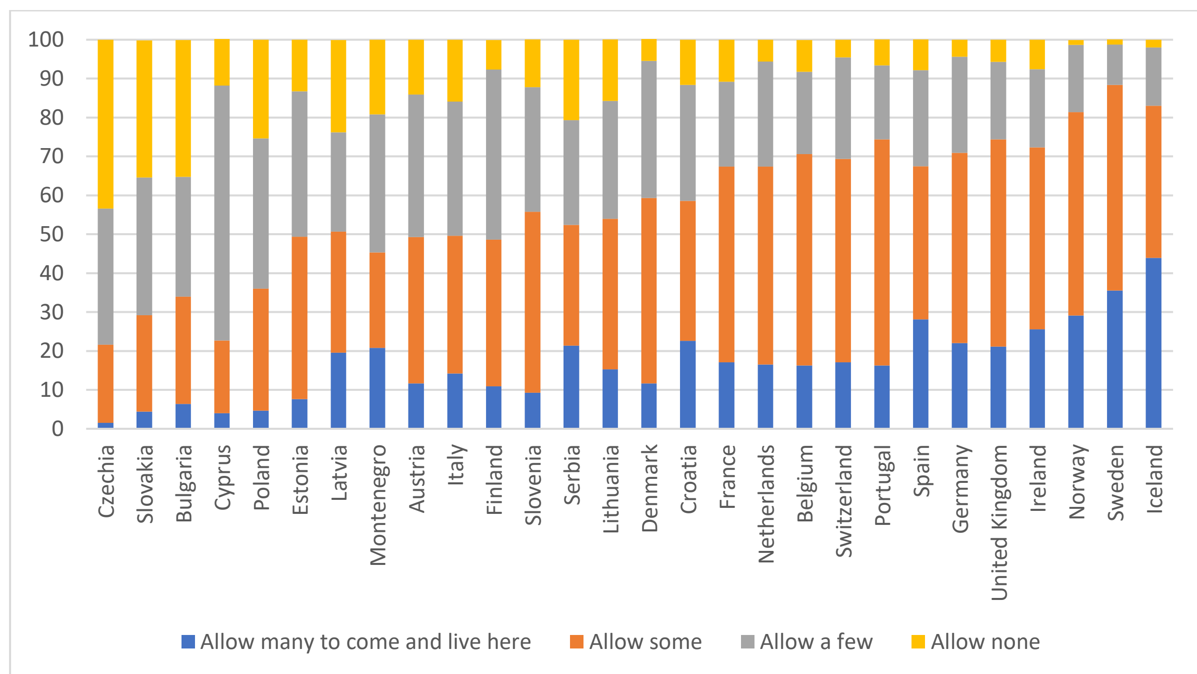

Figure 2. Allow many/few immigrants of different race/ethnic group from majority. *ESS9 (2018). B39 "Now, using this card, to what extent do you think [country] should allow people of a different race or ethnic group from most [country] people to come and live here?" (Paraphrased, as B39 was a follow-up question to B38 about people of same race or ethnic group.)*

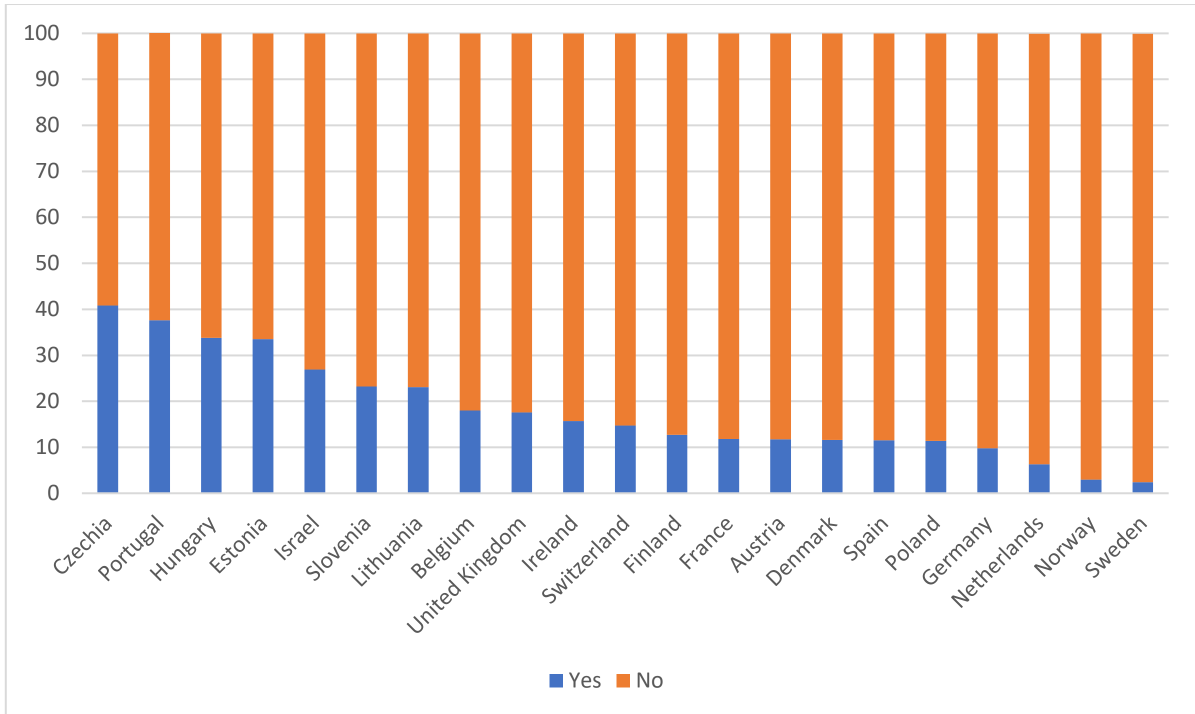

Figure 3. Some races or ethnic groups: born less intelligent. *ESS7 (2014) - D23 Do you think some races or ethnic groups are born less intelligent than others?*

4.2.1 The Roma

> [T]he Czech state emblem consists of four squares—in one is a Moravian eagle, in another a Silesian eagle, and in the remaining two a Czech lion. Why could not one of the Czech lions be replaced by the Roma wheel? (Barša, 2002, p. 256)

By 2015, the Czech Roma constituted a little over 2% of the Czech population, yet the Czech government estimated that around half were socially excluded or risked being so (ČTK, 2016). Since the 1990s, despite some progress (CoE Secretariat of the FCNM, 2016), international human rights watchdogs have repeatedly criticised neglectful and aversive institutional practices towards the Czech Roma (Albert, 2006; Amnesty International, 2013, 2014; Minorities at Risk Project, 2004). Human rights violations included the segregation of Romani children into so-called special schools, forced sterilisation of Romani women (which continued into the 21st century), racial profiling at airports or the forced displacement and residential isolation of Roma communities. Furthermore, for some time, physical (sometimes lethal) attacks from skinhead groups were frequent and leniently responded to by authorities. These circumstances pushed the Czech Roma to claim asylum in Western countries by the mid-1990s, which, in turn, exerted diplomatic pressure on Czechia and led Canada to impose a visa regime on Czech citizens (Transitions Online, 2002).

Attitudes towards 'the Roma' and other ethnicised minorities have also remained significantly negative. In a 2015 Eurobarometer survey (TNS Opinion & Social, 2015a), Czechs were the EU population least comfortable about accepting a person from a

non-majority ethnic group taking the 'highest elected political position' (16% feeling 'totally comfortable', against the EU 55% average). In this survey, Czech respondents were also the least comfortable with working alongside or seeing their children in a romantic relationship with 'a Roma'. In a longitudinal survey, which in recent years lists up to 17 ethnic groups, 'the Roma' were consistently rated as the most disliked group (Červenka, 2015), until 'Arabs' replaced them in 2017 (Tuček, 2019b), as well as the most disliked hypothetical neighbour from a different nationality or ethnic group (STEM, 2016a). The difficult situation of the Czech Roma and widespread negative attitudes surprised many Western observers who had held an image of the Czech nation as traditionally liberal and tolerant (Fawn, 2001). However, as some have argued, rather than a new phenomenon, Czech political platforms always preserved a degree of ethnonationalism and social conservatism (Dawson & Hanley, 2016), which preceded the 1989 transformations (Barša et al., 2021).

During communism, the disadvantaged situation of the Roma was addressed by the state as a socioeconomic problem to be tackled by enhancing their material living conditions and social assimilation, without addressing cultural stereotypes (Weinerová, 2014). After 1989, the socioeconomic conditions of the Roma worsened and public opinion expressed a conflictual relationship towards them (STEM, 2007), despite small fluctuations.[27] According to Fawn (2001, pp. 1195–1198), the post-1989 negative attitudes related to a) perceptions that the incompatible sociocultural behaviour of the Roma was being imposed on Czechs; b) resentment towards the Roma for having materially benefitted from the Communists' policies while most ethnic Czechs endured a certain material deprivation; and c) perceived abuse of social services by the Roma. Fawn (Ibid., p. 1210-1215) sees this interethnic tension rooted in 1) a Czech legacy of ethnic homogenisation post-1945, reinforced by post-1993 efforts at a purely 'Czech' nation-building; 2) resentment and unaddressed latent racism during communism; 3) ambivalences in Czech contemporary liberalism, particularly in attributions of collective responsibility (mostly to former communists and Sudeten Germans); 4) and schisms among the political liberal elite on how to address Romani issues. The negative stereotypes of 'the Roma' emphasising anti-social behaviour widely co-exist with romanticised positive ascriptions of freedom and lack of inhibition rooted in folklore (Weinerová, 2014, p. 215).

A reported rise in radicalisation and violence against Roma over the second half of the 2000s[28] eventually elicited a strong political response, partly signalling an

[27] In 1993, 29.8% of respondents evaluated their personal relation with Roma as 'very bad', 35% as 'rather bad' (i.e. 64.8% total negative) and just 6.4% chose either 'rather good' or 'very good' (IVVM, 1993). In 1996, 68.4% were negative replies (IVVM, 1996), while in 2001 these decreased to 59.8% (CVVM, 2001a). Consistent with the literature, sociotropic questions triggered more negative attitudes: in 1997, 81% evaluated the country's Roma/non-Roma coexistence as bad; decreasing to 66% in 1999; and increasing again over the 2000s, up to 84% in 2014 (Tuček, 2019a).

[28] While the security services warned in 2008 of the potential for dissatisfaction created by the economic crisis to translate into support for populism and extremism (Ministerstvo vnitra České Republiky, 2009), activist Gwendolyn Albert (2007, 2009) detected that extremism rose in 2006, at a time of economic prosperity. According to Albert, since 2006 we can observe a growing assertiveness of extreme-right groups (shown in marches, vigilantes, or gains in local elections); forced evictions of the Roma by local authorities, right before local elections (Government Council for Roma Minority Affairs, 2007, p. 5); and a narrative denying the Roma holocaust.

uncompromising stance against the far right. However, it took two tragic events for there to be a coordinated political response at the national level against anti-Ziganism. First, a violent clash between the police and protesters from an anti-Roma march organised by the extreme-right Workers Party (DS) in Litvínov, on 17 November 2008, led the centre-right government to call for the dissolution of the DS and setting a new Strategy for Combating Extremism. Second, on 19 April 2009, an arson attack conducted by DS-sympathising neo-Nazis on a Roma house, in the town of Vítkov, led the caretaker government of PM Jan Fischer, son of a Jewish holocaust survivor, to strengthen the fight against extremism (Druker, 2010). In 2010, the Supreme Administrative Court approved the dissolution of DS (which later reappeared under the name Workers' Party of Social Justice, DSSS). This was the first dissolution of a political party on the grounds of ideology in post-1989 Czechia (Mareš, 2012).

Although far-right actors were stigmatised as ‘extremists’, anti-Ziganist rhetoric featured regularly in mainstream politics and media. Anti-Ziganism had been expressed with impunity, mostly by regional, but also national figures like deputy PM Jiří Čunek (KDU-ČSL), senator Petr Pakosta (ex-ODS) (ČT24, 2013) or PM Mirek Topolánek (ODS) (Štůsek, 2010). Even president Klaus questioned the proportionality of the severe jail sentences imposed on the perpetrators of the above-mentioned 2009 Vítkov arson (Willoughby, 2010). Moreover, several analyses show that during the period 2004-2014, journalistic reporting about ethnic minorities (mostly Roma and Vietnamese) in Czechia was characterised by a series of simplifications, negative frames, overrepresentation in crime reporting or a lack of their presence as witnesses to the stories (Lolashvili, 2011).

4.2.2. Muslims

Although animosities had been occasionally expressed in mainstream public discourse towards the small Czech Muslim communities, by 2014, the latter were not yet generally perceived as problematic. Disclosing religious belief is not mandatory in the national census, so it is difficult to estimate the size of the Muslim population in Czechia. The most widely accepted method has been to gauge the number of Muslims among foreign residents and international protection beneficiaries in Czechia based on the estimated percentage of Muslims residing in their countries of origin, hence, excluding holders of Czech citizenship (Topinka, 2007, pp. 45–50). Following this methodology, by 2013, there were 22,280 (potential) Muslim migrants in Czechia (Topinka, 2015, pp. 34–38), or around 0.2% of the population. Based on the latter source, two thirds of Muslim migrants were Turkic Sunnis and only one third were Arab Sunnis, the main targets of Czech Islamophobic rhetoric. However, based on anecdotal evidence, other experts suggested that most Czech Muslims were indeed Arabs (Ostřanský, 2007, p. 2).

The literature stresses that Muslims in Czechia are socio-economically well integrated, despite unemployment among Muslim women being above average (Černý, 2015; Heřmanová & Faryadová, 2012; Kropáček, 2017; Topinka, 2007); are more likely to hold university degrees (Topinková & Topinka, 2016, p. 41); and, despite identifying as Muslim, their religious identity was not particularly strong (Topinka, 2015). Most Muslims arrived in Czechia as migrants after 1989 (Felčer, 2020), they possess good

knowledge of Czech and do not want to leave the country (Čeněk et al., 2018). Importantly, the institutionalisation of Islam has faced administrative hurdles at the national and, specially, local level, sometimes under pressure from anti-Islam activists. A handful of projects for building mosques were rejected in the past and, to this day, no Islamic religious institution has been granted full legal status (Janků, 2016). By mid-2014, the most visible cases of institutional discrimination concerned a few cases of opposition to headscarves in public schools, frictions with Arab tourists in the spa city of Teplice (Smékalová, 2017), and, most egregiously, a disproportionate police raid which took place in Prague places of worship during Friday prayer in connection with a controversial book publication (Čermáková, Janků, & Linhartová, 2016, pp. 26–34).

4.2.2.a. Attitudes towards 'Muslims'

Since Islamophobia was not, until recently, a relevant social issue, public opinion surveys on 'Muslims' have appeared only sporadically since the 1990s. Because these surveys were conducted by different agencies, in long and/or inconsistent intervals, using differently formulated questions (usually with one or few items regarding 'Muslims') and methodologies, I cannot present a reliable chronology of attitudes towards 'Muslims'. Despite only having limited and fragmentary evidence prior to 2015, overall, attitudes towards 'Muslims' and Muslim-majority ethnic groups have been constantly and increasingly negative (see second caveat below). This section presents five caveats which allow for a more critical interpretation of existing survey data.

First, surveys have been conducted with certain limitations and biases. They have presented respondents with questions about the category of practice 'Muslims' in the absence of supporting qualitative or cognitive interviewing which could tell us what attributes of the social actor are contingently salient for respondents across contexts (for example, ethnicity, racialisation patterns, expected behaviours, legal status, alien/resident) (Gómez del Tronco, 2023).[29] As a notable exception, open-ended questions added to a 2014 survey asking about the basic characteristics of 'Muslims' and 'Islam' found that that "Muslims were perceived as foreign, violent, in the role of terrifying 'Orientals', religiously inclined, oppressing women, visually different, fundamentalists, irrational, oppressive and suspicious" (Topinka, 2016a, p. 239). Furthermore, surveys on 'Muslims' have often appeared at times when they were being publicly discussed in connection to a sociopolitical problem, which risks representing the demos as demanding racist political agendas (Mondon & Winter, 2020, Chapter 4) and has often resulted in leading questions concerned with validating/refuting Islamophobic tropes like those of civilisationism (SANEP, 2010) or the Islamisation theory (STEM, 2018).

Second, attitudes towards 'Muslims' had been considerably negative throughout the 2000s and early 2010s (Břešťan, 2006; Centrum výzkumu vývoje osobnosti a etnicity, 2002; STEM, 2010), albeit worsening, progressively, after negative/-ly mediatised foreign events (particularly jihadist terrorist attacks, to which Czechs would become

[29] Nonetheless, a few analyses of focus groups on attitudes towards 'refugees' have been published (Brožová et al., 2018; Glopolis, 2016) and, recently, several publications within the framework of The Thirteenth Immigrant project (muni.cz, 2023) have shed considerable light on qualitative aspects of attitudes towards 'migrants', 'refugees' or 'foreigners' (e.g. Božič et al., 2023; or Jaworsky et al., 2022).

particularly sensitive). However, attitudes only became noticeably worse than in most European countries by early 2014 – a fact which, at the time, was explained by early attempts at politicising Muslim migration (Linek, 2014) – and strikingly worse by 2015. After looking at European Values Study survey series across countries, Bell and colleagues (2021, Note 19) observe:

> The case of the Czech Republic is somewhat astonishing when examining the change in attitudes across time; anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant attitudes were around 15 and 19 percent in 1999, rising to around 30 percent for both in 2008 and finally reaching around 60 percent in 2017.

Surveys already measured increased anxiety about and negative attitudes towards 'Muslims' and 'Arabs' after 9/11 (IGAC, 2004; Tomášek, 2001). For instance, in June 2001, around 33% of respondents would not find having an Arab neighbour problematic (STEM, 2001a). However, this percentage declined to 27% by April 2004 – after the Madrid al-Qaeda bombings – and to 21% in April 2006, with the Jyllands-Posten Muhammad cartoons controversy still unfolding (STEM, 2008, p. 5, 2016c). A similar trend was observed for 'Afghans' and 'Chechens', while social distance towards the 'Vietnamese' and 'Chinese' became increasingly smaller. The worsening of attitudes during the late 2000s and early 2010s ran parallel to the emergence of anti-Islam groups and anti-multiculturalist rhetoric in mainstream circles (see sub-section below). Perceived terrorist risks to Czechia also heightened after attacks (Červenka, 2003, 2004), but only started a considerably steep increase after the rise of the IS and, markedly, the Paris attacks of January 2015 (Tuček, 2015b). However, it is worth noting that Czech respondents already declared a very high fear of terrorism before 9/11 (Tomášek, 2001, pp. 5–6).

The third caveat is that attitudes towards different Muslim-majority ethnic groups are likely to diverge, although there is scant evidence to support this claim. Since surveys started measuring Czech attitudes to members of other ethnic groups and nationalities systematically in the early 2000s, Muslim-majority groups have often ranked as the least liked (Červenka, 2009, 2015; Kunštát, 2005; STEM, 2012, 2016a). Even if these data are often taken as evidence of Islamophobia, survey categories have almost exclusively concerned groups associated with conflict and/or violence in public discourse and, thus, potentially stereotyped accordingly (such as 'Arabs', 'Chechens', 'Afghans', 'Albanians', 'Iranians', 'Palestinians'). These groups could be feared either as potential perpetrators of violence, their potential condition of refugees, their racialisation or other stereotypical attributions. Conversely, surveys never measure attitudes towards culturally proximate Muslim-majority groups ('Bosniaks', 'Tatars') nor groups rarely stereotyped in connection to conflict ('Indonesians', 'Turkmen'). As an exception, an early 2016 survey found that, while only 15% of respondents would declare feeling good about living next to an 'Arab' or 'Syrian', 33% would feel the same about an 'Egyptian' (STEM, 2016c). I have three speculative hypotheses for this relative positivity. First, the influence of Arab and Middle-Eastern identities on Czech

stereotypes of 'Muslims' partly spares stereotypes of 'Egyptians'[30] from the influence of Islamophobia. Second, given that Egypt is an extremely popular destination for Czech tourists (an estimated 245,000 Czechs or around 2.3% of the 2016 population travelled there in 2017, see iDNES.cz & ČTK, 2018), 'Egyptians' are likely to be stereotyped in connection with marketed pleasure or safety, and intergroup contact experiences (direct or vicarious) are likely to happen and be neutral/positive. Third, the expected reasons for 'Egyptians' to become neighbours (as per the survey question), unlike for 'Syrians', likely involve using regular migration channels, which could imply attributions of class, institutional gatekeeping, deliberate choice of Czechia as a country of residence or expected contributions to the welfare state. Finally, attitudes towards 'Turks' have also been slightly more positive than towards other Muslim-majority groups (STEM, 2016c). However, Ayan Musil (2015) found that, among the post-2004 EU member states, Czech and Slovak public opinion were most opposed to Turkish EU accession, against the impetus of their political elites. She argued that a historical cultural othering of 'Islam' and 'Turks'[31] drove this animosity, which was reflected in media discourse.

The fourth caveat is that, although surveys have not been good at identifying specific factors which make 'Islam' or 'Muslims' threatening, a few features have been distinguished. Regarding 'Islam', surveys show an opposition to institutionalised and public expressions of Islam like building mosques (Břešťan, 2006; SANEP, 2010). Topinka (2016a, p. 241) finds that while such public or organised expressions are highly disliked (for example, Islamic law, Islamist parties, building prayer rooms), private forms receive much greater support (for example, Islamic weddings, cemetery's sections or media, and basic information about Islam in public schools). Czechs' scepticism towards organised religion seems to be a factor in opposing institutionalised Islam and negative attitudes towards the religion. For example, in December 2001, 55% of Czech respondents marked 'religion' as the driver behind the 9/11 attacks (Tomášek, 2001, pp. 5–6). Although this comparison should be taken with a pinch of salt, in contrast, a November 2001 Eurobarometer survey found that only 32.4% of EU respondents partly or totally disagreed with the statement "the real motivations of the terrorists had nothing to do with religion" (EOS Gallup Europe, 2001). To my knowledge, only two surveys did a relatively comprehensive job at finding 'Muslims'' problematic traits. In 2014, Topinka (2016a) found that the immigration of 'Muslims' would be mostly opposed when driven by their ambition to improve their socioeconomic status, whereas respondents seemed most favourable to accepting 'Muslims' escaping war or political persecution, as well as poor education and healthcare options. In 2018, another survey found that 'Muslims' would be most likely to be granted long-residency status by respondents if they produced a clean criminal record, knew Czech language well and had a stable job, reflecting a mix of

[30] The complex interlinkages between 'Egyptian' and 'Arab' self-identification (Ibrahim, 2010) are probably foreign to most Czechs.

[31] During the early modern period there was a rich Czech literature on Turks. Here, writers expressed diverse attitudes. Nevertheless, despite not experiencing an Ottoman conquest, there was a constant awareness of belonging to the *antemurale christianitatis*, which made the threat of the Turks/Islam feel intermittently imminent (Lisy-Wagner, 2013, Introduction).

socioeconomic and security concerns (MEDIAN, 2018). Very similar factors were identified for the acceptance of 'refugees' during the 2015 'crisis' (Glopolis, 2016).

4.2.2.b. Party politics regarding 'Muslims'

In mainstream politics, 'Muslims' and, more broadly, migration became successfully politicised only by 2014/2015, preceded by various attempts and experiments. Western Islamophobic narratives had increasingly captured the imagination of ideologues across small political circles since the early 2000s (for instance, conservatives, liberal secularists and sectors of the Christian clergy) (Mareš, 2015, pp. 75–97; Mocht'ak, 2015; J. Schneider, 2007). In the mid-2000s, Islamophobic movements began emerging as online communities (for example, websites) and tiny civil society organisations with frequent links to the mainstream right (Tarant, 2010). In parallel, the rise of Euroscepticism and, later, populism would raise mainstream (often centre-right) politicians' interest in Islamophobic politics. The Czech media increasingly but sporadically entertained the skewedly framed debate about whether 'Muslims' posed a public threat, platforming Islamophobic contents and arguments (Cmiral, 2006; Pospíšil, 2010) and conceivably influencing public attitudes. By the second half of the 2000s, with the support of new survey data (Břešťan, 2006), the public discourse on 'Muslims' intermittently shifted to the resulting phenomenon of Czechs being fearful of Islam (Kučera, 2007).

After the 2008 financial 'crisis', many Czech political and intellectual elites expressed scepticism towards the viability of West European cultural and political projects, including multiculturalism (Havlík, 2019a; Slačálek, 2021). Previous critiques of multiculturalism in the early 2000s, most notably by Václav Klaus (ODS), had gained little traction at the time (Hanley, 2007, pp. 172–173, 180–185), despite remaining popular among conservative intellectuals (see Klaus et al., 2007). After 1989, classical liberalism was dominant in the mainstream Czech right which, save for the Christian-Democratic KDU-ČSL, had faced the conundrum of what their conservatism sought to preserve (Rajkowski, 2021). The preservation of 'Western civilisation' in the face of multiple threats and crises would progressively fill this void in the worldviews of different conservative actors (Slačálek, 2021, pp. 177–181). In 2010, Moreno (2010, p. 73) characterised the incipient surge of Islamophobic rhetoric in Czech politics and media as an import from Western Europe which represented failures of migrant integration in the latter region as a cautionary tale for Czech society.

Meanwhile, the West European far right had increased transnational cooperation around an Islamophobic agenda after 2008 (Betz, 2013). In Czechia, actors with little agenda-setting power outside of the Internet were particularly active in reproducing Western Islamophobic discourse: namely, anti-Islam civic groups (like IvČRN, AntiMešita), online media platforms (like Eurabia.cz, EUportal.cz, both associated to members of the Young Right – largely a splinter group from the ODS youth) and, to a lesser degree, far-right parties (like Sovereignty, National Party, Workers Party).[32] In the early 2010s, Czech Islamophobic groups became more active in small street

[32] The National Party's Islamophobic campaign for the EU elections of 2009 was considered highly ineffective (Bélaiová & Mareš, 2009; Smolík, 2010).

actions and campaigns (for instance, against the construction of mosques or halal food) (Mareš, 2015, pp. 84–90). Despite being relatively marginal, the security services saw Islamophobic online activities as popularising extremist opinions (Ministerstvo vnitra České Republiky, 2011, p. 3) and, throughout 2013, they observed an uptick in 'Islamosceptic' (online) commentary (BIS, 2014, p. 14).

Concurrently with the efforts of marginal Islamophobic groups, mainstream, particularly centre-right, intellectuals and politicians were also regularly promoting Islamophobic tropes and the defence of Western civilisation to larger audiences between the late 2000s and 2014 (CzechNews & ČTK, 2009; Petřík, 2014; Pospíšil, 2010). Factions within ODS had shown a particular interest in importing Western Islamophobia into its programme (Mocht'ak, 2015, pp. 148–150), cooperating with and galvanising more radical actors.[33] KDU-ČSL, in intermittent cooperation with or alongside far-right anti-Islam groups, spearheaded the opposition to build new mosques in Brno, since 2009, and Hradec Králové, since 2011. In essence, the centre right was fostering the perceptions of threat that they would later claim to represent. For instance, in 2011, after his party's opposition to mosques and warnings about the Islamisation of society, Bělobrádek (KDU-ČSL) claimed to be surprised by the fact that, after touring the country, citizens allegedly reported the threat of Islam as their second most pressing concern (Šůra, 2011) – a self-interested overstatement not reflected in public opinion surveys.

The second relevant process was the 2010-2013 'political earthquake' which propelled anti-corruption populist newcomers mostly at the existential expense of the centre right. Centre-right ODS' and KDU-ČSL's new leadership responded with a 'return' to conservativism (Mocht'ak, 2015) with both party heads occasionally testing the electorate's appetite for an Islamophobic agenda (Bednář, 2012; Petřík, 2014). In 2010, blunt Islamophobic remarks appeared in both parties' programmes (Hejnal, 2012).[34] Additionally, blatant Islamophobia also became a trademark of Miloš Zeman (Buchert, 2011; Taušová, 2010; TV Nova & Mediafax, 2010) and members of his party (parlamentnilisty.cz, 2010) after his 2010 comeback.

Far-right and centre-right parties tried to politicise migration for the 2013 parliamentary elections (Čaněk, 2013) and, more specifically, Islam for the second-order European Parliament elections of May 2014 (Linek, 2014). In February 2014, ODS leader, Petr Fiala, tried to enact a new Islamophobic agenda (Petřík, 2014), finally sanctioned at the September party congress (Kopecký, 2014b). Over the summer, local ODS politicians tested hateful rhetoric to oppose the construction of an Islamic cemetery in Prague (Janda, 2014) and proposed banning the niqab in Teplice (Janoušek, 2014). Meanwhile, KDU-ČSL MEP Tomáš Zdechovský proudly defended his authorship of a

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[33] Notably, in 2009, Dutch far-right politician Geert Wilders had been invited to give a talk at the Czech senate by senator Jiří Oberfalzer (ODS) in cooperation with the anti-Islam website Eurabia.cz (Kopecký, 2009). The eventual cancellation of this event, following some controversies, allegedly led Martin Konvička to co-found IvČRN (Islám v ČR nechceme, 2015 min. 7:55)

[34] In ODS's '2020 Vision' (2010, p. 22), one of the main foreign policy preoccupations is that the "the free movement of people and immigration, especially from Islamic and African countries, exerts pressure on the cultural identity of our civilisation". In their 2010 programme, and in consideration of the "development[s] in Western Europe", KDU-ČSL starts urging the "quick start of a qualified debate" about the "extent and limits of the possible Islamisation of our society" (KDU-ČSL, 2010, p. 32).

blatantly Islamophobic sentence on an online campaign piece (Kopecký, 2014a) while warning of the dangers of leaving talk about migration to nationalists and populists (European Parliament, 2014).

In April 2014, the only noticeable radical-right party, Dawn, turned from their distinctive anti-corruption agenda to replicate Western far-right campaigns against racialised immigrants (Hloušek et al., 2020, p. 131). In May, an eccentric anti-Islam campaign video was also published by the marginal far-right Sovereignty (Heil, 2014). Both parties performed poorly at the European elections. Despite later amnesic analyses blaming the far right for the radicalisation of the mainstream, by mid-2014, it was the mainstream right which visibly pushed for Islamophobia. After all, until then, the far right had been largely unsuccessful and even uninterested at adopting Islamophobia, focusing on the scapegoating of the Roma instead (Kluknavská, 2014; Mareš, 2014). The legitimating role of the mainstream contributed to normalise Islamophobic rhetoric, attitudes and actors even before the 'refugee crisis'.

4.3. Czech migration since 1945

Contemporary Czech public discourse on migration references the perceived legacies of post-War migration to Western Europe, which, following the conflict, became home to millions of so-called guest workers, citizens and 'repatriates' from the former colonies, refugees from the Eastern bloc or, in the case of West Germany, co-ethnics. Nevertheless, the economic contraction of the mid-1970s, the mechanisation of production and its relocation to poorer countries froze the high demand for workers in the region, cancelling previous state-led programmes in favour of family reunification (Castles et al., 2014, Chapter 5). In the early 1990s, the number of asylum applications filed in West European countries increased, with refugees fleeing armed conflict, persecution or political instability in the former Yugoslavia (notably Bosnia), or countries in Asia (for instance, Iran and Iraq) and Africa (such as Somalia). Despite being a minority among immigrants, refugees became increasingly vilified in public discourse and far-right politics, with European governments turning towards more restrictive policy (Ibid., p.226). In parallel, over the 1990s, diverse flows from Africa, Latin America and Asia increased, while South European countries turned into immigration countries. Most sensitively, irregular migration, particularly from the global South, became a structural feature of the European system and, particularly in times of economic growth, served to fill vacancies in some of the most precarious jobs (Triandafyllidou, 2016, pp. 11–13). By 1995, the Schengen Area had been established, facilitating and increasing intra-EU mobility while pursuing a restrictive control of external borders. Countries in Southern Europe, which had been hit hard by the 2008 economic crisis, became entry points for undocumented migrants partly hoping to move undetected into more prosperous countries.

While post-war Western Europe debated how to best deal with growing ethnocultural diversity, the Visegrád region experienced a different reality. Following the 1945 Potsdam Conference, a substantial population transfer of non-titular nations (most notably, yet not exclusively, ethnic Germans; see Langenbacher, 2009) and a reconfiguration of territorial borders took place (see Gatrell, 2019). This process ethnically homogenised, in a radical way, both Poland and Hungary (the latter already

homogenised significantly after the 1920 Trianon Treaty), and largely reduced the previous multi-ethnicity of Czechoslovakia (Kosinski, 1969). Such homogenisation had already started through displacement and ethnic cleansing (especially of the Roma and Jews) during the War. The presence of ethnic minorities became almost negligible, leaving the Roma as the most distinct ethnic minority and henceforth the most stigmatised (Crowe, 2003; McCagg, 1991).

In terms of migration, during the Cold War, the Visegrád states saw mostly emigration to Western Europe or North America. Some emigrated as foreign workers (Kaczmarczyk & Okólski, 2005, pp. 5–6) but many as refugees, particularly when escaping political conflict in Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1948/1968) and Poland (1980-1) (Wallace & Stola, 2001, p. 14) – although, in the case of Poland, substantial outflows continued over the 1970s and 1980s, particularly to West Germany (Gwiazda, 1992; Łukasiewicz, 2019). The restrictive conditions for obtaining visas to go abroad or finding legal channels for emigration often led to irregular exits. In the Czechoslovak case, on average, these were people in their active years, mostly Czech, with a 2:1 male-to-female ratio and, at least, semi-skilled (Drbohlav, 1994, pp. 90–93; Drbohlav et al., 2009, pp. 10–15). Estimates put the number of Czechoslovaks who left the country during state socialism at 550,000 (Drbohlav & Janurová, 2019).

Immigration to Czechoslovakia, Hungary or Poland was strictly state planned, with programmes allowing for the limited stay of workers and students from countries like Vietnam, Cuba or Mozambique (Triandafyllidou, 2016, p. 10). Czechoslovakia, suffering from marked labour shortages in the 1970s, stepped up its existing programmes to attract temporary workers and trainees/students especially from Poland, Vietnam and Cuba, but also Yugoslavia, Hungary, Angola and North Korea (Drbohlav et al., 2009, p. 13). Some of the new residents reported experiencing discrimination. For instance, Alamgir (2013) explores how the Vietnamese foreign workers were subject to racist prejudice from Czechs, often based on dominant ideas from race theory but also an expectation that Czechoslovakia was fulfilling a *mission civilisatrice* with migration programmes. Despite this, during the 1990s, a sizable Vietnamese community remained within Czechia and served as a link for future migration (Drbohlav, 1994, p. 95; Szymańska-Matusiewicz, 2015). Additionally, Arab students became highly visible in Czech universities from the 1950s. Hannová (2014a, 2014b) finds that Arab students became associated with luxury goods (such as exotic foods or Western clothing) and, through Orientalising stereotypes, as idle dandies and womanisers. Importantly, many came from a wealthy or communist background, or through exchange programmes with friendly Arab nationalist regimes (like Egypt, Iraq or Syria). She did not find that practising Islam became a matter for conflict but, then again, many of the students were highly secular or skipped most practices. Conversely, for African students, racism was at the heart of most conflicts and they became frequent targets of attack (Holečková, 2022)

In the 1990s, Visegrád states became a transit area for African and Asian migrants on their way westwards, and, particularly, Hungary and Czechia received a significant number of refugees from the Yugoslav Wars (Castles et al., 2014, pp. 115–116). Both countries' economies also became a magnet during the 1990s for workers from Romania, Ukraine and Bulgaria (Kaczmarczyk & Okólski, 2005). For Czechia, it can be said that GDP growth, the influx of migrant workers and relaxed migration policies

went roughly hand in hand (Drbohlav & Valenta, 2014, p. 42). Economic development and higher immigration levels coincided during the first half of the 1990s and especially in the 2001-2008 period, when Czechia attracted the largest number of foreign workers among the V4 countries (Drbohlav, 2012, pp. 185–186), later overtaken by Poland. In recent years, most foreigners in Czechia have come from Ukraine, Slovakia, Vietnam and Russia and, to a lesser extent, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland and Germany. Using 2011 data, Drbohlav and Valenta (2014, p. 43) identified three types of migrants in the country: 'Eastern' (i.e. from Eastern Europe and ex-USSR republics), with a higher male proportion, low-skilled or employed in manual labour; 'Western', very heterogeneous and usually with higher qualification; and Asian, who have economic specialisations. They stressed that Ukrainians were largely overrepresented in the construction sector and that over 90% of Vietnamese residents held trading licences, since they have a strong presence in the wholesale and retail sectors.

In 2018, Czechia rejected 89% of first-instance asylum applications, becoming the most restrictive EU country for refugees, closely followed by Poland (Eurostat Press Office, 2019). The Czech Ministry of Interior argued that most applicants came from stable countries and their claims would have not been accepted in other countries either (Kenety, 2019). About a quarter of applicants were from Ukraine, and another quarter were Cubans, Georgians and Armenians. Before the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, Czechia had never hosted many refugees. UNHCR data (2024) shows a considerable spike in the absolute number of refugees in 1992 (Czechoslovakia) and of asylum seekers in 2001 (Czechia). [35] These can be easily explained. First, following the 1990 Refugee Act, Czechoslovakia received many asylum claims, mostly from Eastern Europe. The enthusiasm for this new institution translated into relatively high recognition rates until the breakup of the federation (Szczepanikova, 2011, pp. 791–793). Disappointment quickly followed when the authorities perceived that most asylum seekers were not genuinely interested in staying but rather moving onto Western countries and that the system of international protection was frequently misused by economic migrants (Ibidem; Drbohlav, 1994, p. 97). The perception that refugees did not find Czechia desirable and the progressive harmonisation with EU asylum policy made the system ever more restrictive. Second, a tension between a very restrictive 1999 Aliens Act and a generous 2000 New Asylum Act doubled the number of asylum applications for 2001, with Ukrainians significantly overrepresented (Szczepanikova, 2011, pp. 2–3). This occurred because informal labour migration – mostly from Ukraine – had now come under state control and a visa regime was imposed on citizens from the former USSR (Černík, 2006, pp. 25–26). Surveys from this period do not reveal public opposition to refugees. For instance, in the summer of 2001, 44% of survey respondents would accept every single refugee, regardless of their motive, and 85% would accept refugees from countries affected by war (STEM, 2001b).[36] Conversely, in December 2016, 64% of Czechs thought that their country should *not* accept refugees from countries affected by war (Červenka & Pilecká, 2017).

[35] To compare the number of refugees in Czechia with other countries see Cibulka (2015).

[36] A survey with a different wording revealed milder enthusiasm. Here, respondents were asked whether foreigners persecuted because of political or racial/ethnic reasons should be allowed to settle in Czechia: 28.1% answered that 'practically all' should be allowed, 50.5% replied that this right should be given to a 'smaller portion of them' and 21.4% to "almost none" (CVVM, 2001b).

In 2015, Czechs received 0.1% of all EU asylum applications, and their recognition rate remained relatively low at 34%, with subsidiary protection being by far the most popular form of international protection (Pachocka, 2016, pp. 107–110). While, in absolute numbers, Czechia granted international protection to 375 people in 2014 and 460 in 2015, those receiving refugee status as per the Geneva Convention were fewer in 2015 than in 2014 (Člověk v tísni, 2018).

Interviews with experts and state officials confirm that, despite its restrictiveness, the highly bureaucratic and apolitical field of Czech migration policy (see Shevel, 2011, Chapter 5) only became politicised and securitised by 2015 with the 'refugee crisis' (Beger, 2021; Stojanov et al., 2017, 2022). Nevertheless, even if the country rejected enacting 'refugee quotas', it continued to comply with other EU directives on migration (Beger, 2021) and initiated several new programmes for legal migration and integration at this time (Stojanov et al., 2022). However, politicians remained committed to their rejection of 'refugee quotas' and Muslim 'refugees'.

4.4. The early days of the 'refugee crisis' in Czechia (2014-2015)

This section will treat several aspects of the 'refugee crisis' as it played out in Czechia in 2014-2015 by providing a synthesis of changes in public opinion, political developments, the particularities of ČT reporting and findings from discourse/content analyses covering this period. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to summarise the events of the European 'refugee crisis' or analyse its political dynamics, yet mentions of some key developments are in order. Although a significant increase in crossings by undocumented migrants into the EU and asylum applications had already begun in 2013, it was by 2015 that the size of the predicament placed migration at the top of political and media agendas across the EU. In 2015, compared to the previous year, IOM detected a 400% increase in crossings by undocumented migrants into the EU (around 75% of them from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq); more than a twofold increase in asylum applications; and a 15% increase of migrant deaths in the Mediterranean (BBC, 2015b; IOM, 2016). During the 'refugee crisis', the V4 adopted a common policy position in reaction to the EU Commission's management (detailed analyses in Koß & Séville, 2020; Nyzio, 2017; or Pachocka, 2016). The four countries challenged the relocation and resettlement of asylum seekers into their territories. Initially, Czechia had agreed on 20 July 2015, *on a voluntary basis*, to relocate 1,100 asylum seekers (from Italy and Greece) and accept 400 for resettlement (from outside of the EU). The resolution for this first scheme was passed on 14 September in a seemingly uncontroversial way. However, the second scheme proposed by the Commission on the *mandatory* relocation of asylum seekers from Italy and Greece was approved by the Council on 22 September 2015, with Czechia, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia voting against (Nyzio, 2017, pp. 58–68). These allocations would become known as the 'refugee quotas'.

4.4.1. Shifts in public opinion

Radical shifts in threat perceptions, intimately connected to prejudice, help to contextualise the discursive events of 2014 and 2015. These changes followed from the interlinked events of a) the rise of IS and jihadist terrorist attacks in Western

Europe, and b) the ‘refugee crisis’. In June 2014, IS of Iraq and the Levant declared a caliphate under the name of IS, which became a security concern for many Czechs in subsequent years. Between February 2015 and March 2017, when asked whether IS’s activities posed a threat to Czech security, between 46% and 72% of respondents totally agreed with the statement, with an additional 22% to 33% declaring partial agreement (Červenka, 2017). Importantly, as was the case for ‘refugees’, figures were even higher for the perception of ‘Europe’, rather than ‘Czechia’, as a target of threat (Buchtík, 2015b). Additionally, jihadist terrorist attacks in Western Europe attracted high media coverage, notably: in 2015, in Paris (January/November); in 2016, in Brussels (March), Nice (July) and Berlin (December); and in 2017, in London (March/June), Manchester (May) and Barcelona (August). Thus, a threat of terrorism (often correlated with anti-Muslim attitudes) also became salient in Czech surveys. The percentage of respondents marking ‘terrorists’ as a significant threat to Czech security went from 52.9% in November 2013 to 62.40% in November 2014 (after the rise of the IS) and 80.60% in December 2015, after the November terrorist attacks in Paris (see Figure 4). Again, the EU was perceived as much more vulnerable to terrorism, with Czech Eurobarometer respondents ranking, for years, among the most likely to indicate ‘terrorism’ as one of the two biggest issues facing the EU. However, unlike ‘immigration’ which was initially seen as an urgent issue facing both Czechia and the EU, ‘terrorism’ was evaluated as pressing for the EU but not Czechia (Evropské komise, 2018; TNS Opinion & Social, 2015d, 2016).

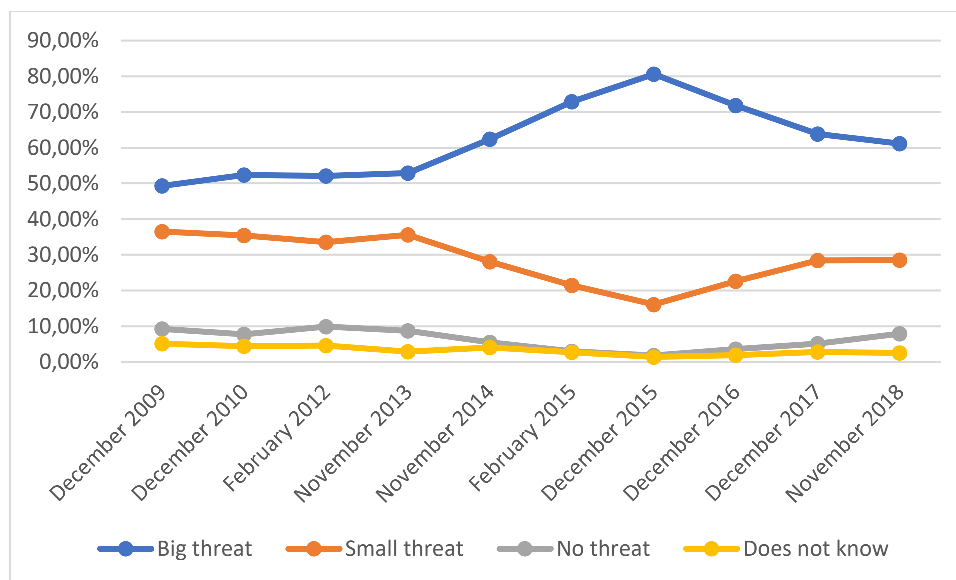

Figure 4. Threat of terrorist groups and individuals to Czech security*. Data from CVVM's Naše společnost series (http://nesstar.soc.cas.cz). Q: Do you consider that any of the following groups presents a real security threat for the Czech Republic at present? If yes, is this a big or a small threat? C: Terrorist groups or individuals*

Anxieties became so high that, by December 2015, 49.60% of Czechs indicated that wars were a significant threat to national security (Figure 5).[37] Evidence suggests that, rather than fearing a spillover from the war in Ukraine, respondents perceived a threat of war coming from the conflicts in the Middle East (Červenka, 2016a, p. 5). Illustratively, in November 2014, 28% of respondents picked Russia as one of the three countries that could threaten Czech security, only 4% marked IS, and 6% Syria; by December 2015, 35% marked the IS, 17% Russia and 20% Syria (Tuček, 2015a, p. 9).

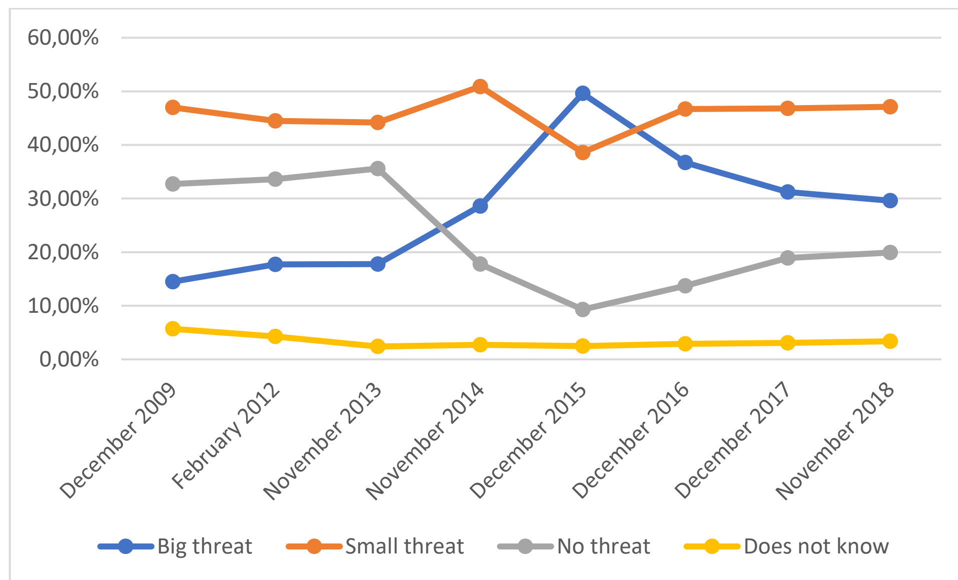

Figure 5. Threat of wars to Czech security. *Data from CVVM's Naše společnost series (http://nesstar.soc.cas.cz). Q: Do you consider that any of the following realities presents a real security threat for the Czech Republic at present? If yes, is this a big or a small threat? A: Wars*

In the 2015 summer, opposition to accepting 'refugees' was high. When Czechs were asked for the first time in June 2015 if the country should accept 'migrants and refugees' (note the category association) from either Syria or North Africa, over 70% of respondents opposed welcoming any (Buchtík, 2015a). In contrast, because the country had previous experiences with Ukrainians, 40% indicated that Czechia should accept 'a few' such 'migrants and refugees' from Ukraine, although only 13% believed that most or all Ukrainians should be welcomed. Publicly, politicians often differentiated their stance towards Muslim and Ukrainian 'refugees', with President Zeman advocating for including the latter into the 'quotas' (ČTK, 2015b). Nevertheless, by early 2016, a slight majority of the public still rejected banning 'Muslims' from receiving asylum (MEDIAN, 2016). After September 2015, surveys from the Public Opinion Research Centre (CVVM) started to ask only about 'refugees'. However, Ukrainians were still clearly preferred (Figures 6 and 7). Importantly, these figures reveal a spike in rejection of both groups of 'refugees' in October 2017, when national parliamentary elections took place and opposition to immigration became central to

[37] Analysts associated increased fears (of refugees, terrorism, radical religious movements and wars) with the 'refugee crisis', IS' activities and jihadist terrorism. Additionally, the co-occurrence of several armed conflicts (in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan, Libya and Ukraine) were identified as relevant (Tuček, 2015a, p. 3).

most party programmes (Krčál & Naxera, 2018). In other V4 countries, migration was also being instrumentalised for domestic political gains (Gigitashvili & Sidło, 2019; Narkowicz, 2018; Tamchynová, 2017).

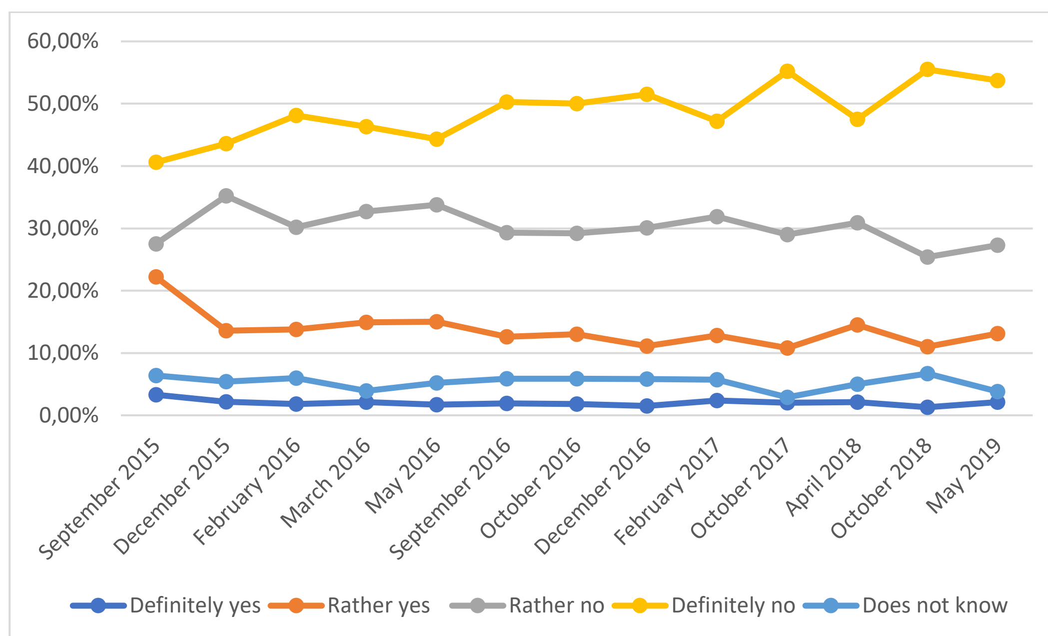

Figure 6. Accepting refugees from Middle East and North Africa. *Data from CVVM's Naše společnost series (http://nesstar.soc.cas.cz). Q: A large number of refugees from the Middle East and North Africa arrived mostly to Southern European countries, which are not able to cope with such a quantity of refugees. According to your opinion, should the Czech Republic accept some of these refugees who are coming into the EU?*

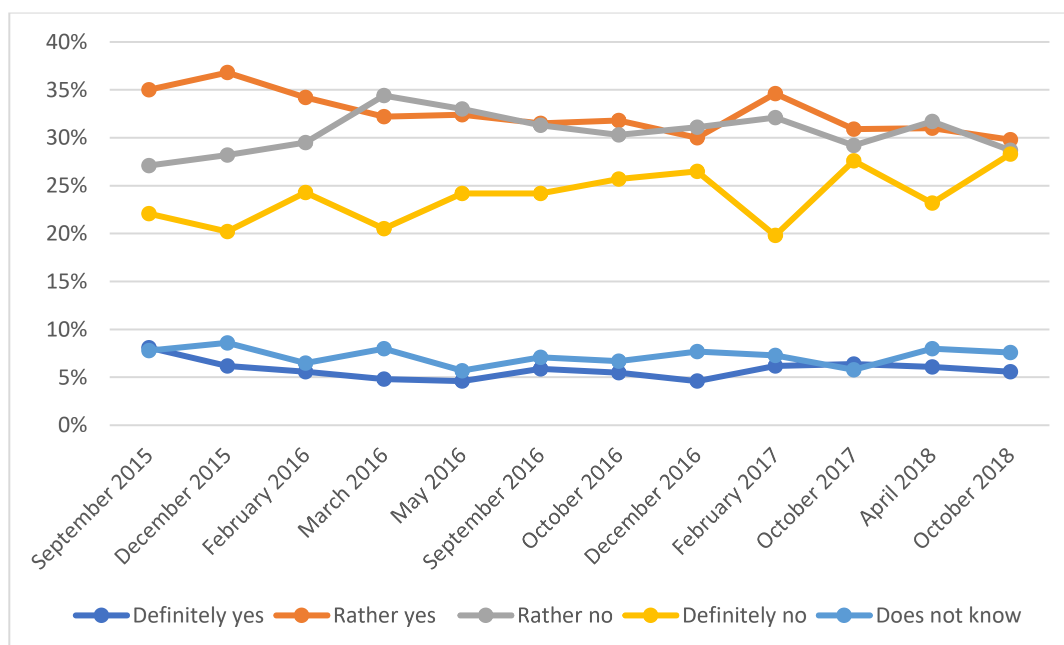

Figure 7. Accepting refugees from Ukraine. *Data from CVVM's Naše společnost series (http://nesstar.soc.cas.cz). Q: The conflict in Eastern Ukraine is also causing an increase in the number of Ukrainian refugees. Should the Czech Republic accept Ukrainians from regions affected by the armed conflict?*

The arrival of Muslim refugees was not only generally unwelcomed, but 'refugees' were considered a huge security risk by late 2015 (Buchtík, 2015b). Even foreign residents in the country became regarded as greater security liabilities (STEM, 2015). The belief that 'refugees' could expand a dangerous Islamic culture was an important explanatory factor (STEM, 2018). However, at first, the threat of jihadist terrorism and potential criminal behaviour from refugees seemed to trump concerns over the erosion of Czech culture (MEDIAN, 2016). 'Islam' was largely associated with fundamentalism, with Czech respondents estimating after the Paris November 2015 attacks that, on average, 43% of Muslims condone the violence of jihadist terrorism (Wirnitzer, 2015). In consonance with the declinist narrative, by late 2015, respondents who considered 'refugees' a significant threat were more pessimistic about their own futures but, especially, about the future of Europe (Tuček, 2015a). Probably as a result of the perceived clash over 'refugees', attitudes towards most West European countries, relative to 2013, worsened over 2015, particularly towards Germany (STEM, 2016b). Paradigmatically, Angela Merkel, who had pushed for burden-sharing and set the example in the summer of 2015 by allowing refugees to claim asylum in Germany (in breach of the Dublin Regulation) went from being the most trusted international politician in April 2014, together with Barack Obama, to one of the most distrusted, performing worse than Vladimir Putin, in December 2015 (Červenka, 2016b). Instead, by the end of 2015, the hardliner Miloš Zeman and (arguably) opportunistic Andrej Babiš (ANO) became regarded as the most trusted hypothetical PMs to deal with the 'crisis' (MEDIAN, 2016).

4.4.2. Czech political events relevant to public discourse on 'Muslims' and 'refugees' in 2015

This sub-section presents a chronological account of relevant national political events that contextualise 2015 public discourse on 'Muslims' and 'refugees'. Nevertheless, in late 2014, the Czech Minister of Interior Milan Chovanec (ČSSD) had already fleshed out Islamophobic arguments against 'refugees'. Earlier that year, Chovanec had defended the aggressive police raids in Islamic centres of worship in Prague (ČT24, 2014). In a November 2014 TV interview, Chovanec reported expressing reservations to his German counterpart about the inclusion of Czechia within a potential system for distributing Syrian refugees among EU member states and argued that this decision should be left to a national referendum. Furthermore, he suggested that the religious identity of migrants – whether or not they were 'ethnic Christians' – might influence citizens' vote (Straka, 2014, min.12:30). Through these statements, the Minister of Interior openly proposed the legitimacy of discrimination against Muslims.

The beginning of 2015 was marked by the reaction to the January Charlie Hebdo attacks, particularly activists' mobilisation.[38] After the 7 to 9 January attacks, public

[38] However, a few days before, Okamura (Dawn) had made the headlines (even international ones) by publicly shifting from anti-Roma and generic anti-migrant discourse towards blatant Islamophobic rhetoric. He did so by, inter alia, encouraging citizens to boycott kebab shops or walking pigs and dogs

debate became increasingly hostile, particularly among online users (Kučera, 2015; Svobodová, 2015) and in important corners of the press (Doležal, 2015). Mainstream parties generally offered a self-contained civilisationist condemnation of the attacks, largely framed as an attack on 'our' common 'European' values. Many public statements by mainstream politicians contained elements of Islamophobic rhetoric,[39] with some, like ODS' leader Petr Fiala, reaffirming their previous warnings against Islam (Fiala, 2015; ODS, 2015). Most significantly, the largely online anti-Islam movement managed to successfully mobilise onto the streets: in January, IvČRN, gathered 700 people, including some MPS,[40] in two protests against Islam in Prague (Muhič Dizdarevič, 2016, p. 128); in February, other protests by IvČRN (Brno) and the DSSS (Prague) confirmed that such actions could consistently mobilise hundreds. This was a relatively huge achievement for the Czech far right then but the influence of IvČRN over the political mainstream should not be overstated. Anti-Islam and other far-right movements were largely framed as pariahs by the mainstream press and parties, and their electoral potential and relative ability to set the key frames in public discourse remained marginal throughout 2015.

The spring of 2015 can be characterised as a period of fermenting politicisation of and mobilisation against 'refugees' before a public discourse on the 'refugee crisis' consolidated by the summer (Kluknavská et al., 2019). Since February, the official government position, communicated in the Chamber of Deputies, had been to oppose mandatory 'quotas', a commitment zealously supported by most MPs (PSP, 2015a, pp. 488, 695). By March, most mainstream parties were internally coordinating and externally communicating their stances against the acceptance of 'refugees', whose Islamic identity was depicted as threatening (Dlabajová, 2015; Grulich, 2015; KDU-ČSL, 2015; TOP 09, 2015; Váhalová, 2015). Two new markedly Islamophobic parties were born in May and June, respectively: former Dawn's chairman Tomio Okamura's Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) and the Bloc Against Islam (BPI), the party transmutation of IvČRN. Despite the disproportionate media attention, both parties retained a marginal support throughout the year.[41] Moreover, during the spring, NGOs working for the rights of migrants became targets of growing Islamophobic attacks (Venturová, 2015), while many conservative intellectuals began publicly positioning against 'refugees' (Institut Václava Klause, 2015; Kohout, 2015).

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near mosques (Hájek, 2015). Even if most of the mainstream press critically caricaturised Okamura as a Quixotic xenophobe damaging Czechia's international reputation, his shocking statements became widely platformed.

[39] For instance, minister Chovanec (ČSSD) reassured the public by repeating the trope that the Czech 'Muslim community' was 'level-headed' (*klidná*), which was something 'unique' – implying that Muslims are not particularly 'level-headed' elsewhere (Kuchyňová, 2015).

[40] Attending the first protest were far-right party leader Tomio Okamura (Dawn) and, controversially for her party, Jana Černochová (ODS).

[41] SPD would not be able to surpass the 5% threshold in voting intentions until June 2017 (CVVM, 2024d). The short-lived BPI was born out of IvČRN and closely cooperated with the declining and by 2018 extinct Dawn. According to Prokůpková (2019), in spring 2015, the unrecognised demands for regulations against Islam made by IvČRN, which had even been articulated from the stance of universalist liberalism and against 'racism' (Chalániová, 2019), motivated IvČRN/BPI to repurpose themselves into populist anti-refugee forces, mutually exchanging support with President Zeman (Vojtová, 2015).

By the summer, the ‘crisis’ and, particularly, ‘quotas’ and ‘border protection’, dominated public discourse. The coverage increased, with Czech politicians often representing ‘refugees’ in connection to Islam and through securitising and other negative frames (Jelínková, 2019), probably in an attempt to capitalise on existing negative attitudes (Saxonberg et al., 2024). Civil society movements visibly mobilised for and against the rights of Muslims and refugees, feeding into a narrative of ‘polarisation’ (see 5.1., 5.3.1.b.). Opposition to ‘refugees’ further normalised Islamophobic rhetoric, increasing attacks against Muslims (for example, organised dog-walks to intimidate Muslims in Teplice) or the desecration of associated buildings like mosques or kebab shops (Muhič Dizdarevič, 2016).

The rising number of refugee arrivals on EU territory and deaths on transit added pressure on member states to coordinate solutions, as well as to act unilaterally, for example, by imposing checks or building fences between country borders. The Czech mainstream political consensus continued to oppose the unpopular[42] mandatory ‘quotas’, with Czechia voting against these at the EU Council in September and most Czech MEPs rejecting the Commission’s proposal that same month. Despite a general agreement on the securitised framing of and solutions to the ‘crisis’, a narrative of ‘polarisation’ generated the illusion that ‘extremists’ and ‘populists’ stood against ‘do-gooders’ and ‘welcomers’. In practice, the mainstream tried to exclude both ‘camps’, with advocates for greater European cooperation and civility in public discourse also being stigmatised as ‘welcomers’ or out-of-touch elites (see 7.3., 8.3.) Additionally, as remarked by Beneš (2017, p. 50), the initial strategy of differentiating ‘economic migrants’ from ‘refugees’ (see 7.4.), largely disappeared in this period to give way to a securitisation of all ‘refugees’.

The summer dynamics continued in autumn. As the ‘crisis’ lost momentum, news media began abandoning the frame of ‘refugees’ as victims, to stress their cultural difference (Kovář, 2022a). Multiple anti-Islam protests against ‘refugees’ continued, notably on the remembrance dates of 28 October (Ferebauer et al., 2015) and 17 November. On the latter day, a Prague rally saw President Zeman and members of BPI/Dawn share the podium, with affiliates of other far-right groups among the attendees (ČT24, 2015). Many in the political mainstream, including the PM, criticised Zeman for his legitimation of the far right at this event, particularly complaining about the presence of the controversial BPI leader Martin Konvička.[43] Despite the cordon sanitaire against the far right, mainstream political discourse about ‘refugees’ remained highly securitising and largely Islamophobic. On 1 October, the Chamber of Deputies passed a resolution urging the government to adopt a stringent approach in selecting asylum seekers (including at ‘hotspots’ in transit countries) to the detriment of ‘illegal’ or ‘economic’ migrants; stressing national sovereignty on migration policy; rejecting ‘quotas’; preserving the free movement of people within the Schengen area; and delivering development and humanitarian aid to tackle the causes that drive

[42] As advanced, in June, an early public opinion survey already measured a majoritarian opposition to ‘quotas’ (among respondents declaring to know something about the relocation mechanism) and resistance to accept ‘refugees and immigrants’ from ‘Syria’ and ‘North Africa’ (Buchtík, 2015a).

[43] A day later, the notoriety of the rally led a public prosecutor to file a complaint against Konvička for hateful comments posted on Facebook.

migrants to leave for the EU (PSP, 2015b).[44] The text also questioned the eligibility of many refugees to qualify for asylum and insisted on fighting 'illegal migration'. At this time, the government did support a few modest initiatives such as hosting 20 Syrian university students (Ferebauer & ČTK, 2015) and backing an NGO programme which aspired to resettle 153 Christian Iraqi refugees (Vlada.cz, 2015).[45] Finally, the 13 November terrorist attacks in Paris heightened the perception of 'Muslims' being a security risk and of terrorists potentially abusing the routes used by refugees.

4.4.3. Particularities of the Czech public broadcaster news' services

ČT's news services present some particularities which have to be understood in order to contextualise the analysed texts. Notably, between March and October 2015, trust in television started a steep decrease that would plateau in subsequent years (CVVM, 2024b). Although the potential reasons behind this dip are manifold, the charges publicly levelled against 'the media', either for 'brainwashing' their audiences (see 5.3.1.a.) or ignoring 'alternative' positions on 'refugees', surely had a discrediting effect. Despite this decline, ČT remained perceived as largely neutral and trustworthy at the end of the year (Česká televize, 2016, p. 93). Television played an important role in Czechs' media diets. According to an analysis of 18 countries' media landscapes, Czechs were heavily reliant on both TV and online newspapers as news sources at the time (Fletcher et al., 2015). The same study found that ČT remained the most popular source of TV news, closely followed by TV Nova. Another analysis found that the news shows of both channels barely differed in their framing of the 'crisis', which, nonetheless, followed the agenda set by politicians, who stressed its security and administrative aspects (Tkaczyk et al., 2015). As a reaction to these conclusions, a study commissioned by the Czech Council for Radio and Television Broadcasting (RRTV) underscored that the TV Nova's show Střepiny did, however, often use humanitarian frames, particularly around the time of the death of Aylan Kurdi. Conversely, the RRTV (2016c, p. 43) found that several instances of news reporting from Prima, the next private competitor, were indeed in breach of broadcasting legislation for favouring anti-Muslim/refugee positions, with Prima's shows generally constructing refugees "as a source of problems for Europeans". Investigative journalists later found that managers at Prima had explicitly instructed editors, who influenced news reporting, to represent 'refugees' as a threatening Islamising force (Břešťan, 2016). Overall, despite a trend of declining trust in television, ČT news services remained popular and trusted, commonly regarded as neutral, and with contents not too different in style to those from its next private competitor. Despite ČT's influence on shaping public opinion on the 'crisis', other media at the time promoted competing and even stronger anti-refugee biases. Although Štětka et al (2020) used data from 2019, they found that consuming commercial television and online news on migration had a significant impact on anti-migrant attitudes and support for ANO and SPD, while watching ČT news did the opposite.

[44] On the other hand, filing a lawsuit against the EU together with Slovakia, as proposed by ODS or Dawn, did not make it into the final resolution.
[45] This scheme was terminated in early 2016 after several of these refugees moved on to Germany or rejected being resettled (Nováková, 2016)

4.4.4. Content and discourse analyses of news media and political discourse from 2015

Several content analyses of Czech media (i.e. not strictly political) discourse have focused on the coverage of migration (i.e. not 'Muslims') during 2015, with the summer and autumn months receiving the most attention. The analyses of newspaper articles, which frequently covered greater timeframes, report a spike in the volume of migration-related pieces in August and, particularly, September; followed by a slump in late September; and a second peak already by January-February 2016 (Fengler & Kreutler, 2020; Neumann, 2015; Tkaczyk, 2017). Unless consciously narrowing their interest to journalists, these works frequently analysed the talk of politicians, who regularly featured in the analysed texts. Kovář (2022b, p. 18) estimated that Czech news media relied on politicians to comment on the 'crisis' more often than their West European counterparts. Even if commercial TV news were more reliant on politicians than the public broadcaster (RRTV, 2016c, cf. 2016a, 2016b), the presence of politicians is quite high in ČT news, with Czech and foreign politicians (methodologically lumped together with ambassadors and close advisors) representing 41% of guests invited to comment on migration at the UK show between 24 August and 13 September 2015 (RRTV, 2016a). The dominance of political talk influenced the media's focus on the political and administrative aspects of the 'crisis' (EJO, 2015; Tkaczyk, 2017), particularly security. Kovář (2022b) finds that 77% of Czech TV and newspaper pieces analysed employed a security frame, compared to 68% in Slovakia. According to Kluknavská et al. (2019), the more security-centred and negative coverage in Czechia contrasts with the more humanitarian and neutral tone found in neighbouring Austria.

These content analyses of media discourse revealed three trends on how 'refugees' were constructed in mainstream media discourse. First, many analysts point to the negativity of discourse on both 'refugees' (Kluknavská et al., 2019; Neumann, 2015; Sedláková et al., 2015) and the EU/German Chancellor Merkel (EJO, 2015). Differences across outlets are observed, with tabloids and commercial TV often identified as more negative than 'quality' newspapers or public broadcasting services respectively (Kovář, 2022b; Neumann, 2015; RRTV, 2016d). Negativity increases when politicians talk (Jelínková, 2019), 'refugees' are framed from the perspective of security or cultural difference (Kovář, 2022b), and the conversation is on mandatory 'quotas' (RRTV, 2016a). Second, as advanced above, the coverage emphasised the political and administrative aspects of the 'crisis', with negligible attention to its root causes. The Ministry of Interior, the dominant actor in migration policy since the 1990s, contributed to set the frames of the debate by engaging most often with the media (Tkaczyk et al., 2015) and presenting its minister as the guarantor of Czechs' security (Daniel, 2020). Journalists, for their part, relied heavily on governmental sources and contributed to steer the discussion towards law-enforcement solutions (Sedláková et al., 2015; Tkaczyk, 2017). Third, as challengers of security or legality, 'refugees' are represented as requiring control*,* containment or management (Tkaczyk, 2017). Although all major political parties contributed to the securitisation of 'refugees' (Strapáčová & Hloušek, 2018), the work of journalists is identified as equally securitising. Even ČT received criticism from the RRTV (2016a) for often depicting

‘refugees’, often through water metaphors, as a mass taking over Europe that law enforcement authorities tried to control.

Another set of publications specifically analysed political discourse and action concerning migration in 2015, regardless of whether these had been mediatised. While studies of the media were particularly interested in how the ‘refugee crisis’ came about as a topic in 2015, more politically-driven analyses also included the use of migration in the campaigns for the October 2017 Parliamentary Election and the January 2018 Presidential Election (Naxera & Krčál, 2018; Zahradník & Rosůlek, 2017). They are also more likely to focus on the Islamophobic dimension of discourse (Čada & Frantová, 2017; Zahradník & Rosůlek, 2017) and Islamophobic actors (Chalániová, 2019; Slačálek & Svobodová, 2018). To the extent that they are relevant to 2015, they agree on the complicity of the political mainstream in promoting anti-refugee and Islamophobic rhetoric. Although several authors emphasise the stylistic differences between mainstream and far-right actors in how they represented ‘refugees’ (Strapáčová & Hloušek, 2018; Stulík & Krčál, 2019; Vallo et al., 2020), the general consensus is that even mainstream parties generally constructed ‘refugees’ (Stulík & Krčál, 2019) and ‘Islam’ (Čada & Frantová, 2017) as security threats while opposing ‘quotas’ (Hrabálek & Đorđević, 2017). According to Havlík (2019a, p. 60), “the admission of refugees is outside politically acceptable boundaries in [Czechia] and rejection of this step forms the basis of discussion”. Unanimously, politicians identified mandatory ‘quotas’ as an ineffective solution putting Czech citizens at risk (Stulík & Krčál, 2019). Often, authors stress discursive differences across and within parties, with most parties being unable to present coherent positions (Havlík, 2019a). In 2015, every mainstream party, except for ODS (and President Zeman), combined a mixture of humanitarian concerns for ‘refugees’ and othering of the latter (Stojarová, 2018; Strapáčová & Hloušek, 2018).

Conclusions

This chapter has presented a broad overview of the socio-historical, political and communicative contexts that situate the Islamophobic turn in Czech public opinion and political discourse between 2014 and 2015. Two processes facilitated the penetration of two ideologies into Czech mainstream politics that would intimately complement Islamophobia in 2014-2015, namely populism and Euroscepticism. By 2010 and, particularly, 2013 the post-1989 alternation of governments led by either social democrats or civic democrats became threatened because of political corruption and government instability. As a result, new populist challengers (mostly running on anti-corruption programmes or, for Zeman, against urban cosmopolitan elites) and rhetoric gained ground while traditional parties, particularly on the centre right, lost a considerable share of the vote. In parallel, after the 2008 economic crisis, Euroscepticism and an anti-colonialist critique of Western liberalism, originally formulated by the centre right, crept into politics and public discourse. In the early 2010s, Czech public opinion had grown distrustful of traditional politicians and increasingly sceptical of West European models. The chapter discusses additional socio-historical factors which accommodated Islamophobic politics, with an emphasis on dominant Czech conceptions of ethnicity and religiosity, and the geopolitical

worldview from which the 'refugee crisis' was interpreted. Nevertheless, before 2014, anti-migrant politics remained largely irrelevant for the Czech public. Furthermore, the Czech far right, save for the 2013 entry into parliament of Dawn (linked to its programme against corruption and for direct democracy) remained weak and fragmented as late as 2014.

Why then would mainstream parties adopt Islamophobic rhetoric in 2014 without any credible pressure from far-right challengers and in the absence of voters' interest in anti-migrant politics? Before entering the empirical chapters and answering this question more systematically in the Conclusions chapter (see 9.1.2.), there are a few processes to consider. First, Islamophobia had already been promoted through elite discourse since 9/11 (4.2.2.b.), resulting in negative public opinion towards Muslim-majority groups (4.2.2.a.). Consequently, when 'Muslims' entered the political agenda in 2014 (Chapter 7), citizens were perceived to be receptive to Islamophobic positions. While news media reporting had been notably biased before 2014, Islamophobia had also been repeatedly pushed by right-wing intellectuals and think-tanks close to ODS, and, occasionally, by mainstream politicians.

Second, traditional parties felt the need to reinvent themselves in the face of public disenchantment with traditional politics and the growingly appealing populist communication. Early on, the centre-right ODS and KDU-ČSL had already started replicating Western Islamophobic politics in the very late 2000s, when even the marginal Czech far right was reaping no results from this agenda (4.2.2.b.). Additionally, important socially conservative factions within the left-wing ČSSD and KSČM became emboldened during the 'refugee crisis', pushing their parties to abandon previous programmatic commitments to multiculturalism. Another factor fostering populist rhetoric was a wariness of being cast as elites, a position discursively reserved for corrupt politicians (in Czech anti-corruption populism) and out-of-touch urban liberals (in the nationalist centre-right or Zeman's worldview).

Third, in a context of relatively high Euroscepticism, Czech politicians interpreted the rise of the West European populist radical right as a symptom of actual street-level and culture-based interethnic conflict (rather than driven by racist scapegoating). Therefore, while there was no credible far-right threat in Czechia, there was a (racist) belief about far-right 'extremists' naturally emerging from contexts of greater ethnic diversity; with politicians allegedly seeking to anticipate this threat. Fourth, Czechoslovakia had become highly ethnically homogenised after World War Two and Czechs retained an ethnic conception of the nation. Post-1989 Czech mainstream politics were not particularly sensitive to matters of religious or ethnic discrimination (unless expressed in extreme forms such as in skinhead-led assaults) and, indeed, were no stranger to anti-Roma politics. Consequently, when 'Muslims' suddenly entered the public debate in 2014 (Chapter 7), there were clear inclinations and few disincentives to adopt Islamophobic rhetoric. Even before the 'refugee crisis' consolidated as a topic in the summer of 2015 (Chapter 8), there was a wide cross-party consensus against mandatory 'refugee quotas' and Muslim migration which defined the limits for party competition in subsequent years.

Annex 2: Political actors (abbreviations)

Acronym	Actor name translated	Ideological position
ANO	Action of Dissatisfied Citizens	Technocratic populism
BPI	Bloc Against Islam	Extreme right
ČSSD	Czech Social Democratic Party	Social democracy
Dawn	Dawn of Direct Democracy	Populist radical right
DS	Workers' party	Extreme right
DSSS	Workers' Party of Social Justice	Extreme right
IvČRN	We Don't Want Islam in the Czech Republic	Extreme right movement (non-electable)
KDU-ČSL	Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party	Christian democracy
KSČM	Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia	Communism
NB-ND	No to Brussels – National Democracy	Extreme right
ODS	Civic Democratic Party	Economically liberal conservatism
SPD	Freedom and Direct Democracy	Populist radical right
SPR–RSČ	Rally for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia	Populist radical right
SPOZ	Party of Civic Rights	Social democracy
STAN	Mayors and Independents	Centre-right
SZ	Party of the Greens	Green party
SZR	Party of Common Sense	Populist radical right
TOP 09	Tradition Responsibility Prosperity	Economically liberal conservatism
VV	Public Affairs	Anti-corruption populism

5. Understanding general aspects of (negative) attitudes towards Muslims in Czechia: current state, history and causes

This is one of two chapters presenting the results of a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with non-Muslim Czechs and Muslims living in Czechia. These chapters explore several aspects of attitudes towards 'Muslims' in the country, both those expressed by participants as being their own viewpoints and as attributed to other Czechs. The main goal of the present chapter is to set out general aspects of these attitudes, namely, their current state, evolution and main causes. The next chapter, while expanding further on causes, will focus on the perceived threat posed by 'Muslims' (whether targeting material or symbolic resources); the aspect targeted by Islamophobic prejudice (whether ethnocultural/racial or religious difference); the role of experiences of intergroup contact in mitigating prejudice; and participants' proposed solutions for reducing prejudice. This qualitative exploration of attitudes aims at compensating for several shortcomings of existing survey data on Czechs' attitudes towards 'Muslims'. Additionally, these chapters' results inform the analysis of political discourse in chapters 7 and 8.

Four overarching research questions are used to interrogate the data for the present chapter: *What are attitudes towards 'Muslims' like in Czechia nowadays? When (if at all) have these attitudes changed? Which actors are responsible for this change? Why social representations of key actors are conducive to Islamophobia?* Each question is addressed within a separate section. The first section reveals that Czechs' attitudes towards 'Muslims' (a category overlapping with 'migrant', 'refugee' or 'Arab') are seen as largely negative, with important differences perceived to exist across groups of Czechs. Interestingly, dominant narratives about attitudes promoted by politicians (see 7.3, 8.3.) feature in the explanations given by participants. Section two identifies the historical milestones in public discourse and politics that participants identified to have impacted attitudes. Many acknowledged that 9/11 introduced 'Muslims' to Czech public debate, while 2015 or the 'refugee crisis' were the biggest turning point. Importantly, Muslim participants reported more fundamental changes resulting from 9/11 and, unlike non-Muslims, spoke of a change in attitudes and politics in the early 2010s. Section three explains how 'the media' and politicians are blamed for these changes in attitudes. Notably, although participants pointed to the use of Islamophobic rhetoric by most politicians, they largely recalled four actors who spoke about 'Muslims' – these were populist and far-right actors who apparently "owned" the issue. Finally, section four analyses the themes within which 'Muslims', 'Czechia', 'Western Europe', 'Muslims in Czechia' and 'Muslim women' were represented. As expected, these themes largely mirror representations from political discourse (see chapters 7 and 8). Participants will only be identified with a pseudonym, an approximate age and a letter indicating whether they are Muslim (n/M). For more details on each participant, see Annex 1.

5.1. Czechs' attitudes towards 'Muslims' are believed to be generally negative…

Almost every participant believed that most Czechs' attitudes towards 'Muslims' are negative. A contemporary survey showed that only a quarter of respondents thought

that Czechs were tolerant towards ‘Muslims’ (Tuček, 2020). However, this belief needs to be qualified in four important ways. First, despite my efforts at favouring the category ‘Muslim’ in the interview questions, participants, and, as they reported, other Czechs, regularly conflated this with ‘Arab’, ‘refugee’ or ‘migrant’ – which reflects public discourse dynamics (see 5.2.). Therefore, while a researcher might want to impose ‘Muslims’ as a category of analysis (for instance, to understand ‘attitudes towards Muslims’), participants use their own stereotypes and context models (van Dijk, 2014) to interpret the category. Second, we tend to believe that others hold more negative intergroup biases (Judd et al., 2005). Thus, even participants expressing some antipathies towards ‘Muslims’ believed that the average Czech was strongly prejudiced or anxious about ‘Muslims’. Third, participants often diagnosed Czechs’ attitudes by relying on narratives from public and, specifically, political discourse, such as a ‘fear of the unknown’, a societal polarisation or a ‘media brainwashing’ (see 7.3., 8.3.). For instance, a handful gauged the percentage of Czechs holding negative attitudes within a range of 70% to 90%, percentages originating in anti-refugee rhetoric (see 8.3.). Finally, individual participants’ situational motivations for self and others’ presentation can bias reported attitudes. These biases could range from a general tendency to describe other Czechs as narrow-minded (Holy, 1996) to an expectation that, I, the interviewer, disapproved of anti-Muslim attitudes and, thus, these should be called out more emphatically.

Although some participants took issue with Czechs’ alleged provincialism (see 5.3.2.b.), ethnocentric arrogance or xenophobia, most often, anti-Muslim attitudes were not blamed on Czechs. Instead, external actors, like ‘the media’ or politicians, or structural factors, like a lack of intergroup contact or distrust of organised religion, were blamed for Islamophobia. Furthermore, fear, rather than hate or disgust, was spontaneously identified as the dominant emotional component of prejudice, with active hostility attributed to a small percentage of ‘extremists’. ‘Fear of the unknown’ was a popular explanation, including among Muslim participants. These allocations of responsibilities, which fail to confront racism, xenophobia or other supremacist beliefs, match those made by politicians (see 7.3., 8.3.).

Beyond echoing public narratives about ‘Czechs’ being prejudiced against ‘Muslims’, all participants had encountered forms of Islamophobic prejudice, frequently, on social media and, occasionally, in conversations with other Czechs. Non-Muslim participants’ conversations about ‘Muslims’ were mostly restricted to the ‘refugee crisis’. Outside of some participants’ ‘social bubbles’, where hostilities were rarer, conversations on ‘Muslims’, about which I enquired, were often recalled as conflictual or aggressive in tone. Consequently, this so-called topic was often avoided in order not to damage relationships, to avoid listening to a loved one expressing prejudice, or because of interlocutors’ perceived unwillingness to shift positions. For instance, after Šimon (32/n) and his cousins got into an unpleasant argument about Muslim migrants with their parents, he agreed with his mother not to open this topic ever again. In extreme cases, participants lost friends angered by them marrying a Muslim man (Agáta, 45/n) or because they were presumed to hold positive attitudes towards Muslim refugees (Tereza, 35). Not all participants avoided conflict. Several instances of contestation were reported by younger non-Muslim participants against older relatives, or by non-Muslim participants with positive contact experiences with Muslims against people without such experiences. For instance, as part of a group guided tour in Oman, Milada (43/n) openly stood up to a Czech tourist who had disparagingly mocked the Arabic

script. Conversely, some young non-Muslim participants reported talking to friends of their own age about the existence of Islamophobic prejudice among Czechs. Therefore, most participants' perception that 'Muslims' was a sensitive conversation topic has probably affected how they communicate or decide not doing so when discussing this topic.

Nevertheless, when asked about the effects of intergroup contact experiences, several Muslim participants positively valued the impact that conversations about 'Islam' or 'Muslims' had with non-Muslim interlocutors if the latter were open to changing their minds. Muslim participants frequented reportedly tolerant social circles and, thus, did not encounter prejudice in everyday interactions. Indeed, Yvona (33/M) claimed that most aggressions against Muslims happen in social media – where dehumanisation is more frequent, blatant and institutionally permitted (Abdalla et al., 2021; Chen & Dang, 2023) – and that the situation for Muslims in the physical public space is not as horrible. She perceived that for every person that insults her on the streets, there are dozens if not hundreds of people who either smile at or do not notice her. However, some of her Muslim friends felt less optimistic and she recognised that negative interactions have a significant effect on wellbeing.

5.1.1. but not all Czechs hold equally negative attitudes

According to surveys, since 2014, factors correlating with anti-Muslim attitudes in Czechia include lower formal educational attainment, not having contact with Muslims, distrusting politicians, living in rural areas, voting for the radical right SPD, holding Eurosceptic beliefs, and being a woman, older or a non-Christian (Bell & Strabac, 2020; Marfouk, 2019; MEDIAN, 2018; Öztürk & Pickel, 2019; Pickel & Öztürk, 2018, 2021). When asked about attitudinal differences across Czech society or when mentioning these spontaneously, participants referred to age and urban-rural (or big city/small town) differences most often. However, the few references to an educational divide highlighted that Islamophobic talk also appeared among highly educated people. Furthermore, considering the gendering of 'extremists' as male and accepting the Christian/Muslim civilisationist dichotomy (see 7.1.), some participants predicted that men and Christians would hold more negative attitudes, although as indicated above, Czech surveys suggest the reverse. Furthermore, participants pointed to the positive effects on attitudes towards 'Muslims' of intergroup contact experiences (as proved by surveys), higher media literacy (not considered in surveys) and low feelings of socio-economic anxiety (which is backed by other surveys and framed as relative deprivation, see Meuleman et al., 2020).

For a significant number of diverse participants, age is the most relevant factor separating a younger and more tolerant cohort, from an older, more anxious and prejudiced one. Survey data points to a growing importance of this divide after the 'refugee crisis' (MEDIAN, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2019a). A similar divide appeared in attitudes towards 'refugees' (Glopolis, 2016) but not so markedly with regard to 'Arabs' and other Muslim-majority ethnicities (STEM, 2016c). Prior to 2015, the effect of age on anti-Muslim attitudes had been weak (Pickel, 2020, Table 3; Pickel & Öztürk, 2018) or non-existent (Topinka, 2016a). Younger participants commonly regarded older Czechs as relatively unskilled and gullible information consumers. This gullibility was perceived to translate into an overreliance on both mainstream television

and online disinformation. Czech surveys did show that following commercial television, tabloids or so-called alternative websites – all of which tend to portray 'Muslims' and 'refugees' less favourably (see 4.4.4.) – correlates with slightly more negative attitudes towards 'Muslims' (MEDIAN, 2018, p. 31). Furthermore, exposure to TV news about migration increases the perceived importance of this issue (Wirnitzer, 2015). However, participants were unclear about the media diets associated with positive attitudes. Additionally, Muslim and younger participants believed that older Czechs were likely to remain sceptical about anything foreign as a result of Czechoslovak society being closed to foreign ideas and peoples during communism.

Another recurrent differentiation contrasted the welcoming attitudes towards foreign cultures in big and cosmopolitan (a term favoured by Muslim participants) Czech cities from those in small towns and rural areas. A few framed this as a 'Prague versus the rest' divide. According to Bell and Strabac (2020, p. 138), Czechs living in big cities and their suburbs, or in towns and small cities are more likely to have positive attitudes towards 'Muslims' than Czechs living on a farm or home in the countryside. They explain this effect as resulting from greater chances of contact with ethnically diverse individuals in urban areas – and, based on modernisation theories, the universalist and cosmopolitan values resulting from living in cities (Strabac et al., 2012). Participants in smaller localities acknowledged this rural-urban divide. Even in the small city of Teplice, Beáta (34/n) recognised that the relative visibility of the sudden seasonal arrival of tens of thousands of, mostly Arab, tourists annoyed locals. In her words "In Prague, [the presence of foreigners] is diluted but here, it was everywhere, in front of our eyes". Interestingly, several participants from smaller localities believed that most of their neighbours felt prejudiced, something which conditioned how attitudes were expressed, for instance, through conformity with or caution about challenging the consensus. When asked whether politicians' rejection of 'quotas' was in line with popular preferences, a student from the small Moravian town answered:

> [Czech] politicians mostly did what people asked them to do. [*CGdT: the participant looks around the crowded biergarten where we sit.]* If you asked anyone sitting around us, the majority would tell you that they don't want refugees here, and the state respected that. (Stěpan, 20/n)

Higher formal educational attainment, negatively correlated with anti-Muslim attitudes in Czech surveys (MEDIAN, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2019a), was only mentioned by a handful of participants. Most often, these participants stressed that highly educated Czechs (even with university degrees in social sciences or the humanities) equally held and promoted Islamophobic views. Muslim participants were likely to recall instances of university-educated Czechs expressing prejudice by cherry picking information about Islam to actively damage the religion, in contrast to the subtler popular 'fear of the unknown'. Malika (32/M) was surprised to encounter Islamophobia among Czech academics and was once reprimanded by fellow university students after calling out Islamophobic comments from an event's guest speaker. Although many Czech academics became vocal against fearmongering in 2015 (Fiala, 2015),

academics also showed support for and led anti-Islam initiatives, particularly as Islamophobic rhetoric became normalised during the ‘refugee crisis’.

Interestingly, the few participants mentioning a gender cleavage perceived men as more Islamophobic. As mentioned above, surveys have measured greater anti-Muslim attitudes among Czech women (Bell & Strabac, 2020) and, despite their lower visibility, women were among the pioneers in the Czech Islamophobic scene (for instance, Olga Ryantová, Jana Bobošíková, Jana Volfová, Klára Samková or, slightly later, Eva Hrindová). Furthermore, non-Muslim female participants showed unique preoccupations concerning ‘Muslims’’ treatment of women (see 5.3.2.f.), reportedly shared by other Czech women. Conversely, Czech men were believed to be more concerned about Islamic radicalism and, relying on gendered stereotypes of ‘extremists’, more hostile: “[The local supporters of SPD] are really drunkards. They’re the guys [*chlapi*] who go to the pub daily, grumble about politics, football and gypsies [*sic*]. Whenever they discuss a big issue, it’s really about Muslims, migrants and so on”. Indeed, male Facebook users are more active in producing Islamophobic hate speech (Hrdina, 2016) but only slightly more likely to support SPD (MEDIAN, 2017). Although Czech men might express prejudice qualitatively differently, the notion that they are more likely to hold Islamophobic prejudice is probably influenced by their higher visibility among anti-Islam activists and politicians, and mainstream politicians accusing ‘extremists’ (gendered as male) of promoting Islamophobia.

Regarding religion, a few believed that being Christian could foster anti-Muslim attitudes, with more negative attitudes expected in ‘Christian’ Moravia (Agáta, 45/n) or, as a resident of Moravia claimed, among older generations with a Christian upbringing (Roman, 39). As explained in 2.1.2, this presupposition is probably wrong (see Bell & Strabac, 2020; for “refugees”, see Glopolis, 2016; or Opatrný, 2019) and likely rooted in civilisationist frameworks promoted by, among others, politicians (see 7.1.). Czech Christian churches have been divided on their positions towards Muslim refugees, from the negative stances of some Catholic priests like the late Milan Badal or cardinal Dominik Duka, to the pro-refugee activism of Catholic priest Tomáš Halík (Vogel, 2018). However, Christian organisations are active in fighting Islamophobic prejudice in Czechia, most notably through interfaith dialogue initiatives. The NGO *Diakonie*, associated with the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, has been particularly active, for instance, through its educational project Faces of Migration (*Tváře migrace*). Indeed, during the interviews, participants who self-identified as practising Christians often saw their faith and its principles as facilitating tolerance and, sometimes, even admiration for ‘Muslims’ as believers. Conversely, they were also more likely to see religious rather than ethno-cultural difference as salient in our conversation about ‘Muslims’.

While age and urban-rural divides were seen as most relevant, they were associated with three mediating factors. The first mediator was a lack of intergroup contact opportunities, which younger, Muslim and more liberal participants often associated with living in smaller towns and being older. Second, many participants, particularly younger ones, spoke about the effects of low media literacy (understood as the capacity to critically evaluate information from the news, and the ability to find and distinguish reliable news sources), which was often attributed to older and less

formally educated Czechs. For instance, Roman (39/n) argued that people between 40-60 joined the information revolution late and had become stuck within a generational echo chamber. Finally, although economic insecurity is often identified as source of support for populist parties (Guiso et al., 2017) and group relative deprivation feelings predict anti-Muslim attitudes (Meuleman et al., 2020), only a few male participants aged 39 to 49 mentioned as predictors the anxieties of being left out by globalisation or frustrations about the unfulfilled promises of the 1989 Velvet Revolution.

Besides these traditional sociological cleavages, participants often expressed the view that the 'crisis' had significantly 'polarised' or 'divided' society into two ideological camps. Buchtík (2023) has written at length about how Czechs' lay perception of societal polarisation around different issues does not usually correspond to survey data. However, in the case of immigration, he remarked that society was almost equally split between those who perceived it as threatening and those who found it both threatening and enriching (p. 49). This inclination among most Czechs to regard immigration at least to some extent as a threat helps explain why participants rarely mentioned the existence of pro-refugee politicians (see 5.3.1.b.), and why they did not consider themselves to hold extreme views just because they felt threatened by migration. Therefore, the narrative of polarisation reflected the fact that the topic was perceived to have become heated and publicly relevant (Ibid.). Interviewees repeatedly used the word 'extremists' to denote people espousing hostile views towards 'Muslims' or 'refugees'. 'Extremists' was a derogatory term denoting incivility but also the term employed by the Ministry of Interior to categorise far-right and far-left activism (Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky, 2023). An equally consistent term labelling the opposite camp was lacking in the corpus. However, when reflecting about the nature of Czechs' perceived threat, an unemployed participant from Prague with liberal views, whose insightful answers were long and digressing, reported a compilation of paternalistic terms (many of which are employed by the Czech right in other culture wars) denoting careless naïveté:

> The words *sluníčkář* [*CGdT: literally 'Sunny person'*], *havloid* [*CGdT: a supporter of Václav Havel*] and *pravdoláskař* [*CGdT: literally 'Truth and love person', mocking Havel's famous moral imperative*] were created for those who weren't scared of refugees and Muslims. […] those words came out of nowhere as if some factory was churning them out. […] 'Extremists' on Facebook considered these people as extremists from their point of view. […] The term *sluníčkář* […] labelled people who said, "*No problem* [*CGdT: English in the original*] with those immigrants. It's crystal clear. I'll bring you peace and love, and nothing will scare me". Of course, that's not me. I'm not someone who'd like to open Europe. That wouldn't be a good thing to say, and I don't think anybody would say that. (Adam, 44/n)

The incivility of 'extremists' was considered to differ from the negative or cautious attitudes of the bulk of society. Consequently, moderate views were perceived to remain legitimately cautious and suspicious towards 'Muslims'. For instance, Roman

(39/n), who gained a rich understanding of the predicament of refugees as a police officer guarding Serbia's borders during the 'crisis', claimed that the Czech political debate was so polarised that it missed a middle ground position, namely a controlled acceptance of refugees who passed a series of security checks. Furthermore, as politicians largely justified their opposition to 'quotas' with reference to the threat posed by 'Muslims' (see 8.1.), several participants spoke as if allowing Muslim migrants into the country was a legitimate point for democratic deliberation.

5.2. 'Muslims' became a topic of public debate by 9/11 but substantial changes in attitudes came mostly by the early 2010s and 2015

This sub-section contextualises the surge in Islamophobia by tracing the perceived chronology of when 'Muslims' became a *topic* of public debate and when *attitudes* towards them started to change in the country. These two analytically distinct concepts appeared inevitably intertwined in the interviews, despite my scripted questions being largely about attitudes. The results show that most non-Muslim participants recalled 'Muslims' entering public debate after 9/11, but attitudes towards 'Muslims' souring mostly by 2015. This account slightly differs from that of Muslim participants, who described growing discrimination after 9/11 and hostilities rising in the early 2010s, which went unnoticed for most non-Muslim participants perhaps because of low public interest in Islamophobic prejudice. The understandings and social representations of 'Muslims' in this study are conditioned by these events, mostly the inflection point of 2015 (for instance, 'Muslims' understood as 'refugees', 'migrants' or 'radicals').

With the youngest participant born in 2001, most did not recall thinking or talking about 'Muslims' much or at all during their childhoods. A handful referenced Czech and foreign fairy tales (*One Thousand and One Nights* being the most popular) and, retrospectively, some noted how some stories contained orientalising stereotypes or anti-Ottoman tones. Most recalled hearing about 'Muslims' for the first time in high school classes. Almost everyone believed that 'Muslims' were not publicly discussed before 9/11, and even if events in the Muslim-majority world were mediatised (for instance, the Soviet-Afghan war or Arab-Israeli conflict), these were not recalled as being framed as issues of religion. As hinted at by Hannová (2014a, 2014b), even participants who met exchange students from Muslim-majority countries before 1989 recognised to me that the student's religious identity was not relevant back then and that, at most, it was their ethnic difference that attracted curiosity. Zain (55/M) recalled many experiences from the early 1990s, when he moved from his native Arab country for his university studies. Although he was violently attacked by skinheads across Czechoslovakia, he believed that the attacks were motivated by his racial rather than religious difference. After the hermetic years of communism, he found Czechs to be sceptical about welcoming new communities and minorities, so that efforts at institutionalising Islam and building mosques found opposition already in the 1990s. (Only one non-Muslim participant recalled this.) In his experience, Muslim communities always faced complications because of politicians' use of Islamophobic rhetoric.

Around half of participants identified 9/11 as the moment when 'Muslims' significantly entered the public debate as a distinct social group and public opinion began to change. When asked how he imagined 'Muslims' as a child, Vítek (31/n) even claimed

that before 9/11 he did not know that there was a group of people who identified as 'Muslim' living somewhere else in the world. Most recognised that, unlike the events of 2015, 9/11 was seen as a distant affair with little potential to influence the lives of Czechs or to generate strong anti-Muslim attitudes – even if surveys at the time measured significant increases in anxieties towards Muslim migrants (STEM, 2001c). Against this backdrop, several Muslim participants and some who personally knew Muslims did recall a significant change in behaviour on the side of Czechs. For instance, Maryam (26/M), who had lived her entire life in Czechia after her family's relocation from an Arab-majority country, suddenly began facing judgement and impertinent questions about her Muslim identity by primary schoolmates, as the terrorist attacks were constantly brought up in conversations. This alienating experience pushed her to identify more as a Muslim and promote the good deeds of other Muslims. In the case of Bernard (32/n), his Muslim relatives, who frequently visited his village, the small Moravian town, went from being perceived as exotic before 9/11 to attracting greater reservation after the attacks. Likewise, in Teplice, Aneta (56/n) and Beáta (34/n) found greater suspicion towards actual Arabs after 9/11,[46] with Beáta recalling growing anti-Arab sentiments after the Madrid (2004) and London (2005) bombings.

While only two non-Muslim participants mentioned the Arab Springs as another relevant moment in shaping attitudes towards 'Muslims' in Czechia, several Muslim participants identified a change in attitudes already around 2011-2013. This period matches what Hesová (2016b) identified as the second wave of Czech Islamophobia, largely instigated by online activists. Some Muslim participants believed that the initial optimism felt by Western audiences about the revolutions shifted from an initial identification with the democratic struggles of Arab civil societies into disappointment. Allegedly, Czechs and other Europeans perceived that radical Islamism eventually emanated from popular will and that Arab autocrats were needed to keep their populations in check. However, hostilities also coincided with growing Islamophobic activism and the Czech centre right's experiments with Islamophobic rhetoric (see 4.2.2.b.). Malika (32/M), who had moved to Czechia as a student in the mid-2000's, identified two phases. Between 2005 and 2010/2011, there was a rather covert and passive aggressivity towards actual Muslims, often Otherised and associated with terrorism. However, by 2010/2011, aggression entered an 'active mode', first, through frequent online attacks and, by 2012-2013, also through political mobilisation and attitudes expressed by many Czechs. She believed that Czech anti-Islam movements were partly replicating their rising West European counterparts. Adam (44/n), highly knowledgeable about and interested in Czech politics, also believed that, around 2013, Martin Konvička (IvČRN) started appearing on media more frequently, introducing average Czechs to the frames of a civilisational war. Additionally, a handful of non-Muslim participants blamed an undated information revolution, presumably between the late 2000s and early 2010s, for introducing many Czechs to vast volumes of disorientating information about 'Muslims', mostly through the Internet and smartphones. Although not mentioned by participants, the comment sections of Czech online newspapers became a hotbed for Islamophobic rhetoric during this period (Hesová, 2016b, p. 136).

[46] Beáta also recalled the preventive deployment of special police operatives and tanks in Prague as adding to Teplice's anxieties. Tanks were indeed deployed to protect the Radio Free Europe building (Štráfeldová, 2001).

While 2015 was seen by most non-Muslim participants as *the* turning point in shaping attitudes towards Muslims, as hinted at in chapter 4 and reflected in the accounts of most Muslim participants, Islamophobic hostilities had already begun to rise during the first half of the decade. Muslim participants noticed this development through personal experiences of aggression, hateful speech online or at academic events, small Islamophobic protests or the humiliating 2014 Prague police raids during Friday prayer. The degree of intimidation might have already been quite high for many Muslims when, on the day of the Charlie Hebdo attacks (7 January 2015) – an event which would trigger the first large anti-Islam protests – Yvona (33/M), an ethnic Czech woman who wears the hijab, felt impending danger:

> That day, I decided not to go out. […] I did not know whether someone would start shouting or swearing at me as if I bore responsibility for what had happened (Yvona, 33/M)

The events surrounding the European 'refugee crisis' were confidently considered to be the most crucial inflection point in shaping attitudes towards 'Muslims' in the country by over two thirds of non-Muslim participants. A handful detected a change in public mood when acquaintances and relatives unexpectedly started to express Islamophobic and anti-refugee hostility. 'Refugees' was reportedly the most contentious issue, with a few participants claiming that 'Muslims' would have never become an issue for Czechs if it were not for migration. Agáta (45/n), a widely travelled trader residing in Egypt, believed that Czechs, for the first time, felt a fear of European borders becoming open to non-Europeans. While the narrative of 'Muslims as terrorists' was highly prominent in 2015 public discourse (Čada & Frantová, 2017), most non-Muslim participants considered that, in 2020/2021, fear of terrorism did not significantly inform anti-Muslim attitudes. Conversely, many Muslim participants believed that this prejudice was still relevant. This finding was surprising. Although it is possible that the trope of 'Muslims' as 'terrorists' might have lost the prominence that it once had at around 2015-2016, self-presentation bias or the discomfort at the incivility of the trope might have affected non-Muslim participants' replies. The possible nature of this omission is further discussed in section 6.1.2. Notably, most participants believed that the intensity of Islamophobic prejudice and active hostility towards Muslims had decreased, although some pessimistically concluded that latent prejudice remained widespread.

Relevant to Teplice, participants in the city referred to the politicisation and mediatisation of alleged tensions between the large number of Arab tourists and local citizens in 2014-2015. Despite the actions of different far-right groups against the tourists since 2014,[47] Zain (55/M) identified the July 2015 second (out of three) dog walks, led by far-right activists and joined by Okamura (SPD), as the turning point at which the tourism industry realised that the atmosphere towards Muslims was becoming quite hostile. After that, the number of Arab tourists reportedly declined.

[47] In September 2014, the Czech branch of Generation Identity grilled pork on land that Arabs allegedly wanted to buy; in April 2015, IvČRN organised a protest against the 'Islamisation' of Teplice and, in July 2015, its affiliated BPI party organised a first dog walk against Muslims.

5.3. Causes behind the rise of negative attitudes towards ‘Muslims’: actors, social representations and intergroup contact

5.3.1. Actors who contributed to negative attitudes

5.3.1.a. An inescapable ‘media brainwashing’ and Islamophobia on Facebook

Although questions on the effect of the media did not feature in the interview schedule, ‘the media’ was blamed by every single participant for inciting anti-Muslim attitudes in 2015. Among the blanket accusations against the media, some stressed qualitative differences across outlets in their representations of ‘Muslims’, with Muslim participants being the only ones recalling specifically balanced or positive texts. ‘The media’ could be inferred to be an amorphous composite of news platforms and information spread via social media, but politicians were frequently included as messengers, thus the category referred to both the medium and content producers. There was a general pessimism about the ability of other Czechs to make sense of world events based on their media use, with eight participants denoting the coverage of ‘Muslims’ and ‘refugees’ as media brainwashing [*mediální masáž*] – which, as promoted by politicians (see 7.3., 8.3.), passivises holders of anti-Muslim attitudes as fearful victims while downplaying racism. Even in Teplice, a few participants remembered how the local reporting of tensions with Arab tourists rather than actual face-to-face interactions drove locals’ animosity and scepticism towards tourists. Importantly, several participants spontaneously highlighted the role of ‘the media’ in heightening perceived intergroup threat and category salience. Furthermore, the identification of social media, particularly Facebook, as the platforms where Islamophobic content was more ubiquitous and egregious reveals the power of these platforms’ messages to compete with those from traditional media.

Several participants considered that ‘the media’ represent ‘Muslims’ as dangerous, prone to conflict or aggressive, with ‘Muslims’ making headlines whenever something terrible happens. These biased representations are likely to increase perceived intergroup threat in citizens’ stereotypes, but also make some ethnic (for instance, ‘Arabs’) or political (‘Islamists’) groups more representative of the ‘Muslim’ category. This teacher from the small Moravian city departed from my question about politicians speaking about ‘Muslims’, shifting abruptly from Okamura (SPD) to the influence of news media:

> Often, in the news, there are only negative things such as catastrophes and so on. Of course, they don’t show you that there’s anything nice in Asia. It’s either wars or rising oil prices because Saudi Arabia has decided to make it more costly for us, and so on. We always hear just the negative things. In our house, at seven or seven thirty, we sit in front of the TV. This is the only way in which we get information. (Vítek, 31/n)

A few criticised the fact that the ‘Muslimness’ of represented subjects was made salient, something which, as mentioned in 2.1.2., can result in an essentialisation of ‘Muslims’ as dangerous, particularly in the absence of mitigating intergroup contact experiences (von Sikorski et al., 2020). Furthermore, this categorisation exercise favours ethnocultural differentiation. Blaming Czechs’ attitudinal changes on news outlets and Facebook, Milada (43/n) contested “the news doesn’t say that a German

man attacked a German woman, yet they say that a Muslim from Syria attacked a German woman". Several participants stressed that 'Muslim' was a fluid category that Czechs often conflate with 'migrant', 'terrorist', 'Islamist' or 'refugee'. Jozef (40/n), who had Muslim friends and acquaintances, believed that these categories were so associated that many Czechs would read a headline about IS or a jihadist terrorist attack as news about 'Muslims'. Asked about the nature of Czechs' perceived threat, again, Malika (32/M) blamed journalistic reporting for foregrounding Muslim identities in connection to negative events:

> What you usually hear from the mass media is that there was a terrorist attack, and it's always a 'Muslim' terrorist attack. If something bad happens, it's always connected to Islam. Unfortunately, they don't show good things linked to Islam. Everything's about aggression [and] oppression, and, for the mass media, that's Islam. These images shape the views of ordinary people.

Many participants blamed information on the Internet, particularly Facebook, for inciting hatred and confusion about 'Muslims'. Roman (39/n), a police officer from the small Moravian city, marvelled at how his 60-year-old father started engaging with Islamophobic content right after Roman had taught him how to navigate the Internet. Facebook was commonly regarded as the platform where 'extremist' user comments were commonplace and Islamophobic information was often circulated (see Hrdina, 2016). The alleged misdeeds of 'Muslims in Western Europe', which were an obsession for both online anti-Islam activists (Doboš, 2023; Slačálek & Svobodová, 2018) and mainstream politicians (see 7.2., 8.2.), and disinformation about 'refugees' were reportedly common online. Interestingly, while younger participants continued to predict that older Czechs were more susceptible to disinformation from Facebook, participants over 40 often reported a negative experience with the platform, described as a site of surveillance, censorship, disinformation and time-waste.

Blaming 'the media' for anti-Muslim attitudes is partially problematic. As argued in 2.1.1., in the absence of intergroup contact experiences, elite mediatised discourse fundamentally shapes stereotypes and prejudice. However, blaming 'the media' or 'extremists' for anti-Muslim attitudes often fails to confront the fact that existing exclusionary or supremacist (for instance, racist) beliefs already accommodated Islamophobia. Furthermore, it overlooks how Islamophobia is reproduced within traditional institutions like the family or school. Mainstream politicians often blamed 'extremists' or 'populists' (see 7.3., 8.3.) but rarely accused 'the media' because of an understandable interdependence, although pro-refugee civil society was much more vocal against media biases. Furthermore, participants often blamed the commercial but not the ideological or political interests of media outlets for their sensationalistic and unethical reporting. When public figures, including politicians, denounced the existence of xenophobia or fearmongering, these were often lambasted by other politicians as patronising and out of touch (see 7.3., 8.3.). However, these public figures generally pointed to the public rather than challenging Czech elites and institutions for also holding (rather than opportunistically spreading) Islamophobic beliefs.

5.3.1.b. The professionalisation of hatred in politics and Islamophobic political actors as more memorable

When asked about their influence and spontaneously, politicians were unanimously identified as influential in legitimising and fuelling anti-Muslim attitudes (note that 'Muslims' was highly interchangeable with 'refugees' or 'migrants'). Their influence reportedly derived from being authoritative sources of information, interpreters of complex realities or providing a sense of national unity. Surprisingly, four far-right and populist actors remained overwhelmingly memorable in relation to discussions on 'Muslims' and were made largely responsible for boosting prejudice. Conversely, mainstream parties were represented as opportunistic or following the lead of the far right and 'populists' – marking a success for mainstream parties in obscuring their initiative (see 7.3., 8.3.). Several participants believed that Islamophobic rhetoric was insincere, a professional tool for politicians, particularly on the far right. However, some non-Muslim participants evaluated politicians' Islamophobic positions as representative of popular will.

Political discourse was frequently described as 'polarised'. As already mentioned, this was a false perception of polarisation as participants acknowledged that most parties made use of Islamophobic rhetoric at some point or remained passive for fear of losing votes. Interestingly, when asked about which politicians spoke about 'Muslims', most participants could exclusively recall some of the four politicians below. With 'Muslims' not being a traditional political issue, far-right and populist rhetoric and actors had remained the most memorable. Tomio Okamura and his SPD party were undoubtedly mentioned most often. PM Andrej Babiš (ANO) and his party's adoption of anti-refugee positions was evaluated as opportunistic; President Zeman was identified for his calculated harsh Islamophobic statements; and activist Martin Konvička was regarded as a provocateur. Muslim participants who did not speak Czech fluently and, therefore, could not closely follow developments in Czech politics were still aware of Islamophobic actions by these actors. Predicting a trend of Islamophobic radical-right parties, the recently launched far-right Trikolóra and its leader Václav Klaus Jr. were mentioned a few times as equivalent to SPD despite having had few chances to articulate their positions. Participants only mentioned the leaders of ANO, SPD and IvČRN, not other politicians from those movements, reflecting their personalistic leadership and, for ANO and SPD, vertical business-like structures (Hloušek et al., 2020).

Additionally, some remarked that Islamophobia was entrenched in the party system. Muslim and more pro-refugee participants recalled feeling hopeless, as all major parties self-servingly used Islamophobic rhetoric, 'played the populist card' or 'gave people what they wanted to hear'. According to Malika (32/M), parties like TOP 09, which aimed at offering an alternative position, moved between Islamophobic rhetoric and statements along the lines of "Muslims are not that bad, we cannot lump them all together". Adam (44/n) believed that individual representatives across parties hoped to advance their personal ambitions within the party by tapping into anti-Muslim sentiments. He concluded that this had been happening since the 1990s, when individual representatives had betted on the 'anti-gypsy card'. Most participants failed or struggled to recall political actors with inclusive positions towards 'Muslims'. The few scattered actors mentioned included the Greens (SZ), the Pirate Party (which entered the lower house in 2017), Robert Pelikán (ANO, Minister of Justice during the 'refugee crisis' and stepbrother to a prominent Czech Muslim), Jaroslav Kubera (ODS,

former Teplice major) or Dominik Feri (TOP 09, from Teplice). Non-Muslim participants also mentioned as welcoming politicians the priest Tomáš Halík and former Ombudswoman Anna Šabatová. Again, the alleged political polarisation cannot be interpreted to divide two similar blocs of pro-refugee and anti-refugee actors.

Although the far right was believed to have minoritarian support, their voices in the debate were considered disproportionately influential. Some participants declared that mainstream parties were forced to take a stance to reassure an anxious population – a narrative which was promoted by the mainstream (see 7.3., 8.3.). However, many said that the rhetoric of PM Babiš (ANO) and President Zeman were more authoritative than the morally dubious Okamura or the theatrical Konvička, whose days of fame were seen to be behind him. Even in Teplice, some participants believed that the opportunistic actions of far-right activists and politicians from outside the city were responsible for heightening perceived tensions between the locals and Arab tourists. However, as reported by Kramáreková and colleagues (in Rosůlek, 2017, Chapter 3) and some participants, the city's communities came closer together against the far right's provocations.

Muslim participants identified SPD and Okamura as the main spreaders of Islamophobic hatred, fake information and hoaxes. Most wished that the state and other parties would do more to send a message to the population by exposing SPD Islamophobic messages as not belonging to a democratic society. Equally, Muslim and many non-Muslim participants believed that the demonization of 'Muslims' by President Zeman was particularly influential in shaping and legitimising Islamophobic prejudice among citizens. However, Yvona (33/M) believed that even if Zeman and Okamura disappeared from politics, it would take some time to cultivate a healthy public debate. Most Muslim participants believed that negative politics had contributed to intimidating the community and they considered it important that Muslims become once again publicly engaged. For most Muslim participants, many Czech and European politicians were trying to benefit from an anti-Muslim mood in society. Save for a few anecdotes, Muslim participants could not recall something significant that Czech politicians had done to benefit their communities.

Frequently, Islamophobia was cynically regarded as a tool in the professional repertoire of politicians, markedly for the far right. Participants often used business metaphors to refer to former businessman Tomio Okamura: "Okamura made a business out of politics" or "Okamura made a career out of Muslims and migrants". These perceptions can respond to the surge of business-firm parties and their introduction of business discursive elements into politics described in 4.1. Some participants openly challenged the convictions of Okamura, accusing him of defending contradictory ideas throughout his career, following political marketing consultants or stealing the Islamophobic agenda from ODS, which allegedly wanted to preserve its catch-all appeal. A Muslim participant recalled how an acquaintance was defending their support for Okamura's anti-migrant programme, unaware (and, later, remorseful) that the participant was a target of these policies. This participant concluded that SPD had created a fictional world to agitate among its voters. Some stressed that the far right and 'populists' employed a logic of extortion by generating imaginary fears to later offer protection against them in exchange for votes. A few stressed that Czechs fear 'Muslims' only because politicians keep fearmongering which, sometimes, can become chronic:

> If SPD shifted positions 180 degrees today and said that it supports the quotas, is pro-European or supports the integration of Muslims, I am afraid that they would lose practically all their political base and the party would cease to exist. What keeps SPD in power today is their hatred towards Muslims and their general opposition to any foreign influences. They cannot afford to change their rhetoric. […] I would say that they are dependent on hatred towards Muslims. Most of their program is about this.

Finally, some non-Muslim participants thought that the consensus over rejecting 'quotas' represented popular will, even if they disagreed with these positions. When asked about how Czech politicians spoke about 'Muslims', this photographer from the small Moravian town rationalised politicians' rhetorical choices: "if citizens want to have calm and security, and they consider that Muslims cause uneasiness in France, Germany or Britain… [policymakers] will not want them here" (Kamil, 49/n). Again, these views were more frequent in smaller localities, where attitudes were believed to be more cautious and homogeneous, and echo the idea promoted by politicians that Islamophobic fears are legitimate bases for Islamophobic policy and unrelated to racism (see 8.3.).

5.3.2. Social representations

5.3.2.a. The stereotypes of 'Muslims' held by participants with limited contact with Muslims share references to the Middle East, headscarves, religious practice and 'difference'

All interviews opened with two warm-up questions that sought spontaneous associations to register *what* and *who* came to the participants' minds upon hearing the words 'Muslim' or 'Muslims'. Although I cannot control for the degree of self-editing involved in retrieval, the exercise sheds light on common stereotypical contents over which attitudes are built. Generally, difference, Arab and Middle-Eastern identities, and female headscarves emerged as relevant. Conversely, when participants personally knew Muslims, these individuals were promptly recalled. Some judiciously realised that the game invited invoking stereotypical information, opting for either knowingly disclosing their alleged stereotypical beliefs or dodging the exercise by appealing to universalism (for instance, "they are just regular people").

Five themes emerged from the answers as to what came to mind when invoking the social category. First, reflecting widely circulated constructions of 'Muslims' as an outgroup, many demarcated them through the adjective 'different' (*odlišný, jiný)*:

> First, I imagine a different culture, a different faith, a different lifestyle, a different type of dress and maybe behaviour. (Adéla, 34/n)

Second, as Muslimness is the salient trait of the category, many referenced faith-related objects and practices like carpet, prayer, Mecca or not eating pork. Third, as a reminder of how non-somatic superficial markers work in the racialisation of 'Muslims', many mentioned female clothing (for instance, veil, hijab, black clothes), which some participants predicated as concealing or anonymising, and, occasionally, male attributes (turban, robe or – partly somatic – beard). Fourth, as advanced in 5.1., some participants associated the social category with a conflictual debate within Czech

society. Fifth, particularly, older participants (most likely to hold Islamophobic prejudice, according to surveys) already in answer to this first question expressed reservations towards some or all ‘Muslims’:

> [What comes to mind is] fear of the unknown. Fear of a different culture about which I do not understand much, yet nobody has ever explained to me. (Aneta, 56/n)

> [What comes to mind is] another religion that I tolerate. If that Muslim is solid and decent, I’m not bothered by him. [...] I know they live in Czechia. They have their community, but they should follow the Czech laws. (Klára, 52/n)

Three patterns emerged when asked who comes to mind. First, references to abstract women in headscarves were by far the most common and, thus, probably salient in stereotypes. Second, since familiarity with the outgroup and the high cognitive demand of a research interview favours recalling stereotypical exemplars rather than prototypes (Fiske & Taylor, 2021, pp. 120–130), participants with regular contact with Muslims or living in Teplice frequently recalled individuals who they knew or, in Teplice, local public figures. Third, some mentioned highly mediatic foreign personalities, mostly Arab men, with Yasser Arafat being recalled by three participants and Saddam Hussein by two. Mentioned once were football players Mohamed Salah and Mesut Özil. Osama bin Laden, the prophet Mohammed and Allah were also mentioned once each. Although only a handful made explicit references to geographical regions, often the Arab peninsula, images were largely informed by stereotypes of ‘Arabs’ and the Greater Middle East through references to the desert or long traditional clothes.

Additionally, participants were asked whom they believed other Czechs with whom they met in everyday life had in mind when speaking about ‘Muslims’. It was evident that non-Muslim participants were aware of a public discourse on Czechs’ attitudes towards ‘Muslims’, with answers falling into the categories of ‘migrants’/‘refugees’ or ‘extremists’/‘terrorists’/‘radical Islamists’. Some stressed that Czechs equated ‘Muslim’ with ‘Arab’, while often thinking of ‘Muslim’ migrants as young men. Muslim participants took issue with popular beliefs that most ‘Muslims’ were a threat based on generalisations from the actions of individual Muslims or authoritarian states like Iran or Saudi Arabia. For instance, Yvona (33/M), an ethnic Czech Muslim, lamented that when some Czechs speak about ‘Muslims’, they generalise from the deeds of someone in a Pakistani village who has little in common with her. However, she also feels invoked by such comments as they lump all Muslims together.

5.3.2.b. Czechia as provincial and fragile

Participants often ascribed attributes to the Czech nation which emerged as relevant in a conversation on “*Czechs’* attitudes towards ‘Muslims’”. These representations were surely influenced by perceptions of widespread anti-Muslim attitudes, a Czech tendency to deprecate the national group (Holy, 1996; Vlachová, 2019b), the interference of other frustrations with Czech society and, possibly, their expectations about my own views. Considering this, ‘Czechs’ were often represented as provincial, reluctant to accept anything foreign, easily led, self-interested, materialistic, envious

and judgemental. This stereotype mirrors those which Holy (1996) categorised as representing the Little Czech and which some believe to underpin Czech liberal elites' representation of the demos as xenophobic (Slačálek, 2016).

Interestingly, attributions of provincialism were more frequent among participants over 40 and almost absent among those in their 20s, who favoured a narrative about 1989 creating a generational and attitudinal divide. Thus, blaming the flawed provincial character of some Czechs might have been a popular narrative for those who were adults or came of age in the 1990s. Vlachová (2019a) found higher national pride among older Czechs, which she attributed to shared experiences of national unity at historical turns such as the Velvet Revolution. This might also mean that explanations based on national character might be more common among older cohorts, but this is a speculation. Indeed, a few male older participants also expressed affection for the anti-cosmopolitan inwardness and bucolic smallness imputed to Czechia. Even Adam (44/n), with relatively progressive views, reflected about Czechs' fears by ambivalently inscribing himself into a provincialist national stereotype:

> We Czechs are homogenous. 95%-98% of the people only speak Czech. We don't have national minorities; we're not accustomed to anything. We all eat *vepřo, knedlo, zelo* [CGdT: *a popular dish, literally 'pork, dumplings, cabbage'*]. I'd say that we're satisfied being alone, by ourselves. When someone comes around, we'll greet him, but afterwards we'll tell him again, "go away". […] We have the feeling that those coming from outside will steal our carrots from the garden. This is a fear rooted in the small person who has nicely raked seedbeds, trimmed grass and would prefer it if nobody stepped onto those. […] I say that we're kind of like hobbits. We have this beautiful hobbit side and we also have this stay-at-home side. Czechs don't migrate. Czechs don't set off around the world like the Poles. Things are going relatively well for us here. How many Poles are there in London? London is the third biggest Polish city and there are maybe one thousand Czechs there.

Additionally, most participants – and experts alike (IEP, 2021) – viewed Czechia as calm and safe. Safety was particularly salient in the Moravian town and city:

> I believe that Czechia is one of the safest countries in the world. There's no high criminality here, and there are few murders. I feel safe. I know that I can go onto the streets and walk around the capital, and there's a 95% chance that nothing will happen to me. Really, I feel safe in this country […] Most are aware that Czechia is a safe country, but they're scared when they travel around Europe, to Paris, London, etc. (Stěpán, 20/n)

> [Egyptians told me] that Egypt is a beautiful country, but it's unsafe. Czechia is one of the safest countries. Thus, when we travel anywhere where the situation is worse, we are always going to feel scared. (Vítek, 31/n)

Provinciality and safety emerged in our conversations about 'Muslims' but might be irrelevant attributes regarding other issues. This salience responds to the fact that 'Muslims' are often represented as a threat to the ingroup (for instance, as conflictual

and pervasive), with provinciality and safety acting as threat boosters. The self-interested and individualistic little Czech might be weak in the face of a more assertive culture. Reflecting on Czechs' fears about the building of mosques, Klára (52/n), a teacher from the small Moravian town who communicated relatively negative attitudes towards 'Muslims', pessimistically conveyed a declinist anxiety:

> A Muslim can make himself understood across the world because Arabic is just one [language] and they are everywhere. Whereas there are plenty of other languages and we cannot understand each other if we do not speak English well. And they take advantage of this, they have acquaintances everywhere. When a Muslim, Arab, relocates anywhere, he is welcomed, and others help him. However, when one of us moves abroad the average Czech would rather act as if he does not know us. They stick together, we do not stick together. The whites do not stick together anymore, to put it somehow, they [whites] are almost on the way to extinction. Whereas Arabs always stick together and help their brother. (Klára, 52/n)

Finally, some participants expressed their own or referred to a Czech fear of invasion rooted in history, with references to the Mongol raids or the Warsaw Pact's 1968 occupation. These anxieties about ethnocultural replacement echoed the civilisationism and assimilationism promoted by politicians (see 7.1., 8.2.). When asked whether something typically Czech conflicted with Islam or Muslims, Adéla (34/n), a healthcare worker from Ostrava with a few 'nationalist friends' but critical of xenophobia, described Czechs as "a nation of racists" and xenophobes, with the roots of this xenophobia lying on historical traumas:

> [W]e fear that they could take away what's ours, […] that they could make out of us something that we're not… that they'd occupy our country as it happened once […] with the Germans or the Russians. We fear that something like this could happen to us again, that they'd take away our country again and bring us something foreign. And we don't like that.

Finally, although several stated that 'Czechs' were prone to distrust foreigners, a few recognised that contemporary Czechia is far more tolerant towards 'Muslims' than Poland, Hungary, places of open inter-ethnic conflict or anti-Ottoman Austria-Hungary. Additionally, many believed that 'Czechs' can welcome individual Muslims into their local communities once they get to know them personally. This conclusion followed from a perception that rejecting 'Muslims' was rather a political position against the formation of dangerous 'Muslim' enclaves rather than the result of negative personal experiences with actual Muslims. However, some believed (and Muslim participants confirmed) that the increased visibility of Muslimness would result in increased everyday discrimination.

5.3.2.c. 'The West' perceived as being either cosmopolitan or a forewarning against Muslim immigration

Muslim participants often spoke about West European cities like Berlin or London as 'cosmopolitan' and tolerant places where Muslims could feel welcome without sticking out, although most of them lived in diverse cities where they felt comfortable as

foreigners – some also characterised Prague as cosmopolitan. They referred to neighbouring German society, albeit not in all regions, as an aspirational example or having grown accustomed to the Turkish heritage of many co-citizens. These hopes of catching up with Western models of multiculturalism, rather than believing in the emergence of a Czech-styled multiculturalism grounded in national experiences, reflected Czechia's semi-peripherality and expectations about assimilationist beliefs remaining dominant.

Conversely, the most recurrent theme concerning Western Europe among non-Muslim, particularly older, participants was the problems of integration of 'Muslims' – a theme recurrently featuring in political discourse (see 7.2.). In contrast to Czechia's safety, some mentioned Western unruly and impenetrable ghettos or "no-go zones" in Sweden, Germany or France; socioeconomic alienation of 'Muslim' migrant communities; aggressive demands for recognising minority rights; and 'Muslims'' anti-social and criminal behaviour. Many of these tropes emerge from the transnational discourse on 'the death of multiculturalism' discussed in 2.2.2, and are influenced by the excessive and negative focus by Czech news outlets on crimes committed by foreigners in, for instance, Germany or Austria (Nadace OSF, 2017). Participants recurrently backed their anxieties and those of other Czechs with reference to news about France and Germany in particular, concerning, for instance, lootings or polygamous men living off social benefits. Some suggested that despite only a few 'Muslims' being criminals, accepting 'Muslim' migrants was a too high risk. However, while those few with friends in multi-ethnic districts of Western Europe spoke of mixed experiences, nobody reported these friends to be victims of any crime. Furthermore, a few believed that Western 'Muslim' enclaves threatened the disappearance of the native 'whites' or 'Europeans'.

These demographic anxieties based on racialised identities, originally promoted in far-right conspiratorial theories about a Great Replacement, became progressively co-opted by the European political mainstream and spread through social media (Ekman, 2022), including in Czechia (Charvát et al., 2023, p. 93). While they featured in banal conversations during my interviews, they have been shown to be conducive to violent Islamophobic behaviour (Obaidi et al., 2022) and, thus, should be carefully tackled in Czech public discourse, particularly when used by the mainstream to caution about the dangers of 'multicultural society' (see 7.5., 8.2.2.). Asked whether something typically Czech conflicted with Islam, Klára's (52/n) long answer strayed from Islamists destroying monuments in Palmira, to the ongoing war in Afghanistan, to a desire for '*Arabáči'* (a derogatory term for Arabs) remaining outside of Europe:

> They all want to go to Germany, but Germany is now getting out of breath. There are plenty of those blacks in the Nordic countries, in Norway and Sweden, which is a catastrophe because they also don't have enough money for them anymore. The local ghettos there are horrible. In France, it's also horrible, in Paris there are six million Muslims[48] – they don't know what to do with them anymore.

[48] Estimates of the French Muslim population have historically been contentious and greatly disparate across sources. The six-million figure resembles the 2020 estimate by the French national statistics bureau based on declared confession (insee.fr, 2023).

The few participants who had had meaningful face-to-face contact with Muslims in Western multi-ethnic districts (although perhaps not those featuring in the news) did not reproduce these catastrophic narratives. If anything, their contact experiences generated stereotypical sub-groups (for instance, based on ethnicity or political beliefs) that increased the perceived heterogeneity across 'Muslims'. In another improvised meditation, Adam (44/n) recalled observing in Paris how pro-Hezbollah protesters were regarded with disdain by most local Muslims. Asked whether life in Czechia is easy for Muslims, Jozef (40/n), who reported no knowledge about this, reflected on the difficulties faced by migrants generally. He was told by Turkish acquaintances in Germany that other Turks were extorting and exploiting the precarious situation of newly arrived Muslim migrants. Based on Jozef's stereotypes, he might have probably reserved different emotions for the exploiting Turks (disgust) and Muslim migrants (pity). Interestingly, being in Western Europe allowed participants to categorise actual people as 'Muslim' based on their expectations about 'Muslims'' phenotype – something rare in Czechia, as there are no sizeable ethnic groups expected to be Muslim. This categorising exercise partly reflects how Muslims are racialised in Europe. In Paris, Hana (24/n), from the small Moravian town, and her friend became unsettled by a group of 'young boys with darker skin' who behaved 'strangely' towards them during New Year's Eve. She admitted that while, at the time, they believed them to be 'Muslims', they had no evidence to confirm this – that is, beyond their phenotype.

5.3.2.d. Muslim-majority countries are remembered as friendly but with unequal gender relations, whereas they are imagined as places of conflict and intolerance

Participants often spoke of Muslim-majority countries, with a marked gap between representations of countries which participants had visited, marked by relatively pleasant experiences, and countries mostly known through frightening news stories. The latter countries (for instance, Saudi Arabia or Syria) often enter the news cycle through conflict reporting, thus conditioning participants' stereotypes, for instance, by making conflict salient. Conversely, participants are likely to travel to countries where there are no such threats but, also, where experiences of intergroup contact generate positive images of the country and local people. Besides the cohort who had been to Egypt, several had visited countries like Turkey, Tunisia, UAE or ex-Yugoslav republics. Most commonly, these participants reported that locals in those countries were friendly and hospitable. Although some also reported negative experiences or observed traits which they did not value positively, these did not generally tarnish the positive image of the country. Most travellers reported having felt safe. For instance, Agáta (45/n), who lives in Egypt, claimed feeling safer in the streets of Egypt than in Czechia, despite attracting greater male attention. Nevertheless, those visiting former Yugoslav republics in the 1990s or Egypt after 2011 were instructed to remain in certain areas to avoid danger.

Particularly female participants who had visited Egypt and other Arab countries remarked on their perceptions of local patriarchy. Despite the complex and various manifestations of patriarchy across (not exclusively) Arab countries, interestingly, this was of particular concern for female non-Muslim participants (see 5.3.2.f.). Women reported perceived sexist behaviours – through their individual and sociocultural lenses. Agáta (45/n), who settled in Egypt, found it difficult to befriend women outside of Cairo since she perceived Egyptian men as protective of their wives and children. Female participants' social identities as women might have become activated, feeling

pity for women whom they saw as avoiding casual interaction and occupying a background role in public life. Additionally, gender norms might have made male participants less motivated to report this information to a male interviewer.[49] A second sub-theme among female travellers concerned being the target of relatively higher male attention. Importantly, they attributed their visibility to their racial difference (i.e. being 'European', 'blonde' or 'white') rather than differences in wealth, citizenship value or ideology – although some might have perceived that these were implicit in the racialised label. Evaluations of this attention were mixed, with some women occasionally enjoying the attention and occasionally feeling harassed (with a participant reporting an unpleasant assault in a Jordanian bazaar which spoiled her subsequent visits to Arab countries by making her self-consciously feel 'on offer'). Conversely, when speaking about the role of the hijab in her identity and asked about her experiences in Muslim-majority countries, Yvona (33/M) expressed relief about her hijab reducing her visibility in those countries, while in Czechia it makes her stand out and continuously defend her choice to wear it. Despite partially feeling included into the local context through her Muslim identity, as other Muslim participants stressed, when Yvona (33/M) is in Muslim-majority countries intercultural and worldview differences with locals makes her Czech identity more salient.

Participants who had been to Egypt were partly selected to ascertain why 'Egyptians' evoked more positive attitudes and what can this tell us about Islamophobic attitudes in the country. The 'Egyptian' stereotype largely seems like a friendly subgroup of 'Muslims' (but not so clearly of 'Arabs') rather than an unrepresentative subtype. These participants differed on whether they perceived local Egyptians as 'Egyptians', 'Muslims' or 'Arabs' but generally understood the weight of Muslim identity. Some travellers reported surprise at discovering a historically multi-ethnic nation juggling with multiple identities, in contrast to the perceived Czech monoethnicity. Conversely, some participants believed that 'Egyptians' were not representative of 'Arabs'. When asked whether Czechs' reactions were positive upon disclosing his Egyptian origin, Youssef (47/M) corroborated this and stressed that Egypt had carved an international image associating the nation with the pharaonic era rather than the more negative 'Arab' or 'African' labels. Likewise, for Barbora (55/n), a Prague healthcare worker who had repeatedly travelled to Egypt, when Czechs think of 'Arabs' they would think of another region where the 'ultras' or 'ultra-strong' 'Arabs' live, namely "Israel, Lebanon or Jordan". The anti-Arab bias among Czechs has been pointed out in the literature but stereotypes of 'Muslims' are also largely informed by an Arab identity (see 6.2.1.). Thus, it is possible that some ethnic/national Muslim-majority groups might become more likeable due to their perceived low 'Arab Muslim' identity. 'Arab Christians' are not perceived as negatively.

The second factor eliciting more positive attitudes towards 'Egyptians' was, as hypothesised, the pleasantness and low threat perceptions of the actual, reported or advertised tourist experience. As explained in 2.1.3., intergroup contact can reduce prejudice, even when experiences are imagined, or read or heard about (for instance, through travellers sharing their experiences back at home). Participants reported returning to Egypt for its historical monuments, sea and safety. Furthermore, as the Egypt based Agáta (45/n) remarked, Czechoslovakia/Czechia and Egypt had built

[49] Using different interviewing methods with, often, female interviewers, Jaworsky and colleagues (2022, pp. 7–9) found that Czech male participants were equally likely to report fears of sexual violence when looking at pictures of, mostly male, refugees.

good diplomatic and trade relations since the early twentieth century, fostering positive perceptions of and knowledge about each other. Several participants highlighted that many Egyptian merchants and guides spoke fluent Czech. Altogether the tourist experience was pivotal to the positive stereotype of 'Egyptians'. When asked whether in the, roughly fifteen, years he had lived in Czechia, he had observed changes in national politics regarding 'Muslims', Youssef (47/M), an IT worker who had migrated from Egypt, contrasted the recent politicisation with, inter alia, the positive effects of tourism:

> One of the good things in Czechia is that most people I meet tell me, "Oh, we were in Egypt, in Hurghada, Marsa Alam..." There was a big tourist activity between the countries, perhaps 10 years ago. There used to be like 100,000 Czech tourists who went to Egypt every year [*CGdT: the Czech Statistical Office (2018) recorded twice as many trips for 2011*] – which is a huge number for a country with 10 million inhabitants. So, almost everybody knows Egypt and says, 'Oh, Egypt's nice, it's cool' and so on [...]. [These travels had an impact on Czechs' attitudes towards 'Muslims' as] it wasn't as scary there as they could have thought. If you'd told them, "Over there, there's Sharia and they're cutting off hands", but when they travelled to Egypt, they saw how people really lived and came back thinking that Egyptians are nice people. Or they were in Tunisia and they saw nothing of this sort. So, being open to Muslim countries influenced Czechs' attitudes. (Youssef, 47/M)

Conversely, participants who spoke about countries which they had not visited mostly referred to negative events in places of conflict like Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Syria or Iraq. These countries made it into the news cycle mostly because of newsworthy conflict, just like Muslims from Western Europe usually do, thus heightening threat perceptions about most 'Muslims'. A few spoke of Saudia Arabia as a fundamentalist and misogynistic country, while Maryam (26/M), who had been raised in Czechia, bemoaned that the media's augmentation of the actions of some Saudi men led many Czechs to believe that most Arab men were tyrants. Other Gulf states were associated with not showing solidarity towards Syrian refugees (a premise used by Czech politicians in 2015 to denounce 'quotas' as unjust). Dubai was an exception; Stěpan (20/n), a student from the small Moravian town, claimed that, for his generation, the city was an aspirational destination for its futuristic outlook, luxury, jewellery, parties, skyscrapers and expensive cars. A few participants also reported outrage about religious intolerance in undetermined Muslim-majority countries towards Christian minorities – with several Czech Christian organisations denouncing particular cases. Nevertheless, this intolerance often served the topos of justice, as participants highlighted the incongruence between religiously intolerant actions 'from them to us' against the expectation that religious tolerance will be extended 'by us to them'. This attribution of collective responsibility follows a worldview, promoted by politicians (see 7.1.), that represents a conflict between allegedly 'Muslim' and 'European' civilisations.

5.3.2.e. The 'national Muslim community' is so far small and well-integrated

Except for in Teplice and the occasional sightings of tourists in big cities, most non-Muslim participants did not commonly encounter Muslims within the country. Overall, the (often assimilated as) 'Muslim community' in Czechia is perceived as small, economically active and restricted to big cities. Generally, this 'Muslim' sub-group is

neither perceived as a target of political Islamophobia nor as responsible for intergroup tensions. Indeed, Roman (39/n), a policeman, confirmed that local Muslims never caused trouble and Teplice policemen reportedly told Zain (55/M) that their experience with Muslim tourists and locals had always been positive – if anything, they were occasional victims of aggression or theft by non-Muslim Czech perpetrators. Some participants underlined that many Muslims in Czechia are university graduates (probably a higher share than the national average, see Topinková & Topinka, 2016), working as doctors or entrepreneurs. The frequent reassurance about Czech Muslim communities by Islamic institutions' spokespeople or politicians (see 7.2.) paradoxically risks supporting anti-migrant arguments by casting Czech Muslim communities as an exception to the rule or unthreatening only because of their comparative lack of resources/numbers. After Hana (24/n), from the small Moravian town, expressed believing that Muslims were well integrated in Czechia, I asked whether Czechia somehow differed from other European states in this regard:

> Overall, I have a feeling that their numbers are not yet as large [here]. I don't know what would happen to us if there were going to be here, for example, as many people as there are in France or Germany. It's different there also because of the quantity and they already need some system that integrates them. In Czechia, it's more about individuals and whether they want to [integrate], so it's alright. But they're few. (Hana, 24/n)

Despite having been famously labelled as an invisible minority (Křížková, 2006) for their low presence and public opportunities for self-presentation, Czech Muslims can become hyper visible when their Muslimness is evinced. However, their frequent dehumanisation (see 6.3.) places Czech Muslims at risk of online threats or, particularly for women in hijabs, physical intimidation. In Teplice, Beáta (34/n), recalled the vitriolic attacks directed against local schoolgirl Eman Ghaleb on social media for wearing her hijab at school, while her actual schoolmates stood behind her proudly and unbothered (see Prchal, 2016). Wishing for a greater participation and visibility of Muslims in public debate, Yvona (33/M) who had to go through the distressing experience of taking a man to court because of online threats, said:

> In Czechia, Muslims are still so terribly anonymous that nobody feels sorrow about writing something mean about them. I saw this [ignorance] in that man in court. When I stood in front of him and told him what he had done to me and how I had been affected by his comments, he was shocked. Had I not told him in court, he would have not realised. Afterwards he apologised to me several times. Czechs are lacking experiences with actual Muslims. If they had these, whenever they imagined who stands under the label 'Muslim', they would think of a regular person who they encounter several times a week or month.

Against this invisibility, two groups likely to be encountered outside of big cities were the foreign Muslim (frequently Arab) doctor and kebab sellers. These groups rarely feature in news stories but, through contact opportunities, often became positively evaluated subgroups which could potentially affect the superordinate 'Muslim' stereotype. Consistent with stereotypes of the Global South, the competence of some of Muslim doctors was reportedly distrusted at first but, with time, patients grew accustomed or fond of them. Beáta (34/n), who had worked in several hospitals around

Teplice, believes that Arab doctors became progressively liked as they made noticeably greater efforts to care for their patients compared to other foreign doctors. Kebab sellers were evaluated remarkably positively. Some participants only realised during our conversation that their local kebab seller was or could indeed be Muslim. A few male participants reported close relationships with them, leading to positive generalisations about the superordinate category. Stěpan (20/n) commended the small Moravian town's local vendor:

> Young Czechs have become really fond of Muslims who own kebab shops. We've become very fond of our local one. [...] He offers refreshments that are attractive to young people. […] When I think of the sale of fast food, it happens in every corner of the country. They consider it their source of livelihood and try to be the favourite spots in their localities so that customers visit their places regularly. Muslims are excellent traders, sellers, businessmen and so on. They know how to sell their products and how to make money – how to connect with clients.

Interactions with customer or patient facing Muslim workers might have been positively evaluated since they follow relatively clear scripts, which can reduce intergroup anxiety. Furthermore, the entrepreneurial and professional profile of these Muslims challenge some negative stereotypical attributes like laziness and poverty (see 6.3., 8.2.2.), resulting into sub-group stereotypes high in warmth and competence. Sadly, Teplice was only mentioned by a few participants from other cities, with different appreciations. While Kamil (49/n), from the small Moravian town and relatively sceptical about Muslim migration, recalled news of rich Arab tourists making a mess in hotel rooms and throwing stones at local dogs, Milada (43/n), from Ostrava and relatively liberal towards Muslim migration, praised Teplice's exemplary intercultural harmony:

> [Czechs] should go to Teplice to be schooled. Integration and cohabitation work there. Of course, there has not been an increase in criminal cases. […] People get cured [in Teplice's spas] whether they are White, Black, Muslim, Christian, non-believer or atheist. It works there, there are no big problems and, even to this day, I think Teplice is exceptional (Milada, 43/n)

Conversely, a handful of non-Muslim participants who had little contact with Muslims lamented an alleged tendency by the latter of keeping to themselves. Regardless of whether this is simply a perception, it reveals another source for prejudice. At least regarding public activities, Muslim participants reported that Islamic institutions had become more reserved and fearful of reputational damage since 2015. Two female converts expressed frustration about the lack of public engagement, and previous spokesmen not having been entirely fluent in Czech, qualified or representative enough. They believed that female Muslims, who are subject to greater discrimination and intimidation, should be encouraged to become more publicly engaged – despite female converts being quite active already (Čermáková, Janků, Linhartová, et al., 2016, pp. 335–337).

Finally, forms of belonging to their local religious communities among Muslim participants were extremely varied (see also Topinka, 2015) in terms of mosque attendance, engagement through other activities, or agreement with the views of

Islamic leaders. A few participants stressed that in diverse Prague, many Muslims socialised within their ethnic group and only joined other groups for big celebrations like Eid.

5.3.2.f. Non-Muslim female participants believe 'Muslim' women to be oppressed by 'Muslim' men whereas Muslim participants report Muslim women to be harassed by Czech men

This topic was not covered in the interview schedule but most female non-Muslim participants (and only a few non-Muslim men) spoke of how, to different degrees, 'Muslim' women are discriminated against by 'Muslim' men. Perceptions of gender inequality among 'Muslims' has been identified elsewhere as a driver of anti-Muslim sentiments (Verkuyten, 2021, pp. 123–124). As already mentioned, surveys indicate that Czech women might be slightly more prejudiced against 'Muslims' (Bell & Strabac, 2020; Pickel & Öztürk, 2018). Marfouk (2019) found this to be the case for the average EU respondent, which he linked to attributions of misogyny to Islam. Blaming similar stereotypical beliefs, Meuleman et al. (2018) found that gender traditionalism led to more positive attitudes towards 'Muslims'. While I could not find Czech surveys correlating perceptions of gender inequality and Islamophobic prejudice, Czech women consider male-female inequality a far more pressing issue than Czech men (Pew Research Center, 2019b). This could explain why female participants (and politicians) were more likely to bring attention to this inequality. Other authors have alluded to the popularity of orientalising literature on helpless 'Muslim' women among Czech female readers for fostering Islamophobia (Ostřanský, 2017, pp. 26–27; Popovová, 2012, pp. 22–23). As argued in 2.2.2., liberalism has had a tense relationship with multiculturalism, in the European case, often with Muslim communities. Women wearing headscarves have become particularly vulnerable as both the targets of orientalising stereotypes - which frame them as passive, backward and subservient to men – and objects of hostility for resisting Western allegedly liberal programmes for emancipation (Chakraborti & Zempi, 2012; Zine, 2006). Overall, 'Muslim' women were given little agency by most non-Muslim female participants, being regarded with pity while the Islamophobic discrimination which Muslim women feared daily went unregistered.

Concerning migration, some non-Muslim female participants, mostly over 45, expressed anxieties about them or their loved ones seeing their rights as women compromised, even if some of them disclaimed being feminists (a somehow derided label in Czech public discourse then). When asked about Czechs' views on Muslims, Lucie (68/n), a retired educator from Ostrava, admitted sharing some popular fears:

> When I see my two-year-old granddaughter, how lively and gorgeous she is… and to think that one day she may be forced to end up under a chador…[…] People and, particularly, women were not as free in the 50s as they're now. I would not like it if we had to lose [our gained freedoms] because of some religion that is forced upon us. […] European achievements are the best that we, as humanity, have been able to work together.

Additionally, a few female participants recalled stories from Muslim families living in Czechia or mixed couples where Muslim men allegedly behaved oppressively towards their partners or daughters. It was common to refer to Czech women entering failed

marriages with Muslim men as having been ‘fooled’, ‘manipulated’, or as having become ‘his property’. (Participants were likely to be friends with the female rather than the male ex-partner.)

Conversely, the biggest theme concerning Muslim women for Muslim participants across the interviews was that Muslim women in Czechia wearing a headscarf were more likely to become targets of attacks and unwanted attention. Every Muslim participant recalled incidents of harassment against women in headscarves in Czechia, yet not a single non-Muslim participant mentioned this. This gap reflected a fundamental lack of awareness about Czech Muslims’ experiences – as public discourse focuses much more on the threat posed by ‘Muslims’ than on those faced by actual Muslims. Zain (55/M) spoke of how his wife was spat at from a car while walking on the street. Malika (32/M) decided to stop wearing her hijab after several unpleasant incidents which included having to step out of a tram after passengers shouted at her. The mother of Maryam (26/M) and Zehra’s (30) Palestinian friend also decided to remove their hijabs permanently because of unwanted attention or being shouted at in the street. Tereza (35/M), a Czech who is delaying wearing her hijab because of the consequences she anticipates, reported how, since 2015, her Muslim female friends have become accustomed to almost daily harassment. Yvona (33/M) also reported having faced attacks since the moment that she started wearing her hijab, which abhorrently included death threats. Additionally, participants complained of the difficulty for some Muslim women in Czechia in finding jobs where they would be allowed to wear the hijab, with Yvona (33/M) reporting having to take it off in the past. Listening to these testimonies, those concerned about the wellbeing of Muslim women in Czechia should urgently advocate for making public spaces safer for them.

Conclusions

This chapter has discussed various general aspects of the current state and evolution of anti-Muslim attitudes, reported on the main actors blamed for spreading Islamophobia, and analysed dominant themes in the social representations related to discourse about ‘Muslims’. Overall, the interviews revealed that many Czechs, in the context of conversations about public opinion, processed the category ‘Muslims’ in relation to certain events (for instance, the ‘refugee crisis’), political issues (‘quotas’), actors (‘Arabs’, ‘migrants’ or ‘refugees’) or themes in social representations (‘Muslim ghettos in Western Europe’ or ‘they should respect our norms’). The results highlight the value of studying the identity of the imagined ‘Muslims’ in these attitudes before understanding why these attitudes are the way they are. Additionally, besides some traditional sociological differences (5.1.1.), the interviews revealed the effects of intergroup contact on how participants retrieve information about ‘Muslims’ (see 5.3.2.a., also 6.3.). Therefore, the results also raise the importance of asking about the identity of people imagining the ‘Muslims’ and how they imagine their national ingroup (5.3.2.b.) when thinking about ‘Muslims’.

Participants were unequivocal about attitudes towards ‘Muslims’ being largely negative and relatively recent in the country. ‘Muslims’ were reportedly introduced into the public debate by 9/11 and, particularly, 2015 or the ‘refugee crisis’. However,

Muslim participants were more emphatic about the importance of the change in attitudes after 9/11 and reported another change in the early 2010s, which corresponds to greater anti-Islam online activism and the centre-right early engagement with Islamophobic rhetoric, which went unnoticed for non-Muslim participants. Importantly, participants often explained attitudes through frameworks proposed from public discourse such as 'fear of the unknown' (which does not address racism) or (a false) social polarisation. Perceptions of widespread negativity towards 'Muslims' among Czechs, even if not based on direct personal experience, can still affect Muslims' public engagement and tolerance for Islamophobic prejudice – with many Czechs possibly seeking to bond with others by communicating stereotypical beliefs about 'Muslims' believed to be widespread in their communities (see Clark & Kashima, 2007). For instance, the perceived consensus against 'refugee quotas', which politicians justified on basis of the threat posed by 'Muslims', made participants speak of whether Czechia should accept Muslim migrants as subject to democratic deliberation. Opposing 'Muslims' is partly a symbolic rejection of political programmes associated with Western Europe (such as 'quotas' or 'multiculturalism') or outcomes ('Muslim ghettos').

Participants blamed news media and politicians for spreading anti-Muslim attitudes. However, I contend that framing these actors as self-interested opportunists and Czechs as manipulated victims of fearmongering fails to confront the underlying racism fuelling Islamophobia. Nonetheless, these actors shaped the debate, with participants predominantly recalling negative mediatised events and politicians who had promoted blatant anti-refugee or Islamophobic rhetoric. The salience of certain topics from public discourse were more likely to emerge in interviews, like terrorism or ghettos, than those that are absent, like common problems of postcoloniality or Muslims' charitable activities. Consequently, social representations of 'Czechia' as provincial and vulnerable starkly contrast with those of 'Muslims' as aggressive and conflictual. However, intergroup contact fosters more nuanced and positive representations, as evinced in the gap between participants' reporting of holidays in Muslim-majority countries and their impressions of Muslim-majority countries which they had not visited. Additionally, the disparity between the perception of 'Muslim' women as oppressed held by non-Muslim ethnic Czech women and the reported experiences of assaults faced by Muslim women in Czechia highlights a significant lack of public understanding regarding the realities of Muslim lives. The following chapter further elaborates on the drivers of prejudice by focusing on the perceived threat posed by 'Muslims' (whether symbolic or material), the identity of 'Muslims' which is perceived as problematic (ethnocultural/racial or symbolic), the positive effects of intergroup contact and the solutions proposed by participants to reduce Islamophobic prejudice.

6. The stereotype contents driving Islamophobic prejudice and the effects of intergroup contact on social cognition

This chapter continues to examine the symbolic content of stereotypes to identify their relationship to Islamophobic prejudice and public discourse. Specifically, it analyses the extent to which the perceived threat from 'Muslims' a) targets symbolic or material resources, and b) stems from ethnoracial or anti-religious prejudices. Additionally, I examine the effects that intergroup contact with actual Muslims had over mental representations of 'Muslims'. Finally, I report some of the solutions to Islamophobic prejudice proposed by participants.

6.1. The nature of resources threatened by 'Muslims': symbolic or material?

Self-reported and attributed threat perceptions came overwhelmingly from non-Muslim and, only incidentally, from Muslim participants. In practice, reports of threat perception often mix what, analytically, a researcher would like to distil into symbolic and material threats. Thus, I have exercised some discretion when isolating threat types. An example can illustrate this difficulty. Here, a participant answered the question of whether cultural or physical security drives most Czechs' alleged unwillingness to accept 'Muslim' neighbours:

> It goes hand in hand. For example, the dog's an unclean animal for Muslims. Muslims might become bothered if a neighbour has a dog. If someone told that man "if you have a Muslim neighbour, he's going to throw stones at [the dog] or he'll poison it", that man might become worried. (Kamil, 49/n)

6.1.1. Symbolic threat

Four distinctive themes emerged in connection to perceptions of symbolic threat. The first two are mostly threats to the ingroup – more relevant to Europeans' anti-migrant prejudice, according to the literature – and the last two threaten mostly individuals. First, the most reported perceived threat was that 'Muslims' would endanger national norms and customs while trying to impose theirs onto Czechs. This threat resonated the most among participants, with the warning 'they should respect our norms' featuring often. This expression, commonly and literally articulated in political discourse (see 8.1.), functioned as a black box for diverse Islamophobic sub-themes without specificity about both groups' allegedly clashing norms. Second, some referred to the specific threat posed by Islamic religious practices. Through a Western secularist lens, many non-Muslim participants evaluated high observance of Islam negatively and associated it with greater threats. This might partly reflect a general distrust of organised religion. Conversely, most self-declared Christian participants and Muslim participants shared the view that Islam, like most religions, can be interpreted in diverse ways by different individuals. Third, forms of family organisation and gender relations were also perceived to be in conflict. A few non-Muslim participants with Muslim migrant acquaintances saw these distinct forms of family

organisation as a risk for migrants rather than Czechs. As argued in the previous chapter, non-Muslim female participants often expressed a fear about Czech women losing rights because of Muslim migration. Fourth, some reported fears about the cohesion of local communities and intergroup anxiety when engaging with Muslims. These fears related to sharing public spaces, as well as having disengaged, disorderly or aggressive 'Muslim' neighbours.

6.1.1.a. 'They should respect our norms'

Albeit with different substantives (for instance, regulations, rules, laws, conditions), some participants expressed a personally held view that "Muslims should respect our norms". This expression reflects an assimilationist view of integration and, thus, citizenship, and is an old device of Islamophobic rhetoric transmitted through elite discourse – including Czech politicians (see 8.1.) In the early 1980s, van Dijk (1987, pp. 54–55) found a high occurrence of an identical claim about Muslim migrants among Dutch participants whose attitudes, he argued, had been largely influenced by elite discourse. Indeed, the fear that Muslim immigrants to Europe were going to erode its cultural character was grounded in the colonial experience and articulated by elites with the first migratory flows through similar strategies to those employed nowadays in anti-multiculturalist talk (see 8.2.1.). As Gatrell (2019, Location 2713) reports about France:

> The war in Algeria raised the stakes by associating Islam with terrorism, or at least with ineradicable difference. In March 1959, de Gaulle famously defined France as a country "of the white race, of Greek and Latin culture and the Christian religion…. The Muslims, have you seen them, with their turbans and their djellabas. You can see clearly that they are not French!" He entertained the alarming possibility that, in the absence of restrictions on entry, "my village would no longer be Colombey-les-Deux-Eglises, but Colombey-les-Deux-Mosquées", in which twin mosques would replace the two churches. Those on the right of the political spectrum quoted the speech approvingly.

'Muslims not respecting our norms' was the anxiety most often articulated by participants – and attributed to other Czechs – with a few expressing it at the start of the interview. Words derived from the verbs *tlačit* (to push, to force) or *nutit* (to force, to compel) described 'Muslims'' presumed will to impose their own rules. 'Czech' norms perceived to be under threat remained largely undefined, even when participants were asked to make these explicit. Thus, "Muslims should respect our norms" or "Muslims try to impose their norms on us" appeared as pre-formulated shared attitudinal statements largely devoid of consistent or shared content.

Since the allegedly clashing norms remained unspecified, the spectrum of threatened 'Czech' norms ranged from cultural customs (for instance, eating pork) to matters of public order (being quiet neighbours), socioeconomic engagement (having a job), mingling with the local community (joining social activities), the criminal code (not assaulting others), following administrative procedures (regulating one's legal status as a migrant), or compliance with the perceived secular character of the state (Muslim nurses should remove their headscarves). In short, 'Muslims' should fulfil the ideals of citizenship (including adopting as much of the national culture as possible) while being a priori suspected of wanting to subvert this ideal (see vignette 2). I asked Barbora

(55/n), a healthcare worker from Prague who had been to Egypt, whether most Czechs would be willing to accept Muslims in their neighbourhood or town. Barbora believed that Muslims would be accepted if they complied with some local conditions. Her hypothetical substantiating case used ‘Arabs’ as proxy, asserting that ‘Muslims’ (a fuzzy assimilation of associated actors where terrorists or fundamentalists are prominent) are particularly different and prone to compromise ‘our’ culturalised world:

> [Czechs would be willing to accept Muslims moving into their neighbourhoods] if they adapted to the conditions that apply in the environment in which they live and don’t enforce theirs. When people arrive in a place with a different culture […], they must accept their milieu and adapt their culture to where they live. […] If I went to Arabia, then I would not go around half-naked and wearing a deep neckline. I’d need to respect that the body is regarded differently, so I would not sunbathe on a nudist beach. If Arabs moved into my building, then I’d respect them and have no problems with them - if they adapt to our legal system and to our terms. […] I can respect their religion. They’re free to gather at mosques but setting off bombs in shopping malls… that doesn’t make sense to me. I think the same about veiling. […] Just from a security perspective, if someone goes around in a burka, I think that’s not standard in our environment. […] However, I am not offended when I encounter an Arab who wears a long skirt and a headscarf.

The broad range of endangered norms reported by participants reflect what is relationally cherished about life and citizenship in Czechia. The self-conception of the Czech nation was predominantly ethnic and, as mentioned earlier, cultural assimilation was largely expected. According to a few Muslim participants, ‘Czechs’ would rather see ‘Muslims’ assimilated than integrated. Yvona (33/M), a Czech convert, reported being completely socioeconomically integrated and felt unproblematically Czech but nonetheless she believed that many co-nationals felt bothered by her hijab or because she wants to raise her children as religious. Some non-Muslim participants felt anxious about the potential erosion of Czech ethnicity. Even among those not strongly opposed to ‘Muslim’ migration, there was occasional discomfort about the possibility of having to dress differently, seeing their children’s diets altered in school canteens, or feeling forced to change their dog walk itineraries to avoid offending ‘Muslims’ – i.e. a fear of becoming more ‘Muslim’ and less ‘Czech’. After implying that migrants’ Islamic laws could conflict with Europeans’, Radek (31/n), an actor from Ostrava, conveyed anxieties about the erosion of national identity when asked which norms he thought conflicted with ‘the Czech system’:

> Sharia law, of course. We’re a nation obsessed with pork. We simply like *vepřo knedlo zelo* [*CGdT: pork, dumplings, cabbage]*, *ovar [CGdT: an assortment of pig’s innards]*, pig slaughters… When someone comes and starts telling us that we won’t be doing pig slaughters because that’s wrong from the point of view of their faith, then, that’s not in conflict with the law, but in conflict with our culture and lifestyle. I like my lifestyle and I like our culture an awful lot. I’m proud to be a Czech and I would like my children to grow in the same cultural environment [*kulturní zázemí*] in which I grew up. Equally, [Muslims] would also like their children to grow into their own culture. I understand that this is an absolutely reasonable and rational

> demand. […] As I said, I don't have a problem as long as nobody blows my church up, doesn't force me to stop eating pork or prevent me from celebrating the holidays that I celebrate.

Cultural assimilationism, combined with the liberal individualism promoted by Czech elites (2.2.2.) and Islamophobic beliefs about 'Muslims'' pervasive difference, translated into some participants' conviction that demanding special rights was unfair, as Czechs were the titular nation. A few praised Czech Roma or second-generation migrants who had managed to abide by 'Czech rules' – i.e. to assimilate. From this perspective, 'Muslims' can already be accommodated within the existing institutions and there is not much else that the state or nation should do. When asked about Czechs' views on Muslims, Aneta (56/n), an entrepreneur from Teplice with some reservations towards visiting Arabs, expressed her own beliefs regarding Czech-Muslim intercultural differences:

> If they come to us, they should behave as if on a visit *[CGdT: for the metaphor of the home, see 7.5.*] That is, they should respect us. They should respect that we have different ideas and culture. They don't accept that, and they expect that we'll have to be the ones adapting to them.

6.1.1.b. Religious practice

Several participants blamed Islamic religious practices for leading to potential intergroup conflict. Since my questions favoured the category 'Muslim', it is also possible that participants perceived religious difference as foregrounded (Brubaker, 2013). As advanced in 2.3.4., 'Islam' has been attributed geopolitical/civilisational, cultural and political aspirations. Therefore, many non-Muslim participants attributed threatening phenomena to the religion as conditioned by its representation on the news and politics (see also 6.2.2.). Most Muslim participants expressed this same view. Asked about why Czechs would allegedly be bothered by her raising her children as religious (i.e. Muslim), Yvona (33/M) criticised public perceptions of Islam:

> People perceive that Islam contains many negative things. They perceive polygamy, having four wives or child marriage to be elements of Islam – all of which shouldn't appear within Islam. They're wrong. They see many Eastern rather traditional things [as part of Islam] and they get the feeling that we, as Muslims in Czechia, […] because we're also Muslims, will [automatically] do all those things.

An understanding of Islam as a religion which can be interpreted in multiple contexts by diverse believers appeared often among self-reported Christian participants. This view probably related to their own experience of following Christianity in a country apathetic towards (Václavík et al., 2018) or outright suspicious of organised religion. These participants often condemned the stigmatisation of 'Muslims' as believers while acknowledging the benefits of religiosity, which could partly explain why some surveys found Czech Christians to be more tolerant of 'Muslims' (see 2.1.2.).

Through dominant understandings of secularity and religiosity, non-Muslim participants often associated a heightened 'Muslim' identity with strict observance of practices and threatening phenomena like jihadism or fundamentalism. Conversely,

positive manifestations of religious identification (for instance, concerning ethics or pro-social behaviour) were largely absent. Many participants asserted that more secular 'Muslims' would be more likely tolerated in the country (hence, proposing an inverse correlation between religious identification and tolerance). A few spoke of foreign-born Muslims living in Czechia who engaged in alcohol-drinking or promiscuity as having somehow 'integrated'. Likewise, a few Muslim participants reported how other Czechs watched the formers' degree of religious identification by noting whether they abstained from drinking alcohol or eating pork. (Muslim participants reported to Tungul (2020a, pp. 75–76) having their degree of Muslim identity or integration tested through similar measures.) These tests reflect assumptions about irreconcilable intercultural differences, treating the sympathetic Muslim who does not fit the 'Muslim' stereotype as a subtype, unrepresentative of their group.

Some believed that Islam manifested differently across ethnic groups (more on this in 6.2.2.) and national contexts. For instance, a few believed that Czech converts interpreted Islam more dogmatically and held more conservative values. In a 2018 survey, Czechs reported feeling significantly more fearful of converts than second-generation 'Muslims', which the responsible research agency attributed to concerns about potential radicalisation (Heller, 2018). Similar stereotypes appear across Europe (Bartoszewicz, 2013), even if the data does not support that converts are more likely to radicalise (Schuurman et al., 2016). However, based on intergroup threat perceptions, the motives for 'one of us' to change sides might be seen with suspicion or, directly, through enemy images. Some were not as sceptical of first-generation migrants who, as Kamil (49/n) believed, might be inoffensive 'cultural Muslims', but believed that there was a tendency among second-generation migrants in Europe to radicalise. However, Czech survey data suggests the opposite (MEDIAN, 2018), perhaps because of expectations that there might be jihadists among migrants from the Middle East whereas Muslims raised in Czechia might have largely adopted the ethnic culture of the ingroup. Since a common underlying belief is that European liberalism and Islam are at odds, some are hopeful that European Muslims might become more liberal. Lamenting a European inaction against the Saudi financing European mosques, consonant with his socially liberal views, Adam (44/M) remarked:

> I'm terribly glad that in Germany and Austria they're trying to build their own European Islamic schools. When, nowadays, we have a normal, civilised priest who doesn't preach that each homosexual will go to hell, so I hope that we'll have an equally civilised Islam.

Conversely, a few believed that Czech Muslims were peaceful because, unlike in Western Europe, they were too few to demand special rights – which presupposes that, with enough resources, 'Muslims' will enter a conflict with 'us' (see politicians' use of the topos of numbers in 7.2.).

6.1.1.c. Family organisation and patriarchal norms

Some found 'Muslims'' allegedly different ways of family organisation and, particularly, patriarchal norms as unsettling to other Czechs or themselves. Despite being a key institution in everyday life, family seldom features on political discourse on 'Muslims'. Family was often perceived as being more central to 'Muslims' than to Czechs. A few participants with Muslim migrant acquaintances with families abroad perceived that

strong family ties could hinder integration, for instance, by restricting their autonomy. Agáta (45/n) knew the struggles of Arab men who had relocated to Czechia:

> Moving away from a place does not mean that the norms of that place do not apply to them anymore. The tentacles of their families reach them often. This means that they have certain responsibilities so that they provide financially for relatives or remain in contact with them. If they cope with this counter-pressure, and they learn how to defend their opinions and new life, they manage to adapt themselves quite well.

Similarly, Ondřej (20/n) believed that his Muslim classmates in Teplice needed to juggle identities depending on whether they were with relatives or other Czechs. Other participants praised 'Muslims'' strong family ties. Jozef (40/n), who described how his Muslim friends spent most of their time with other Muslims' families and theirs, praised such 'clan-like' family relations.

However, non-Muslim, particularly female, participants were often concerned about the patriarchal character of 'Muslim' families. In 2015, mainstream politicians were only occasionally speaking about threats to women's rights coming from 'Muslims', and this issue did not emerge as relevant in other analyses of Czech mainstream political discourse (like those from Strapáčová & Hloušek, 2018; Vallo et al., 2020; Zahradník & Rosůlek, 2017). However, images of 'Muslim' men as sexual predators were central to the Czech anti-Islam movement (Beauduin, 2018; Čada & Frantová, 2017; Slačálek & Svobodová, 2018). Surprisingly, mainstream parties did not fully appeal to these concerns that seemed common among Czech women. Several female non-Muslim participants referred to women potentially losing rights in romantic relationships with 'Muslim' men. Sometimes, participants based these fears on known cases of unsuccessful marriages between Muslim (often North African) men and Czech women.

Consequently, actual Muslim men often face prejudices, as they are suspected of misogyny. According to Maryam (26/M), these prejudices had deeply affected the romantic life of her brother, born in Czechia to Arab migrants and whose partner's parents had been either distrustful of him or opposed to their daughter's dating an Arab man. After expressing her views on the burqa and lamenting that French Muslims' sensibilities allegedly prevent French Christians from wearing a necklace with a cross, Barbora (55/n) admitted that she would be scared for her daughter if the latter brought home a 'Muslim' boyfriend. Asked why, Barbora's essentialist belief was that even if that boyfriend was kind, the (patriarchal) cultural practices of previous generations were likely to have become rooted into his psychology. Many non-Muslim female participants expressed a suspicion, or reported other Czech women's suspicions, that Muslim men would not respect their female partner's rights, forcing them to adopt a subservient position such as they were perceived to occupy in Muslim-majority countries.

Although most non-Muslim participants did not declare feeling personally threatened by other women wearing a headscarf, it was not infrequent to encounter rejection of more conspicuous forms of veiling. A survey asking whether 'Muslim' women in

Czechia should be allowed to publicly wear different forms of headscarves depicted in cartoons found that half of respondents agreed with the hijab and 43% with the chador, while only 15% agreed with the right to wear the niqab or burqa (MEDIAN, 2018). Even if a few Christian participants praised the hijab as a courageous expression of religious convictions, some, particularly older female non-Muslim participants saw some headscarves as an extension of patriarchal subjugation. Lucie (68/n), a self-described Catholic who rejected the label 'feminist', struggled to reconcile interreligious tolerance with, inter alia, the misogyny she often ascribed to Islam:

> [the chador] seems to me something outrageous, against nature, against God. It's meant so that a woman would be so humiliated that she cannot show her whole face. How do we communicate? With our face. I'd still accept that they're more modest […] there's no harm in that. [But] a university-educated woman is not equal before Islamic law. In legal processes, she can be represented even by an illiterate man and without having a say. […] However, this is the case mostly in their countries – I mean maybe not in all of them, it differs.

6.1.1.d. Local community cohesion and public space

Several non-Muslim participants raised issues that could arise at the local community level from having 'Muslim' neighbours. Although this is not an issue in mainstream political discourse, it is an extrapolation of dominant stereotypes of 'Muslims' (for instance, living in 'ghettos', being intolerant or behaving anti-socially) to the local context. Threats to the local community affected symbolic and non-critical material resources. For instance, a participant felt that, in his local community, people could fear that their 'Muslim' neighbours conduct ritual slaughters in adjacent gardens. In other instances, the use of public spaces was of concern. After studying alongside Muslim classmates, Ondřej (20/n) had become sensitive to the prejudice and inaccurate beliefs from many citizens of Teplice, who lacked similar contact experiences. He reported that the recreational picnicking of many Arab tourists in the city's parks violated Czechs' expected uses of this space, so that ethnic Czechs began complaining about feeling excluded from the parks, and the litter and commotion allegedly caused by the foreigners.

Frequently, participants expressed intergroup anxiety (a strong mediator of prejudice) about having to interact with disengaged, dishonest, aggressive, noisy or disorderly 'Muslim' neighbours. Participants spoke about the anxiety of crossing paths with their 'Muslim' neighbour in common hallways or whether the latter would take offence at the sight of one's dog while walking outside. From the small Moravian city, Roman (39/n) believed that 'Muslims' could fit into his city's local communities perfectly but that, if those 'Muslims' attracted negative attention (for instance, through a loud marital argument), most neighbours would feel far more uneasy than if the neighbours were non-Muslim ethnic Czechs. As argued in 2.1.3., contact experiences contribute to reducing intergroup anxiety, and most participants intuitively acknowledged this. They believed that, after facing initial prejudices, neighbourly relations were likely to normalise. After living for over a decade in a small town where only a handful of Muslims live, Youssef (47/M) has never felt subject to any discrimination for being Muslim. Even if people still regard him as a foreigner, he never had bad experiences with people within the local community.

Some non-Muslim participants expressed and attributed to others a fear that 'Muslims' would not engage with their local communities and participate in common social life. This issue of social cohesion appeared most often outside of the big cities of Prague and Ostrava. In the small Moravian town, the widely travelled Štěpán (20/n), who recently started living in a big city during the academic year, put himself in the shoes of a hypothetical 'Muslim' migrant arriving to Czechia. He anticipated receiving pressure from the local community to integrate by, for example, joining local men at the pub, watching football or speaking to them about 'regular things' – also reflecting perceived gender norms. Likewise, Milada (43/n), who had travelled to several East African and West Asian countries and knew a few Muslims in Czechia, gave testimony of a Black African Muslim acquaintance living in a small Czech town. Reportedly, other men used to laugh at him and tell him to "go home", until one day, interaction turned aggressive. In Milada's opinion, 'Muslim' migrants need to resist some of the pernicious pressures from the local community if they want to become part of it.

6.1.2. Material threat

Participants were highly unlikely to express the belief that 'Muslims' posed a material threat to them as individuals. On the other hand, these fears were often paternalistically attributed to other 'Czechs', like older people or the least formally educated, perceived as susceptible to 'frightening' information. Additionally, several participants stated that the more alarmist anxieties about terrorism were mostly the domain of political 'radicals'. Second, drawing on the 'Muslim ghetto' repertoire, a more commonly felt or attributed fear concerned the future social unrest caused by disaffected and potentially radicalised 'Muslim' migrants. Finally, when non-Muslim participants foregrounded the category 'migrant' or 'refugee' over 'Muslim', socioeconomic competition and welfare were more commonly mentioned.

6.1.2.a. Terrorism, crime and radicalisation

Several participants dismissed accusations that 'Czechs'' dominant fear concerning 'Muslims' had to do with the possibility of a terrorist attack, which as explained in 2.1.2. correlates with anti-Muslim attitudes in both directions. In fact, after a considerable spike in 2014-2015, the perceived threat of terrorist attacks in Czechia had consistently reduced, reaching 2013 levels by 2021 (Spurný, 2021), when the interviews were conducted. In 2015, terrorism was also far more present in public discourse (Čada & Frantová, 2017). Nevertheless, some participants reported that the jihadist terrorist attacks in Western Europe since 2015 had contributed to damage the reputation of 'Muslims', with many Czechs fearing any tiny risk of radicalisation. Štěpán (20/n) recounted a terrifying emergency landing after his plane received notification of an onboard bomb threat – this occurred shortly after the November 2015 Paris attacks. When asked how his views on Muslims had changed after his international travels, Štěpán (20/n) responded:

> The Islamic State, terrorist attacks [*CGdT: in Europe since 2015*] and so on changed my opinions about Muslims. Before, I thought Muslims professed a different religion and I respected that. But those attacks were the last straw. The way I saw it, Muslims [sic] wanted to subjugate the territory, force Christians to convert to Islam […], to disrupt their culture. […] The terrorist attacks were something awful. Honestly, from that time, I don't like Muslims. Not all Muslims are the same. Yes, the normal Muslim doesn't eat pork, prays five times a day, but this is a normal person. He's humble, you can

> speak to him normally. But then you have the second type of Muslim, who turn a switch on within their heads, who can take up arms and murder people on a square or inside some building.

Fears of sexual or terrorist violence were more commonly attributed to other 'Czechs'. Not subscribing to these fears may reflect a misperception about Czech society, a skewed sample or the results of self-presentation bias. Paternalistically, fears of physical violence were often attributed to the uneducated evaluations of others, from the less travelled older people to those with low media literacy, and from irrational political 'radicals' to factory workers. These might simply act as imagined proxies for Zeman or SPD supporters, or a classist caricature of the Czech provincialist xenophobe (Slačálek, 2016). Perceived individual threat from terrorism was dismissed through a self-presentation as rational. Most commonly, this was done through the topos of numbers, pointing to the small Muslim presence in Czechia or the tiny minority of potential terrorists among 'Muslims'. These arguments about terrorism might have been reinforced through public discourse. The Czech government reassured the public about the unlikelihood of terrorist attacks in 2015, partly because of the scarce Muslim presence in the country. However, the same topos of numbers was seldom used to claim that only an insignificant minority of 'Muslims' or 'refugees' are willing to 'disrespect our laws' or to compromise 'our culture'. Conversely, using her experience living in Egypt, Agáta (45/n) contrasted some Czechs' idea of 'Muslims' as prone to aggression and seeking to impose Islam by force with the widespread condemnation of jihadist violence which she had found among Egyptians.

Finally, informed by the narrative of Western 'Muslim ghettos' and avoiding the mistakes of the West central to political discourse (see 7.2., 8.2.), some feared that ill-integrated 'Muslim' males would grow idle, unemployable and resentful towards a society delivering under their expectations. Some participants feared the possibilities of protests, lootings, theft, aggressive conduct and damage to private property. These fears were reportedly more common than those of terrorism or sexual violence, and participants were more likely to express them as their own beliefs. Both 'Arabs' and 'Muslims' were unequivocally associated with aggressivity, in contrast to the 'friendliness', 'warmth' or 'smiling faces' regularly described by participants who had been to Egypt. For Milada (43/n), who had conduced job interviews with, inter alia, Arab candidates, the latter's conduct and mannerisms can unintentionally come across as aggressive to Czechs.

6.1.2.b. Economic competition, destitution and associations with the 'Roma'

When participants framed the subjects of our conversation as 'migrants' or 'refugees' rather than 'Muslims', they were more likely to bring up socio-economic issues and resource competition. Fears of low-skilled 'migrants' and 'refugees' as resource competitors were, again, attributed to Czechs with lower socio-economic status or those accused of becoming accustomed to a comfortable life, devoid of struggle. Here, judgements were extended to both 'migrants' who do not want to work at all and 'Czechs' who do not want to work hard enough. For Kim (2021, Chapter 3) the celebration of work has been fundamental in constructing citizens and the people in Czech post-1989 political discourse. According to him, while ODS neoliberal discourse limited the claims to national solidarity to the working/enterprising responsible individual, ČSSD rhetorically excluded those not performing 'honest work' (i.e. those working off the books). Over time, Kim writes, their frames would be repurposed by

populist actors exalting hard work against the corrupt and incompetent politicians (ANO/VV) or to exclude the 'unadaptable' unproductive minorities (VV, Dawn/SPD). These linkages between work and ethnic/civic inclusion might have penetrated social imaginaries to different degrees. However, the inability or unwillingness of 'Muslims' to perform meaningful work was an important preoccupation perhaps imported from narratives about Western 'Muslim ghettos' or recycled from Czech public discourse on 'the Roma'.

Several participants connected anxieties about 'migrants' and 'refugees' with those about 'the Roma' which, in essence, took issue with perceptions of poverty and affronts to authority, which the RWA associates to prejudice. Here, stereotypes of 'the Roma' were associated to abuse of the welfare state (dependant image), while 'Muslims' were *additionally* believed to pursue pushing their own norms (dependant and enemy):

> […] gypsies [*cikáni*] are not accused of wanting to rule us culturally. They're thought to possess no culture, to be primitive. The threat of Muslim migrants was suddenly discovered and I believe that gypsies were projected onto Muslims. [Czechs] carried the characteristics of gypsies over to refugees, "they will be 'unadaptable' [*nepřizpůsobiví*], they will be a burden to society", and so on. […] A second thing is that Muslim culture, as opposed to that of gypsies, is strong. A peculiar idea that is now very popular became suddenly discovered – that European culture finds itself in some sort of crisis, that it is terribly weak. (Adam, 44/n)

Several participants believed that part of the imperative of 'respecting our norms' included engaging in meaningful and stable economic activity. They expected that 'Czechs' would feel more welcoming towards 'Muslim' entrepreneurs and those working in specialist occupations (such as doctors, engineers or IT workers). This aporophobic preference for middle-class 'Muslims'/'refugees' was promoted in 2015 mainstream discourse (see 8.4.). In related statements, participants conveyed the desirability of middle-class ideals of decency, social order, educational attainment or family stability – factors not scrupulously policed when it came to Czech citizens:

> [When people say that refugees need to abide by 'our customs and rules', they have in mind] a general conception of how the right citizen should look. That he's educated, has a university degree, then gets a job, pays taxes, has a decent family [*spořádanou rodinu*] and so on. [They mean that he should] not be someone who starts stabbing and mugging people in the streets (Věra, 25/n)

> If a [Muslim] family lived in a house next to me and they were decent, well-ordered [*spořádaní*], working normally, I would have no problem about it (Milada, 43/n)

A few participants remained sceptical about the willingness of 'Muslim' migrants to integrate socioeconomically into European nation-states. Kamil (49/n) contrasted the alleged industriousness of 'Vietnamese' and 'Ukrainian' migrants in Czechia with the tendencies of the Czech 'Roma' and some 'Muslims' in Germany who would rather live off generous benefits. When asked about the type of migrant more likely to

integrate successfully, Radek (31/n) believed that genuine 'refugees' would be more willing than 'economic migrants' to adapt to the host country's demands out of existential necessity and gratitude. (Similar representations of the process of integration as voluntaristic, without any state intervention were promoted by politicians, see 8.4.)

> [Economic migrants] don't flee because they're afraid. They go after a better life. From good to better. They don't thrive in Czechia because, even to us, nobody is giving anything away for free [*pečení holubi nelítají do huby*]. Things are going relatively well for us [Czechs] because of how we manage to work as a society. If someone comes here, does not want to follow the crowd, and does not work according to given rules and limits… then, logically, he starts destroying those limits because he was expecting that things would be incredibly comfortable here… that here was the real Garden of Eden where he could do whatever he wants, and things will be excellent. But when he arrives, he finds out that people do not want him to do whatever he wants but to respect some rules. Logically, he will not want to respect those rules because that is not why he came here in the first place (Radek, 31/n)

6.2. Is prejudice targeting religion or ethnicity/race?

In practice, the category 'Muslim' can invoke both a religious group and a group with perceived shared ethnocultural and racial attributes. This section discusses how Islamophobic prejudice in Czechia targets the perceived difference of one or the other. Again, this analytical distinction is not clearcut in practice. Based on participants' accounts, the racialisation of 'Muslims' in Czechia is informed by the perceived Arab, Middle-Eastern, non-white, migrant and refugee identities of its targets. Consequently, the causes of anti-Muslim attitudes need to acknowledge that these attributes lie at the core of the category. Additionally, participants conveyed mis-/preconceptions about what it means to be religious and presuppositions about the cultural content and politics in 'Islam'. Echoing Halliday (1999), although Islamophobia has real consequence for followers of Islam, in practice, Islamophobic attitudes are better understood to socio-cognitively target 'Muslims' based on emic understandings of 'Islam' rather than the extremely diverse structures of actual Islam.

6.2.1. Czechs are prejudiced against 'Muslims' because of their ethno-cultural or racial difference

Based on participants' testimonies and attributions to other Czechs, attitudes towards 'Muslims' were informed by their perceived Arab, Middle-Eastern and, to a lesser degree, non-white (sometimes black) identities. From my perspective, racialising colour labels were surprising, as they differed from dominant uses in Spain. 'Muslims' seemed demarcated within colour areas shared with other lower-status categories and excluded from a restricted understanding of ('European') whiteness. Some participants employed or referred to the adjectival noun *černý* (black) to distinguish white 'Czechs' from 'the Roma' (see Grill, 2018) or 'Muslims'. Conversely, the noun *černoch* (also black) was exclusively reserved for black Africans and Afro-

descendants.[50] An Arab participant, who reported having been called *černý* explained "Yes. Whoever is not blonde or [ethnically] Czech, is black [*černý]*. Even you [*CGdT: I]* might be called black by some" (Zain, 55). This was not the first time a participant spoke of how Southern Europeans could be excluded from whiteness by some Czechs. Conversely, some participants expressed surprise when I reported that *černý* (which is not infrequent in racialisations of the Czech Roma) was being used to racialise 'Muslims'. Furthermore, two participants reported the use of *čmoud* (smoky person) to refer to 'Muslims'. Asked to clarify this term, Prague caregiver Žofie (48/n) explained: "Whoever is not white is considered a *čmoud* [by those using the term]. It doesn't matter whether you are Gypsy [*cikán*], Arab or Indian, you are a *čmoud"*. According to Žofie, tanned ethnic Czechs would never be *čmoudi* and, while some Southern Europeans could be *čmoudi*, she half-jokingly remarked that my (smart-casual) dressing style and not being too hairy – expectations in the racialised stereotype – disqualified me from being called a *čmoud*. A few participants spoke of the more dehumanising abstraction *špína* (dirt). A non-Muslim participant lamented that his mother referred to 'Muslims' as *špína*, yet he believed that the term marked the socially undesirable without any racial connotations. Its connection to race talk was more evident in Muslim participants' accounts. For instance, an Arab friend of Tereza (35/M) was verbally attacked in a shop as a 'dirty Arab' (*špinavý Arab*) just based on his phenotype. Likewise, three men verbally assaulted an eleven-year-old Maryam (26/M) in the metro, by calling her "dirty [*špinavá*], unpalatable [*nechutná*], hairy" – attributes demarcating non-whiteness. She thinks that these men might have mentally categorised her as a Romani.

In everyday life, whiteness might seem irrelevant to ethnic Czechs. However, when speaking about 'Muslims' or 'the Roma'[51], whiteness takes a relational salience. When discussing actual or potential encounters with Muslims/'Muslims', participants self-identified as white or part of a white ingroup. As already argued, a few saw Muslim migration to Europe as a threat to white people and their culture. Thus, the Czech nation is largely imagined in ethnic terms, excluding non-white Czech Romanies or Czech Vietnamese, whose children are often referred to as 'Banana Children' (Aktuálně.cz, 2020), implying that their outer yellow appearance contrasts with their inner white Czech core. Although mainstream politicians seldom speak about 'Muslims' with colour codes, they frequently use the culturalised categories 'European' and 'Christian', which carry the baggage of white identity through other discourses.

Additionally, the perceived Arab (or Turkish, in the German context), Middle Eastern, refugee and migrant identities were imputed to or assumed as representative of the 'Muslim' category. Participants were surely aware that there are Muslims in Kosovo or Russia, yet these groups were irrelevant to our conversations. Furthermore, participants' talk was largely informed by the geography of the Greater Middle East, particularly Arab countries, and in connection with recently mediatised developments in migration. Asked about whether Czechs reserved different views for different groups of Muslims, Adam (44/n) replied:

[50] It was unclear whether some participants believed that most Czechs included *černosi* as 'Muslims', particularly in the context of mixed refugee flows of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa (some of whom might be Muslim) and the Greater Middle East (mostly expected to be Muslim).

[51] In Czech public discourse, relations with the Roma are mostly framed as based on ethnicity (i.e. Czech-Roma relations) but the representation of a racial divide is not uncommon (i.e. Whites-Roma relations).

> I believe that Czechs make a terrible mishmash. For them, [the 'Muslim'] is a mixture of an image of a sly Arab merchant going back to those Jewish and anti-Semitic stereotypes of the cunning guy [*vyčůránek*] who cheats and haggles with you. The Arab from this image is civilised, yet rather sleazy. Then, that [image] is merged with that of the Islamic State – simply, the barbarians. On top of that, there is an addition of sub-Saharan Africa – also barbarians. That's all mixed-up in a strange way. We have no idea that Indian Muslims exist. We don't even know that Indonesian Muslims exist, therefore we are not interested in those at all.

As an ethnic Turk who had relocated to Prague in 2016, Zehra (30/M) believed that most Czechs seem to have a vague idea of 'Muslims' as Middle Eastern. She believed that Arabs where more easily categorised as 'Muslim' by Europeans because of their recognisable accent. However, Czechs also assume that she must be Muslim when she discloses her Turkish identity. Turkish participants in another study reported that Czechs primarily ascribe them a Muslim identity, regardless of whether the targets self-identify as secular or atheists (Tungul, 2020b, pp. 512–513, 2020a, p. 75). Thus, even if actual Arabs are more likely to be categorised as 'Muslims', there might be expectations about how important a Muslim identity is for other ethnic/national groups who do not match the Muslim-as-Arab stereotype.

However, the relatively small presence of actual Arabs in Czechia is of little public relevance. Thus, male Arabs are not assaulted in public spaces as 'Muslims' due to their phenotype – unless linked to symbols associated with 'Muslims' like kebab shops, non-Western dress or mosques. All three male Arab Muslim participants reported assaults or discrimination against them as foreigners, not as Muslims. It is also possible that many Muslims in Czechia might be racialised as Arabs when making their Muslim identity visible. Even for women, Maryam (26/M), who spoke at length about her family, recalled how Czechs allegedly ethnicised her mother, who had migrated from an Arab-majority country in Mediterranean West Asia, as Arab when wearing the hijab, but as a member of culturally more proximate groups upon removing it:

> People shouted at her in the streets when she started wearing the hijab. When she removed it, people stopped screaming at her because of the way she looked. She had beautiful short curly hair and always dressed impeccably. That is why there was no reason to scream at her. She looked like a Spaniard or Italian. […] The hijab became the problem. She believed that people categorised her, that they said, "there goes an Arab and we don't know people from there".

The hijab does not only mark religious difference but also the ethnocultural distance associated with 'Muslims'/'Arabs'. Czech and other Slavic female Muslim participants became foreignized when wearing the hijab. Yvona (33/M), a Czech convert, has become accustomed to other Czechs thinking she is a foreigner, stripping her of her Czech identity. Reportedly, many Czechs in public spaces unabashedly scrutinise Czech hijabi women and speak about them out loud as if they could not understand Czech. When Tereza (33) and her hijabi convert friend walk around Brno, only the latter is believed to be a foreigner and, in a flat search, landlords would only ask her friend about her country of origin. Therefore, Tereza remains hesitant about wearing

the hijab because she does not want to renounce to her Czech identity in the eyes of others. This is also one of the reasons why Malika (32/M), who self-reportedly looks Slavic and could pass as a Czech, decided to stop wearing the hijab. One participant reported how, when the 'refugee crisis' coverage started, a Czech man exclaimed upon seeing her "Damn it. They're already here". Thus, the hijab could also turn women of any ethnicity into a 'refugee'.

Importantly, my exploration of stereotypes of 'Muslims' is not exhaustive as discrete parts of the stereotype are activated in context. Mutual understanding requires that participants generate cognitive context models (van Dijk, 2014, 2018) to, for instance, interpret my motivations as a researcher when asking 'what do you think Czechs think about Muslims?' For example, participants from Teplice answered to this or similar questions by drawing on the experience of Arabs in Teplice, which they found relevant for our communicative event. If I had asked participants about Muslims in Russia or the Balkans, they might have retrieved different traits. Despite this, the ethno-racial traits described in this section remain the most relevant when speaking about most 'Muslims' or, at least, those concerning Czechs at that point in time. Asked whether Czechs might fear more an Arab or Muslim identity, Vítek (31/n) replied:

> In my opinion, people don't differentiate whether someone is a Muslim or comes from Arabia. A Muslim does not have to be Arab. A normal European [*sic*] who is also Muslim does not produce fear. However, if he looked like an Arab, he would immediately be seen by people, myself included, as 'a Muslim' and people will start behaving more cautiously. We [Czechs] do not know who follows which confession. If I take it further, even blacks are Muslims but I regard them as 'black'. Even a white can be Muslim and I will not be afraid of him. However, if I was approached by a person with [black] skin, even I would tell myself that I must act more cautiously. Right now, I realise that this is perhaps how it really is.

As hinted at in this excerpt, some ethnic and racial traits made and were regarded to make 'Muslims' more (un)desirable. In essence, proximity to whiteness and a European/Christian identity were favoured over a Middle Eastern or Arabic one. According to Bernard (32/n), a small-Moravian-town resident with Muslim relatives abroad, Czechs might be more inclined to accept as a neighbour a hypothetical Arab Christian than a European Muslim immigrant without realising that they might feel culturally closer to the second one. According to him, Czechs would not feel bothered if the hypothetical Muslim neighbours were 'blonde Austrians' or 'fair-haired whites' (i.e. whitened 'Muslims'). Similarly, Jozef (40/n), a former soldier from Ostrava turned entrepreneur who had met Muslims while travelling across Western Europe, believed that Moroccans or Turks are culturally and genetically closer to Czechs, making them less suspect than Pakistanis. Prague student Robert (19/n) believed that a UK-born Muslim would be preferred as a neighbour over a 'Muslim coming from (stereotypically Arab) Saudi Arabia. Assertively, unemployed Prague translator Šimon (32/n) believed that the less Middle-Eastern the hypothetical Muslim would look (he gave the example of an Indonesian Muslim), the less opposition Czechs would show. Other participants attributed a public preference for whiter 'Muslims' (for instance, those 'raised in Europe' or looking 'more like us'), middle-class types (Muslim doctors working for years in Czechia) or those not committed to orthodox religiosity (women not wearing highly concealing headscarves). Even if secular hypothetical Muslims were favoured over more observant ones, traces of a Muslim religious identity were believed to be

suspicious, with some acknowledging that Muslims might remain suspect after abandoning their faith. Many Muslim participants agreed that Czechs might feel the least comfortable about Arab ‘Muslims’ and black people – who, reportedly, suffered double discrimination and could not avoid their racial categorisation as many Muslims did.

Finally, there are certain ethno-racial ‘Muslim’ groups who might face greater scrutiny for their religiosity, suggesting that the pathologies of Islam are coded into ethnic stereotypes. The concern about some groups’ religiosity reflects the geopolitical dimension of Islamophobia, since Islam is perceived as politically mobilised ‘against us’, particularly in the Middle East. For instance, some believed that the presence of Muslim Bosniaks or Tatars in Czechia does not bother Czechs significantly but that these are not the groups that Czechs imagine when thinking of ‘Muslims’. Conversely, the religiosity of Arabs is perceived as threatening. Raised in Prague, Maryam (26/M) recognised that her Christian Palestinian friends did not have such a hard time as did Muslim Palestinians, who were frequently distrusted by their classmates’ parents and confronted with uncomfortable questions about their faith and politics. While a survey measured high reservations towards ‘Muslim’ migrants from the Balkans and former Soviet Republics, the percentage of respondents reporting to be ‘definitely concerned’ about the arrival of ‘Muslims’ from Arab countries was 14 points higher (MEDIAN, 2018). In short, as with other religious groups, not all ethnic groups are expected to live their religion equally – although a Muslim identity is attributed great salience, for instance, with Turks. Stereotypical beliefs about Arabs’ religiosity make Arab ‘Muslims’ particularly threatening. Importantly, since Arabs are seen as most representative of the ‘Muslims’ category, when most Czechs express prejudices against Islam, they might be, in essence, conveying anti-Arab prejudice.

6.2.2. Islam and Islamic convictions are what makes ‘Muslims’ threatening

As argued in 2.3.4., perceived religious difference can be hardly disentangled from ethno-racial difference. The previous section argued that stereotypes of Muslim-majority ethnic groups attribute to them problematic manifestations of religion and some of these groups are more representative of the category. For instance, ‘Arabs’ might be perceived as threatening, partly because their interpretation of Islam is believed to make them more aggressive, radical or prone to disrespect ‘our’ norms. While ‘Arab Christian’ migrants are significantly favoured in surveys (MEDIAN, 2018) and political discourse (see 7.4., 8.4.), their Christianity is often interpreted to make them ethno-culturally/racially closer and politically more loyal.

The interviews revealed common (mis-/)preconceptions, or attributions thereof, about the nature and prescriptions of ‘Islam’ ranging from cultural practices to political goals. For instance, several participants indicated that many Czechs fear ‘Muslims’ as potential terrorists or radical fundamentalists but not because they may pray to their God at home. There are also expectations about ‘Muslims not respecting our norms while trying to push theirs’ which attest that ‘Islam’ is different, inimical, pervasive and damaging. These aggressive manifestations reflect representations of events overwhelmingly discussed in the news (Burešová & Sedláková, 2016; Vesecký, 2007) and mainstream political discourse (see chapters 7 and 8). Thus, while part of the prejudice towards Islam might respond to secular suspicion towards the competing political power of *any* organised religion (Brubaker, 2015, pp. 97–101), the perceived political and cultural programmes of ‘Islam’ are what make this religion particularly

threatening. As mentioned, Czechs were significantly likely to blame Islam for motivating the 9/11 attacks (Tomášek, 2001, pp. 5–6) and significantly overestimated the percentage of 'Muslims' willing to condone terrorist violence (Wirnitzer, 2015). Similar suspicions are unlikely to be attributed to other religions and their followers.

Some argue that limited general knowledge about Islam makes the Czech public and elites likely to generalise about Islam based on controversial events (Ostřanský, 2017, pp. 69–70). However, it is hard to define what kind of knowledge should be favoured to understand a vast, diverse, multi-perspectival and multidimensional phenomenon like Islam. At very least, it should critically confront the filter of Islamophobic beliefs. Several participants believed that most 'Czechs' cannot differentiate among different Islamic confessions or diverse ways of observing Islam. However, Czech survey analysis showed that basic factual knowledge of Islam did not predict less prejudiced attitudes towards the religion unless mediated by intergroup contact (Novotný & Polonský, 2019). These respondents were university students, who might be more knowledgeable than average about Islam and, indeed, humanities and social science students were more knowledgeable than those from other disciplines. Conversely, some surveys do show a positive correlation between factual knowledge and positive attitudes elsewhere (Mansouri & Vergani, 2018). However, factual knowledge is not necessarily objective or pro-Islam, as knowledge is also affected by stereotypes, ideologies and so on (van Dijk, 2014). For instance, Czech anti-Islam activists built their critique on a rich and partial selection of knowledge about Islam, displaying a greater knowledge of Islam-related facts than the average Czech.

However, having experienced the struggles of being religious in a country that is generally apathetic or hostile towards organised religion might foster sympathy. As predicted by surveys (see 2.1.2.), self-reported Christian participants were more likely to recognise the diversity of ways of experiencing religion and belonging to a religious community; although, they were also more likely to reference religious texts to stress interfaith differences. Furthermore, they often disapproved of Czechs' opportunistic embrace of a Judeo-Christian heritage against refugees and were wary about the consequences of restricting freedom to exercise one's religion. A participant pointed to the hypocrisy of this identification, which was absent during the debate about the post-Communist restitution of assets to the Catholic church. For many, particularly in Prague and regardless of confession, anti-religious prejudice was a smokescreen concealing racist and less socially accepted forms of prejudice, which points to the serious limitations of considering religious bigotry against Islam as a politically relevant component of Czech Islamophobic prejudice. This Prague participant with socially liberal views was asked whether Czechs' anxieties during the 'refugee crisis' responded to migrants' perceived religious or ethnic identities:

> In my opinion, ethnic origin is more significant. Well, maybe it's not that easy to say. It is true that during the migration crisis, Islam was presented as a bloodthirsty religion that must convert everyone by force. If someone does not want to, they simply cut their heads off. That could play a role. [But] I think that behind that stood a fear or opposition to people who don't look like us, who are darker. Thus, we find [in religion] a reason to hate them […]. Maybe the religion was an easy topic. People know very well that being regarded as racist is wrong […] However, this might change when that racism can be hidden behind something else that coincidentally

> overlaps more or less with race. After all, Muslims from the Middle East have darker skins, they are Mediterranean types, and, at the same time, there is that second element, Islam. […] it is possible that religion was the substitute reason, but the real reason was simply racism (Šimon, 32/n)

6.3. Meaningful intergroup contact shows positive effects over stereotypes, but superficial or one-time isolated negative contact can reinforce them[52]

Only about a third of non-Muslim participants had had any form of personal contact with Muslims, even if these had been with clerks at regularly frequented shops. These interactions took place most often in Prague, Teplice or abroad. Memories of contact with actual Muslims generally enriched non-Muslim participants' mental representations of 'Muslims' by generating subgroups and fostering deprovincialisation, reducing perceived intergroup threat and anxiety and (re-)humanising them. A first, noticeable, effect was that meaningful contact with Muslims contributed to resisting generalisations about all 'Muslims'. Two mechanisms that contributed to de-homogenisation were subgrouping and deprovincialisation. Subgrouping happened often with neutrally or positively evaluated Muslim-majority ethnic groups, but also with Muslims encountered regularly in professional roles. Therefore, positive stereotypes of, for example, 'Egyptians' or 'kebab sellers' resulting from contacts heightened the heterogeneity within the 'Muslim' superordinate category. For instance, Jozef (40/n), who had been stationed as a soldier in Kosovo and travelled extensively across Western Europe, generalised the sometimes-conflicting forms of social organisation, religious observance or dispositions of 'Kosovars', 'Turks' and 'Moroccans' - for which he reserved discrete warmth levels. In Teplice, where the labels 'Arabs' and 'Muslims' are often used interchangeably to refer to local Muslims and tourists, ethnicity could also play a role in subcategorisation:

> I used to work in Šanov, the main area where Muslims stayed. I established great relationships with Syrians. The men were thoughtful about their wives – for example, by holding the door for them. However, I didn't like how those coming from the UAE behaved towards their wives, let alone their servants – most of them had Filipino women working for them. Simply put, the Filipino woman was the 'white trash' of their society. [Emiratis] had their whole visits funded by their prince. Although anyone could get along well with visitors coming here with their own funds, that scum [spodina] behaved terribly. At some point, it became horrible in the city. Even local Muslims who'd lived here for longer were strongly against this. They didn't like how those specific Muslim visitors made them look in the eyes of the rest. (Beáta, 34/n)

Here, this healthcare worker, answering to how her attitudes had changed over time, operated with three 'Muslim' subgroups ('local Muslims', 'Syrians' and 'Emirati male tourists') while embedding herself in several social identities (female, ethnic Czech and resident of Teplice). For Beáta (34/n), the contents of the stereotypes of these subgroups differed, and consequently, so did her evaluations of the subgroups in the context of their behaviours towards women and the city. Following the stereotype content model (Fiske et al., 2002), thoughtful 'Syrians' and embarrassed 'local Muslims' shared a high-warmth/high-competence position, while the dehumanised

[52] Most of this sub-section is literally reproduced from Gómez del Tronco (2023)

'Emirati' 'scum' belonged to the low-warmth/low-competence matrix quadrant. Contexts of high diversity, like multicultural Teplice, are particularly conducive to the subgrouping of individuals who, in context, are perceived as 'Muslim' but exhibit manifold behaviours.

Deprovincialisation, which generally results from intergroup contact, describes the reduction in insular intergroup thinking (which favours negatively evaluating other cultures) and, consequently, results in reappraisals of the ingroup (Pettigrew, 2011). Some participants did not only speak about how their contacts had contributed to perceive 'Muslims' as more heterogeneous, but also positively stereotyped 'Muslims' in relation to 'Czechs'. During Jozef's (40/n) trips across Europe, Muslims had frequently treated him kindly – for instance, by inviting him to family lunches. A Muslim man once disinterestedly helped him repair his car as a good deed during Ramadan, which he believed that "nobody in Czechia would have ever done". Jozef (40/n) essentialised Islam as inherently positive, claiming that "under the right interpretation of the Koran, everyone should help each other, regardless of their faith". Similarly, Teplice student Ondřej (20/n) reflected on Czechs being unsettled by Arab tourists' foreign custom of picnicking in the city's public parks. He was convinced that the same number of Czechs drinking beer in those parks would have been far more disturbing. This widely travelled entrepreneur from Ostrava spontaneously praised a behaviour which she believed most Czechs could not match:

> [In Oman,] there was a lady at the pharmacy's cash register. I needed eye drops because I'd suffered a reaction to the sun... and that lady offered me different types of eye drops. She explained them to me, and she was smiling, pleasant. She asked me where I was from, and she looked for the country on a map. In Czechia, a lady at a pharmacy would probably not speak to a Muslim lady like this. This lady pharmacist [in Oman] was veiled; she wore a burka. I wasn't veiled, but she spoke to me nicely. Now, turn it the other way and imagine that a Muslim lady comes to Czechia and has an aching eye. And the lady pharmacist in Ostrava tells her, for example... What does she tell her?! This is why I really appreciate that she talked to me in this way. It was very pleasant for me. She didn't make any distinction based on skin colour or faith. She simply treated me as a patient. (Milada, 43/n)

A common way of entering meaningful contacts was by travelling to Muslim-majority countries, where interactions were often reportedly positive and beyond the settings regularly discussed in public discourse. Most participants travelling to Muslim-majority countries had visited either a specific country repeatedly or more than one country. Local guides were regularly praised for explaining behaviours (for example, regarding waste management) and exposing participants to new situations (for instance, as conversation interpreters). For most of these participants, these trips significantly reduced perceived intergroup threat and anxiety and, consequently, prejudice. For example, instead of interreligious conflict or 'no-go zones', the three most common themes emerging from participants' stays in Egypt were locals being very friendly, female participants attracting too much attention and, consistent with the commercial nature of the trip, feeling perceived as a source of profit. These trips contributed to dispelling participants' own or acquaintances' fears. Despite noting that she always stayed in resorts, Barbora (55/n) claimed that her travel experiences in

Egypt and Tunisia had taught her that "it's possible to live among them – that I have nothing to fear". This teacher from the small Moravian city recalled his radical attitudinal shift after being asked when had Czechs' reported fear of Muslims begun:

> I was also brainwashed by the media, and even I became afraid of [Muslims]. However, I'd never been to Asia. I'd only seen Muslims on TV. Even my parents transmitted this fear to me because of how much they'd been brainwashed by the media. Thus, I feared Muslims even though I'd never seen one in my life. Then, we started going on holidays. My parents went to Egypt, and I joined them. We even went to Turkey after we went to the UAE with a friend. We were really excited about it. We never had any issues in any of those countries. On the contrary, we found smiling faces everywhere. The truth had been somewhere else. Those evil [Muslims] I was afraid of are a tiny minority. (Vítek, 31/n)

Particularly powerful were accounts of the (re-)humanising power of contact. Bruneau et al. (2018) found significantly higher levels of dehumanisation of 'Muslims' in Czechia than in other European countries (see also Prokop, 2019, p. 101). Muslim participants reported instances in which they felt they had been denied the attribution of human emotions (i.e. infrahumanisation; see Leyens et al., 2007) or traits (i.e. dehumanisation; see Haslam, 2006) by non-Muslim Czechs. They, including this participant who had relocated from an Arab-majority East Mediterranean state to Prague fifteen years before we spoke, believed that contact was the antidote:

> The more visible [actual Muslims] are, [the more they will be] seen as fellow human beings, with their good deeds and bad deeds, their contradictions as human beings, their ability to do good and bad. It's just another human being. Then, the Czech public will see them as just... 'yeah, they're just like us' – not necessarily that they're really great people and angels. They're not. Muslims are just part of humanity. They're not angels; they're human beings. They can make mistakes and commit crimes – like any other human being – and they can also be very good. (Maleek, 51/M)

Intergroup contact has proved effective in humanising out-groups by establishing common identities through reduced intergroup anxiety and increased empathy (Capozza et al., 2013). Asked about the effectivity of actions organised by Teplice's Muslim communities in challenging stereotypes, Zain (55/M) recalled an intercultural event at which some non-Muslim attendees broke into tears after intergroup encounters. He explained to them that besides Muslims' private relationship with Islam, "we have exactly the same problems and difficulties: our children are in school; we have sick mothers to care for... Our lives are exactly the same." Likewise, having Muslim schoolmates reportedly allowed non-Muslims to better understand cultural differences and why some comments could be offensive and, generally, to humanise their classmates' social groups.

Finally, as predicted by the literature (see 2.1.3.), some, mostly superficial and negative, intergroup contact experiences also reinforced negative stereotypes. For instance, Lucie (68/n) and her daughter had each had one-time disappointing experiences with foreign Muslim students which had led Lucie to the conviction that most 'Muslims' are arrogant. Likewise, when Malika (32/M) presented information

about Muslims and Islam at public events, she found attendees who nodded in agreement but just reinterpreted the talk through their biases to conclude “I agree, [Muslims] are killers”. A second negative aspect of intergroup contact was that the behaviour, diets or dress of actual Muslims were sometimes measured against the ‘Muslim’ stereotype. In other words, for some non-Muslim Czechs, actual Muslims were not real ‘Muslims’ if they did not fit the stereotype. This dynamic generates two risks. The first is related to heightened stereotype threat (Spencer et al., 1999) by actual Muslims who see their behaviours and Muslimness scrutinised. Zehra (30/M), who had been in Czechia for just five years, was surprised to discover that whenever she drank alcohol in front of Czech students, the latter told her, “Okay, so you’re not Muslim… you’re not a believer” – which was disconcerting to her as this behaviour did not compromise one’s Muslimness in her native Turkey. Likewise, growing up in Czechia, Maryam (26/M) declared not having had alcohol during her teens partly because of peer pressure from other Czechs who expected an Arab Muslim to be abstinent. The second risk is that actual non-stereotypical Muslims can be cognitively registered as subtypes who are unrepresentative of ‘Muslims’, thus compromising stereotype change. For instance, as a university student, Kamil (49/n) had a Sudanese flatmate who “did not behave as a Muslim”, partly because of his promiscuous behaviour and adoption of ‘European ways’. Also, a Turkish neighbour from Klára (52/n), a teacher from the small Moravian town, admitted enjoying drinking beer, which led the participant to state that her neighbour had ‘adapted’ to life in Czechia (i.e. more ‘Czech’ and less ‘Muslim’). From the same town, Štěpán (20/n) had a very pleasant interaction with a Muslim student whom he met in Prague from whom the participant could not perceive any religious difference. When asked why, he replied:

> It was because he was a Muslim in Czechia. When Muslims come to Czechia, Allah is not seeing what they do. They can drink alcohol, eat pork and do forbidden activities from which they would have to abstain back home. This was maybe the biggest difference. (Štěpán, 20/n)

6.4. Solutions offered to Islamophobic prejudice by participants

On a positive note, all participants believed that Islamophobic prejudice should and could be reduced. For most, increasing knowledge about Muslims/Islam (for instance, in school curricula or through fairer media representation) and fostering intergroup contact would challenge prejudices most effectively. Many are hopeful that younger generations will become less prejudiced as they travel and receive more information about the Islamic world. The knowledge that was valued concerned Muslim diversity, positive aspects of Islam or better understanding about the worldview of Muslims:

> I would like to have more information so that somebody tells me more about those things that are positive […] I would like to find out if there is something that could be good for us: they have this and that hierarchy in the family, in Scandinavia they have it maybe differently. People do not seek information about the pluses in this country, you would have to actively be interested in it. Yet, people also need to find time for themselves (Aneta, 56/n)

Nevertheless, intergroup contact was regarded as the optimal tool for reducing prejudice. Several participants wished or hoped that as more Muslim migrants move into the country, Czechs will lose that ‘fear of the unknown’. Jozef (40/n) claimed that

even nowadays, people in small Czech towns are coming into very positive contact with Muslims through local kebab shops. The general hope that younger Czechs are markedly more tolerant and open marked a view of future societal progress concerning prejudice. Malika (32/M) saw that both the non-Muslim and Muslim youth in Czechia are already drivers of change as they conduct interesting activities where diverse communities come together. Various participants advocated, from either positive actual experiences or intuition, for intercultural events where Muslims and non-Muslims could come together:

> If [Muslims] lived here, they could organise a cultural event where they presented themselves to show they are not terrible but simply have another culture. It could look similar to the International Roma Day, when the Roma present their culture. When Muslim festivities take place, they could show how they celebrate them and how they live. They would then open the topic a little bit so that people would have a chance to meet them and look them with different eyes (Adéla, 34/n)

Many, particularly younger, participants believed that change had to come from civil society given the lack of political will. Ondřej (20/n) or Zain (55/M) highlighted that, in Teplice, civic organisations, rather than state authorities, were the ones organising successful intercultural events and platforms for neighbourly dialogue, both of which served to increase cooperation and reduce prejudice. Also from Teplice, Aneta (56/n) advocated for a space where local communities can express and understand each other's grievances and try to come up with common solutions.

Some looked for contacts at the international level, by advocating for travel and international cooperation. Flippantly, Milada (43/n) suggested Czechs should be sent to spend two weeks with a regular Muslim family abroad, for instance, to Turkey. As Zehra (30/M) said "if any person from Czechia travelled Turkey for a week, they would understand how Muslim Turkish people live". She recommended Czechs to travel solo to other countries, as by being alone, one remains far more open to opportunities. Bernard (32/n) supported student exchanges, particularly in higher education, with a focus on generating business opportunities. Agáta (45/n) upheld that trading with other nations and signing diplomatic agreements are a good way of bringing their members together. Additionally, she was enthusiastic about the University of Cairo's programme on Czech studies and language, and wished there would be stronger international relations in education.

Several participants advocated for the media changing the way they portray and inform about Muslims and their geographies. Adéla (34/n) suggested not platforming people who repeat that 'Muslims are evil' without even having had meaningful contact with Muslim communities. Agáta (45/n) would like to see PR agencies and mass media organisations enforcing ethical codes, and for Muslims being given more space in the media. Jozef (40/n) believed that TV travel shows can help people with less knowledge of the world to open their views without simplistically enforcing positive messages onto them. Maleek (51/M) expressed gratitude for a recent show celebrating Eid for children on the Czech Public broadcaster. He also wished that more women in hijab would appear in the media, as well as university professors speaking on television about the positive contributions from the Arab and Muslim worlds. Robert (19/n) and Adéla (34/n) wished politicians would not use misinformation or alarmist reporting to get votes.

Conversely, others hoped that change would come from media consumers. Roman (39/n) believed that citizens should become able to browse through the Internet, from the ('alternative' and more nationalist conservative) *Parlamentní Listy* to (the independent website of investigative journalism) *Hlídací Pes*. Vítek (31/n) thought that younger generations needed to pass a more balanced picture of reality to older media consumers. Šimon (32/n) thought that prejudice should be stopped from the beginning of the conversation by being able to offer better arguments than those of fearmongers before their views become ingrained in people's minds.

Conclusions

This chapter focused, firstly, on the content of stereotypes driving Islamophobic prejudice in Czechia. Specifically, it explored the extent to which this prejudice is driven by the perceived threat to either symbolic or material resources and based on either ethno-racial or religious difference. Although I tried to analytically separate symbolic from material threat perceptions, in practice, they appeared intermeshed. Overall, symbolic threat seemed most dominant and more likely to be self-reported. Conversely, material threat (unless related to 'Muslim ghettos') was most likely to be regarded as irrational or uncivil, hence attributed to perceived lower-status Czechs. Threats that were often self-reported were also those that had been previously normalised through political discourse: for instance, 'Muslims should respect our norms' (see 7.5.) or 'Islam clashes with our European values' (7.1.). Unlike sociotropic threats, threats to individuals are seldom represented in political discourse. However, participants also extrapolated stereotypical features of 'Muslims' to hypothetical 'Muslims' in their communities. Here, intergroup anxiety defined the anticipation of unsettling interactions and uses of common public spaces. Additionally, female participants regularly expressed concern about potential threats to women's rights. Interestingly, Czech mainstream political discourse, dominated by men, largely ignored this concern. Another important insight is that the perceived threat of terrorism was exclusively attributed to others, which mirrors a reduction in public perceptions of terrorism relative to 2014-2018. Finally, anti-Roma rhetoric, the narrative of 'Muslim ghettos' and a political glorification of hard work combined to create aporophobic anxieties associating 'Muslims' with destitution, alienation and laziness. Conversely, middle-class 'Muslims' were believed to dispel many of the fears experienced by Czechs.

Again, the analytical distinction between ethno-racial and religious prejudice was not clearcut in practice. Stereotypes of 'Muslims' contained a wealth of ethnoracial information but were, albeit less markedly, informed by understandings of 'Islam'. Stereotypes of 'Muslims' are largely informed by their perceived (racialised) Arab, Middle-Eastern, non-white, migrant and refugee identities. These traits are seen as most representative of the category but also make individual 'Muslims' less likeable. Whiteness set up a boundary for exclusion and confrontation, with 'Muslims' sharing similar colouring labels as those used for the 'the Roma', such as *černý* (Black), *čmoud* (smokey person) or *špína* (dirt). Although mainstream political discourse avoids colour-coded language, whiteness is implicitly contained within the 'European'/'Christian' identity (see 7.1.). The hijab emerged as a racialising symbol which foreignised Czech converts and increased perceived ethno-cultural distance.

There might not be an actual ethnicised group acting as a proxy for 'Muslims' on Czechia's streets, but wearing the hijab can turn ethnic Czech women into 'Arabs' or 'refugees', and removing it can transform hijabi women into 'Southern Europeans' or 'Czechs'.

On the other hand, pathologies like fundamentalism or jihadism are associated with 'Islam'. Therefore, through local understandings of religiosity and secularity, Islamic religiosity is largely regarded as threatening. Therefore, low religiosity is associated with cultural assimilation and secularity and high religiosity with fundamentalism and radicalism. However, the problematic aspects of 'Islam' are also associated with and perceived to be more present among the ethnicised and racialised groups dominating the stereotype (i.e. 'Arabs', 'Middle-Easterners'). Consequently, the 'Islam' of groups like Palestinians is considered more problematic than that of Indonesians. Furthermore, the general indifference or antipathy towards organised religion in Czechia adds another layer of suspicion. Conversely, self-described Christian participants were more likely to acknowledge the diverse ways of experiencing religion and belonging to a religious community.

Finally, the chapter turned to the positive socio-cognitive effects over stereotypes and prejudice caused by intergroup contact, and the recommendations put forward by participants to reduce Islamophobic prejudice. Overall, positive contact experiences contributed to heighten the heterogeneity of the superordinate 'Muslim' stereotype by generating stereotypical neutrally or positively evaluated subgroups, like 'Moroccans', 'Syrians' or 'kebab sellers', and fostering deprovincialisation. Additionally, contacts helped to reduce intergroup threat and anxiety, and (re-)humanise 'Muslims'. Conversely, the rarer negative contact experiences also reinforced previous negative stereotypes (see Graf et al., 2014). Furthermore, negative stereotypes of 'Muslims' hindered the positive effects of contact in two ways. First, some Muslim participants found their behaviour and religious identities scrutinised against others' stereotypical expectations, conditioning their behaviour to either fit or challenge the 'Muslim' stereotype (for instance, by regulating their alcohol consumption). Second, actual Muslims who did not fit the stereotype were likely to become cognitively subtyped as unrepresentative of 'Muslims', thus, restricting the possibilities for stereotype change. Finally, most participants believed that Islamophobic prejudice should and could be challenged. Their two favoured mechanisms were to foster intergroup contact and increase knowledge about 'Muslims' and 'Islam', for instance, through fairer media representations.

7. The normalisation of Islamophobia by the Czech political mainstream right before the ‘refugee crisis’

Although Czech mainstream parties had intermittently used Islamophobic rhetoric before 2015 (Mochťak, 2015; Zahradník & Rosůlek, 2017), most analyses have focused on its occurrence during the ‘refugee crisis’ (for instance, Strapáčová & Hloušek, 2018; Vallo et al., 2020). This chapter argues that there is a brief period before what is generally understood to be the ‘crisis’, when Islamophobia was central to political discourse and prepared the ground for the discourse on ‘refugees’ beginning by mid-2015. Political parties began coordinating positions towards ‘refugee quotas’ in March 2015 (see 4.4.2.) and publicly articulating them in May 2015 (Hrabálek & Đorđević, 2017), with the anti-refugee themes of the ‘crisis’ crystallising by the summer (Kluknavská et al., 2019). However, between 2014 and early 2015, Czech politicians were already reacting in public to events concerning Czech Muslim communities, the rise of IS, a backlash against a project teaching schoolchildren about Islam, Czech anti-Islam activists, jihadist terrorist attacks in France or Muslim migration in the EU, more generally. This was before the number of migrants arriving on the continent increased dramatically after the spring of 2015 and created the ‘refugee crisis’ topic. Importantly, during this period, the mainstream cannot be regarded as being pushed to radicalise by far-right actors. Anti-Islam protests, which, some would argue (Navrátil & Kluknavská, 2023), could have pressured parties to compete for issue dominance only started to gather momentum after the January 2015 Charlie Hebdo shootings; Dawn was plagued by infighting, with voting intention for the party below the 5% threshold (CVVM, 2024d); and the anti-Islam SPD had not been founded yet. Mainstream parties had their own motivations for opposing Muslim migration and Islam (see 4.2.2.b.). However, they only found the events with which to engage and an eager audience during the period analysed in this chapter.

The chapter analyses the strategies for representing social actors and topoi employed by mainstream politicians to demonstrate how they preceded and impacted on the discourse on ‘Muslims’ and ‘refugees’ from spring 2015 onwards. The results of the discourse analysis are organised into five sections. 7.1. explores how ‘Muslims’ as a topic of public discourse was created, with an important influence from moderators. Sections 7.2. to 7.4. structure the results of my analysis according to the different social actors important to discourse on ‘Muslims’ (see 2.4.). 7.2. illustrates how ‘Muslims in the West’ are constructed negatively as a warning against future migrants to Czechia. Some politicians reassuringly differentiate the relatively unproblematic Czech Muslim communities from those in Western Europe, but I argue that this uniqueness counterproductively reinforced the idea of most ‘Muslims’ being problematic other than in Czechia. 7.3. explains the strategies and arguments employed to justify the adoption of Islamophobic positions to pre-empt a hypothetical far-right advance. 7.4. explains how migrants moving towards Europe are represented as dangerous, to justify policies that exempt Czechia from granting asylum, such as favouring developmental aid. Additionally, section 7.5. focuses on politicians’ support for assimilationist policies based on claims about the allegedly corroborated failure of

‘multiculturalism’ and the threat caused by ‘Muslims not respecting our laws’. Lastly, a summary of findings and a synthesis of party positions closes the chapter.

7.1. Creating the topic: association, assimilation, differentiation

This section presents general, mostly problematic, aspects of how ‘Muslims’ entered Czech public discourse in 2014 based on the analysed texts. Particularly, I describe an overarching representational structure which confronts ‘Muslims’ with ‘us’, as well as pointing to the roles of civilisationism and a lack of expertise on the topics discussed in promoting Islamophobia. Before attending to these features, I briefly outline the topics which gave rise to this discourse.

The political discourse on ‘Muslims’ emerged in relation to specific events and policy issues in 2014 but became a regular feature of Czech public debate after the January 2015 Charlie Hebdo shootings. The topics and frames overwhelmingly stressed intergroup threat. Before 2014, ‘Muslims’ had been largely irrelevant to Czech politics, with debates on ‘Muslims’ on ČT featuring mostly journalists, religious representatives or researchers. For instance, in 2013, only one politician in the surveyed shows tangentially mentioned Islam. Although politicians had sporadically spoken about ‘Muslims’ or ‘Islam’ before 2014, their appearance in the analysed shows became more frequent during this year. Their interventions (on matters related to national security, geopolitics or migration) started shaping an emerging public discourse on ‘Muslims’. Generally, during 2014, politicians were invited to react to specific events, initially domestic episodes such as a police raid of Islamic institutions in Prague (UK1)[53] or the Ombudswoman’s pronouncement about the 2013 expulsion of two students from a Prague secondary medical school for refusing to remove their hijabs (UK4). Two important shifts took place during this year. After the summer, political commentary on the war against IS foregrounded the topic of Islamist radicalisation, which would spill over to future debates on ‘Muslims’ (see vignette 1). Additionally, from October, politicians began discussing policy options regarding refugees coming to Europe. At this point, anxieties over cultural integration, radicalisation, terrorism and migration became highly intertwined.

The January 2015 Charlie Hebdo shootings introduced three additional changes to public discourse on ‘Muslims’. First, the volume and frequency of media content on ‘Muslims’ and ‘Islam’ increased exponentially. Second, the debates became more abstract, with politicians, often at the behest of moderators, discussing philosophical ideas such as freedom, security, identity or responsibility – which is reflected in bloc headlines like “Terrorism, freedom and ethics” (UK10) or “Correctness and freedom” (UK12). Third, rather than reacting to specific events or policy issues, politicians were given space to articulate their positions regarding a myriad of topics concerning ‘Muslims’ – or, put differently, the position that Muslims should occupy within European polities. These changes allowed politicians to promote Islamophobic representations

[53] Muslim communities publicly denounced the aggressivity of this raid. Even if political parties did not engage intensively with this issue, newspapers at the time generally framed Czech Muslims as a security threat and, according to interviewed Muslims, contributed to their stigmatisation (Sedláková & Barbora Nohlová, 2017).

more often, with a higher degree of generalisation and a greater number of associations.

Debates about 'Muslims' and 'Islam' reinforced an ideological representational structure that favours the incorporation of Islamophobic rhetoric by creating two Janus-faced clusters of 'Czechs'/'Europeans' and 'Muslims' (see Figure 8). This structure generated and exaggerated a clash between two social identities while fostering a threatening stereotype of 'Muslims'. As a first component, assimilations subsumed a heterogeneity of actors under labels that favoured an 'us' (for example, 'Europe', 'the West') and 'them' ('the Muslim community', 'refugees') juxtaposition. Second, clusters were differentiated (for example, 'they have a different culture', 'we have our own civilisational space'). Third, regular associations ensured that diverse individuals and sub-groups became related to the larger 'Czech'/'European' or 'Muslim' clusters, for instance, 'Muslim migrants ('they') are dangerous for us because in France some Muslims ('they') burn cars of ethnic French citizens' ('us').

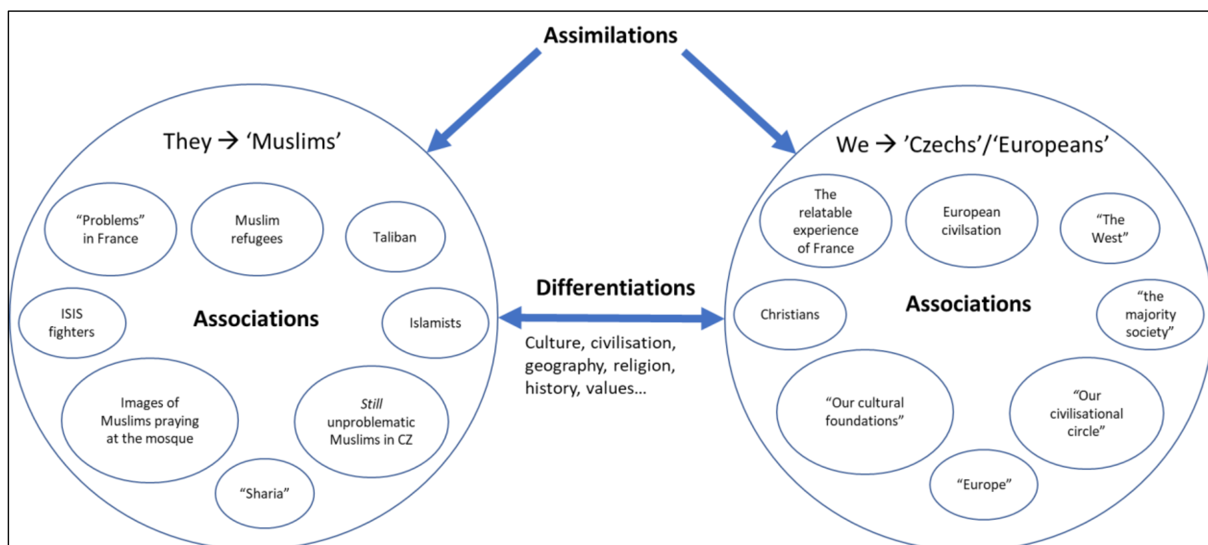

Figure 8. General representational structure in analysed debates about 'Muslims'.

Assimilations contribute to attributing a common essence and collective responsibility. Consequently, the actions of jihadist terrorists triggered debates about (fellow) 'Muslims', for instance, on the institutionalisation of Islam, legislation on headscarves or the so-called Muslim ghettos. Assimilations are emphasised and justified through differentiations, which politicians establish along the lines of culture, civilisation, geography, religion or politics. Differentiations are often implicit in assimilations, so that 'the Muslim world' or 'our Judeo-Christian roots' create group boundaries while highlighting intergroup differences. Culturalist and civilisationist differentiations appear frequently and interchangeably. For instance, 'Muslims' are represented as exogenous to "our civilisational circle" (Polčák, TOP 09, UK3), "our cultural circle" (moderator, UK3), "our cultural foundations" (Filip, KSČM, UK13) or "the Czech space" (Chovanec, ČSSD, in Straka, 2014, min.14:49). Some politicians nonchalantly validate jihadist worldviews when warning that terrorists targeted something shared by non-Muslim 'Europeans'. For instance, Němcová (ODS, UK12) rather than referring to the

intentions of jihadists, claimed that, *effectively,* "we all clearly see that the attack in France [is] on one of the fundamental values of Western society – freedom of speech, freedom of thought, the democratic way of life". Similarly, in Černochová's (ODS, UK13) civilisationist assessment, "our society, our civilisation, is over the last years, and this has intensified in recent months, a constant target of attacks". Nevertheless, and even if this only occurs a few times, appeals to 'our Christian roots' can also function to argue for tolerating Muslims based on Christian values ('our Judeo-Christian foundations make our society open' – Gabal, KDU-ČSL, UK6) or traditions (since Czech Catholic nuns should be allowed to wear a wimple, Czechs should allow Muslim women to wear a hijab in Czechia – Polčák, TOP 09/STAN, UK3).

For Czech mainstream politicians (most consistently, from ODS and ANO), civilisationism provides an important framework for Islamophobic rhetoric. As explained in 2.3.6., Brubaker (2017) re-popularised this term to describe how the Northwest European far right had articulated Islamophobia through "an identitarian 'Christianism', a secularist posture, a philosemitic stance, and an ostensibly liberal defence of gender equality, gay rights, and freedom of speech" (p.1193). Although the concept is often used in studies of far-right discourse (see Cerrone, 2022; Kaya & Tecmen, 2019), civilisationism also fits liberal Islamophobic rhetoric employed in mainstream European politics (Mondon & Winter, 2017). Other scholars have found that Brubaker's (2017) civilisationist framework fits the Islamophobic rhetoric of Czech far-right (Slačálek & Svobodová, 2018) and mainstream politicians (Tabosa, 2020).[54] However, there are two caveats in the Czech case. Generally, Czech politicians do not mention the protection of LGBTQ rights, although gender equality for women emerges sometimes, particularly among female politicians. Second, for members of the Christian-democratic KDU-ČSL and some in TOP 09, the secular defence of a (Judeo-)Christian identity coexists with calls to preserve Christianity or protect threatened Christian minorities in Muslim-majority countries. Lastly, reference to Muslim migrants endangering a glorious national culture, as in the speeches of the French National Front or Greek Golden Dawn (Kaya & Tecmen, 2019), are only really emphasised by the far-right Dawn. Otherwise, when Czech identity is securitised, it is commonly understood as a representative or extension of a collective European identity.

Even though moderators are not the main subjects of my analysis, it is important to consider how some of their discursive practices (together with those of crew members engaged in meaningful content production) contributed to the Islamophobic bias of mainstream discourse on 'Muslims'. Moderators had a pivotal role in setting the agenda for the political debate, foregrounding issues and aspects of events that would become salient for audiences (McCombs, 2014, Chapter 3). Their framing practices surely influenced interpretations among the public too (Gross & D'Ambrosio, 2004; Kim et al., 2002). The Islamophobic bias is most evident in how information is organised within the show. There is a tendency to associate, as related, different topics which present 'Muslims' as problematic and in conflict with 'us'. For instance, after a foreign policy bloc on the war against IS, the moderator segues to the next bloc (UK4) about a controversy over a project educating Czech schoolchildren about Islam:

[54] Without citing Brubaker, Strapáčová & Hloušek (2018) also describe anti-Muslim messages by ODS, TOP 09, ANO or Dawn as civilisationist.

> [W]e remain on the same topic and will still look at it from a slightly different angle. Relations between Islam and Western culture are a very delicate subject […], and these are dealt with not only at the global level but also the domestic one. For instance, in this particular case. Experts prepared a project for two years that was meant to bring a different culture closer to schoolchildren and raise them into tolerance. […] Even the Ministry of Education liked the project. Although, only until the moment when, reportedly, parents' complaints started accumulating.

Through 'remaining on topic' (that is, tensions between 'Islam' and 'us') this moderator implicitly associates states militarily fighting IS with Czech parents protesting against an educational programme about Islam. As another example, shortly after the Charlie Hebdo shootings, the moderator (UK11) introduces the day's agenda by addressing viewers with differentiating dichotomies:

> What will the confrontation of Europe with radical Islam look like? How are the limits of free speech transforming? And will the immigrant wave headed towards the Old Continent from the Arab World also reach the Czech Republic?

Show producers, under pressure from the IS-dominated news context, decided to group these discursively constructed topics into one show (UK11, UK12). The moderator's opening sentences associate these topics by representing two opposing clusters through impersonalised assimilations (the Old Continent versus the wave from the Muslim World) which clash through verbs of direction ('confront', 'head to', 'reach'). The newsworthy possibility of 'clash' highlights the differentiation between clusters. Furthermore, both blocs bear titles with binomials stressing this narrative of oppositionality: 'Europe and immigration' (UK11), 'Correctness and Freedom' (UK12). What audiences were essentially promised was a debate on the dangers of contacts between 'us' and 'them' across different spheres.

Moderators are not covert Islamophobic activists, but simply reproduce Islamophobic biases which had been part of public 'common sense' even before 2014. For instance, the frame of Islam as a threat had been crystallised much earlier, with numerous Czech public debates in the 2000s and 2010s bearing variations of the title 'Should we fear Islam?' In the absence of alternative narratives, the practices of moderators often failed to critically confront Islamophobia. For example, they platformed far-right arguments by asking guests to comment on provocative Islamophobic quotations from Tomio Okamura (OVM2), Václav Klaus (UK12) or writer Benjamin Kuras – who whitewashed Le Pen and Wilders and equated Sharia law with Nazism (UK13). Moderators also included far-right tropes in their questions as facts worth discussing, such as "Do you agree [with the claim] that Europe is already full and [it] should do everything [possible] so that no more migrants would come?" (UK19); or considering PEGIDA's demonstrations in Germany, "is Europe threatened by Islamisation or by extremists [like PEGIDA's]?" (UK10). Furthermore, when moderators ask whether existing legislation should be expanded, it is only when it would allow for discriminating against Muslims rather than protecting their rights. For instance, they ask whether, considering the growing 'radicalisation of Muslims', Czechia should be stricter in its regulation of Islamic practices and institutionalisation (UK13); or, after admitting having nothing personal against discriminating against refugees based on religion, ask how

the Czech government could do so without being called out by the international community (UK16).

Nevertheless, moderators have a complex relationship with the far right. On the one hand, they constantly condemn or challenge radical statements from Dawn MPs or Konvička (IvČRN) – but seldom those from mainstream politicians. On the other, moderators also show a problematic equidistance between the far right (sometimes associated with the ethnic majority) and Muslims, whose rights the former want to infringe. Most egregiously, Konvička (IvČRN), who had become a regular guest on national TV, was invited to debate with the president of the Czech Muslim Union on, according to the moderator, "the relationship between Muslim communities and the majority society [*většinová společnost*]" (UK4). The ethnicised term *většinová společnost* is likewise used by other moderators to refer to the few hundred participants in a IvČRN protest (OVM5) or claim that IvČRN reflects the feelings of the 'majority society' (UK13). In these instances, IvČRN gets defined based on shared ethnicity ('us') rather than othered for its Islamophobic ideology.

Besides speakers possibly holding or strategically promoting prejudices, many associations result from a lack of rigour or expertise from both guests and the shows' staff. In UK3, the Ombudswoman and a politician call out show producers for wrongly illustrating their debate around the case of the two hijabi students with the more sensationalist images of women in niqab. Only in UK14, the moderator speaks about '*Islamist* attacks', '*Islamic terrorists'*, a 'confrontation with *radical Islam*', the '*Islamic violence* from Paris' and 'the threat of *Islamic radicalism'* as the same phenomenon. Many politicians show an identical lack of specialised knowledge as they often muddle Salafism, jihadism, Islamism, social conservatism in Muslim-majority societies or Islamic law. Illustratively, Černochová (ODS, UK13) casually associates the conspiratorial process of the "Islamisation of Europe" with the state of "Islam in Czechia" as one and the same: "I would be glad if a roundtable was convened, maybe even with representatives of the Muslim communities, on the topic of the Islamisation of Europe, on the topic of Islam in the Czech Republic". Černochová is particularly confrontational about Islam and serves under a party generally hostile to Muslims. However, the quotation illustrates the deep penetration of Islamophobia into political 'common sense', as it assumes Muslim leaders' willingness to engage in dialogue with the state over an Islamophobic conspiracy theory manufactured by the West European far right. This lack of rigour and expertise remains virtually unchallenged and, thus, Islamophobic tropes often frame the debates. For instance, a November 2014 debate on public radio bore the title "Is Islam the biggest threat to Western civilisation? Experts totally disagree" (dvojka.rozhlas.cz, 2014).

Overall, speakers generally reproduce the representational structure described above. Arguments against Muslim migration or tolerating Islamic practices rely on cherry picking from a jumble of 'Muslim'-related topics, thus reinforcing collective responsibility, Otherisation and threatening stereotypes. Therefore, some politicians argue for only welcoming refugees who are Christian (i.e. like 'us') since 'Europe' cannot easily incorporate 'Muslim culture' (Jermanová, ANO, UK16) or because there are other 'Muslims' who commit jihadist attacks in France (Němcová, ODS, UK7). With a mixture of Islamophobic assumptions (many ingrained into political 'common sense') and limited specialised knowledge, mainstream politicians seem to navigate this confusion seamlessly. However, as the mainstream expands the limits of acceptable

discourse, the far right profits from dispensing with costly concealing strategies that would allow them to promote Islamophobic messages through the cracks. They can simply refer to the confused debate 'out there' to make the case that 'Muslims' are dangerous, as the following vignette illustrates.

Vignette 1*. How the muddle in the 'Muslim' topic accommodates the far right's rhetoric*

A bloc aired on 31 October 2014 under the assimilationist headline "The radicalisation of Muslims" (UK6) hosted two members of a parliamentary committee on defence: Ivan Gabal (KDU-ČSL) and Martin Lank (Dawn). The debate's triggering event was a much-hyped paragraph contained in the recently published 2013 Military Intelligence Annual Report. The paragraph in that original document (which had assessed the risk of terrorism in Czechia as "very low") reports the intelligence agency's monitoring of al-Qaeda's online activities, accusing this organisation of "spreading […] jihadist ideologies among Muslim communities in Europe, including in the Czech Republic" (Ministerstvo obrany České republiky, 2014, p. 17). Later in the document, *there are no further mentions of Czechia in connection to terrorism* but general claims about the possible security risks resulting from jihadist activities at the European level. Despite this, the moderator introduces this report's findings by announcing at the beginning of the bloc that "the terrorist organisation al-Qaeda is spreading its ideology in Czechia much more than before" and misrepresents the report's warnings at the general European level as actual threats to Czechia. Similarly scandalising misinterpretations of this report's paragraph made headlines in other Czech dailies (iDNES.cz & ČTK, 2014).

This discussion occurs in the context of security concerns about the rise of IS and the war in Ukraine which the Czech media covered extensively. Moreover, jihadist terrorist attacks by radicalised individuals who supported IS had taken place in Ottawa (22 October – covered in the 23 October UK show), Melbourne (23 September) and Brussels (24 May), and by other radicalised jihadists in Woolwich, England (May 2013). (In UK6, Gabal mentions unspecified attacks in these cities' corresponding four countries.) These security concerns coincided with rising Islamophobic politics across Europe (for instance, the infamous anti-Islam PEGIDA movement had first marched through Dresden's streets a few weeks before this debate), including in Czechia (see 4.2.2.b.), and a reinvigoration of the European radical right following the 2008 crisis. In Czechia, two weeks before this bloc aired, a mysterious explosion at an ammunition depot in Vrbětice, later identified as an act of Russian sabotage, had fuelled security anxieties. Fears of terrorism and war (see 4.4.1.) converged with a national media ecosystem displaying an Islamophobic bias and a domestic intensification of Islamophobic politics throughout 2014.[55] Despite conversations on 'refugees' still being at an embryonic stage, proposals for regulating Islamic institutions and symbols had been publicly discussed. UK6 confronted the views of Gabal, a well-known sociologist and a tolerant voice within KDU-ČSL, and Lank, a fresh face from the radical-right Dawn, which was progressively profiling itself as a blatantly Islamophobic party.

[55] From the April raid of Islamic institutions to Islamophobic campaigns during the May EU elections, Zeman's recurrent Islamophobic provocations, ODS and Dawn doubling down on an Islamophobic agenda, mainstream politicians fighting the Ombudswoman for defending hijabi students, opposition to the complete institutionalisation of the Centre of Muslim Communities or the rising popularity of IvČRN.

Before the debate begins, the moderator presents viewers with key takeaways from the report over a sequence of video shots of Czech Muslims uneventfully praying at a mosque, as well as women in hijab cooking at home or playing with their children in the park. When the video finishes, the moderator introduces the debating MPs over a headline reading ‘The radicalisation of Muslims’. The video-reportage and headline effectively associate regular Czech Muslims engaged in mundane activities and ‘Muslims’, generally, with the al-Qaeda threat pulled out of the report. This recontextualisation of the original report frames the ensuing debate, which will touch upon the fears of European Muslims turning into ‘radicals’, ‘Islamists’ or, worse, ‘terrorists’. While Gabal, who nonetheless reproduces some Islamophobic tropes, sporadically tries introducing anti-inflammatory topics (like Czechs/Europeans inherent tolerance and the fight against corruption), the moderator and Lank stir the debate back towards ‘the death of multiculturalism’ or the radicalisation of Muslims in Western Europe. This discussion looks set to tackle the concern of ‘Muslims’ in Europe not integrating and, instead, radicalising, regardless of the Military Intelligence Annual Report contents.

Lank (Dawn) answers the first question about how worried Czechs should be about the activities of al-Qaeda and ‘radical Islamists’:

Martin Lank (Dawn):
1 Well, I think that it’s definitely not good to underestimate [these activities].
2 And I am only reminding you that for our Dawn movement, it really comes
3 as no surprise that it came to this because already in Spring, before the
4 elections to the European Parliament, we warned of the dangers of
5 radical Islam and religious fanatics. At that time, everyone demonised us
6 and said we are xenophobes. Right now, basically, across the political
7 spectrum one can hear almost the same opinion which we had
8 expressed. So, now I am just waiting until someone says “well, that
9 Okamura [*CGdT: party leader]* was right back then” or “we are also
10 xenophobes, then”. But they won’t really say so. Some colleagues even
11 tell me but, publicly, none of them will. In any case, I’m happy that they’re
12 talking about it somehow and that this topic is starting to open because,
13 as the experiences from abroad show, it is a matter of time, I am afraid.

To this, the moderator reacts by addressing Lank’s interlocutor:

Lukáš Dolanský (moderator)
14 Ivan Gabal, is it a matter of time or, according to you, is it something which
15 somehow has surfaced, and we are just afraid to talk about it?

When representing ‘Muslims’, Lank does two important things. First, he represents them through indeterminations (‘it came to this’, line 3), impersonalisations (‘the experiences from abroad’, l.13) and supressing/backgrounding their agency (they are presumably the ones in ‘it is a matter of time’ [before they do X, which worries Lank], l.13). Second, (a) al-Qaeda and ‘radical Islamists’ are associated with: (b) “the danger [*impersonalisation*] of radical Islam and religious fanatics” (ll.4-5) about which Dawn warned before the European elections; (c) the targets of, reportedly, allegedly xenophobic rhetoric by Dawn and other (indetermined) politicians (ll.5-10);

(d) “the experiences from abroad” (l.13). Furthermore, Lank legitimises his party position on ‘Muslims’ through the topos of authority:

> Topos/warrant: if an authority says something is right or needs to be done, so be it.
> Arguments: Across the political spectrum, (presumably mainstream) politicians (‘one can hear’ [*backgrounding,* l.7], ‘some colleagues’ [*indetermination,* l.10]) are saying what Dawn used to say, for which Dawn (an emerging pariah party) had been demonised as xenophobic.
> Conclusion: Dawn’s previous messaging on ‘Muslims’ was not xenophobic because diverse authoritative (i.e. mainstream) politicians now support it.

Lank strategically blurs the agency of ‘Muslims’ to avoid accusations of Islamophobia/xenophobia while conveniently tapping on Islamophobic discourses familiar to viewers (for instance, “as the experiences from abroad show, it is a matter of time” → the ‘death of multiculturalism’ discourse – later fleshed out in the interview by both politicians, albeit asymmetrically). His association of ‘Muslim’ actors includes an interdiscursive reference to those mentioned in Dawn’s 2014 campaign for the European Parliament. During that campaign, Dawn replicated the infamous 2007 Swiss People’s Party white-sheep-kicking-out-a-black-sheep poster, replacing the original text by “Support for families, not the unadaptables [*CGdT: racist euphemism for Romani people]*. Jobs for our people, not the immigrants.” (Kostlán, 2014) A 2014 publication on Dawn’s Facebook page did indeed associate ‘religious fanatics’ with other undesired actors: “We don’t want in Czechia any unadaptable immigrants, unadaptable minorities or religious fanatics […] we want to protect the Czech, Moravian and Silesian character of our republic, which was built over centuries by our ancestors” (Ibid.) – this latter line on ancestors is paraphrased by Lank in UK6. Not only does Lank attempt to normalise this blatantly racist rhetoric, ostensibly legitimised by mainstream politicians’ approval, but he is associating “unadaptable migrants”, with al-Qaeda or ‘Muslims in Western Europe’.

After Lank’s intervention, the moderator (ll.14-15) takes this multifarious confusion of ‘Muslim’ topics as an ‘it’ that is thrown onto Gabal (“is it a matter of time or […] we are just afraid to talk about it?”). However, by this point, it is difficult for viewers to clearly understand what issue is being debated – except for ‘the Muslim threat’.

Later in the interview, Gabal (KDU-ČSL) celebrates European commitments to diversity and, praising the successful integration of migrants in Czechia, remains optimistic about Czechia’s ability to accommodate Muslim migrants. However, Lank reacts through a hasty generalisation which invalidates multiculturalism based on radical Muslim immigrants who want to live according to their own rules and what tyrannical jihadists allegedly write on the website ‘Sharia for Czechia’. This implicit association of all ‘Muslims’ with these groups is later contested by Gabal:

> Ivan Gabal (KDU-ČSL)
> But, in our society, we don’t have such communities. That is clearly a made-up problem!
>
> Lukáš Dolanský (moderator)

> OK, well, but you [previously] spoke about, for example, Germany. There, that happened.
>
> Gabal's "such communities" was referencing Lank's previous Islamophobic association (i.e. immigrants who want to live according to their rules and the 'Sharia for Czechia' website). However, the moderator disagrees by equidistantly referencing Gabal's previous words on Germany. Gabal's exact words had been "in Germany, the Turkish minority has remained completely on the margins and became radicalised". The moderator's retort again associates 'the radicalised Turkish minority' (an Islamophobic assimilation) from Gabal with the Islamophobic association by Lank. As the initial framing of the debate anticipated, this anxious discussion casts a doubt over most 'Muslims', generalising from the alleged actions of a fuzzy association of actors.
>
> Under stricter journalistic rigour, this could have been a discussion about the risks of jihadists' (or al-Qaeda's) activities to Czech national security. Instead, viewers are left confused with indeterminate appeals to 'that thing' which is threatening, about which Dawn warned in its (xenophobic) campaign, which 'some politicians' think in private or 'which happened in Germany'. This indeterminacy, strategically fed by Lank and accepted by the moderator, reinforces the representation of 'Muslims' as a multifaceted, dangerous social actor.

7.2. 'Muslims in the West' as 'problems' and how 'our Muslims' are different

Much of Czech politicians' Islamophobic discourse reinforces a widespread negative representation of the West European experience with Muslims. The core of the argument was synthesised in a 2017 interview for *Die Presse* by PM Bohuslav Sobotka (ČSSD): "when we look at the problems in other European countries, we don't want more Muslims in Czechia" (Ultsch, 2017). This section analyses some of the common discursive features that feed into this narrative. Additionally, it also challenges the appeasing representation of Czech Muslims as uniquely unproblematic for portraying national communities as exceptions to the rule.

The Czech critique of Western multiculturalism largely surged after a centre-right positioning against European integration, growing Euroscepticism and the subsequent proliferation of declinist narratives in the late 2000s. Inherent to most conservatisms, in its Czech variant, declinism identifies Western malaises and self-destructive impulses to challenge the notion that Czechia should emulate 'the West' (Slačálek, 2021). While in many West European countries, visible actors challenge the validity of such narratives (from lived experience, ideology or identification), Czech political elites seemed largely ineffective or unmotivated at doing so. 'Muslims' had been relatively irrelevant for national politics but, consequently, so had been challenges to scandalous representations of 'Muslims in the West'. By the time such representations became politically relevant in 2014, they were already too embedded in social imaginaries and political 'common sense'.

Negative 'Muslims in the West' narratives appear across parties. Even in 2008, when 'Muslims' had not yet become a civilisational enemy, the moderate social democrat

Zaorálek (ČSSD) employs in the lower house similar strategies to those from 2014-2015 (impersonalisations, backgrounding):

> I have always believed that the Czech Republic should avoid the mistakes made in the rest of the countries of Western Europe. I am thinking of what happened in France and Germany, countries in which relatively vast ghettos of citizens – Turks, Arabs – emerged. There, whole suburbs in which there are nowadays relatively big dramatic social problems were established. In France, there are burnt cars. Those countries, visibly with difficulties, are searching for the ability to manage the torrent [*příval*] of those new ethnicities, cultures, nations. (PSP, 2008)

Representations of 'Muslims in the West' often foster dehumanisation by abstracting the latter as 'problems' (for instance, "when we look at the problems in other European countries"). The nature of these 'problems' often remains excluded or vague. Instead, Czech politicians mostly encourage audiences to 'look at the problems in France'. A few colour the representation through vague appeals to common tropes like ghettos, burned cars, terrorist attacks or 'unrest'. 'Muslims' are activated as either being or causing these 'problems' while ethnic majorities (often impersonalised with a country name like 'France') are passivised as 'facing', 'suffering' or, at least, activated as 'having' or being 'unable to cope' with 'the problems'. Nevertheless, associations of migrants with social problems (van Dijk, 1987) or their outright abstraction as 'problems' (van Leeuwen, 2013) are common in xenophobic, particularly Islamophobic, rhetoric across Europe.

'When we look at the West' claims rely on a rich repertoire of topoi and fallacies. Given the penetration of the narrative, the dominant topos is that of reality (i.e. since 'problems' exist, we need to avoid them). Politicians appeal to the eyes of audiences as corroborators (i.e. producers) of empirical truth. They do so by allocating 'us' (Czechs) the role of witnesses through verbs of sight ('when we look at', 'what we see in') or, less frequently, activating the 'problems' as 'showing themselves up' (*se ukazují, se objebují*). In a talking head from a press conference, vice-premier Bělobrádek (KDU-ČSL, OVM6) justified filtering future refugees by religion in positivistic terms, as the presence of different faiths brings with it "diverse risks – which is somehow an empirical fact [*empirie*] that is relatively easy to find out [there]".[56] As Černoch (Dawn, UK10) contends, this reality is easily accessible to the naked eye: "it is enough to look abroad – and this is nothing secret –, […] to look at the situation in Belgium, France, Britain, in the […] Nordic countries". Commanding to 'look' encourages audiences to retrieve memories of the disproportionately catastrophic mediatised representations of 'Muslims' circulated on newspapers, social media or political discourse.

Complementing the premise that 'we can see problems in the West' is the one that 'the West has refused to look at its problems for a long time'. Ergo, 'we' or 'our

[56] Although the broadcasted talking head excludes mentions on confession, the quotation is introduced by the moderator as an argument supporting Bělobrádek's premise that "Various confessions […] bring various risks". The audio records of that press conference (vlada.gov.cz, 2015, min. 12:30-12:50) confirm that the quotation refers to the claim attributed to Bělobrádek by the moderator.

(mainstream) politicians' should be 'looking at' or 'talking about the problems' if we want to avoid them. This is how the topos of *responsibility* is built in. Politicians again rely on verbs of sight to normatively claim that 'we should not look away', and recurrently employ the ostrich metaphor 'we cannot bury our heads in the sand'. Consequently, speakers often command fellow politicians to 'look at reality' or call it into being ('we should call things by their name'). While, in the West European context, it is usually the far right who accuses national mainstream politicians of blindness and muteness in the face of the 'Islamisation' of their societies (Brubaker, 2017), in the Czech context, mainstream politicians launch identical accusations against West European mainstream politicians. Consequently, West European far-right rhetoric becomes legitimised by the Czech mainstream but against their Western counterparts. Therefore, the normalisation of uncivil rhetoric should not only be studied as originating within but also across national borders.

As argued, the nature of the 'reality' or 'problems' that require attention is a vague and multi-themed entanglement. Thus, speakers can selectively invoke those who 'have been able to see the problems before us' and define (or not) what elements of the heterogeneous 'Muslim' menace demand attention. The 'problems' that 'we' need to look at are, for Tejc, issues of cohabitation; for Robejšek, a 'Clash of Civilisations'; and for Lank, a zero-sum battle for cultural domination:

> The problem is that eyes were often closed in front of those problems [in countries like France or Britain]. Politicians tried to say "this is not a problem", and it… that problem, it was. It escalated. And those who felt it like a problem, that means, those who vote, those who perceived cohabitation concretely – of concrete people on a concrete street with concrete people –, then, of course, started to turn their backs on the politicians who were in charge. That means, they stopped going to vote or started voting for extreme parties. (Tejc, ČSSD, UK10)
>
> The good Mr [Samuel] Huntington […] was obviously right in his assessment and analyses. And we, in Europe, try to behave as if we had not read that book [*CGdT: The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order]* and as if we didn't see the world around us. (Robejšek, political scientist,[57] UK15)
>
> If we are going to close our eyes in advance, then, what will happen is that we will be endlessly retreating more and more. When space for many cultures is created, then, in the end, what happens is that the most aggressive [culture] will simply win and we will suddenly realise that we have nowhere to retreat to. (Lank, Dawn, UK6)

Additional rhetorical tools implicitly or explicitly complement the 'Muslims in the West' narrative. These are not necessarily less frequent but subsidiaries of the overarching topos of reality as, without the ontological acceptance of the 'problems', all other

[57] Although not a political candidate in 2015, Robejšek was then a high-profile political commentator who, in this bloc, debates with the Minister of Foreign Affairs. In 2016, Robejšek founded the short-lived conservative party The Realists with a markedly Islamophobic programme.

arguments lose persuasiveness. Through the topos of *history*, politicians uphold that Czechs should learn from the past disappointments of West European states, whose politicians also stand as *authorities* whose actual experiences with 'Muslims' should be listened to (in UK11, Němcová, ODS, details a visit to Czech MPs from Dutch politicians who lamented how their "assumptions [about Muslims' integration] had been fatally mistaken" as a premise to claim that "we need to be very careful" and that "the question of religion needs to be publicly named"). Most arguments are permeated by the topoi of *danger* (greater Muslim presence should be avoided because 'in Europe' there are six hundred women who underwent FGM because of 'Islamic reasons', Hannig, SZR, UK2) and *culture* (in UK16, Jermanová, ANO, claims that Christian refugees should be given preference because "Europe has its culture and […] we are not able to incorporate all cultures into ours").

The 'Muslims in the West' narrative is further fed by fallacies which far-right politicians exploit, like the recurrent *slippery slope* (in the UK6 extract above, Lank, Dawn, claimed that the more 'cultures' there are within a space, the more likely the most aggressive one will try to impose itself); *false causality* (in UK16, Jermanová, ANO: "Switzerland does not have this problem because they do not have the historical connection to the Arab world that France has"); or *hasty generalisations* (in UK2, Hannig, SZR: "[W]e definitely don't need some like those who are in France, in Paris, someone who just comes here in order to destroy, burn cars and so on").

The topos of *numbers* is another central figure in the 'Muslims in the West' argumentation and no speaker ever suggests that a large increase in Muslim population could benefit Czechia. In essence, problems exist in the West because the number of Muslims is high, whereas those problems do not (yet) exist in Czechia because of the low number of Muslims (a rhetorical anteroom to the *slippery slope* fallacy):

> In comparison with West European countries, there are almost no Muslim immigrants here. If we compared it to France, a million Muslims [*CGdT: roughly 9.5% of the Czech population]* would have to live in our country. […] That would be a problem. We simply do not have any real problems with Muslims now. (Komárek, ANO, UK11)

Illustratively, when senator Bublan (ČSSD) was asked where the suspects from the Charlie Hebdo attacks could have fled to (UK9), he speculated that the attackers could be, rather than in Czechia, somewhere in Spain, Great Britain or other states "where the Arab community is relatively stronger [*silnější*]". Identically, when interviewed after the Madrid 2004 bombings, Bublan, then the director of the Czech foreign intelligence service, claimed that "the Arab community in Spain is also very strong [*silná*], thus there are opportunities for preparing such an action" (Straka, 2004). Despite being a politician who often tries to disassociate most Muslims from the actions of individual terrorists, over the decade, Bublan makes the argument that a populous (collectivised) national 'Arab community' heightens the chances of organising acts of terrorism. This argument about numbers differs from the strategic choices that jihadist groups took in establishing cells in Western Europe over the 1990s and 2000s. Klausen (2021,

Chapter 5) finds that al-Qaeda consolidated its European network after being largely disarticulated in the US in the aftermath of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. The reasons for establishing different cells (mostly in large cities) varied, depending on the potential support from already settled communities of refugees from Islamist revolutionary groups (for instance, from the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria in France), proximity to North Africa, the sometimes-fortuitous decisions of the leadership or favourable migration and counterterrorism policies.[58] Furthermore, jihadists did not simply sprout from populous European Arab communities. At first, they came largely as migrants (relying on favourable paths for asylum), being recruited from particular ethnic and political backgrounds.

Regarding numbers, some politicians employ a topos which I will label *exceptionality* to reassure citizens: 'because Muslims in Czechia are exceptionally unproblematic, we should not share West Europeans' fears'. Minister of Interior Chovanec (ČSSD, OVM2), invites a feeling of safety based on the unique 'calmness' (a historically desirable value in Czech/-oslovak politics) attributed to the collectivised 'community':

> [R]egarding the Muslim community in the Czech Republic, we are in a unique situation since […] it's a markedly calm [*klidná*] one which emerged here under different conditions than those [communities] in France and Germany.

This exceptionality, which spokespeople of Czech Islamic organisations understandably like to promote, is counterproductive in that it presupposes that the immaculate record of Czech Muslim communities can become tainted by the kinds of 'Muslims' who migrate to Western Europe. Although some could also want to promote 'Czech Muslims' as a positive sub-group for challenging negative stereotypes of all 'Muslims', this is not the intention of politicians. According to Sobotka (ČSSD, OVM7), Czechs should rest assured about the risks of jihadist actions in the country as, with the present status quo, their exceptional 'community' is not *yet* radicalised:

> It is important to inform you that, here, in Czechia, we have a relatively small Muslim community. This has different sources in its origin than the numerous Muslim communities in countries like, for example, Germany or France. [The Czech] Muslim community is not yet radicalised.

The topos of numbers sometimes hints at veiled ethnocultural demographic anxieties as a large Muslim presence is expected to change the future of 'Czech' cultural and genetic heritage (as expressed by some in 5.3.2.c., 6.1.1.a.).[59] For Chovanec (ČSSD, OVM2):

> A second issue concerns the difference between the birth-rate in European countries and that from countries which are, de facto, Islamic. Well, that

[58] For instance, according to Klausen (2021), the London base, which coordinated the European network, was established because of Bin Laden's connections and family assets in the city, high press freedom and the British willingness to host militants from former colonies if they restrained from attacking British targets.
[59] For similar demographic concerns, see Černochová (ODS, 2015).

> imbalance between the birth-rates in Europe, in the old Europe, and in Muslim countries also doesn't fill me with big optimism.

7.3. Pre-empting the far right's advance

Politicians often refer to their responsibility to tackle an impending far-right threat. This assessment derived from a domestic crisis of representation, which had pushed politics towards populism, and a pessimism about the West European experience with multiculturalism (see 4.1.). Mainstream politicians promoted the racist belief that the presence of 'Muslims' in Europe leads to culture-based interethnic conflict (see 7.2.) and, inevitably, the subsequent rise of far-right 'extremists' who capitalise on these grievances. Their allegedly pre-emptive strategy mostly involves antagonising Muslims before the far right claims exclusivity over this agenda. Since this strategy's rationale heavily depends on the 'Muslims in the West' representations analysed above, antidotes to potential far-right gains again include 'not burying our heads in the sand' or 'calling things by their name'. Similarly, in this cautionary tale, Western (multiculturalist) elites have refused to 'see' or 'speak' about the 'reality' which their 'populist'/'extremist'/'fascist' counterparts reportedly have:

> I think that if we want to take the wind out of the populists' sails, then we need to call things by their right name and must start having this discussion seriously and not hide our heads in the sand (Chovanec, ČSSD, OVM3)

Rather than being novel, this argument had appeared in previous discussions on migration. In May 2002, ODS wanted to challenge a ČSSD government project to attract migrant workers to tackle demographic decline. Using the context (Jean-Marie Le Pen had just notoriously made it to the second round of the French presidential election), Ivan Langer (ODS) claimed in an interview: "we fear that a second Le Pen or Sládek [*CGdT: leader of the then ailing Czech radical right SPR–RSČ*] might emerge in this country. Those [politicians] emerged because the problem [of migration] had remained taboo for a long time." (MF Dnes, 2002) However, proponents of this argument do not seek to hold a critical discussion on integration policy but rather employ this strategy to justify the 'acceptable' racism of the mainstream against that formulated by dangerous 'fascists' (see Wodak, 2015b, Chapter 3).

Ultimately, the political mainstream actualises the 'problems' caused by 'Muslims' in the purported effort to halt the greater fascist evil. First, vague appeals to the 'problems' guarantee that audiences in agreement cherry pick from the myriad of issues entangled into the 'Muslim' topic. Second, by attributing to the national electorate the ability to 'see', these discursively constructed 'problems' move from alleged or speculated to witnessed. Finally, by conferring on the far right a natural advantage in accessing this reality, the latter's reports about the 'problems' gain veracity. Counterproductively, this actualisation expands the borders of acceptable discourse to the benefit of far-right actors. Furthermore, it favours populist identifications (out-of-touch tolerant elites versus citizens seeing the 'Muslim' threat), based on which politicians like Černoch (Dawn, UK10) can refute accusations of racism or nativism as elitist:

> When we look at the reason [why preferences for what Marek Benda – *ODS discussant* – called 'extremist' parties grow], that reason is in Europe where, actually, parties that are labelled as xenophobic racists or are ultranationalist receive nowadays greater and greater preferences. In some cases it's true [that such labels are fitting] but, on the other hand, a million and a half people in France, thousands in Germany, clearly manifest that they want politicians who'll care about them and, among those parties, the fact that Dawn or ANO entered the Chamber of Deputies, that's simply a clear sign that those parties that were here [before] were doing something wrong and people simply want someone to start really caring for them.

Against pressures to conform to the dominant mainstream assessment that 'Muslims' cause 'problems', several politicians do raise concerns about the dangers of fearmongering and call for preventing panic. Even Šarapatka (Dawn, UK8), under pressure from the moderator, confronts his party leader's provocation to walk pigs near mosques and boycott kebab shops: "Such simplifying appeals as those heard in that pronouncement can have an impact on, simply, some of the lowest instincts […] and can, essentially, raise some sort of xenophobic atmosphere in society". Nevertheless, in a climate of growing populism, those encouraging fellow politicians to reject fearmongering risk being cast as out-of-touch elites, since the 'problems' were widely actualised across parties. During this period, this populist strategy was particularly promoted by ODS but during the 'refugee crisis', it would become far more extended (see 8.3.). Condemning an IvČRN protest, Bublan (ČSSD, UK13) urges viewers to avoid falling into the terrorists' trap of turning against fellow Muslim citizens. In response, Černochová (ODS), who had joined that protest, accuses Bublan of being out of touch through an *argumentum ad populum* that posits that the content of 'fears' (regardless of their correspondence with reality) should guide exclusionary policies towards actual Muslims:

> I don't know how it is for the senator here. Whether he also receives 50, 70 e-mails each day like I do. They're not spam. I receive actual e-mails from individual people who turn to me, as a deputy [*CGdT: MP from the lower house, more visible than Bublan's senate*], with their concerns.

References to an overlooked general will function within the climate left by a period of low political trust and satisfaction (2010-2013) (Horáková, 2020; Linek, 2016). From the opposition, centre-right ODS had seen its options plumet and, thus, had stronger motivations for claiming representativeness from the governing ČSSD or ANO. Another ODS MP (Němcová, UK11) accuses discussants of elitism after the latter had blamed voters' illiberal attitudes for limiting policy options towards refugees. First, Komárek (ANO) acknowledged a "certain degree of, perhaps not xenophobia, but a certain insularity [*zápecnictví*]" in the population. Immediately afterwards, Chvojka (ČSSD) metaphorically compared Islamophobia to an (opportunistic) political instrument (a melody): "If I wanted to play some ominous chords, of course, I would then say that it's about those Muslims and that 'Muslims no!'… but I just refuse to do that". Němcová (ODS) skilfully dispelled their accusations:

> Regarding that 'insularity'. I would reject that word in this case and think that it's a natural and normal fear from people who see what goes on in the world. They see radicalisation, especially in Muslim countries, and the risks this brings. […]. But allow me a small observation regarding what 'to assimilate' means. Some time ago, I had the opportunity to speak to people who came from the Netherlands on an official visit to our parliament. They told us "We were fatally mistaken in our assumptions when we welcomed refugees from third countries. We thought two things. First, that those who are more capable, more active, will integrate, will learn something here – we teach them a craft, entrepreneurship and so on, and, with those skills, they will return and economically lift up their countries of origin. And the second assumption was that those who will not start in that way, will integrate themselves and slowly step into the majority society [*majoritní společnost*] and accept their rules". They said, "those two assumptions were fatally mistaken". This happened right after the murder of that filmmaker, van Gogh, who described the situation of women in the Muslim world. That's why I think we need to be very careful. That the question of religion needs to be publicly named. That, if we fear that the Muslim world brings with it risks for Western civilisation, we should not make a secret out of it.

Němcová legitimises 'fears' based on their alleged 'naturalness' and 'normality', rather than resulting from a defect in Czechs' character ('insularity') or a mood instilled by an opportunistic melody ('ominous chords'). She relies on the familiar topoi of reality ('people see what goes on in Muslim countries'), authority ('the Dutch delegation told us') or history ('Muslims failed to assimilate in the Netherlands before'). Furthermore, she associates the murder of Theo van Gogh[60] with alleged failures of Muslim immigrants to integrate (attribution of collective responsibility). The assassination is mentioned in connection to the filmmaker's attempt at showing 'us' reality ("described the situation of women in the Muslim world"); thus, elevating the director's fictional short film 'Submission: Part I' from an attack on Islam by two well-known activists (Ayaan Hirsi Ali and van Gogh) to documentary evidence about a collectivised 'Muslim world'. In Němcová's account, the responsible politician is the one who, unlike her discussants but like van Gogh, names and avoids concealing the reality that people can see.

Moderators further embolden Islamophobic rhetoric by regularly hyping the advance of the far right and growth in society's 'fears'. References to 'fears' often background agents and objects, with moderators referring to "emotions on the streets" (UK16), "the Czech debate about refugees" (UK7), how the Charlie Hebdo shootings "have awaken something in Europe" (UK10) or how "after the terror in Paris and Belgium, fear actually arrived not only in Western Europe but, also, in Czechia" (UK13). Indeed, the representation of these 'fears' will become a central feature of political discourse onwards, particularly during the 'crisis' (see 8.3.) Lay interpretations link 'fears' to rising

[60] Dutch filmmaker and columnist known for his criticism of Islam and Muslim migration. In 2004, he was assassinated by a Dutch Islamist extremist of Moroccan descent, sparking international debate.

preference for ‘extremist parties’ (a hypothesis never contested or corroborated with survey data), adding pressure on mainstream parties: “don’t you think that the government contributes to the radicalisation of the majority population with your approval this week of the welcoming of fifteen Syrian families as a humanitarian gesture?” (moderator, OVM5).

7.4. Migrants on the move as a source of danger

‘Muslims’ became suddenly relevant to Czech policy as policymakers had to respond to the 2014+ increase in asylum applications and irregular arrivals to Europe from Muslim-majority countries. As these were not hypothetical ‘Muslims’ or Muslims settled in Western Europe, politicians wanting to promote restrictive policies towards these specific Muslims had to represent them as dangerous or unworthy of help. This section analyses strategies employed to reject welcoming these actual Muslims in Czech soil: a) impersonalisation and backgrounding; b) proposing (Islamophobic) filtering processes; c) offering to help abroad; d) representing Czechia as small and lacking capacity; and e) attributing to migrants selfish material interests which make them unworthy of asylum.

To reduce empathy for and increase fear of migrants, impersonalisations were often employed. Muslim migrants can be abstracted as policy objects rather than humans: “there are risks in migration which are a timebomb for which we are not ready” (Gazdík, STAN/TOP 09, UK16), “European states are facing far stronger migratory pressures” (Sobotka, ČSSD, OVM6). Water metaphors like wave (*vlna*) or influx (*příliv*, also meaning tide) are another popular form of threatening abstraction. Migrants are also impersonated as an approaching mass: “they’re flocking towards us” (Jermanová, ANO, UK7), “Turkey is stopping that massive flight of refugees towards us” (Jermanová, ANO, UK16). It is extremely rare to hear a politician arguing to reject, literally, ‘refugees’, as the latter are, when not impersonalised, backgrounded. However, Jermanová (ANO, UK16) proposes that “we should figure out how to do it so that we wouldn’t have them [refugees] here and so that, in case we had some refugees, we would be able to return them”, exposing poor knowledge about asylum law.

Calls for filtering undesirable migrants generally present ‘Muslims’ as more dangerous than non-Muslim refugees. Arguing for a no-Muslims policy can be done implicitly by tapping into well-known tropes. Pavel Svoboda (KDU-ČSL, UK2) defends a ‘selective immigration’ that excludes those who do not want to respect human rights or the equality between men and women. Similarly phrased party documents from the time target ‘Muslims’ more explicitly (Kopecký, 2014a). Němcová (ODS, UK11) assembles references to culturally invasive, socially deviant, and potential jihadist grandchildren without uttering the word ‘Muslim’ (i.e. backgrounding):

> In the future, I think the Czech government should choose those people which it welcomes, of course. It’s the same principle as when you welcome someone into your house. You decide with whom you are going to live or not. So, [we should] very cautiously watch whether these are people who are able to take up our culture, [and] have the certain degree of tolerance

> which we require from them in order to live here in a normal way… so that they don't create ghettos which, in the second or third generation progressively turn their backs on that society which had accepted them.

It is never clear how refugee filtering should formally function. In January 2015, under the coordination of the ČSSD-run Ministry of Interior, the government announced a scheme (marketed as a 'humanitarian gesture') to welcome fifteen Syrian refugee families whose children required medical treatment. The Ministry's press release assures that a special task force, in cooperation with the ČSSD-run Ministry of Foreign Affairs, will be choosing refugees according to their, *inter alia*, "degree of integration potential" and "religion" (Nováková, 2015). These requisites resulted in ČSSD MPs uncomfortably trying to convince moderators in the corpus that the document did not explicitly exclude 'Muslims'. However, this exclusion is evident from the context. Already in a November 2014 interview, the ČSSD Minister of Interior had advocated for a referendum on whether to accept refugees. According to Chovanec, it was relevant for his ministry to know whether arriving refugees would be "ethnic Christians" and encourages caution as the long stay of these refugees could "influence the Czech space *[český prostor]*" (Straka, 2014, min. 12:30). In that same interview, Chovanec suggested that some refugees could be IS fighters, and backgrounds 'Muslims' behind an impersonalisation (West European 'islets of instability') easily decoded by the audience as 'Muslim ghettos':

> Islets of instability could emerge around them. When we look at France, where in those suburbs in Paris cars burn every night and so on and so forth… let's be prudent with the way in which we approach this question.

Two alternatives to filtering are to help refugees in/near their countries of origin or allowing them to stay in Czechia only until relevant armed conflicts conclude. Regarding the former, a few discussants encourage helping Lebanon or Turkey accommodate refugees, or demand that Gulf States shelter refugees from a 'similar culture'. At this stage there is no qualified debate about the composition of migration flows, although, progressively, some start suggesting a preponderance of 'economic' migrants. Some politicians adopt the familiar prism of development aid, prescribing raising people out of poverty and teaching entrepreneurial skills to tackle the root causes of migration. Gajdůšková (ČSSD, UK7) defends the view that "we should mainly help so that there is calm [*klid*] in that region and, when there isn't, so that we help those people there. It's usually said, in vain, that rather than giving away fish, it's better to teach how to catch it". Helping in/near countries of origin is upheld through the topos of advantage *pro bono publico* (i.e. so that 'we' avoid the pressures from migration, and 'they' can prosper near their homes). Development aid as a solution remained particularly popular within ANO throughout the 'crisis' (Zahradník & Rosůlek, 2017):

> Europe is a relatively small continent which is highly densely populated. And immigrants who are flocking towards us [*hrnou se k nám*] – and due to understandable reasons – in essence, will slowly start displacing the traditional values and culture which exist here. The question is whether we

> should be solving the root cause rather than giving a home base to those immigrants, [and] instead, solve those problems through economic assistance, supporting entrepreneurship, trading with them and so on. (Jermanová, ANO, UK7)

Secondly, some may agree to welcome refugees only until 'the conflict is over' or 'there is calm in their region'. This premise relies again on a topos of advantage *pro bono publico* as 'refugees' are represented as wanting to return as soon as possible (regardless of possibilities to embed themselves into post-conflict contexts) and Czech cultural 'purity' as suffering from refugees' prolonged stay. Paradoxically, not offering refugees paths to citizenship would disincentivize efforts at integrating and increase the chances of marginalisation. For Chovanec (ČSSD, OVM4), a swift return is in refugees' interest "so that those people could return to their houses and would not be uprooted, so that we don't put them in an entirely foreign environment". For Jermanová (ANO, UK16):

> [I]f we receive those refugees onto our territory and they don't have a vision for return, then it will be hard for us to return them. And I should say that Europe should, first and foremost, defend its values and citizens at this point [*21/01/2015*] when they are under threat.

Another common premise for resisting welcoming refugees is that Czechia and, sometimes, 'Europe' are small, and that the Czech state has a shortage of facilities for refugees. Several politicians repeat that Czech asylum facilities can host up to 700 people and, thus, the number of (Middle Eastern) refugees should never exceed that capacity. This circular argument resembles that later used by Ivan Netik, the Slovak Minister of Interior, to reject Muslim refugees under the pretext that there were no mosques in Slovakia (BBC, 2015a).

No politician argued for expanding the capacity of existing facilities. This shortage of constructiveness reflects a perceived lack of political capital to propose solutions to the hypothesised issues of integration or accommodation of Muslim refugees. As the next section shows, politicians in the corpus, mostly in discursive risk management mode, neither argue that the Czech government can develop better integration policies nor that increasing budgets for such policies could result in socially desirable outcomes. Political solutions remain constrained to the limited existing capabilities or can be generous only if conducted abroad.

As in previous arguments, like the fixation with 'helping them over there' or the need to return 'once the war in their country is over', limited asylum facilities do not concern Ukrainian refugees. When arguing against accepting Middle Eastern refugees, some discussants raise *motu proprio* the existence and need to be prepared for the arrival of Ukrainian refugees. This strategy serves to dodge accusations of being anti-humanitarian as, unlike their burdensome and dangerous Middle Eastern counterparts, Ukrainian refugees are represented as adaptable and beneficial to the national economy. In OVM4, Chovanec (ČSSD) offers several hypocritical arguments to reject accepting Muslim refugees, like Czechia being legally exempt from processing asylum application as not being the first Schengen country of entry (despite

this also being the case for Ukrainians) or prioritising Christian refugees because of their higher integration potential (a discriminatory policy in breach of asylum law). Likewise, Chovanec rejects ‘mandatory quotas’ on the grounds that “Czechia does not currently have the capacity” (despite the absence of an agreed-upon allocation mechanism) while announcing that the government was ready to accept up to one hundred thousand Ukrainian refugees – about 1% of the Czech population and 62 times the number of refugees eventually allocated to Czechia for relocation in the ‘mandatory quotas’ (Nyzio, 2017). Advocating for Ukrainian refugees was less politically controversial but revealed a utilitarian conception of asylum policy. Despite their increasing presence across sectors, Ukrainians traditionally occupied low-skilled and low-paid jobs in Czechia (Leontiyeva, 2016). Hence, they were largely perceived as economically useful and, despite facing prejudices, culturally closer and not particularly threatening. Chovanec represented Ukrainians as a tried and tested national group:

> For a long time, Ukrainians have been active in our country. They have permanent residence here, they work here, they run businesses here. So, if the migrant wave from Ukraine rose, the Czech Republic, our institutions, will be justified in fearing that a certain number of Ukrainians will head all the way towards the territory of the Czech Republic.

Finally, a mark of unworthiness other than Muslimness progressively appears in the corpus, namely the exclusion of ‘economic migrants’ (sometimes ‘economic refugees’) from the protection reserved for however-defined genuine refugees. As previously mentioned, Jermanová (ANO, UK7) baselessly claimed that most refugees coming towards Europe are so-called ‘economic refugees’ who, for unnamed reasons, are predicted to drain state resources. Gazdík (STAN/TOP 09, UK16) asks viewers to differentiate refugees who are “in reality, economic refugees” from those who “flee based on a threat to their lives”; and Jermanová (ANO, UK19) establishes a similar distinction between deserving “political asylum-seekers” and those who “abuse the so-called political asylum”, “have nothing to do with political discrimination” and “look after their own economic interests”. At this historic early stage in Czech public debate about the institution of asylum, some lawmakers reduced the legal grounds for asylum to political persecution and imminent threats to one’s life deriving from armed conflict. The agency of potential refugees to declare their unwillingness or inability to feel safe in their countries of origin – a criterion of eligibility in, for instance, Czech subsidiary protection (Act on Asylum, 1999, §14a) – is absent from the conversation.

7.5. The failure of ‘multicultural society’ and desire for cultural assimilation

Politicians across ideologies, relying on negative representations of the West European experience, regularly declared multiculturalism (perceived as a Western import with no references made to Austria-Hungary) as mostly or wholly faulty. Previous programmatic commitments to multiculturalism from the left dissipated as members like Chvojka (ČSSD, UK12), PM Sobotka (ČSSD, OVM5) or Filip (KSČM, UK13) questioned whether multiculturalism could accommodate future Muslim

immigrants. Two tendencies mark the narrative about the failure of multiculturalism. First, multiculturalism is blamed for allowing the problematic aspects attributed to 'Muslim culture' to flourish unrestrainedly at the expense of 'Western culture'. For example, this MP argues for multiculturalism through a topos of advantage *pro bono nobis* ('we can learn from their culture') but also opposes it through the topoi of *culture* and *abuse* ('they can take advantage of our tolerance by damaging us with the arson-prone and murderous aspects of their culture'):

> I really like when Muslims pursue their culture and I can learn a lot about it. But when they go to burn something or, God forbid, murder someone in a horrible way, then they violate that right which, for me, is multicultural – even though Western civilisation particularly enforces it. Simply put, you don't kill. You don't harm others. If someone infringes this, then the state, the state apparatus must be hard, unequivocal. (Komárek, ANO, UK12)

Second, multiculturalism is often represented as a model promoting multi-ethnic societies and generous migration policies rather than an approach to migrant integration. Accordingly, the problem of multiculturalism is that, in the first place, it allows for the *presence* of members from cultures conflicting with the nationally sponsored one. Thus, the fact that Muslims reside in European countries is considered a shortcoming of multiculturalism. Chvojka (ČSSD, UK15) argues that, since "support for multiculturalism cannot be boundless […] maybe it cannot anymore be about boundlessly welcoming those people irrespective of what lifestyles they follow, which opinions they support or what lifestyle they push for". As Němcová (ODS, UK12) assures, multiculturalism has undoubtedly failed in its presumption that we should be open to everything and *everyone*:

> I think the project of multiculturalism in Europe, as it was conceived, has failed. We, as the Civic Democratic Party, even had a sort of special meeting about it already in 2010 in our Conference of Ideas congress. But maybe, whether we held that view is not so substantial. What is important is to look at, for example, Europe, when, in 2011, Angela Merkel, Sarkozy, David Cameron declared that, as it had been approached until then, such wide-open arms towards everything and everyone had totally failed.

Němcová reinforces her argument through intertextual references. First, the ODS' 2010 Conference of Ideas which she refers to, not only declared multiculturalism 'a dead concept' but produced a series of Islamophobic comments which were denounced by the Czech NGO Libertas Agency (Fialová & Horák, 2010). Despite ODS later rejecting, tongue in cheek, the claim that Muslims had been singled out in their deliberations, the strategic document resulting from that conference identifies as one of the great international risks to Czech security that "the free movement of people and immigrants, particularly from Islamic and African countries generates pressure on the cultural identity of our civilisation" (ODS, 2010). As Dawn did (see vignette 1), Němcová cites an older prophetic Islamophobic text to legitimise ODS as an authoritative party in 'Muslim' matters.

Němcová's representation of Western multiculturalism as a policy welcoming 'everything and everyone', which other politicians label 'multicultural society', had circulated for some time in Czech public discourse – heavily borrowing form the West European 'death of multiculturalism' discourse (see Chin, 2017, pp. 281–286). For instance, a moderator interviewing British-Pakistani writer Hanif Kureishi in 2012 asserted that "British PM David Cameron announced that multicultural society, as a project, had totally failed" (Hanuš, 2012, min. 2:55). However, what Cameron pointed to was the failure of "the doctrine of state multiculturalism" (BBC, 2011). Likewise, while the Czech public broadcaster [and other European media] reported Merkel announcing in 2010 the failure of 'multi-kulti *society*' (ČT24, 2010), Merkel had originally referred to a German-specific *approach* [*Ansatz*] to integration (Reuters, 2010). In essence, Cameron and Merkel questioned the effectiveness of multiculturalism as integration policies favouring the institutional accommodation of cultural diversity. Given the absence of a qualified Czech public debate on these policies, the examples above confirm the circulation of intertextual misinterpretations of multiculturalism (and its epitaphs by Western leaders) as referring to a society with ethnic, racial or religious diversity.

Paradoxically, multicultural society is regarded as defective because of its inability to achieve the antithesis of multiculturalism: assimilationism. Černochová (ODS, UK19) argues that because "multicultural society does not work", Czechia has the right to handpick the fleeing Syrian refugees most willing to 'integrate'. As an example of 'unwilling' migrants, she caricaturises the 2013 case of two foreign Muslim female students who "the first thing they wanted from the schools' headmistress was for them to be able to wear a headscarf". These students' act revealed little about their actual willingness to integrate; if anything, their dissatisfaction was with a school regulation which they and the Ombudswoman found to infringe religious freedom, hampering their ability to complete their formal education. Right and left, politicians at the time charged against the Ombudswoman for taking up this case (Právo & Brožová, 2014). One of the most forthright articulations of the failure of 'multicultural society' comes from Jermanová (ANO, UK16) who fatalistically argues that 'we' could never successfully incorporate (an impersonalised) 'Muslim/Arab culture' into 'ours':

> I, myself, am an atheist and don't judge people according to the faith they profess. Now, we're not talking about religion but culture. Of course, religion is also a part of culture, but we should note that, maybe, family in Europe works differently than in Arab countries, which means that we should be ready for the fact that those people will live with us but won't ever be able to behave according to our rules, because they don't know how, they've not been taught.

In this intervention, culture and religion are dissociated and re-associated again, with 'Arab countries' being assimilated as the origin of irreconcilable cultural difference. Far-right contenders thrive in discussions about the failure of 'multicultural society', as it becomes acceptable for them to take issue with the nature of 'Muslims' rather than with the effectiveness of state integration policies.

Very commonly, politicians caution that Muslims or refugees ‘should respect our norms/laws’ rather than ‘pushing’ (*vytlačit, prosazovat, nutit)* ‘theirs’ onto ‘us’ – a formula repeated by participants in 6.1.1.a. These ubiquitous directives represent ‘Muslims’ as ever suspicious norm revisionists imposing a pervasive ‘Muslim culture’ from which ‘we’ could never benefit. ‘Our laws/norms’ vaguely and variably encompass criminal law, values, loyalties or cultural practices; and often reveal intergroup anxiety about encountering visible differences. Clashing ‘laws’ mostly remain excluded, indeterminate (‘family in Arab countries works differently’) or based on hasty generalisations. (‘Muslims burn cars’ – an intertextual reference to the 2005 riots in France – is extremely recurrent.) Conversely, there is virtually no talk about the state’s role in facilitating integration. Instead, politicians appeal to migrants’ individual responsibility, nature or abilities: “[Czechia] should host people who are capable of integration and inclusion, but also, who will be able to integrate according to our conditions, that they won’t force Czechs to integrate according to their conditions” (Černochová, ODS, UK19). For Gazdík (STAN/TOP 09, UK16), it is a mixture of willingness, confession and nature “we support Czechia welcoming such a quantity of refugees, especially Christians, who are willing to integrate into our society. We don’t support it welcoming refugees who are not able to integrate into the society”. Generally, mainstream politicians strongly defend cultural assimilationism and the ethnic character of the nation.

A metaphor conveying these assimilationist ideals is that of the ethnicised ‘home’ (*dům*). The titular ethnic group (Czechs) or host is here entitled to set a cultural code of conduct while remaining willing to respect others when visiting their ‘homes’ (Muslim-majority countries). When this principle is violated, Islamophobic discrimination is predicated on the topos of *justice*. The hosts are never represented through their hospitality. In its more nationalistic far-right articulation, by Lank (Dawn, UK6) the undetermined house rules were established by Slavic ancestors inhabiting the historically multicultural regions which compound Czechia’s post-1993 borders:

> It's quite simple. If you want to live here, we welcome you, of course, but you’ll behave according to our rules and traditions. When I go on holiday, and this could be to an Islamic country, then I’ll simply respect their rules. There won’t be a risk that I enter a mosque in a swimming suit. And I’d expect that when someone lives in our country, [they] would again respect that tradition which our ancestors in Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia and, in short, across the whole Republic built over centuries.

Conclusions

This chapter has analysed whether, how and why Czech mainstream political actors normalised Islamophobic rhetoric between January 2014 and February 2015: that is, before the discourse on the ‘refugee crisis’ crystallised. According to the analysed strategies for representing social actors and argumentation, there was a clear Islamophobic bias in how political discourse on ‘Muslims’ emerged in 2014. Overall, this discourse promoted stereotypes of ‘Muslims’ as threatening, different, sharing a conflictive politico-cultural essence and lacking human qualities. Politicians reacted to relatively new policy issues, such as jihadist terrorism or migrant integration, with a

mix of Islamophobic and ethnonationalist assumptions, limited knowledge of the subjects discussed, strategic considerations and their reading of the context. The context favoured populism and Euroscepticism domestically (see 4.1) and, from Czech politicians' perspective, Islamophobic politics at the wider European level. In a nutshell, mainstream politicians promoted the beliefs that 'the problems in Western Europe' were real; that Czechs' 'fears' were legitimate and should be represented through exclusionary policies; that 'multicultural societies' cannot work; that actual culture-based interethnic conflict with 'Muslims' leads European ethnic majorities to support 'extremists'; and that by preventing the arrival of Muslim migrants, politicians would be protecting Czech citizens from interethnic conflict and 'extremists'. By portraying the racism of 'extremists' as dangerous, mainstream politicians justified their own racism and exclusionary policies. Furthermore, politicians challenging the widespread actualisation of 'problems' risked becoming ostracised as out-of-touch elites.

The political discourse on 'Muslims' emerged strongly in 2014 as politicians reacted to events and policy issues with a domestic repercussion. However, after the January 2015 Charlie Hebdo shootings, this discourse became more abstract, general and confused. Politicians, with a great influence from moderators, promoted a civilisationist/culturalist representational framework which differentiated two Janus-faced clusters of associated groups of 'Muslims' and 'Europeans'/'Czechs'. This framework constructed two essentialised social identities in conflict, favouring collective responsibility, and stressing intergroup difference and threat. Negative representations of 'Muslims in the West' were pivotal to Islamophobic rhetoric, being so ingrained into public 'common sense' that the topos of reality ('we can see the problems in the West') was dominant and went unquestioned. Conversely, national Muslim communities were reassuringly represented as exceptionally unthreatening but only insofar as they remained 'unique' and small. Tilting towards populism and sceptical of Western multiculturalism, mainstream politicians justified their Islamophobic positions by asserting their responsibility to pre-empt the rise of the radical right and the 'problems' that, they insisted, Czechs could 'see'. As advanced, politicians warning about the pitfalls of fearmongering would often become framed by others, particularly from ODS, as unrepresentative elites. Counterproductively, this purportedly pre-emptive strategy opened the window of 'acceptable' discourse to more radical expressions. Additionally, Muslim migrants moving towards the EU were represented as threatening. Their human qualities were minimised through impersonalisations and the exclusion of their emotions or desires. Since late 2014, policy proposals regarding 'refugees' suggested filters keeping 'Muslims' out or helping them in/near their countries of origin through development aid and teaching entrepreneurial skills. Conversely, politicians expressed openness to offer some of the benefits of Czech citizenship to Ukrainian or Arab Christian refugees. Finally, drawing on the discourse on the 'death of multiculturalism', politicians generally misrepresented state multiculturalism as failing because it permitted the immigration of 'Muslims' and did not achieve cultural assimilation. Undoubtedly, the implicitly favoured model was a cultural assimilationism in which migrant integration depended on the individual responsibility, nature or skills of the 'Muslim'.

All the analysed mainstream parties contributed to the normalisation of Islamophobia during this period, although they had to navigate different tensions. As explained in Chapter 4, ODS and KDU-ČSL had previously experimented with Islamophobic programmes. Since they individually polled at 5%-8.5% during this period (CVVM, 2024d) and their supporters seemed to harbour negative attitudes towards Islam (Linek, 2014), they may have betted on Islamophobic positions to remain relevant. In my corpus, ODS members present a more coherent Islamophobic position but Gabal (KDU-ČSL) challenges most in his party by protesting against fearmongering and advocating tolerance. Similar ideological divisions were visible within the TOP 09/STAN tandem, from the conciliatory rhetoric of Polčák to the culturalist exclusivism of Gazdík. Eventually, TOP 09/STAN MEPs would become the only Czech representatives to vote for the 'mandatory quotas' in September 2015 (Gregor, 2015). Despite the strength of ČSSD (polling 24-30%), the senior partners in the governing coalition experienced important divisions. Although the party had programmatically supported multiculturalism (Hejnal, 2012), after its 2013 victory, it became evident that there was a conservative faction close to President Zeman conspiring against the leading progressive wing (ČT24, 2023) and splitting the party during the 'refugee crisis'. The ethnonationalism from members of this conservative faction like Tejc or Chovanec contrasts with the conciliatory tone of Bublan above. Since ČSSD held the relevant ministries of Interior and Foreign Affairs, they had ample leeway to define the response to the 'refugee crisis'. However, as Minister of Interior, Chovanec (ČSSD) had adopted a confrontational Islamophobic position since the April 2014 raid of Islamic institutions in Prague and later became the most influential driver of 'refugee' securitisation. In the case of ANO, which slightly overtook ČSSD in voting intention polls in 2014, speakers either upheld moderate caution (Komárek) or embraced civilisationism (Jermanová). Finally, the historical *cordon sanitaire* around the far right remained visible in the way moderators dealt with Dawn MPs or Konvička (IvČRN). However, moderators and politicians relied on strategies and texts initially put forward by far-right actors, even from abroad. In this regard, while a cross-national adoption of discourse within the far right has been sometimes studied (Rydgren, 2005), the analysis demonstrates that mainstream actors also adopt foreign far-right strategies. Importantly, the inclusion of anti-Islam activists, arguments and quotations by media producers favoured the use of sensationalist Islamophobic frames during the debates.

Overall, politicians contributed to normalise Islamophobic rhetoric through their participation in the public discourse on 'Muslims' during this period. The strategies employed set the foundations for the incipient discourse on 'refugees'. By March 2015, surveys pointed to growing xenophobia, with respondents feeling much less open towards multiculturalism and granting citizenship rights (STEM, 2016d), and supporting more restrictive migration policies (Čadová, 2015). Notably, after the Charlie Hebdo attacks, politicians (and moderators) rhetorically shifted their attention from the construction of 'problems in Western Europe' to that of popular 'fears'. From then onwards, 'fears' were used to justify further Islamophobic rhetoric and positions.

8. When opposition to ‘refugees’ accommodated Islamophobia and boosted its normalisation

In this chapter, I continue to analyse political discourse on the blocs of the show *Události, Komentáře* (UK) in which words derived from ‘Muslim’ or ‘Islam’ appeared. I cover the interval from March to December 2015, when the ‘refugee crisis’ became the dominant topic concerning ‘Muslims’, and the ‘refugee quotas’ were the most discussed relevant pieces of legislation. The previous chapter illustrated how mainstream politicians normalised Islamophobic rhetoric, under no credible pressure from the far right, at a time when ‘Muslims’ significantly entered public discourse. During the ‘refugee crisis’, politicians had to urgently offer policy positions towards (mostly Muslim) ‘refugees’. In this chapter, I argue that the previous normalisation of Islamophobic rhetoric set the tone for the discourse on ‘refugees’ and served the mainstream to build their anti-refugee rhetoric. Even if, this time, far-right actors (IvČRN, BPI, SPD) were being more effective (for instance, at mobilising protesters, and gaining publicity and mainstream allies – notably, President Zeman), their electoral threat always remained marginal. Despite this, mainstream politicians continued to inflate the ‘Muslim’ threat. Furthermore, they comparatively portrayed themselves as the only legitimate actors in the competition over tackling popular ‘fears’ while stigmatising both far-right ‘extremists’ and mainstream figures who condemned fearmongering (see 8.3.). Collectively, mainstream politicians set boundaries to the acceptable range of Islamophobia that belonged in public discourse. The focus on the ‘Muslim’ threat eventually foreshadowed the appalling humanitarian catastrophe experienced by migrants and emboldened far-right actors.

During the ‘refugee crisis’, Islamophobia became ever more acceptable across society and embedded into public ‘common sense’. On the one hand, mainstream politicians consistently legitimised and normalised Islamophobia. On the other, opposing ‘refugees’ did not have to rely on forms of collective responsibility previously deemed improper or too ‘extreme’ but, instead, could use a richer repertoire of apparently innocuous topoi (like law, numbers or disadvantage) and strategies of representation (like passivisation of borders or objectivation of refugees as water phenomena) which did not take issue with a ‘Muslim’ essence. Consequently, diverse elites (journalists, academics, artists, state officials) co-opted Islamophobic anti-refugee rhetoric, particularly after considering opposition to ‘quotas’ a just cause. Groups and individuals from across civil society, and even some political mavericks, continued trying to keep this normalisation in check. However, after the Charlie Hebdo shootings, the mainstream actualisation of ‘fears’ had intensified and those fighting anti-refugee talk became increasingly branded as out-of-touch elites. Furthermore, the fearmongering of ‘populists’ and ‘extremists’ was mostly challenged because it tarnished national decency, while its effects over actual Muslims were largely irrelevant for most mainstream politicians.

In the following section, I address the overlap between the ‘Muslim’ and ‘refugee’ categories to assess the role of Islamophobia in anti-refugee discourse, and to clarify why I include instances of anti-refugee talk in my analysis of Islamophobia. The three

following sections organise my findings along those actors whose representation I found most relevant for mainstream Islamophobic discourse, namely a) ‘Europe’; b) the far right, populists, and the popular ‘fears’ guiding mainstream politics; and c) ‘Muslims’ and ’refugees’. While several representations of ‘Czechs’ appeared in the corpus, these were often related to ‘Europe’ and were not frequent enough to merit their own section. Some insights on the representations of ‘Czechs’ are thus scattered across the other sections. Finally, a concluding section presents and reflects on the chapter’s findings.

8.1. Relationships between anti-refugee and Islamophobic discourse in the 2015 Czech context

Analytically, it is challenging to separate anti-refugee from Islamophobic political rhetoric in the 2015 Czech context. In her report on Islamophobia in Czechia for that year, Muhič Dizdarevič (2016) observed that “Islamophobia has become connected to the issues of the so-called ‘refugee crisis’. In the minds of many, refugees are Muslims only and arguments against immigration and asylum policy become one with arguments against Muslims and Islam”. Despite the intricate overlaps between the ‘Muslim’ and ‘refugee’ categories, it is technically possible to set apart formal elements belonging to the distinct discourses about each actor. The emerging Czech political discourse on ‘refugees’ exhibited new and unique characteristics that some might wish to analyse as independent of Islamophobia. For example, ‘refugees’ were represented within a relatively new semantic field. Instead of being associated to ‘ghettos’ or ‘cultural incompatibility’ like ‘Muslims’, much of the talk about ‘refugees’ invoked administrative technicalities like ‘hotspots’, ‘quotas’, ‘asylum facilities’, ‘protection of borders’, the ‘Schengen Area’, ‘FRONTEX’ or the ‘Dublin Regulation’. Another particularity is that ‘refugees’ were not exclusively represented as ‘Muslim’, but also, recurrently, as poor, ‘illegal’, unqualified, in need, uncivilised, ‘African’, victims, potential jihadists, (un)deserving, burdening, uncontrollable or a moving mass. Although ‘Muslims in Europe’ had been associated with some of these characteristics before, it would not be accurate to conclude that Muslimness was the only or dominant trait emphasised in the representation of ‘refugees’. Finally, unlike ‘Muslims’ before, whose marginal presence in the country made them largely irrelevant to policymakers, ‘refugees’ entered the political agenda with pre-eminence and urgency by 2015. Therefore, state actors, notably the government and parliamentarians, were required to become visible speakers on ‘refugees’. The speech of these actors was subject to the interests, constrictions or legacies of their institutions. Additionally, politicians’ talk possessed new functions like providing authoritative risk assessments or shaping life-or-death policy towards actual refugees.

Nevertheless, ‘refugees’ was a temporary or concealing category for ‘Muslims’, with anti-refugee rhetoric drawing from a preceding Islamophobic repertoire (see previous chapter). While discussing policies towards ‘refugees’ on the move did not require invoking their Muslimness, arguing against welcoming them in Czechia (or Europe) was entirely related to the dangers they posed as ‘Muslims’. This is why politicians advocated for ‘helping refugees over there’, in countries ‘with a similar culture’, rather than staying ‘with us’ (a space reserved for Christian, Ukrainian or Yazidi refugees).

Additionally, politicians stressed that preventing the arrival of refugees responded to the need of 'putting the safety of our citizens in the first place' (Hrabálek & Đorđević, 2017; Vallo et al., 2020). Thus, the legal implications of being on each side of the EU's external borders constituted an imaginary line between helpless 'refugees' (outside of the EU) and dangerous 'Muslims' (within the EU). For instance, when the moderator in UK39 asked where the line lay between caution towards refugees and xenophobia Benešík (KDU- ČSL) answered by assimilating indeterminate inimical Islamists with 'refugees' by claiming that both 'want to establish Sharia law':

> I think it goes both ways. We should not behave according to the motto "I tolerate my intolerance" [*toleruj moji netoleranci*]. I think that if elements who somehow were not able to be compatible with our culture arrived - and they openly say so; they want to, for example, establish Sharia law and so on, then don't be surprised if Czech people are very cautious about this.

Another novelty of the discourse on 'refugees' was that these were increasingly feared as potential jihadist terrorists. Many refugees were fleeing complex conflicts participated in by diverse Islamist and jihadist groups, while IS-inspired terrorist attacks against civilians took place on EU soil. Although fears of jihadism presented components which cannot be fairly characterised as Islamophobic (as similar concerns could have emerged about hypothetical conflicts involving non-Muslim actors), Islamophobia was perhaps their main driver. For long, public discourse had contributed to shape stereotypes of 'Muslims' as potentially dangerous radicals by obsessing over the deeds of an unrepresentative minority of Muslims, which were generalised to include and ignored the actual attitudes of the vast majority of Muslims (Hesová, 2016a, pp. 5–6). 'Refugees' were then perceived as potential terrorists through assimilations and associations which represented jihadist terrorists as their 'fellow Muslims'. For instance, Stehlík (2016) rejected the concept of Islamophobia because, inter alia, of its stifling of allegedly legitimate criticisms of Islam in connection with "Islamist terrorism". However, he differentiated Antisemitism from Islamophobia because the former was historically based on "stories of murderous Jews [which] were largely fictitious and driven by Christian anti-Jewish fundamentalism", while, concerning Islamophobia, "hardly a day goes by without yet another terrorist attack perpetrated by the followers of Islam". This attribution of collective responsibility works through the logics of Islamophobia (i.e. associations, assimilations, etc.) to represent jihadist terrorism as representative of Islam, or 'Muslim culture', 'Muslim civilisation', 'true Islam' and so on. Jihadism has much more in common with non-Muslim violent movements than with Islamic tradition and it is generally despised by Muslims and most of the often-conflated Islamists (Robinson, 2020). Even if jihadists claim to represent Islam, most forms of terrorism also nominally claim group identities (for instance, ethnic or religious), yet other members from those identities are not stigmatised to the extent that 'Muslims' are in European public discourse.

As already argued (see 4.4.4.), most Czech discourse and content analyses covering this period analytically focused on anti-refugee or anti-migrant discourse. However, most authors considered representations of 'Muslims' as part of these discourses and many refer to how Islamophobia informs them. Here, I follow the inverse strategy.

Although my analysis is primarily concerned with Islamophobia, I often include instances of anti-refugee rhetoric since 'refugees' or 'migrants' became the dominant categories under which 'Muslims' were discussed in political discourse. Furthermore, the interviews with Czech citizens revealed that these categories were conflated in everyday use. Nevertheless, following the considerations exposed in this section, my analysis focuses less on aspects which are more unique to 'refugees' such as strategies to represent the 'refugee quotas' (see Hrabálek & Đorđević, 2017) or the Dublin Regulation. Therefore, I encourage readers to remind themselves that both discourses overlap somehow imperfectly and to retain a critical stance towards my methodological decisions.

In conclusion, the articulations of Islamophobia which grew since the mid-2000s informed the discourse on 'refugees', understood as a historical type of 'Muslim', from 2014 but, particularly, 2015. In contrast, 'refugees' were constructed very differently when referring to Ukrainian refugees fleeing war from 2014, and, especially 2022 (although only non-Romani refugees: see Shmidt & Jaworsky, 2022). Although 'refugees' could be opposed by reasons other than their Muslim identity, it was evident that their Muslimness was the main concern when it came to granting them asylum and, potentially, future citizenship rights.

8.2. The 'Europe' 'we' want to preserve and belong to, and that which 'we' despise and want to avoid looking like

8.2.1. 'We' belong to 'European civilisation'

Using similar strategies to those outlined in the previous chapter, speakers across different parties continued to employ differentiating assimilations to call for the preservation of a politico-cultural or civilisational project interchangeably defined as 'Europe', 'Christianity' or 'the West', including to oppose 'refugees'. If anything, civilisationism becomes more pronounced over this period as politicians need to justify policy positions rather than offering commentary. In 2014, Mendel (2014, pp. 31, 46) lamented that while West European academics had long since refuted Huntington's 'Clash of Civilizations' thesis as unscientific, Czech academics, intellectuals and politicians still promoted it. Likewise, Daniel (2020, p. 110) argues that Czech audiences had become markedly receptive to this thesis after two decades of its reproduction in Czech political discourse. Culturalist or civilisationist rhetoric comes more naturally to the right, although even social democrats like Sklenák concede that "our society comes from Christianity, we are a Christian civilisation" (UK21). Even members of the Christian-democratic KDU-ČSL abuse the 'Christian' identity to antagonise 'Muslims' by inconsistently adding and dropping prefixes like 'Western-' or 'Judeo-' to the label '-Christian' within a text.

Over this period these intercultural or intercivilisational differences are increasingly represented as unbridgeable or innate. To convey maximum ingrainedness, some politicians evoke the immutability of the natural and tangible worlds. The metaphors 'foundations' [*základy]* or 'roots' [*kořeny*], an interdiscursive borrowing from botany via genealogy, actualise assimilations of those who, by virtue of ancestry, can(not) become part of 'the West'. Many, like Kupka (ODS, UK53), believe that the integration

of Christian refugees will be easier because these share with Czechs “similar traditions or roots”. As Rose (2021, pp. 150–151) remarks, such racialisations of a Christian people would have perplexed ancient populations, since Christianity was born with a universalist rather than ethno-exclusivist pretension. Chovanec (ČSSD, UK43) also explained that second or third generation migrants in Western Europe ‘radicalise’ (note the agent activation through this verb whose etymology leads to the Latin word for ‘root’) is that “they didn’t grow with the new country […], they don’t feel their roots there”. The botanical implication of this metaphor is that the ‘roots’ of second-generation Muslims are in another, non-Western soil, while the Western soil is inadequate for the ‘Muslim’ species.

Politicians continue to invoke a ‘European’ set of values or norms that ‘Muslims’/‘refugees’ could violate and corrupt. Liberal conservatives tend to identify these values with civil liberties like freedom of religion or equal treatment for women, and the primacy of Czech over Islamic Law. Pospíšil (TOP 09/STAN, 40) differentiates an association of value-respecting ethnic groups from ‘Muslims’ (repeatedly differentiated from ‘us’):

> Czechs are not xenophobes. They’re not bothered by the Vietnamese, Ukrainians or the wave arriving from Yugoslavia – people who were willing to respect our civilisational values. However, if people who profess slightly different civilisational values, have a different religion, a different view on the equality of women and minorities, and so on, are to come here, logically, we must hold this debate.

Once again, these warnings against ‘refugees’ are not complemented by presenting programmes to facilitate integration (reportedly dependent on migrants’ will and nature) or the expansion of civil liberties. The Czech legal code already regulates the protection of those civil liberties most often represented by politicians to be vulnerable to ‘Muslim culture’. Furthermore, in domestic issues, politicians would rarely invoke ‘our European values’ to address inequalities experienced by Czech women or minorities like the Czech Roma. Importantly, the norms or values that ‘Muslims’ would need to comply with remain strategically indeterminate. Given the scant political will to promote policies accommodating Muslims or Muslim migrants, ‘Muslims’ are paradoxically represented as eternally unable to respect ‘our’ values and norms (see Vignette 2).

Vignette 2: How the Christian democrats’ leadership makes ‘our’ values impossible for ‘Muslims’ to adopt

The KDU-ČSL leader, Bělobrádek (UK51) is among the few politicians explicitly unpacking the content of ‘our values’. A European People’s Party (EPP) summit in Prague and a high-level visit to Warsaw by British PM David Cameron were the triggering events for UK51, aired on 10 December 2015. The bloc was framed as touching upon ‘the future of Europe at the time of the refugee crisis’, stressing the alleged existential threat of the ‘crisis’ to the EU. At this point, with a highly securitised discourse on the ‘crisis’ across the EU (Kluknavská et al., 2019; Krzyżanowski et al., 2018), several states had established border controls and

fences, and EU-Turkey cooperation aimed at obstructing refugee flows.[61] Notably, the 13 November Paris attacks by IS militants had shaken up public debate. In Czechia, 'quotas' were determinately opposed across parties; Islamophobic activities by civil society had been widely mediatised; and president Zeman had publicly endorsed the Islamophobic BPI party. The referenced EPP summit had partly touched upon migration and jihadism, calling for coordinated EU action. Despite its securitising tone, the summit also carried out interreligious dialogue activities (EPP, 2015, 2019). The moderator in UK51 asked deputy PM Bělobrádek, invited as the leader of the hosting party for the EPP summit, about possible communitarian solutions to the 'crisis', widespread distrust of politicians, Cameron's advocacy for greater national sovereignty and the regulation of Islam. Replying to the latter, Bělobrádek (KDU-ČSL), who had previously been shown lambasting multiculturalism in a talking head from the summit, invoked European values:

1 […] our legal rules apply to everyone, and these rules are derived from
2 our values, which are shaped by three foundational pillars. These are:
3 Christian-Jewish ethics, Roman law and the Greek approach to
4 rationality. And whoever comes here must contend with the fact that
5 those are European values. And I think that it's necessary to protect that
6 European identity because, as professor Bárta says: with the loss of
7 identity comes the end of civilisation. And I believe that we must stand
8 by the fact that we have roots in this, that these are our values, and
9 whoever is willing and able to accept these values of ours, from which
10 our legal order originates, is welcome. Our legal order does not lie in
11 Islamic law, it lies in Roman law and Christian ethics.

In this conservative prescription, the topos of law is subsidiary to that of culture. The conclusion would be: 'they can stay if they respect our laws, which need to be protected as part of our culture' (ll.1-2). Although the speaker explicitly differentiates 'Muslims' (impersonalised by reference to "Islamic law", ll.10-11) from 'Europeans' ("our [European] legal order", l.10), most representations of the former are cushioned in universalist indeterminations ('whoever comes', l.4, or 'anyone is welcome', ll.9-10). The extract is awash with formal fallacies, as Bělobrádek largely equates 'identity' (l.6), 'values' (l.2, 8, 9) and the 'three foundational pillars' (l.2). Moreover, the three foundational pillars listed in ll.2-3, differ from those in l.11. Notably, "Christian-Jewish ethics" morph into, simply, "Christian ethics".

Bělobrádek (KDU-ČSL) is deploying the civilisationist repertoire (Brubaker, 2017). His inconsistencies reveal a greater preoccupation with differentiating 'Muslims' than with cracking the code of 'our' cultural essence. The intermittent in-/exclusion of the Jewish element in 'our ethics' reflects the relatively low political relevance of Jewish people for excluding 'Muslims' in this context. As advanced, indeterminations mitigate the incivility of exclusionary discourses but, from the context and by reference to 'Islamic law', the audience decodes the differentiation with 'Muslims'. The conditional topos of culture means that 'Muslims' are not simply being asked to 'respect our laws' but to accept their (differentiated) cultural substance – i.e. cultural assimilationism. The classical and pre-Islamic genesis of 'Europe' captured in the

[61] The Turkey Refugee Facility had just been set up to financially support refugee settlement in Turkey in exchange for border management cooperation.

‘three foundational pillars’ (ll.2-4) excludes not only ‘Muslims’, but also non-Mediterranean European legacies or interactions with ‘the Orient’.

Ten days after these words were broadcast, Bělobrádek authored a blog post in which he elaborated his vision of “Europe as a space of common values”. This time, he performed a different kind of authority by signing the text with three academic titles and structuring it as an essay (Bělobrádek, 2015). Here, he represented:

1 big communities of people who, despite accepting citizenship, did not take
2 with the latter European values [as] the breeding ground [*podhoubí – *
3 *literally mycelium, a fungal structure*] for Islamic terrorism.
[…]
4 They did not take on our Christian approach to human rights and freedoms,
5 nor the classical tradition of knowing the world and good through reason,
6 nor the principle of equality before the law.

The “big communities of people”, impersonalised as “the breeding ground” (l.2), are associated with ‘Islamic terrorists’ by means of another impersonalisation (l.3). Moreover, they are implicitly differentiated from ‘us’, represented as just liberals, Christian(ish) humanists and rationalists (ll.4-6). Bělobrádek (KDU-ČSL) again uses the topos of culture, blaming ‘their’ cultural difference and lack of assimilation for Islamic terrorism. This coded language invokes in readers the disenfranchised citizens from the infamous West European ‘ghettos’, associating them with terrorists. Furthermore, the predication of ‘our approach to human rights’ as, specifically, ‘Christian’ sets a definitionally unreachable bar for ‘Muslims’. In a radical show of cultural assimilationism, this time, Bělobrádek does not blame ‘Muslims’ for ‘not respecting our laws’ but, rather, for not embracing ‘European values’ (ll.1-2), which include reason (l.5) and respect for human rights (l.4.).

Later in this text, Bělobrádek (KDU-ČSL) does not argue, through cultural pluralism, that intercultural differences create conflict, but blames conflict, through Euro-centric universalism, on ‘their’ barbarism. Arguing for helping ‘refugees’ outside rather than inside ‘Europe’, Bělobrádek (Ibid.) wrote that:

> what is threatening is that millions of people will come, [and] will bring us problems from their culture: a lack of freedom, despotism, discrimination, violence and poverty. All of these represent a fundamental threat for European civilisation.

‘Muslims’ are backgrounded and indeterminated (“millions of people”). Instead, they are represented through an association of abstractions “from their culture” (like despotism or poverty). Moreover, ‘Muslims’ are implicitly activated as causing those abstractions (i.e. ‘Muslims produce violence and poverty’) to the detriment of the differentiated ‘European’ civilisation. In this Islamophobic representation, ‘Muslims’ are not only essentialised through threatening traits, but their migration is represented as contaminating ‘our’ (pre-determined) civilisational progress.

Other high-ranking Christian-democrats also contrasted ‘our’ relative civilisational progress with that of ‘Muslims’. In a text of similarly limited circulation, the party’s internal news magazine, Pavel Svoboda reacted to the Charlie Hebdo attacks and

the alleged support of most Muslims for violent retributions for blasphemy by writing about how "we, Europeans, already have that cruel and unsophisticated [*nevycválané – often used to describe undisciplined small children and untrained puppies*] period behind us" (KDU-ČSL, 2015, p. 15). The MEP credited 'our' centuries-long struggles over the division of power between Church and State for leading 'us', through democracy, to a "conciliatory […] Western-Christian secular state" whose legal system "lacks draconian penalties (stoning, cutting off hands)". By contrast, the alleged lack of such historical conflicts among 'Muslims' has contradictorily resulted in both a lack of widely shared dogmas and a blind adherence to 'Sharia', with the latter driving the "average Muslim" to consider "our concept of the state, democracy and freedom of speech [as] essentially 'sinful'". The underlying civilisationist belief is that the brutality, discordance and radicalism of 'Muslim culture', which rivals 'our' existence, could one day disappear if 'Muslims' followed 'our' historical footsteps. Overall, even if less acute on the left, civilisationism appeared across mainstream parties to represent 'Muslim civilisation' an unmodern project through which individual 'Muslims' will bring a violence that is allegedly foreign to peaceful 'Europe'.

Calling on a 'Christian' identity became more frequent during this period, mostly to exclude 'Muslims', as, in the corpus, Iraqi Yazidis or the Vietnamese are never scrutinised for their non-Christian credentials. However, as the debate over 'refugees' attracted diverse voices, a minority of politicians, particularly from KDU-ČSL, appealed to Christianity to advocate for more inclusive policies or a less hostile tone. Cyril Svoboda (KDU-ČSL, UK26) or Dienstbier (ČSSD, UK50) identified in Christianity a moral responsibility towards 'refugees'. Bělohradský (UK27), a philosopher and sociologist associated with left-wing parties, deterministically argues that 'Europeans' "have the problem of being Christian" and therefore, cannot "build some kind of wall" against people in need. A few expose the hypocrisy behind opportunistic secular ascriptions to a 'Christian' identity, like the Slovak Christian-democrat Vášáryová (SKDU-DS, UK49), who calls out Czechoslovak society's multidecade lack of contestation of the Communist Party's trampling on Christianity only to claim its heritage for discriminating against refugees.

Conversely, other actors connected with Christian organisations stressed that national security and sovereignty should take precedence over Christian-inspired solidarities. Joch (UK22), a Catholic conservative intellectual, finds that 'European values', which resulted from 'Judeo-Christian' ones, make it 'extreme or unacceptable' to take away basic rights from any European citizen, including Muslims. However, he believes that the principle of national sovereignty guarantees that the polity decides 'which and how many' migrants it accepts. Some politicians rely on the Popperian paradox of tolerance for arguing that the 'European'/'Christian' tolerance is not owed to 'Muslims', as these show intolerance towards 'us' (topoi of justice and danger). Pospíšil (TOP 09/STAN) makes the only argument in the corpus against 'refugees' based on the threat to gay people's rights by essentialising the former through association and the fallacy of hasty generalisation: "[…] in Germany, they have to, for example, separate homosexuals in immigrant camps, because they are bullied and beaten by the other Syrians […], they simply aren't capable of being with each other. Where is the respect to European values?"

Finally, Czech politicians expressed their will to preserve something technical but perhaps more esteemed than fleeting identitarian appeals: namely, the EU's 'external borders' and the free movement of peoples within Schengen (see also Beneš, 2017, p. 59). Freedom of movement, several times differentiated from the despised regime of closed borders before 1989, is an EU benefit which is highly valued by East Europeans (TNS Opinion & Social, 2015d, p. 17). Illustratively, the Czech political establishment forcefully rejected the creation of 'mini-Schengen' areas within Schengen to manage intra-communitarian mobility during the 'crisis', while expressing anxieties about neighbouring countries establishing border checks. Indeed, a recurrent argument against mandatory 'quotas' was that it would be illegal and immoral to stop 'refugees' assigned to stay in Czechia but who do not wish to do so from moving onto Germany – an evocation of the Cold-War regime of closed borders.

For free movement to function, the external borders must keep unwarranted or undesirable groups away from the 'European' community of values (Anderson, 2013). Therefore, borders are frequently passivized as in need of protection from both 'traffickers' and 'refugees' or activated as dangerous 'open gates' when not fulfilling their filtering function. The ubiquitous and sweeping "we need to protect our external borders" is ambiguous enough to convey establishing a physical seal, although such a measure is rarely overtly advocated for. Although actual border fences were discouraging crossings at the time (for instance, in Melilla or by the Evros river), the EU had been implementing more sophisticated mechanisms for preventing crossings such as the externalisation of border management from the Sahel to the Southern Mediterranean coast (see Reyhani et al., 2018). When pressed to explain how the 'protection of borders' should look, most politicians referred to the profiling of refugees complemented by mechanisms of physical control like detention and return. At other times, concerned with the magnitude of 'millions' of refugees or 'uncontrollable waves' making it into 'Europe', politicians proposed ways of physically obstructing paths to asylum, favouring the sinking of empty smuggling boats over sea rescue missions. Tomský (UK34) proposed the most radical measure, building "a wall like the one the Chinese built two thousand years ago, or like the *limes* that Romans built", implicitly promoting an association of 'Muslims' with invading barbarians. Although Stulík & Krčál (2019) found the securitisation of borders to be characteristic of the discourse of populist actors, in my corpus, this is commonplace across mainstream parties.

8.2.2. The undesirable aspects of 'Western Europe': 'ghettos' of the poor, multiculturalism, the dysfunction of Southern Europe and German impositions

Despite using inscriptions into 'Europe', 'Christianity' and 'the West' to exclude 'Muslims', Czech politicians also represent elements of Western Europe and 'the West' as undesirable, either because they act as warnings or direct threats. First, negative narratives about 'Muslims in Western Europe' (see previous chapter) continue to prevail. While analyses of Czech anti-refugee or Islamophobic discourse tend to highlight the perceived cultural threat of 'Muslims', importantly, narratives about the 'Muslim ghetto' transcend the symbolic realm by promoting anxieties about a type of West European urban poverty and social alienation perceived to be *caused* by 'Muslims'. Aporophobia (Cortina, 2017) fuelled opposition to 'refugees' almost as

much as a fear of Islamism or jihadism (see also 8.4.). According to OECD (2023) data, Czechia had, in 2015, one of the lowest income inequality and poverty rates among the world's richest countries. Similarly, rates of subjective poverty (Želinský et al., 2022) and estimated risks of falling into poverty (Eurostat Press Office, 2016) in the country were very low by EU standards. Against this backdrop, the perceived kinds of destitution and anomie that West European 'Muslim ghettos' evoked were likely perceived to be as foreign and undesirable as the cultural alterity of their inhabitants.

The closest referent to 'Muslim' poverty was that attributed to the Roma in Czech anti-Ziganist narratives. Čada and Frantová (2017, p. 21) identified a "Muslims as Roma narrative" in public discourse that drew from an old mainstream repertoire that charged the Roma as being "lazy, crafty, unwilling to work, abusive of the generous social system and, above all, ungrateful; they make no effort to adapt, despite being repeatedly offered a helping hand". Indeed, the Czech far right had tried to associate the ethnicised Western ghetto and the Czech Roma before. As advanced in Vignette 1, Dawn interdiscursively predicated the attribute of 'unadaptables' [*neprizpusobivi*], common in anti-Roma discourse, onto 'migrants' in their 2014 campaign for the European Parliament. Likewise, in the context of interethnic tensions in the town of Šluknov (in the Děčín district) in 2011, senator Jaroslav Doubrava, from the regionalist Severočeši.cz, suggested that the army should be ready to intervene against the Roma, so that they do not "set our towns on fire like [in] the unrest in England" (Albert, 2012) – referring to the 2011 riots following the police shooting of Mark Duggan. Like the Roma before (Leudar & Nekvapil, 2000), 'Muslim culture' is associated with idleness, crime, the inability to work hard and generating wealth. 'Refugees' are dangerous because, as Bělobrádek (2015) wrote, poverty is part of their culture. Relying on his authority on England, Tomský (UK34) differentiates the unproductivity of 'Muslims' with the hard-working ethics and skills of an association of 'civilizations' – culturalising intergroup differences rather than offering sociological explanations for allegedly different socioeconomic outcomes:

> England is really hospitable towards foreigners. It doesn't want to make English people out of them but [instead] it's very tolerant. For example, as an immigrant, I was a director in England and they even told me after I had passed the [job] interview: "you know, you foreigners are better than the English because you try harder and cause no problems". Well, but this applies only in the context of a certain European civilization or, alternatively, Russian or Hispanic from South America. However, when it comes to the immigration of an ignorant, illiterate and Islamic population, then it's a tragedy; and not even the English are happy about this.

As identified by Slačálek (2021), declinist narratives about 'Europe' and 'the West' became commonplace during this period, particularly pushed by conservative men in ODS, KDU-ČSL or Dawn, right-wing intellectuals, or former president Václav Klaus. These narratives followed a semi-peripheral anti-colonialist discourse against the EU, first articulated by ODS (Slačálek & Šitera, 2022), and followed issues previously politicised by the party (Hanley, 2007, Chapters 7–8). They targeted: inclusive ideologies (multiculturalism, 'political correctness' or 'the cult of human rights'); geopolitical processes (multipolarity or globalisation); and generous welfare programmes (particularly in Germany). Notably, 'Muslim ghettos' and multicultural

societies epitomised Western decadence. Tapping into stereotypes that associate Muslim migrants with delinquency and 'failed integration', Vondra (ODS, UK27) stressed the importance of being cautious with migration "so that all of Europe does not turn into Marseille". That same day, in an interview for the more anti-migrant website *Parlamentní Listy*, Vondra associated other cities with high percentages of Muslim citizens as undesirable referents: "surely, Czechs do not want Prague to look like Marseille, Malmö or Birmingham" (krajskelisty.cz, 2015). Through these references, Vondra communicated that 'Muslims' have compromised the liveability and 'European' character of these cities.

Two trends emerged in the rhetoric about 'multiculturalism' and 'political correctness'. First, both phenomena are represented as reflections of Western infantilism and irrationality, with 'political correctness' being also attributed totalitarian aspirations. With male chauvinistic undertones, both ideologies are criticised as reflections of weakness, emotionality, naiveté, immaturity, incertitude, and, of course, decadence. They are predicated as 'hysteric', 'a cult', akin to the dogmatic 'use of the Quran by Arab politicians', supported by 'fools', 'coming from Western universities', 'naïve', 'obsessed with minorities', 'indoctrinated' or 'muddling language'. The second trend is the populism inherent in the declinist critique, as Western liberal elites, whether infantilised (see extract below) or dangerous (Tomský, UK34, associates them to Jacobins), are blamed for promulgating both ideas against the will of anxious ethnic majorities. Thus, *argumenta ad populum* justify opposing these programmes. Reflecting both characteristics, Vondra (ODS, UK50) differentiated Babiš (ANO), based on a nativist claim by the party leader, from Minister of Justice Pelikán (ANO), who allegedly did "anything possible so that doors would open as wide as possible for those new refugees":

> Minister Pelikán is the textbook example of the representative of political corretness. He's simply that new kind of *hipster* [*English in the original*] who we see in the West a lot. Whereas Andrej Babiš is of a completely different opinion; he knows that [refugees] are a problem but also needs to demonstrate some of his refinement [*kultivovanost*] to the West. However, in Czechia, […] he wants to absorb absolutely all [voters], therefore he uses the language that [is liked] at home.

Vondra represented Pelikán as inauthentic, infantile and un-Czech by associating him with the 'new Western *hipster*'. Conversely, Babiš is represented as rational since he "knows there is a problem", yet, unlike Pelikán, only uses political correctness to the extent that it serves to court 'the West' (the passive agent). Again, ethnic Czechs are assimilated under the impersonalisation 'home' and differentiated from the 'Western hipster' based on their preference for rational, nativist, anti-refugee and politically incorrect rhetoric. Vondra's remarks alluded to a headshot of Babiš (ANO) where the ANO leader had differentiated the careless attitudes in the symbolic capital of 'the West' from 'our' rational (topos of numbers) concerns over ethnic replacement: "I'd like it only for Czechs to live in Czechia. If there are more Muslims [than Belgians] in Brussels in 2030 and Belgians don´t care [fine]; but I think that we'd be bothered by this in Czechia". In the declinist worldview, 'the West' has lost its self-preservation instinct by accepting multicultural societies that include Muslims.

The purposefully shallow debate on multiculturalism ensured that no speaker proposed that Czechs could do things differently than in Western Europe. The ‘ghetto’ is never explained through structural factors like dysfunctional state policies or racist discrimination but as a product of ‘Muslim culture’. Váňa (ČSSD, UK48) differentiated the Prague ‘Vietnamese ghetto’ of Sapa from those inhabited by “the Muslim community” (collectivisation) in West European cities: “here, in Czechia, it’s about illegal trade, there it’s [about] their tribute to terrorism”. Right-wing politicians continue to legitimise the ‘Muslim ghetto’ trope through intertextual references to West European centre-right politicians who had co-opted the ‘death of multiculturalism’ discourse:

> [Czechs and Moravians] clearly see that clash of cultures, the failed integration [or] assimilation of people from that cultural environment into Western Europe […] It’s enough to look to our neighbouring states, like Germany, Austria, France or Great Britain. And if you play the speech of David Cameron, who is the British PM, where he speaks precisely about Islamists, where he speaks about the Muslim community, then, I think, and it’s publicly available, that our fears are legitimate to a large extent (Benešík, KDU-ČSL, UK39)

Skipping a description of the representational strategies employed by Benešík (similar to those in 7.2.), I want to highlight how the referenced texts become distorted. Benešík cites an undetermined speech – undoubtedly, Cameron’s (2011) 5 February 2011 address at the Munich Security Conference. As with Angela Merkel’s speech (see 7.5.), Cameron’s text presents problematic elements but, importantly, it stressed the failure of a particular British state approach to multiculturalism. In his speech, Cameron *insistently* differentiates ‘Islam’ from ‘extremism’, ‘warped interpretations of Islam’ or ‘Islamist extremism’. These differentiations are never mentioned by the Czech centre right, with Benešík undoing them by associating ‘Islamists’ with ‘the Muslim community’. Furthermore, Cameron accused those who tried scapegoating all Muslims of being ‘fascists’, ‘promoting Islamophobia’ or doing ‘nothing to help confront Islamist extremism’. In the British sociopolitical context of 2011, these differentiations were highly pertinent even when the Conservative Party was trying to lead the charge against state multiculturalism. However, such nuances were so irrelevant for the 2015 Czech context, where cultural assimilationism was widely advocated for, that simply referring to an undetermined speech by Cameron can imbue an argument about the cultural incompatibility of ‘Muslims’ with the topos of authority without facing scrutiny.

Once again, it is important to remark that a minority of politicians, notably from KDU-ČSL, spent political capital challenging culturalist negative narratives about ‘Muslims in Western Europe’. One strategy was to associate ‘Muslims’ with ‘us’. For example, Langšádlová (TOP 09, UK52) destigmatised Muslims by claiming that many are members of their German partners, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU/CSU). Other strategies include praising West European successful models of integration (Gabal, KDU-ČSL, UK36; Cyril Svoboda, KDU-ČSL, UK26) or dissociating the tiny minority of ‘Muslim’ troublemakers from most other ‘Muslims’ living in Western Europe. Šojdrová (KDU-ČSL, UK46) differentiated between the French and Czech presidents, as the former, François Hollande, reportedly rallied all French society against ‘radical Islam’ after the Charlie Hebdo attacks, whereas Zeman tried to associate himself with Konvička (IvČRN). Nevertheless, as they did against politicians combating

fearmongering (7.3., 8.3.), members of ODS continued to fish in troubled waters by accusing these disassociating politicians of elitism. Jirsa (ODS, UK44) accused West European liberal politicians of being out of touch with the threatening reality, that is, that 'Muslims', 'jihadists' and 'uncontrolled migrant waves' are associated:

> Those jihadists in France were people born in France as second-generation Muslims and came out of those Muslim ghettos, and that's simply something we're scared of here, in the Czech Republic; and it's connected to that fear of uncontrolled migrant waves. Therefore, I wouldn't divide [*nerozděloval*] these [issues], as many European politicians want, but rather connect them.

As the debate over the 'quotas' intensified, two other 'European' spaces emerged as dysfunctional, different and dangerous: namely, Southern Europe, particularly Greece, and, for ODS, Germany. As in Czechia's neighbouring countries, Greece had become lambasted in public discourse during its early-2010s debt crisis. In Czechia, the crisis was blamed on state corruption and Greeks' laziness (Huleja, 2013). During the 'refugee crisis', politicians continued to accuse Greece of incompetence, unwillingness to solve the 'crisis', causing the 'crisis' or illegally profiteering from EU funds for migration management. Daniel (2020, p. 116) identified Okamura as the politician who, by late December 2015, "revived […] orientalist stereotyping" of Greeks to accuse them for failing to cut down the number of refugees arriving. Even if Okamura's (2011) lambasting of the Greek state predates the 'refugee crisis', similar accusations to those referenced by Daniel had been promoted much earlier than December by the mainstream. After the moderator in UK26 (13 May 2015) cited accusations by MEP Zahradil (ODS) to Greece of not having had set in place "army units, boats, and flotillas in the Mediterranean to solve the situation", Hybášková, the EU ambassador to Iraq and formerly active in the Czech right, differentiated the corrupt and refugee-ridden Southern Europe from its good-governing, logical and 'humane' Northern counterpart:

> Significantly, in those countries where there is disorder [*nepořádek*], to put it nicely, where corruption reigns, [and] there's an informal labour market – that means, mostly in the Southern [European] states – there's the greatest penetration [of refugees] […]. It's in the interest of the Czech Republic not to rank among the Southern countries, but the Northern countries, so that [Czechia] is transparent; accountable; its adopted measures, logical; so that it ranks among the countries providing humanitarian help and having a clear, open, legible and legal immigration policy.

Politicians relied on the topos of justice throughout the year to refuse taking responsibility for Italy or Greece's alleged lack thereof. By June, Vondra (ODS, UK27) argued that Czechs were morally exempt from helping 'refugees' since Italy and Greece had done nothing to stop them. By September, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Zaorálek (ČSSD, UK37), complained about Czechs earning a bad reputation as unsupportive towards 'refugees' when Greece was rejecting Czech aid to secure its external borders. By early 2016, political leaders North of the Mediterranean were threatening to expel Greece from the EU and Schengen if it kept 'neglecting its obligations on external border control' (Traynor & Smith, 2016). Czechia was no exception. During the first half of the decade, most Czech parties, including ČSSD,

had aligned with the Northern European right by strongly advocating for austerity programmes in Greece – with the possibility of 'Grexit' being, if not encouraged, welcomed as inevitable and having a deterrent effect (Beneš, 2017). By the end of 2015, several politicians, including the Ministers of Interior, Chovanec (ČSSD, UK47), and Finance, Babiš (ANO, cited in UK54), were proposing to expel Greece from Schengen. The normalisation of anti-Greek discourse reached a high by late December, when Greece decided to recall its ambassador to Czechia after President Zeman had expressed his wish to expel Greece from the Eurozone, forcing the Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs to apologise (Pavel, 2015). In short, years of anti-Greek rhetoric set a precedent for a confrontational position towards Greece, whose actions were perceived to clash with Czech proposals to reduce refugee arrivals and supporting refugees outside of the EU.

Additionally, drawing on a partisan tradition of antagonising Germany as a Europeanising agent (Hanley, 2007, pp. 199–201), members of ODS used the 'crisis' to blame Germany for, first, having invited too many (Muslim) refugees and, second, asking countries like Czechia to share the excessive burden. This strategy probably appeared for the first time in a June text, authored by Němcová (2015), to which her author (ODS) refers in UK27. The original text argues, through a topos of burden, "Although I understand the principle of solidarity, I do not think that [just] because individual societies – be this Sweden, Germany or other countries – are starting to significantly feel the burden of refugees, that we [should] alleviate the situation by also burdening ourselves". Appealing to the anti-colonialist frame, for several ODS speakers, Germany is the neighbour pushing foreign ideas, people and policies. Jirsa (ODS, UK45) celebrated through a differentiation that some of these ideas had not 'yet' made it into Czechia: "in Europe, there are different opinions and in the Czech Republic, thank god, the [public] debate is not yet as restricted as, for example, in Germany". Consonant with ODS proposals to cut welfare spending, Vondra (ODS, UK50) represented the German 'generous social system' as having acted as a dangerous magnet for 'refugees' whose surplus Czechs were then being asked to accept. Similarly, in his analysis of Czech Islamophobic Facebook groups' montages of maps, Doboš (2023) found that Germany was represented as the epicentre of a 'Muslim' epidemic progressively spreading Eastwards.

Beyond ODS, Germany was frequently criticised in Czech public discourse on 'refugees'. The German chancellor, Angela Merkel, had become widely vilified for pushing for burden-sharing across EU member states and her welcoming approach to refugees. According to Czech surveys, Merkel went from being the most trusted foreign politician in April 2014, together with US president Barak Obama, to becoming, in December 2015, one of the most distrusted, performing worse than the loathed Russian president Vladimir Putin (Červenka, 2016b). The anti-colonialist frame of Germany as imposing refugees on Czechs (a position shared by other V4 leaders that year) would progressively find in 'the EU', understood as an outgroup, a preferred scapegoat. The Slovak PM, Robert Fico, publicly introduced the term *diktát* to refer to 'quotas' in September 2015 – for Slovaks and Czechs, this is an interdiscursive reference to the 1938 Munich Agreement, sometimes labelled as the Munich *diktát*. This expression was later adopted by other V4 politicians, famously by Hungarian PM

Viktor Orbán, to charge against ‘Brussels’ appealing to the region’s semi-peripherality. The ‘diktat from Brussels’ slogan became enthusiastically adopted by the Czech far right (NE Bruselu - Národní demokracie, 2015) and, eventually, the political establishment (Hlaváček, 2016).

8.3. The far right, ‘populists’ and ‘extremists’ as competitors over popular ‘fears’

Over the analysed period, the marked politicisation of ‘refugees’ and the rise of anti-Islam movements made mainstream politicians allegedly more wary about the actual or potential rise of the far right and so-called populists (FRaP). The strategy of pre-empting their rise by claiming exclusivity over popular ‘fears’ continued to bear no relationship with fighting Islamophobia, as the mainstream continued to feed these ‘fears’. Rather, it sought to ostracise both the FRaP, whose rhetoric became increasingly legitimised by the mainstream’s normalisation of Islamophobia (vignette 3), and mainstream actors challenging Islamophobia, accused of elitism (vignette 4). Mainstream politicians activated the FRaP as opportunists hurting the decency of the demos, which was passivised as scared, manipulated and disinformed. Meanwhile, they justified their Islamophobic positions based on their responsibility to react to popular ‘fears’ and protect citizens from the dangers of ‘Muslims’ and the FRaP. Conversely, West European politicians continued to be lambasted for offering tepid and unsatisfactory responses to popular anxieties:

> One of the problems of the contemporary West is that it talks beautifully, but that talk isn’t backed by any will to act. And if the space between such beautiful talk and reality becomes unbearably large, a new space will be created, which different extremists will fill in, sending those speakers of niceties [*krasořečníky*] to the bench (Vondra, ODS, in krajskelisty.cz, 2015).

This section describes and explains the process for creating the narrative that justifies contesting the FRaP over popular ‘fears’. Additionally, it shows how the narrative benefits the FRaP at the expense of Muslims, refugees, Czechs and the political mainstream. The foundations for this narrative were set in the period analysed in the previous chapter (see 7.3.) but elaborated during the ‘crisis’. Importantly, attributions of ‘fear’ to Czech citizens began increasing in the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo shootings in connection to jihadist terrorism.

The first step to legitimise the need for catering to people’s ‘fears’ is to construct the fearful ingroup in a positive light. ‘Czechs’ are overwhelmingly passivised as either ‘scared’ or ‘manipulated’, but rarely attributed the active and more stigmatising elements of bias such as hatred, the desire for social dominance or racism – these are, instead, the attributes of ‘extremists’. Consequently, as anti-Islam protests (for instance, by PEGIDA, in Germany, or BPI/IvČRN, in Czechia) began attracting more participants, the latter were associated to the passivised demos as ‘scared’, ‘manipulated’ or ‘dissatisfied’ with issues unrelated to racism like the EU or ‘traditional politics’. Vignette 3 explains how this framing contributed to legitimise the hateful and

incendiary aspects of these events by associating protesters with the rest of concerned co-ethnics.

Vignette 3: How anti-Islam movements represented the will of most 'scared' Czechs against anti-fascism

On 28 October 2015, the remembrance date for both the founding of Czechoslovakia and its resistance against Nazi occupation, several anti-Islam and anti-refugee protests were organised across Czech cities, mostly by the radical-right Dawn and BPI, with the participation of other radical-right parties like SPD or the extreme-right DSSS. In total, three thousand protesters were estimated to have joined (Ferebauer et al., 2015). News reports of these protests spoke of expression of, not only fear, but outright hatred – even under apparently banal slogans in placards held by protesters, such as "Sausages and beer! Stop the hatred [Muslims]!" (Ibid.). The events, whose exclusionary rallying call was "We say no to Islamic immigration" (Blok proti islámu, 2015), aimed at curtailing the rights specifically of Muslims; attendees cheered Islamophobic bigotry; and members of other far-right movements like the German PEGIDA and, most likely, the Czech neo-Nazi National Resistance participated in the events (Ferebauer et al., 2015).

UK40 covered these protests through the frame of popular 'fears'. In an opening video reportage of the protests, an off-voice narrator presented "fear of Islam" as the protests' common denominator. Conversely, the narrator described the Prague counter protesters, shown chanting "fear and panic are a Nazi tactic!", as 'the advocates of migrants'. The reportage gave visibility to hateful video-recorded statements like "Islam is a disgusting ideology" (Konvička, IvČRN) and showed stylised takes of Islamophobic placards. Among the latter, a caption of two young men holding offensive messages is later repurposed as a background image behind the discussants in the studio (see image 1). The first protester's poster associates 'us' with a series of archetypical anti-Muslim crusaders, while the second activates Islam as dehumanising:

> *Left poster*: "OUR HEROES KNIGHT ROLAND, EL CID, JAN SOBIESKY, ZDENEK KASPAR ZE SULEVIC [*CGdT: Czech noble who participated in the defense of Vienna against the Ottoman siege of 1683]"*
> *Right poster*: "ISLAM = DISRESPECT FOR LIFE"

Asked about the origin of these protests, the three invited right-wing politicians, Pospíšil (TOP 09/STAN), Vystrčil (ODS) and Lidinský (Dawn), represented the protests as responding to citizens' 'fears' and 'dissatisfaction' - with Pospíšil adding that organisers further exploited protesters' 'fears'. During the second half, at the behest of the moderator, which cites a justification for the protests given by the speaker of the Islamophobic BPI party, the politicians assessed the alleged cultural threat posed by 'Muslims' to 'Europeans'/'Czechs'.

Image 1. Caption from UK40.

The uncritical frame of popular ‘fears’ overlooks the innumerable problematic actors, goals and discursive strategies (for instance, in the background posters) from these protests – surely known to the politicians and journalists. The organisers’ abuse of national symbols, visible in the preceding video-reportage (like ubiquitous Czech flags or singing the national anthem), functions to claim representativeness for the national group. Associating the protests with popular ‘fears’, rather than disassociating them as an action with uncivil goals and means, reinforces their claim to national representativeness and normalises hate speech as a legitimate majoritarian expression. Additionally, by thematically intermeshing the protests with the politicians’ own Islamophobic rhetoric about the threat of ‘Muslim’ culture, the protests and their arguments become further normalised. Meanwhile, the voices of Muslims, the targets of protesters, remain excluded throughout the bloc.

Finally, the video-reportage’s framing of anti-fascist protesters as “the advocates of migrants” fed a narrative of social polarisation over ‘refugees’, reported by participants (see 5.1.1.). Problematically, it compared pro-refugee activists to the ‘extremists’ – with the Ministry of Interior (2016, p. 17) categorising the ‘Refugees Welcome’ initiative as left-wing extremism. The cleavage was not represented as one between the uncivility of Islamophobia and anti-discrimination, but rather the opposers and defenders of ‘refugees’.

The second step is actualising ‘fears’ and defending their primacy over other factors. ‘Fears’ assimilate diverse anxieties as a relatively static phenomenon over which politicians justified their positions. Politicians never unpacked the contents of such ‘fears’, even if they came up with explanations for whatever laid behind them. In 2015, publicly accessible Czech surveys on attitudes towards ‘refugees’ and ‘Muslims’ were largely superficial, yet what was important was that ‘fears’ existed and were widespread. Prokop (2019, p. 103) observed that many politicians justified their anti-

refugee stances by echoing a myth, according to which, 80% of Czechs would not want to accept any refugees. He did not find any survey data backing this claim but heard that same percentage from citizens participating in focus groups (as I did from my participants, see 5.1.). According to Prokop, Zeman was already pushing this narrative, albeit with even higher percentages from October 2015. Indeed, Veleba (SPO, UK46), from Zeman's party, claimed that 80% of Czechs held similar opinions (about Muslims and refugees) as those expressed by the President in his controversial 17 November 2015 speech. Even before (August 2015), Hořejší (UK32), one of the promoters of the liberal 'Scientists Against Fear and Indifference' call, stated that 70% of Czechs hold an opinion like that of the President or his spokesperson Ovčáček. Framing surveys as 'reflecting the opinion of the president' equates 'scared' citizens with the multifarious statements and policy proposals put forward by Zeman. Additionally, Czechs' 'fears' were made the principal phenomena to which policy making should subordinate, while 'Muslims' and 'refugees' were not attributed 'fears' or any emotions worthy of compassion. Other characteristics or impulses from Czech citizens (for instance, responsibility or courage), perhaps conducive to more open migration policies, remained largely excluded. As explained in section 7.3., even moderators and politicians critical of anti-refugee positions impersonalised citizens as an anti-refugee 'mood' (emotional), 'hysteria' (irrational) or 'atmosphere' (natural), making 'fears' overdetermine policy choices.

After agreeing on the existence and primacy of 'fears', politicians made 'listening to fears' a priority over other paths of action like firmly standing for non-discrimination or teaching the public. However, if politicians would have carefully 'listened to fears', the interest of 'refugees' could have also been considered. For instance, in late 2015, Daniel Prokop and colleagues conducted an analysis of attitudes towards 'Muslims' (Wirnitzer, 2015). The results revealed that Czechs hugely overestimated the percentage of Muslims who according to other international surveys would condone violence towards civilians under certain circumstances. The analysis found that higher overestimation was positively correlated with restrictive measures towards Islam. If this survey is indicative of people's 'fears', 'listening to fears' could involve tackling such misperceptions. However, according to Hořejší (UK32), except for some people in KDU-ČSL, all parties were 'gambling on the populist wave' while fearing that by expressing opinions that are up to 'European standards´, they would be losing votes. In the illustrative excerpt below, Kupka (ODS, UK39) differentiates an impersonalised threatening 'wave' from an anxious 'society/culture'. Importantly, he represents the politician's job (through the topos of responsibility) as having to tackle 'fears' rather than assessing the actual properties of the 'wave':

> If there is a real risk, a state and a culture must, of course, protect themselves. It's a natural reaction and that doesn't mean that some emotional dramatic fear is created here. But what a politician has to offer right away is also an answer; what to do about it, how to prevent such risks. And then, of course, the wave that you mentioned can be connected to a concrete proposal, concrete measures, and, conversely, lead to an outcome in which society will not convulse over unnecessary fears if it finds an answer to how to deal with the problem.

Few mainstream politicians offered alternative strategies to listening to people's fears. With an elitist take, Bělobrádek (KDU-ČSL, UK51) activated the disaffected citizenry as wanting easy solutions for complex problems and, thus, passivised successful populist parties like VV as a symptom (not the cause) of this social problem. In his view, mainstream politicians should listen to the citizenry while explaining to them the complexity behind different issues. Likewise, Vystrčil (ODS, UK40) or Hamáček (ČSSD, UK54) believed that mainstream politicians should offer citizens clearer information about 'refugees'.

After standing at the forefront of decision-making, 'fears' require destigmatisation and differentiation from more uncivil '-phobias'. When the mainstream employs the 'politics of fear' (Wodak, 2015b, Chapter 3), they need to construct the appropriateness of such 'fears', in this case, as natural, rational or the result of manipulation by ill-intentioned actors. (There is no soul searching by the mainstream for their complicity in promoting Islamophobia.) Although Pospíšil (TOP 09/STAN, UK40) acknowledged the role of news media in presenting a negative image of Muslims, he argued that Czech citizens' 'fears', while not reaching the scale of 'panic', are justifiably rational in the face of a "wave of an enormous quantity of asylum-seekers from the Third World, from the Middle East". Here, citizens are rational risk-avoiders facing a 'wave' which might hit them with an association of poor, numerous and culturalised Muslim asylum-seekers. The topos of numbers inflates the 'refugee' threat with greater civility than taking issue with their nature, although both types of threats are inseparable. For instance, Bělobrádek (KDU-ČSL) affirmed in an interview that the issue with refugees is 'not their quality but their quantity', only to later associate them with potential jihadist terrorist attacks, creating 'problems' for 'us' or displacing 'our values' (Danda, 2015). The centre right continues to justify 'fears' on intercultural difference and 'what we see in the West' most often. Unlike the rational, natural or inoculated 'fears', politicians exclude or refuse considering racism/xenophobia to explain anti-refugee attitudes – as the title of UK34 reads: "Xenophobia or a natural fear?" Speaking of Czech xenophobia seems taboo for politicians, who rationalise or justify opposition to certain groups of migrants, and dispel the accusation that Czechs hold xenophobic beliefs based on their 'courage' to holiday in North African countries (Gabal, KDU-ČSL, UK36) or living alongside a large percentage of foreigners (Kupka, ODS, UK39).

Since xenophobia is off the table, those campaigning for the rights of 'refugees' are regularly represented as challenging the legitimacy of 'our fears' (see Vignette 4). In the summer of 2015, part of Czech civil society visibly mobilised to offer aid to refugees on the move, countered anti-refugee protests and organised other public initiatives. However, no politician in the corpus refers to the rationality or naturalness driving their actions, nor of the attitudes of 'fearless' citizens. This vacuum was leveraged by centre-right, far-right and populist actors to spread the frames of the 'pro-refugee camp' as naïve, irrational, elitist or un-Czech. Pro-refugee actors thus turned into another camp or 'extreme' from which mainstream politicians tried to disassociate or cast as unrepresentative, preferring to take issue with the tone rather than content of anti-refugee rhetoric.

Consequently, the debate on xenophobia largely turned into a discussion about public decency or national values rather than policies affecting refugees – over which there was a broad consensus. For instance, in early December 2015, men from the NGOs Post Bellum and Memory of the Nations authored an 'Advent appeal' calling out 'populists' (implicitly, anti-Islam actors like BPI or IVČRN) and appealing to 'humanistic' approaches to refugees (parlamentnilisty.cz, 2015). Unlike much of mainstream political discourse, that text attempted to represent 'humanism' as a national tradition which should inform popular attitudes. Instead of appealing to popular 'fears', the call activated as 'hateful' and 'aggressive' an assimilation of 'populists', represented to endanger the national character. One of its earliest and most visible signatories, Daniel Kroupa (UK50), who Hanley (2007, p. 55) described as a neo-conservative dissident, contextualised his own signature by claiming to stand neither for racism nor political correctness. Many mainstream figures recurred to similar cautionary contextualisations to place themselves in the middle of similar continua which do not question the existence of the 'Muslim' threat (for instance, 'between solidarity and security' or, as the moderator in UK22 proposes, "between our legitimate request for [refugee's] assimilation […] and violent nationalism"). Even the 'Advent call' signalled that "of course, we do not wish the introduction of Sharia law in Europe" and demanded from 'refugees' that they "accept the respect for and reverence towards the freedom of others" (parlamentnilisty.cz, 2015). Similarly, Šojdrová (KDU-ČSL, UK46) refused to be assimilated as a defender of Islam for her support for refugees' rights:

> I'm against radical Islam, but also against the hatred against Islam tout court that Mr Konvička calls for, because there's also liberal Islam. Of course, there's a relatively fast way from liberal to radical Islam, but there's a liberal Islam for which Muslims themselves suffer as they are persecuted by radical Islam. So […] a movement that fights against any form of Islam […] is really […] propagating a hatred that incites fascism [because it says] "those who are not with us are against us". That means "those of you who aren't against Islam [or] for the Bloc Against Islam, are for Islam". That's an outrageous lie, it's what Hitler used!

Šojdrová disassociated 'liberal' from 'radical' Islam as the two main variants of Islam, while re-associating both as being separated only by a short distance. She also associated the BPI with Nazis mainly because the BPI would be forcing supporters of 'liberal Islam' like Šojdrová to appear as supporters of 'Islam', which prominently included 'radical Islam'. By adopting the frame of the good and bad 'Muslim' (Mamdani, 2002), Šojdrová projected liberalism, a desirable ideology for the ingroup, onto the good 'Muslims' whose rights should be upheld to the detriment of non-liberal ones ('radicals'). This dichotomy stresses a dangerous illiberalism specifically attributed to 'Muslims', while non-liberal Czechs are implicitly excluded from such discrimination.

Many mainstream politicians represent Islamophobic discourse and the rise of the FRaP has having a negative impact over 'us', for instance, by polarising 'us', and impinging on public decency or international prestige. Through reverse victimisation, 'Muslims' and 'refugees' are blamed for causing 'us' to be Islamophobic and 'fearful'.

Zaorálek (ČSSD, UK50) activates an impersonalised refugee 'wave' as 'driving votes towards extreme right-wing parties'. Other politicians blame 'Muslims' for radicalising ethnic majorities. Even when arguing for the usefulness of 'quotas', Cyril Svoboda (KDU-ČSL, UK26) claimed that forcing 'refugees' to accumulate in the countries of entry would 'radicalise' the citizens of Spain, Italy or France. At its most extreme, Tomský (UK34) explained an allegedly growing number of attacks against refugee facilities in Germany as resulting from Germans' exhaustion with tolerating migrants. Like the passivized participants of far-right protests, the assailants in Tomský's representation are passivised as an assimilated worn-out ethnic majority rather than activated as, for instance, extremist thugs.

Vignette 4: How the academic elite dared to pathologise 'us' as xenophobes

On 17 August 2015, at the behest of dissatisfied PhD students, hundreds of academics signed a public call (Výzva českých vědců, 2015) condemning the promotion of intolerance in Czech public discourse. In the following days, thousands of signatories joined the initiative and drew media attention to the document. High-profile politicians, mostly from KDU-ČSL (Pavel Bělobrádek, Michaela Šojdrová) and ČSSD (František Bublan, Jiří Dienstbier) also added their signatures (Vědci proti strachu a lhostejnosti, 2018). The call was discussed in UK32 and UK33 after the President's spokesperson, Ovčáček, pushed it into the news cycle by accusing the 'elites' behind the call of 'widening an existing gap in Czech society' (UK32). The text partly responded to growing and increasingly transgressive demonstrations against 'Muslims' and 'refugees'. Most infamously, on 1 July, two protesters at a BPI event had carried props of gallows reserved for 'traitors' to the homeland (Třeček & ČTK, 2015).

The so-called Scientists' call was another humanistic appeal for public decency, social responsibility and cohesion. Its authors expressed concern with the "growth of xenophobic sentiments in society and the activities of extremist groups which lack a proportionate counterweight". However, they still acknowledged "the real risks resulting from immigration" and never sought to challenge mainstream migration policy. The call advocated for conciliation and avoided confronting racism: mainstream politicians had been opportunistic but could be redeemed; 'extremists' remained inexpiable and dangerous; the media's sensationalism and lies were products of their commercial logic; citizens were passivised as scared, disinformed or manipulated.

Politicians in both blocs used the opportunity to accuse the authors of being out of touch with popular 'fears'. Ovčáček, the president's spokesperson, skilfully used this strategy in UK32:

1 […] the petitioners shield themselves behind a belief in tolerance, yet they
2 themselves behave intolerantly. By this, I am referring to statements
3 suggesting that Czechs do not understand refugees and that society
4 should mature. I believe this is a situation where, in some way, the
5 petitioners sit on an imaginary cloud above Czech society and, in some
6 way, lecture it. People have real [*reálné*] concerns, and it is necessary to

7 talk to them, to listen to them, and not to lecture them. I speak about this
8 in this way because Mr president regularly meets with real people [*s*
9 *reálnými lidmi*] in the regions. People truly and really [*reálně*] express
10 concerns about the refugee crisis, and it is unacceptable to, in some way
11 or another, essentially insult them.

Ovčáček functionalises the signatories as petitioners in l.1., which activates them as requesting social action rather than signing a document, and impersonalises them as "statements suggesting" (ll.2-3). These "statements" are activated as invalidating "Czechs" and accusing the latter of being immature (ll.2-4). Moreover, the signatories are differentiated from "Czech society" (l.5), and activated as, implicitly, looking down on 'Czechs' from their cloud and lecturing 'Czechs' (ll-4-6). In ll.6-11, Ovčáček relies on a combination of the topos of reality (i.e. because reality is as it is, a specific action should be taken) and an *argumentum ad populum (*that is, relying on popular emotions rather than providing supporting evidence). He emphasises the topos through lexical markers of reality (*reálně, opravdu*), by implicitly differentiating the "real people in the regions" from the signatories of the call, and by representing the president as regularly meeting these people (hence, verifying these 'fears'' existence).

Ovčáček is appealing to Zeman's political base through the president's trademark antagonism with the urban elite, represented by the signatories. These were familiar targets of Klausian discourses against moralising civil society leaders and liberal globalists (Slačálek & Šitera, 2022). Moreover, Ovčáček offers a populistic prescription based on the exaltation of the *volonté générale*, namely listening to the 'real' fears separates the leaders of the people from its enemies. Just like Miloš Zeman had done in his 2013 presidential campaign against Germans and nobles, his spokesperson appealed to historical anti-elitist grievances. The signatories' imputed paternalism intertextually equated them to the Communist nomenklatura. On 22 November 1989, an infamously patronising speech from a balcony (akin to the signatories' "imaginary cloud", l.5) by the Czechoslovak Communist Party's Prague secretary, Miroslav Štěpán, triggered workers to respond by chanting "We are not children!". This motto became a rallying cry during the Velvet Revolution and, throughout the years, has been appropriated by ideologically diverse actors to reduce their targeted elites to authoritarian Communists (Milion chvilek pro demokracii, 2019; Vondráček, 2015). Ovčáček accuses the signatories of conceiving Czech society as 'immature' up to four times throughout the UK32 interview.

Importantly, Ovčáček's accusation of elitism set the frame for the ensuing public discussion. The day after the spokesperson had been interviewed, the title of UK33 already read "The elite against 'normal' society?". Several mainstream politicians publicly reacted to the call by underscoring their commitment to listening to people's 'fears' rather than combating hatemongering. Reactions for the Parlamentní Listy website, cited in UK33, imply that scientists cannot fear because they are out of touch with reality:

> "It's possible to differentiate between xenophobia and common sense. I recommend each signatory of the petition to move around France and see

with their own eyes how the acceptance of refugees from countries culturally distant from us can look like" (Tejc, ČSSD).

"The best solution would be for each of those scientists to permanently take home 10 refugees from, for example, Africa and, on top of that, 10 relatives per refugee, and take good and proper care of them" (Jaroslav Zeman, ODS)

By then, the authors of the call were pushed to defend themselves against accusation of being out of touch and not allowing critical voices into the debate on refugees. In other outlets, several signatories defensively embraced the 'elite' label (Věra Luptáková & Senková, 2015) and employed fairly condescending language towards the national group. From the left, Slačálek (2016) has criticised a Czech liberal tradition whereby intellectuals have blamed a demonised 'Little Czech' [*Čecháček*], "a parochial simpleton; a boor […] of low taste", for the country's lack of progress. As Slačálek contends, the intelligentsia's association of popular racism with stupidity is born out of a concern for public decency and not the harm inflicted on the targets of racism.

Czech society had become increasingly sensitive to the kinds of accusations described by Slačálek, since Zeman had previously antagonised urban liberal elites (Naxera & Krčál, 2018, pp. 9–10). Since late 2014, Zeman and Ovčáček had been popularising the label 'the Prague café' [*Pražská kavárna*] to caricaturise this liberal straw man (Joch, 2014b) which the academics fitted. Although 'the Prague café' had originally been applied to those challenging Zeman, by Autumn, the President repurposed it for the pro-refugee minority: "On the one hand, [we have] the so-called Prague Café […], and on the other the 90-to-95% of the Czech society", who, particularly agree on "illegal immigration" (ČTK & heg, 2015). In short, the Castle sought to alienate its challengers by promoting itself as the protector of the 90%, not defined in socioeconomic but cultural terms, a strategy on which Zeman would try to capitalise in subsequent years.

Reflecting an uncritical dismissal of racism, mainstream politicians challenge far-right actors rather than exclusionary rhetoric. Illustratively, when the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights criticised Zeman's speeches as xenophobic and Islamophobic in October 2015 (UK39), several high-ranking politicians dismissed the accusations by justifying the president's remarks with reference to his idiosyncratic rhetorical style or willingness to thematise issues of general interest like terrorism. Conversely, when not under the lens of the international community, the mainstream consensus was to condemn Zeman for offering a xenophobic speech on the remembrance date of 17 November 2015, not because of its contents, but due to the fact that the president shared a podium with Konvička (IVČRN) or Černoch (Dawn) for an audience that included supporters of IvČRN, the German PEGIDA or, the leader of the English Defence League, Tommy Robinson. Šojdrová (KDU-ČSL, UK46) found Zeman's speech unproblematic, but what was troubling was that he went on a podium "next to those people" and gave the speech for "that audience" (UK46). Indeterminations such as "those people" are often used derogatorily by mainstream politicians to avoid giving publicity to actors regarded as beyond constitutional politics.

The unequivocal camaraderie of the president with far-right actors was what finally led mainstream politicians, including PM Sobotka, to condemn the Islamophobic actions of the president, whereas, the month before, the five-year record of blatantly Islamophobic speeches condemned by the UN had not merited such ostracism. These contrasting reactions reflect the mainstream's greater preoccupation with the normalisation of Islamophobia being conducted by the far right than by themselves. Jirsa (ODS, UK44) lamented that ostracising IVČRN was silencing good ideas. He did so by associating the 'senior lecturer' and 'Belgian PM' (topos of authority): "the Belgian PM said that all returnees from Syria should be immediately imprisoned. If senior lecturer [*docent*] Konvička said that, our do-gooders [*sluníčkáři*] would go crazy." Although the deferential use of academic titles is common in many Czech social contexts, and Konvička consciously exploited his academic pedigree, other nominations of the IVČRN leader attest that his academic title is irrelevant to his political activism against Islam unless in the interest of conferring authority to his Islamophobic ideas. Likewise, when speakers want to introduce anti-Islam arguments from other academics, they do so by citing them alongside their academic titles.

8.4. How the representation of Muslim refugees as uncontrollable and dangerous favoured 'control' over 'quotas' as a policy principle

The discursive focus on the administrative and security aspects of the 'crisis' made exerting 'control' over 'refugees' obscure their helplessness or perils. 'Uncontrollability', therefore, became 'refugees'' most salient feature. After discussing the German management of 'refugees' in UK40, the moderator opened UK41, about a Czech government plan to attract Ukrainian workers, by differentiating both types of migration: "And now, once again, migration; [but,] this time, a managed [*řízená*] one." Two strategies for emphasising uncontrollability are to aggregate 'refugees' as large quantities (through adjectives like 'massive' or 'huge', or quantifications like 'millions of refugees') and objectivising them as assimilated water phenomena such as a flow [*proud, tok*], inflow [*příliv*] or wave/s [*vlna/y*]. To culminate their securitisation, policy proposals suggested mobilising resources for 'stopping', 'regulating', 'controlling', 'managing' or 'redirecting' the threatening phenomenon: "Those migrant waves are very strong and it's necessary to equip hotspots with qualified personnel." (Chovanec, ČSSD, UK47) Since representations overwhelmingly favoured 'our' subjectivity and how 'they' affected 'us', commonly proposed measures supressed what these could cause on 'them': "If the migration flow, which today consists of ten thousand people a day, turned towards us and suddenly headed towards the Czech Republic, I wouldn't be against building a fence, as Hungary did." (Jirsa, ODS, UK45) 'Refugees' were agents who overburdened member states, infringed laws and aimed towards Germany. Even among those politicians who acknowledged the desperate situations driving refugees' choices, several concomitantly passivised them as victims of 'traffickers' or 'mafias' to justify a clampdown on the latter that would effectively seal paths for migration.

The ruling coalition aimed at reassuring the public by emphasising the notion of control. While the Minister of Foreign Affairs complained about 'Europe' not being "able to control the external borders, nor to register refugees who come in such numbers;

[…] nor to agree on a system that would handle the tens or hundreds of thousands of refugees" (Zaorálek, ČSSD, UK37), that of Defence called for placing personnel at hotspots "to differentiate among the migrants, to have control over their real origin." (Stropnický, ANO, UK52) After the November 2015 attacks in Paris, European security services heightened their concerns about IS fighters infiltrating refugees. Part of the rationale behind the promulgated idea of 'control' had been to prevent terrorism. However, in the aftermath of the attacks, several Czech politicians, starting with minister Chovanec (ČSSD, UK43), promoted the idea that 'second- and third-generation Muslims' could be the ones turning into terrorists, further securitising 'refugees' (Jirsa, ODS, UK44 – referenced by Mihola, KDU-ČSL, UK45 ; Lank, Dawn, UK48; Klaus, UK55). Even before this, a strategy regularly employed by ODS was to question the illusion of control that the EU and the Czech government aspired to possess. At least since July (Fiala, ODS, UK29), ODS members stressed that 'we know nothing about those people', an indetermination assimilating refugees. The idea that 'refugees' could never be controlled because they could either be hiding their terrorist intentions or their children might one day become terrorists led to the conclusion harshly articulated by Jirsa (ODS, UK44): "

The settling of Muslim 'refugees' is considered dangerous on three grounds: the threat of jihadism, intercultural differences and poverty. First, Muslims are feared as potential jihadists, which is my category of analysis since Czech politicians rather employ a nebulous collection of categories like 'radical Islamism/Islam', 'Islamic radicalism', 'Islamism' or 'terrorism'. The overlap of these categories with jihadism was unclear since they were umbrellas for sociopolitical ills ranging from worldviews resisting integration to attempts at 'Islamising' society. Here, the process of radicalisation (as that of migrant integration) is represented as largely voluntaristic, erasing the agency of state institutions, the host society or other third parties. 'Muslims' were activated as radicalising as a result of their inevitable frustrations and disappointments, which the state could only combat through law and order measures. Second, as elaborated in 8.2., many politicians stressed cultural or civilisational differences between 'Muslims' (sometimes 'Arabs') and 'Europeans'. Unlike the Christian refugee, with whom 'we' share "a similar worldview" (Foldyna, ČSSD, UK53), their Muslim counterparts are cautioned about having to "respect our laws and integrate themselves." (Jurečka, KDU-ČSL, UK38) The idea of a migrant-led assimilation remains part of political 'common sense'. The moderator asked Syrian and Muslim senator Mezian (ČSSD, UK36) about the everyday challenges to integration which he faced since arriving in Czechoslovakia (where he studied medicine in the 1970s), likely expecting some anecdote about different cultural practices. In contrast to the voluntaristic representation of integration, Mezian, a social democrat, stressed the importance of systems which offer access to jobs and education. Furthermore, he was the only politician to stress that 'refugees' need, first and foremost, for the state to confer on them a feeling of safety and protection from discrimination and refugees. This remark contrasted with dominant frames such as 'Muslims' being a threat to 'us' or that, as guests, they are not owed hospitality but owe obedience to the house rules (see 7.5.).

Third, as advanced in 8.2., there is a set of aporophobic prejudices expecting Muslim refugees to be uneducated, unable to escape poverty and ignorance, and, thus,

burdening. The fear of class conflict with a Muslim underclass is evident in preference for middle-class archetypes from the liberal professions or holding professional degrees. Middle-class 'Muslims' were not only more 'useful' but also their expected participation in the projects of modernity made them less threatening. Robejšek (UK22) claimed that 'we' do not need every single refugee but those who are "educated specialists […] who are willing to assimilate". Even if Christian 'refugees' were already perceived as less threatening, Dezort (UK29) from the NGO Generace 21, reassured the public about his organisation's programme bringing Iraqi Christian refugees to Czechia: "We have people there like a vet, a school headteacher, a construction engineer, a joiner." Indeed, in an interview with Dezort (Funka, 2017), this lawyer acknowledged that redressing the loss of refugees' middle-class status was one of the original drivers of the initiative:

> I remember when I travelled to Iraq to meet some of the displaced people we eventually helped to move. They were people like me, but I could travel there and back and they had no way to get out. They were staying in metal caravans in a refugee camp just few miles from an airport. The only difference between us was they had a different passport in their pocket. A year and half before I met them some of them had fine lives - they had homes and cars and jobs. Now deprived of that, they lived with the pain of what happened to them and uncertainty about what was to come.

Similarly, as mentioned earlier, Langšádlová (TOP 09, UK52) illustrated that German Muslims could integrate since many reportedly were members of the CDU/CSU and attended university. University and CDU/CSU membership implied a certain class position, plus the guarantee that those Muslims would not organise politically along Islamism. Gabal (KDU-ČSL, UK36), who was relatively receptive to refugees, wanted to expose the hypocrisy of Czechs not being bothered by "Chinese capital buying up our big business" but rather by the appearance of "kebab shops, or Syrian nurses or doctors at our hospitals". Even when de-demonising 'Muslims', Gabal relied on their functionalisation as health professionals and entrepreneurs against an impersonalised 'Chinese capital'. Speakers attempted to differentiate the middle-class 'Muslim' from their dispossessed and uneducated counterparts in the 'Muslim ghetto'. Conversely, the dispossession of Christian and other non-Muslim migrants was not viewed with suspicion. For instance, Cílek (UK30), mostly known for his academic work on geology and climatology, argued that 'Muslims' cannot integrate because "most Muslims are for Sharia law, even in Western Europe", they are unable to adopt "a second or third identity like they have in Switzerland" or learn about Czech literature, history and language. Instead, he advocated for an active NGO-led pre-emptive recruitment of migrants 'who can integrate', that is 'Christians' like 'Egyptian Copts' because "they're excellent economists" and "Armenian Christians". This pre-emptive artificial selection of 'integrable' and 'useful' groups reflects a misperception of asylum policy as an ethnoreligious and class shopping list in which non-Muslim refugees are exempted from the scrutiny and forewarnings conditioning the entrance of Muslim refugees (Lukášová, 2017). As Kupka (ODS, UK26) wrongly claimed "the basic principle for a good asylum policy is that those people have an interest in integrating into the

receiving society”. However, as this chapter illustrates, that willingness was predicated a priori by political rhetoric and anti-refugee policies.

Mandatory ‘quotas’ remained the policy issue around which the rejection of refugees was most frequently articulated. Arguments against ‘quotas’ did not need to refer to the Muslimness of refugees, ‘even if most refugees were Muslim. When discussing ‘quotas’ or similar mechanisms, several politicians manifested preference for Christian or Yazidi refugees. The government-supported plan to welcome over 150 Christian refugees from Iraq (Vlada.cz, 2015) was self-congratulatory and lauded across the board as a ‘humanitarian gesture’ (as opposed to the uselessness or carelessness attributed to the ‘quotas’) with which, nonetheless, civilisationist rhetoric co-existed:

> I read the report which the NGO [coordinating the programme] presented in relative detail. So, I’m glad that the Czech Republic decided to support this, because, here, we can show that we want to help, that we offer a prospect to these people. I firmly believe that their integration will be easier than, let’s say, in the case of those people who do not share that civilisational value [*CGdT: Christianity*]. (Polčák, TOP 09/STAN, UK53)
>
> [I]n this case, it will really become true that the, important, integration will be easier, among other things, precisely because of the sharing of similar traditions or roots. (Kupka, ODS, UK53)

However, the rejection of ‘quotas’ was sometimes made without reference to civilisationist/culturalist rhetoric. Uselesness was the most commonly employed topos against these. ‘Quotas’ were useless because most refugees were represented as wanting to go to Germany and, thus, politicians regarded coercing relocated refugees to remain within Czech borders as inhuman, illegal or technically unfeasable. The RRTV (2016b, pp. 17–18) analysis of ČT’s reporting on ‘refugees’ also identified this as the most common argument against ‘quotas’. The RRTV report also pipointed that politicians never thematised the reasons why refugees allegedly wanted to go to Germany instead of applying for asylum in Czechia. This omission responded to the lack of political will for facilitating the access of Muslims to asylum. Similar concerns were never divulged in the case of the Iraqi Christian refugees mentioned above and, when some of them escaped to Germany, for reasons which cannot be explored here, the narrative that ‘they all want to go to Germany’ became reinforced. ‘Quotas’ were also cast as useless because of their short-sightedness or for not tapping onto the (otherwise, unaddressed) roots of the ‘crisis’. Additionally, ‘quotas’ were rejected under a topos of legitimacy. In public discourse, the mechanism was often framed as confronting Czechia or the V4 countries with Germany and the EU (RRTV, 2016c, 2016a). Politicians, particularly on the right, saw ‘quotas’ as impinging on national sovereignty and ignoring that Czechia was receiving Ukrainian refugees. The governing coalition, despite making a case against mandatory ‘quotas’, conceded that Czechia would eventually accept its commitments within the EU. Once the mechanism was approved, politicians started arguing for negotiating opt-outs or presenting alternative solutions. Despite its promises, Czechia would largely ignore both the mandatory and voluntary mechanisms, with its reasons being dismissed by the EU Court of Justice in April 2020 (Gómez del Tronco, 2020).

Conclusions

This chapter presented the results of an analysis of political discourse in the *Události, komentáře* show aired between March and December 2015, when the 'refugee crisis' became the dominant topic in public discourse and the 'refugee quotas' the most discussed piece of legislation. It argued that the strategies used to represent 'Muslims' before the 'refugee crisis' (see chapter 7) largely contributed to build anti-refugee rhetoric in this period. Despite their differences, the discourses on 'Muslims' and 'refugees' generally presented overlaps. Opposition to 'refugees' transiting to Germany did not need to invoke their Muslimness; it was only when fears were raised about refugees hypothetically settling in Czechia that they became threatening 'Muslims in Europe'. Most anti-refugee rhetoric was implicitly or explicitly driven by Islamophobia and clearly Islamophobic instances of anti-refugee rhetoric were considered for analysis. Three changes in context conditioned Islamophobic rhetoric during this period. First, since January 2015, the fear of jihadist terrorist attacks on European soil had heightened and became incorporated into political discourse. Second, the far right was relatively successful during this period although their influence remained marginal. More importantly, the divisive President Zeman revived his popularity by betting on blatantly Islamophobic anti-refugee and anti-terrorist rhetoric. Third, Czech politicians were required to clearly and urgently articulate their policy towards the 'refugee crisis'.

During this period, the representation of clashing identities became emphasised. Civilisationism was more marked, with an exclusionary Christian identity often foregrounded, intergroup differences becoming reified and the narrative of irreconcilable values taking a fatalistic turn. Politicians crystallised a narrative manufacturing popular 'fears' on which to justify their Islamophobic positions. An amalgamation of 'fears' then became misused to dismiss intolerant anti-Islam protests as manifestations of national anxieties and to brand politicians condemning fearmongering as out-of-touch elites dismissing the general will. Again, concerns about 'extremists' or excessive fearmongering (perceived to corrupt the nation, rather than hurting refugees) co-existed with the Islamophobic agenda proposed by the political mainstream. Regarding migrants moving towards Europe, during the 'crisis', they were represented as an object in need of control. Restrictive migration policies were justified by representing 'refugees' as an approaching mass or their objectivisation as water phenomena. Conversely, restrictive asylum policy relied on their association with jihadist terrorists, intercultural differences and poverty. Even if 'quotas' were nominally rejected as useless, ultimately, the attributes of 'Muslims' justified solutions to invest in helping them in/near their countries of origin (i.e. among fellow 'Muslims') rather than in the capacities of the Czech state to absorb an inflow of 'Muslim' migrants. Politicians made appeals to boost state capabilities only in order to welcome a greater number of Ukrainians, as well as Arab Christian or Yazidi refugees.

The opposition to Muslim 'refugees' during the 'crisis', legitimised through the consensus against 'quotas', boosted Islamophobic rhetoric and contributed to its normalisation. Ostensibly technical, tactical and security arguments against 'refugees' appeared alongside vehement representations of their threatening 'Muslim' essence. As Havlík (2019a, p. 60) wrote, "the admission of refugees [was] outside politically acceptable boundaries". Thus, politicians challenging fearmongering were still warning the electorate against welcoming 'refugees'. Since 'quotas' were widely opposed, most

of the political debate was not very informative of policy positions – at least, those concerning the arrival of refugees in Czechia. However, the substance of the confrontation generally concerned whether ‘fears’ or ‘fearmongering’ were appropriate and the ability of populist actors (like Zeman or Konvička) to condition national politics. Conversely, understanding the fates and predicament of refugees remained secondary. Eventually, the pro-refugee factions within mainstream parties failed to promote alternative narratives and, for the 2017 elections, most party programmes would converge in the securitisation of migration.

9. Conclusions

This work has contributed to explaining the extreme political and public opinion shift against 'Muslims' that took place in Czechia in 2014/2015. By contrasting a critical analysis of political discourse from those years with the themes emerging from the testimonies of participants interviewed in 2020/2021, I have been able to substantiate my three initial arguments. First, that mainstream politicians began normalising Islamophobic rhetoric before the 'refugee crisis' and continued doing so throughout. The reproduction and legitimation of this rhetoric, in turn, exacerbated and informed the contents of Islamophobic prejudice. Second, contrary to dominant interpretations of normalisation, mainstream politicians opted to articulate an Islamophobic programme because of their own motivations and interests, rather than being pushed to radicalise by far-right challengers. Politicians warned about the potential emergence of far-right 'extremists' to justify their own Islamophobic rhetoric. In parallel, they were feeding and constructing popular 'fears' by representing 'Muslims' largely as a threat. Third, to better appreciate the public opinion shift and the influence of political discourse over Islamophobic prejudice, 'Muslim' needs to be recognised as a socially constructed polysemic category of practice rather than analysis. From this perspective, Islamophobic prejudice does not follow a uniform historical path since the stereotypes of 'Muslims' supporting those prejudices change over time. As the interviews in chapters 5-6 confirmed, the content of these stereotypes was influenced by political discourse from 2014/2015. Importantly, these conclusions follow from a critical, sociopsychological and constructionist approach to the research problem. The following sections synthesise the results according to the original research questions in 3.1., discuss the contributions and implications of these findings, and, lastly, propose new avenues for future analyses of the problem while acknowledging the limitations of this project.

9.1. Recapitulating and answering research questions

9.1.1. Exploration and description

The first set of exploratory questions sought to understand the nature, history and causes of recent negative attitudes towards 'Muslims' according to non-Muslim ethnic Czechs and Muslims living in Czechia interviewed in 2020 and 2021 (RQ1). The results need to be contextualised. According to surveys, attitudes towards 'Muslims' and Muslim-majority groups had been negative at least since 9/11, quantitatively worsening over subsequent years but, especially, since 2015 (see 4.2.2.a., 4.4.1.). However, from a social constructionist perspective and despite the lack of supporting empirical analyses, the trends in prejudice should also be interpreted qualitatively. The stereotypes of 'Muslims' supporting Islamophobic prejudice and, consequently, respondents' interpretation of survey questions about 'Muslims' changed over this period. When I conducted the interviews in 2020/2021, attitudes were generally negative but the stereotypes (and accompanying knowledge, beliefs, arguments and so on) guiding these attitudes had been largely influenced by the discursive shift of 2014 (see chapter 7) and, especially, 2015 (see chapter 8); although the 2020/2021 stereotypes undoubtedly presented continuities with their predecessors. After 2014,

the discourse on ‘Muslims’ and ‘refugees’ (in combination with that on IS, the death of multiculturalism, refugee ‘quotas’ and so on) significantly shaped stereotypes of ‘Muslims’ as Arabs, Middle-Easterners, migrants, refugees, prone to radicalisation, potential jihadists or destitute. Concluding from surveys alone that anti-Muslim attitudes (an analytical concept, after all) present a linear evolution is a partial simplification since each survey posed different questions, at different historical points, responding to different contexts and presenting commonplace methodological biases (see 4.2.2.a.). Therefore, while there was a complex and understudied base for prejudice before 2015, attitudes towards ‘Muslims’ qualitatively and quantitatively changed that year.

The interviews shed light on the historical development of attitudes (RQ1.a.ii.), which participants tied to news and political events. Overall, Muslim participants evaluated some events as having a greater impact over attitudes, notably 9/11 and, to a lesser extent, the Arab Springs. Furthermore, they recalled increased hostility from activists and the public by the early 2010s, which coincides with a time of increasing online anti-Islam activism (Hesová, 2016b) and the centre right’s early experiments with Islamophobic rhetoric (see 4.2.2.b.). Non-Muslim participants did not raise the period between 2010 and 2014 as relevant, speaking at most of the pernicious effects of a synchronous information revolution which, through the Internet, exposed many Czechs to threatening and confusing information. Finally, 2015 was unanimously regarded as the pivotal moment when attitudes worsened and hostilities increased.

Participants acknowledged that not all Czechs were equally biased (RQ1.a.i). Consistent with correlations with anti-Muslim attitudes identified in previous surveys, participants alluded to a generational and urban-rural divide, which, according to their lay theories, were often mediated by intergroup contact opportunities, media literacy and socioeconomic anxieties. Interestingly, participants in smaller localities often expressed conformity with or reluctance to challenge the perceived dominance of local negative attitudes – supporting the notion of a spiral of silence effect (Prokop, 2019, pp. 103–104). Contradicting surveys, participants predicted that males and Christians would be more likely to hold anti-Muslim attitudes. I interpreted that this discrepancy reflected public discourse narratives attributing Islamophobia to ‘extremists’ (see 7.3., 8.3.), generally gendered as male, and a civilisationist framework (see 7.1.) which represents an enmity between ‘Christian’ and ‘Muslim’ identities. Indeed, female non-Muslim participants seemed notably concerned about patriarchy in Islam (see 5.3.2.f.) and self-declared Christian participants showed antipathy to the persecution of another religious group. Furthermore, sections 5.3.2.f. and 5.3.1.b. reveal that participants were influenced by public discourse when reporting a (false) social and political polarisation. Rather than thinking about the spectacularised clash between pro-refugee (for instance, ‘truth lovers’) and anti-refugee (‘extremists) poles, it is more accurate to conceptualise a large section of society opposing ‘refugees’ and another large section being somehow cautious but not entirely opposed to them (see Glopolis, 2016).

Moving forward to questions of plausible causality (RQ1.b.), the two actors blamed for promoting anti-Muslim attitudes (RQ1.b.i.) were ‘the media’ and politicians. Importantly, mirroring public discourse narratives, blame was largely allocated to elites

or structural factors (such as a lack of intergroup contact) rather than critically acknowledging the existence of exclusionary or supremacist beliefs, like those from aporophobia or racism, across society and institutions. Although older participants frequently represented co-nationals as provincial Little Czechs (see 5.3.2.b.), this essentialisation disregards the material conditions fostering discrimination towards some outgroups (like the Roma or Muslims) and not others. Thus, 'the [news] media' and politicians were not seen as racist but driven by commercial and electoral interests, respectively. News media were blamed for 'brainwashing', promoting representations that heightened intergroup threat, negative stereotypes and category salience, while Facebook users and groups incited hatred and confusion.

Regarding politicians, participants largely reproduced a narrative proposed by the mainstream (see 7.3., 8.3.) portraying 'extremists' and 'populists' as leading the charge against 'Muslims', while opportunistic or helpless mainstream politicians were believed to have jumped on the bandwagon. Reflecting their perceived 'ownership' of this issue, four far-right and populist actors were overwhelmingly recalled as politicians who spoke about 'Muslims' while positive rhetoric remained hardly memorable. Since opposition to 'refugee quotas' was the most salient related political issue and had been politically justified based on an opposition to Muslim migration, most non-Muslim participants spoke as if welcoming Muslims into the country was a legitimate matter for democratic deliberation.

Another cause for prejudice lay in the contents of widely shared social representations (RQ1.b.ii) which heightened intergroup threat and difference, and negative stereotypes of 'Muslims'. Importantly, contact with actual Muslims contributed to richer and alternative stereotype contents. For instance, the relatively neutral and positive representations of Muslim-majority countries visited by non-Muslim participants contrasted with the threatening countries which participants knew through mediatised representations. Notably, the interviews revealed the hegemony of the 'Muslims in the West' narrative intensely promoted by politicians (7.2., 7.5., 8.2.). In contrast, the calm, safety and provincialism with which Czechia was represented heightened the perceived 'Muslim' threat. The Islamophobic bias from public discourse resulted in a disconnect from the experiences of actual Muslims. Most notably, for non-Muslim female participants, the most common theme regarding 'Muslim women' was that these were oppressed by 'Muslim' men. Conversely, every Muslim participant reported how Muslim women in Czechia regularly faced serious forms of discrimination from non-Muslim Czechs, including assaults in public spaces.

Prejudice is also motivated by the type of perceived threat (symbolic or material, RQ1.b.iii.) posed by 'Muslims' and the identity carrying that threat (ethnocultural/racial or religious, RQ1.b.iv.). Mirroring political discourse (see 7.5., 8.2.1.), 'Muslims' were mostly perceived as a symbolic threat, often seeking to 'push' an amalgam of 'their norms onto us'. However, since symbolic change is expected to take place by force, the material/symbolic analytical boundary remains fuzzy in practice. Importantly, although the material threat of terrorism seemed salient in 2015, this was no longer the case by 2020/2021. Instead, fear of crime, deviancy and the poverty *caused* by 'Muslims' were of greater concern. Consequently, participants reported a societal preference for cultural assimilation, and secular and middle-class hypothetical

Muslims. Additionally, section 6.2. showed how Islamophobic prejudice is largely driven by the racialisation of 'Muslims' as an ethnocultural group and the perceived Arab, Middle-Eastern, non-white, migrant and refugee identities of its targets. These attributes are seen as most representative of the category but also make individual Muslims less likeable. Additionally, through local understandings of religiosity and secularity, the religion of 'Islam' is often blamed for containing a threatening cultural and political programme. Nevertheless, these fears are based on generalisations about the religion connected to imputations to 'Muslims'. For instance, the problematic aspects of 'Islam' are associated with and perceived to be more present among the ethnicised and racialised groups dominating the stereotype. Consequently, in most cases, fears of 'Islam' are based on generalising beliefs about the ethnocultural group racialised as 'Muslim' in which many non-threatening Muslim groups and behaviours are heavily backgrounded or excluded.

As expected, intergroup contact experiences exerted a significant effect on stereotypes of 'Muslims' (RQ1.c.). These experiences favoured the perception that 'Muslims' was a rather heterogeneous group, mostly through the incorporation of relatively friendly subgroups under the 'Muslim' superordinate stereotype or by fostering deprovincialisation (i.e. the reduction in insular intergroup thinking) (RQ.1.c.i.). Furthermore, travelling to Muslim-majority countries (like Egypt), visiting multiethnic districts in Western Europe or interacting with Muslims in Czechia (such as kebab sellers) allowed for contacts that reduced perceived intergroup threat and anxiety – two mediating processes reducing prejudice. The solutions proposed by participants to reduce Islamophobic prejudice (RQ1.d.) intuitively supported promoting intergroup contact opportunities and increasing knowledge about Muslims/Islam through fairer representations. Importantly, all believed that reducing prejudice was possible and necessary.

The second set of exploratory questions sought to understand how Czech mainstream politicians (and activists) employed Islamophobic rhetoric in two popular political debate shows broadcast on public TV between 2014 and 2015 (RQ.2). The analysis unveiled the different strategies employed to represent 'Muslims', 'Europe', 'Czechs' and 'the far right' (RQ.2.a), the *topoi* used to justify Islamophobic rhetoric and policies (RQ.2.b.) and why these strategies were Islamophobic or normalising Islamophobia (RQ.2.c). Normalisation is understood as an intersubjective process through which previously uncivil discourses, actors or ideas become (effectively) legitimised as acceptable or part of 'common sense' (see 2.5.). Politicians employed an assortment of strategies that contributed to promote and legitimise Islamophobic beliefs. Most representations fitted an underlying civilisationist/culturalist framework which differentiated two assimilating clusters of associated groups of 'Muslims' and 'Europeans'/'Czechs' – with 'Christians' becoming foregrounded as a synonym for 'Europeans' during the 'refugee crisis' (see 7.1., 8.2.). This clustering plausibly fostered Islamophobic prejudice (see theoretical framework in 2.6.) by essentialising and emphasising intergroup differences, heightening intergroup threat, attributing collective responsibility to Muslims and favouring identification mostly with non-Muslim victims of the 'Muslim' threat.

Generally, representations of ‘Muslims’ underscore threat, for instance, through impersonalisations (‘problems’, ‘wave’), activations (‘they radicalise’, ‘they don’t integrate’) or differentiations (‘they have a different civilisation’, ‘we prefer Christian refugees’). ‘Muslims’’ allegedly threatening and different essence discursively justifies their exclusion and validates Islamophobic prejudices among the citizenry. However, different Muslim groups are represented differently. To minimise interethnic tensions, Czech Muslims are reassuringly represented as an exception to the rule. Conversely, ‘refugees’ shift from uncontrollable while on the move (topos of numbers or objectivisations) to dangerous ‘Muslims’ as hypothetical EU residents. Thus, ‘refugees’ became associated with the dangerous ‘Muslims in Western Europe’ whose demonisation and connection to the death of multiculturalism were part a ‘common sense’ narrative (see 7.2.). Depending on the topos of reality (‘we can see the problems in Western Europe’), subsidiary topoi in this narrative included those of history, authority, danger, culture and numbers. Here, politicians distorted Western multiculturalism as a defence of ethnocultural diversity which allegedly failed because ‘Muslims’ were allowed to immigrate in the first place and, then, did not assimilate culturally (see 7.5.). This narrative serves to defend cultural assimilationism by essentialising ‘Muslims’ through activations (‘they radicalise’, ‘do not respect our norms’ or ‘cause their poverty and exclusion’) while passivising the hosting states and societies. Additionally, centre-right politicians twist speeches by their West European counterparts to authoritatively prove multiculturalism’s failure. Conversely, the humanitarian predicament of ‘refugees’ and positive traits from ‘Muslims’ remain largely excluded.

Politicians often justified their Islamophobic positions by appealing to their responsibility to protect citizens from danger (from either ‘extremists and populists’ or ‘Muslims’) or, through *argumenta ad populum*, to tackle popular ‘fears’ of citizens, represented as natural, rational or manipulated. Popular ‘fears’ are largely discursively constructed (see 8.3.) by the mainstream after the January 2015 Charlie Hebdo shootings. By passivising holders of Islamophobic prejudice as legitimately ‘scared’, politicians legitimised Islamophobic beliefs by discursively voiding them from their uncivil character. However, these ‘fears’ were being largely fed by mainstream politicians who continued to represent ‘Muslims’ as a threat (see 8.2., 8.4.), hence creating a self-validating cycle of fearmongering. Against this backdrop, mainstream politicians constructed the additional threat of ‘extremists’ to normalise their own racism. The racism of the far right was represented as unacceptable and, thus, ‘extremists’ and ‘populists’ were illegitimised to represent the ‘natural’ and ‘rational’ (i.e. ‘normal’) popular ‘fears’. Furthermore, extreme forms of racism were portrayed as hurting Czechs rather than Muslims (see 8.3.). This strategy of allegedly pre-empting the rise of ‘extremists’ eventually expanded the limits of civil discourse to accommodate more extreme rhetoric (see vignettes 1, 3, 4). Finally, while ‘Western Europe’ was often represented as a forewarning against Muslim migration or, for the right, a threatening colonising agent, politicians paradoxically also proudly inscribed the Czech nation into ‘the West’ to exclude ‘Muslims’ (see 8.2.).

9.1.2. Explanation

The results of the exploratory analysis were set in retroductive conversation with the theoretical framework (see 2.6.) by retrospectively assessing the plausibility of its explanations. This framework proposes that the normalisation of Islamophobic rhetoric by Czech politicians, including through securitisation, not only legitimised Islamophobic prejudice (for instance, through destigmatisation), but also informed stereotypes which heightened perceived intergroup difference and threat, both conducive to prejudice. The framework acknowledges that individual factors (see 2.1.2.) and intergroup contact experiences (2.1.3.) can mitigate or heighten this prejudice. Moreover, it postulates that a series of contextual factors (see 4.1.), particularly rising populism and Euroscepticism, influenced mainstream Czech politicians' decision to rely on Islamophobia. Finally, the negative effects on public opinion, whether actual or alleged, become another factor pushing politicians' Islamophobic turn.

The results have contributed to explain the effect that the normalisation of Islamophobia by Czech politicians plausibly had over citizens' public opinion regarding 'Muslims'(RQ.3). My methods did not measure prejudice or stereotypes directly. Alternatively, I use as proxy the coincidences between the themes emerging from the interviews (which assume a fuzzy correspondence between social representations and stereotypes) and the discursive strategies used by politicians to assess the latter's degree of influence over public opinion. Undoubtedly, Czech political discourse in 2014/2015 was highly influential in shaping public opinion. This influence was acknowledged by participants (5.3.1.b.). Additionally, the social representations extracted from the interviews confirm that, in the absence of contact experiences, public discourse had a significantly negative effect on public opinion. The literature already stresses the fundamental role of politicians in shaping public discourse on 'Muslims'/'refugees' during 2015 (see 4.4.4.) and kindling social media discussions (Bakamo Public, 2019). Overall, the analysis of political discourse (Ch.7-8) demonstrates that politicians relied on a representational framework which differentiated, essentialised and stressed intergroup threat from 'Muslims' (see 7.1.). The tendencies captured by this framework contribute to theoretically explain shared stereotypes that stressed 'Muslims'' inherent difference and threat.

Furthermore, participants repeatedly reproduced discursive elements from political discourse such as narratives (for instance, about 'Muslims in the West'), frames ('Muslims push their norms onto us'), facts ('70% to 90% of Czechs feel negatively about Muslims'), interdiscursive references (to the discourse on 'the Roma'), stereotypical attributes ('Muslims' as prone to radicalisation) or arguments ('politicians should prevent refugees from coming because Czechs are fearful'). Conversely, experiences of intergroup contact fostered alternative themes (such as 'Muslims being more generous than Czechs' or 'people in Muslim-majority countries being hospitable') while strategies omitted by politicians are also absent among participants (for instance, state institutions are rarely activated as responsible for migrant integration or influencing radicalisation).

After accepting that politicians influenced anti-Muslim public opinion, there is the question of why normalisation became possible (RQ.4.). Since normalisation is

conceptualised as an intersubjective process (see 2.5.), this question should be answered by looking, separately, at the conditions which facilitated citizens' acceptance of Islamophobia (i.e. the demand side) and those which pushed politicians towards Islamophobic rhetoric (i.e. the supply side). First and foremost, on the demand side, the lack of intergroup contact experiences and low awareness about Czech Muslim communities made information in public discourse, with a marked Islamophobic bias, formative in shaping stereotypes and prejudice. Far from a 'fear of the unknown', the interviews reveal that (stereotypes of) 'Muslims' are well known (for instance, through shared themes and racialisation patterns) and that many Czechs reportedly hold active forms of aversion or disgust towards 'Muslims' besides fear. Indeed, politicians go at great lengths to feed Islamophobic beliefs to make 'Muslims' better known and foster other emotions like contempt ('they cause poverty') and resentment ('they don't respect our laws'), while promoting exclusionary behaviours. The 'fear of the unknown' thesis is a lazy empiricist-like shortcut that remains inaccurate and justifies racism by dismissing the rich ideological content behind Islamophobic prejudice. From a constructionist, critical or socio-cognitivist point of view, ideology, rather than its absence, is at the core of the contents informing citizens' Islamophobic prejudice.

Second, related to the previous lines, since the racism and xenophobia across society and institutions were seldom challenged, Islamophobic prejudice became often interpreted as either manipulated, legitimate or natural 'fears'. Czechs were represented as victims of 'fear', exempted from responsibility in perpetuating forms of oppression and exclusion towards Muslims. Tackling Islamophobia was unimportant since its existence was not politically acknowledged – as some participants claimed, Czechs were simply and legitimately 'cautious'. As advanced in 4.1.1., the roots for this laxity towards racism partly lie in dominant monoethnic conceptions of the nation, unaddressed anti-Ziganism, and historical narratives which promoted collectively blaming ethnic groups (Pekárková, 1995) and ignored Czechs' participation in the Holocaust (Sniegon, 2014) and in the project of European colonialism (Herza, 2020). Although some less forgiving research participants fatalistically represented 'Czechs' as *essentially* racist, this is neither productive for anti-racism (Slačálek, 2016).

Additionally, voters lacked a strong actor confidently articulating appealing alternative pro-refugee or anti-racist positions with which to align. Against the backdrop of outright fearmongering from the far right, Zeman or ODS, most mainstream parties engaged in the securitisation of refugees to a considerable degree (Strapáčová & Hloušek, 2018). Actors labelled as 'welcomers' like TOP 09 (2016), prime minister Sobotka (ČSSD) (Ultsch, 2017) or, Zeman's main challenger in the 2018 elections, Jiří Drahoš (Kabátová, 2018) eventually drew attention to their anti-refugee and Islamophobic credentials at some point. Conversely, advocates of the rights of migrants and Muslims became increasingly ostracised by many politicians who associated them with unrepresentative and out-of-touch dangerous elites. In essence, mainstream politicians established a tolerated degree of Islamophobia within public discourse, distinguishing it from the deemed unacceptable racism of 'extremists', and the perceived elitist and disconnected liberalism of pro-refugee advocates.

Muslims, including migrants on the move, had little political influence in Czechia and lacked the power to represent the agency and interests of other Muslims in public discourse (see Mokre & Six-Hohenbalken, 2024). Even when 'Muslims' were invited to mainstream media, the Islamophobic bias of public discourse pushed them to debate with Islamophobic ideas and actors. Despite actual Muslim refugees suffering from discriminatory Czech migration policies (Amnesty International, 2017; ecre.org, 2015), representations of Muslim migration remained an abstraction against which to define variations of an ethnonational identity or political positions concerning other issues like European or migrant integration, populism, social policy and so on. Unlike other West European states, Czechia did not have to compromise a historical source of foreign labour or the interests of a sizeable national Muslim population. Therefore, constraints on Islamophobic rhetoric were comparatively lower.

Third, besides a relative laxity towards racism and ethnopolitics, what accommodated Islamophobia was a particularly Czech generalised estrangement from religion. Although Czech Islamophobic rhetoric mostly reflected racist beliefs, using Islam as proxy made 'Muslims' a more acceptable target. For instance, it might seem more acceptable to essentialise 'Muslims' as potential radicals who want to impose their norms onto 'us' because of (a representation of) 'Islam' rather than blaming less acceptable markers of difference like skin colour, genes or physiognomy. Indeed, scandalising representations of Islam were initially dominant in the popular IvČRN, which wanted to eschew accusations of racism, and Czech Islamophobic civil society exhibited a relatively rich knowledge about aspects of Islam. As a form of cultural racism, Islamophobia eventually essentialises sharers of 'a culture' largely perceived to also share descent. This is why, in the interviews, 'Muslims' who looked more 'European' or 'white' were reportedly less threatening than stereotypical 'Arabs' or 'Pakistanis'. As detailed in 6.2.2., the interviews revealed common (mis-/)preconceptions, or attributions thereof, about the threatening nature and prescriptions of 'Islam'. Consequently, the visible and institutionalised expressions of Islam were often viewed with suspicion. Conversely, self-declared Christian participants showed a much greater sympathy towards Muslims' religious rights. In a counterfactually Christian-majority Czechia, 'Muslims' might have not been so heavily censured for their religious aspirations and, perhaps, Islamophobic prejudice might have been more frequently framed as unacceptably 'racist'.

Fourth, politicians did not generate Islamophobic prejudice from scratch in 2015 (see 4.2.2.a.) but, as further confirmed by Muslim participants, capitalised on existing Islamophobic prejudice. Moreover, other anxieties, captured in Eurosceptic attitudes (including perceptions of a declining Western Europe consumed by 'the failures of multiculturalism'), distrust in political elites, xenophobia, preference for cultural assimilationism and fears of terrorism further accommodated Islamophobia.

This research has also helped to explain why mainstream Czech politicians employed Islamophobic rhetoric when 'Muslims' had not been politicised nor had Czech far-right parties presented a significant electoral challenge. Although politicians had articulated Islamophobic positions before 2014, the opportunity to effectively politicise Muslim migration came only that year. During the period analysed in chapter 7 (January 2014 to February 2015), politicians reacted to news events with potential repercussions for

or taking place within the domestic context (see 7.1.). In contrast, news reporting in 2013, despite having a marked Islamophobic bias, had largely concerned events abroad, mostly in Muslim-majority countries (Burešová & Sedláková, 2016), which did not require formulating policies concerning migration or the national accommodation of Islam. Since the very late 2000s, the Czech right had been experimenting with Islamophobic rhetoric (see 4.2.2.b.), which featured in subsequent programmes, actions and campaigns (Čaněk, 2013; Hejnal, 2012; Linek, 2014). However, Islamophobic politics remained largely irrelevant to voters. Only by 2014 did Czech politicians find opportunities to articulate their positions regarding mediatised issues which increasingly interested voters, such as the domestic accommodation of Islam, regulations over the hijab, fighting IS, dealing with domestic anti-Islam movements, the rise of refugee arrivals following conflicts in the Middle East and, in January 2015, the threat of jihadist terrorism. During the 'refugee crisis', the policy input from Czech lawmakers became more urgent.

Several factors explain why Czech mainstream politicians employed Islamophobic rhetoric. First, Islamophobia was not in tension with most parties' ideologies. Even before 2014, Islamophobic and other xenophobic beliefs (for instance, targeting the Roma, Ukrainians or the Vietnamese) had been promoted across mainstream parties, including on the left (Netočný, 2011; Petřík, 2010). In addition to the centre-right opposition to Muslim migration since the early 2010s, the social democrats and communists decided, albeit with internal divisions, to abandon their previous commitments to multiculturalism (Hejnal, 2012) during the 'refugee crisis'. The social democrats acted certainly under duress from internal challenges from a conservative wing, their right-wing opposition, being the leaders of a governing coalition and the regional zeitgeist, which seemed to favour Islamophobia. Furthermore, in 2014/2015 'Muslims' became targeted through appeals to previously held conceptions about citizenship, geopolitics (for instance, acceptance of Clash-of-Civilisations beliefs), welfare, national identity, secularism or European integration.

Second, in a climate of growing Euroscepticism, politicians' perception that the liveability, safety and cultural identity of West European cities were being compromised by 'Muslims' remained unquestioned and part of a political 'common sense'. The analysis demonstrates that many politicians sponsor representations of Muslims as 'the problems in Western Europe'. The extended lay theory is that *actual* experiences of interethnic conflict are pushing ethnic majorities in 'the West' to turn to the radical right. Under this diagnosis, Czech politicians advocate for 'listening to people's fears' (i.e. discomfort about interethnic contact) to pre-empt the rise of 'populists'/'extremists'. This strategy normalises Islamophobia by legitimising the 'problems in Western Europe' theory and the 'populists'/'extremists' who are *effectively* representing ethnic majorities' alleged experiences of interethnic conflict. Moreover, Czech mainstream politicians operated in a domestic context of growing populism and distrust in traditional parties. At this juncture, mainstream politicians were concerned about their representativeness, which became intimately tied to 'listening to popular fears'; fears, which, as explained in 8.3. were (co-)constructed by mainstream politicians. However, Czech populist parties were not precisely pressing the mainstream to embrace Islamophobia. While Zeman's populism touched upon

ethnopolitics and Islamophobia, ANO, the party with the highest voting preferences by early 2015, was a relatively late adopter of Islamophobia and only did so progressively. The failure of Czech parties to confidently represent pluralism should perhaps be found in their institutional design, including their weak links to civil society (Dawson & Hanley, 2016; Greskovits, 2015; Hanley, 2016).

Third, related to the latter, the sociological explanation of Islamophobic attitudes as an amalgamation of 'fears' was enhanced by the lack of solid empirical research on this prejudice. More sophisticated Czech surveys on attitudes towards 'Muslims' and 'refugees' that facilitated more nuanced sociological interpretations would emerge by 2016 (for example, Glopolis, 2016; MEDIAN, 2018). Although some of the initial surveys' deficiencies related to the relative new importance of this phenomenon, many politicians had incentives to misuse or misrepresent available survey data in 2015. Fourth, there was a genuine concern about jihadist terrorism which needed to be prevented, particularly when the number and duration of future refugee crossings into Europe remained uncertain. Fifth, as advanced in 4.1.1., whether the Czech government honestly expected the imminent arrival of Ukrainian refugees, its readiness to welcome them was often presented by politicians, notably the Minister of Interior, as a bargaining chip against 'quotas'. Sixth, the Czech government did not stand alone against the European Commission but presented a collective bid alongside other East European governments, particularly, from Slovakia, Hungary and, later, Poland. Had Czechia been alone, perhaps it would have bent to the other member states.

Against the conventional narrative of the normalisation of uncivil discourse (see Brown et al., 2021), the Czech mainstream did not adopt Islamophobic rhetoric under duress from the far right and 'populists', or an illiberal public. First, as stated, Czech mainstream parties had been experimenting with Islamophobic rhetoric since the late 2000s, associating early with fringe anti-Islam movements (for instance, KDU-ČSL with AntiMešita in Hradec Králové, or ODS with the Young Right). They were adopting Islamophobic programmes at a time when these were being clearly ineffective for the debilitated Czech far right (Mareš, 2014; Smolík, 2010). Only in 2017 did a Czech radical-right party running on a markedly anti-migrant platform, SPD, continuously garner enough voting intention to cross the 5% electoral threshold (CVVM, 2024d). When it comes to 'populists', the popularity of President Zeman and Okamura (SPD/Dawn) had dipped by January 2015 (Kunštát, 2015) – although the 'refugee crisis' is credited with reviving support for Zeman (HI-LIGHTS, 2017). Furthermore, Minister of Finance Babiš (ANO) would not form a clear anti-refugee position until well into the 'crisis'. During the summer of 2015, before ANO re-orientated towards capturing the traditional electorate of the left – i.e. in areas with lower potential for economic development and structural socio-economic issues (Maškarinec, 2019) –, Babiš was still warning against rising anti-refugee xenophobia (anobudelip.cz, 2015) and suggesting that Czech employers could benefit from the arrival of thousands of Syrian refugees (Houska, 2015).

If mainstream politicians justified their Islamophobic positions by citing their responsibility to respond to popular 'fears', these were the same fears which they had fostered and manufactured (see 7.3., 8.3.). Even if Czech surveys had measured

relatively strong anti-Muslim attitudes since 9/11, these had been largely informed by public intellectuals (Mendel et al., 2007, pp. 134–154), politicians (Moreno, 2010; Schneider, 2006) and news reporting (L. Janků et al., 2013; Křížková, 2006; Vesecký, 2007). As argued in 9.1.1., the quantity and quality of anti-Muslim attitudes changed because of shifts in political discourse in 2014/2015. Public opinion never responded to an actual intergroup conflict but only to the Islamophobic bias in public discourse. Czech surveys show that intergroup contact with Muslims correlated negatively with anti-Muslim attitudes. Similarly, mainstream politicians justified their Islamophobic positions on a narrative about the problems with 'Muslims in Western Europe', which rhetorically Czechs could 'see' but, in practice, did not experience.

9.2. Contributions and implications

This dissertation owes greatly to previous investigations of Czech Islamophobia, mostly but not exclusively by Czech and Slovak researchers. This literature shaped my understanding of the research problem but also turned my interest towards gaps that my project aspired to fill. The interviews analysed in chapters 5-6 make a particularly important contribution since the literature lacked qualitative analyses of popular forms of prejudice (Černý, 2019, pp. 301–303). While research on Czech public opinion on 'Muslims' predominantly favours quantitative survey methods (for instance, Lhoťan, 2011; Topinka, 2016a), qualitative interviewing of non-Muslim Czechs had only featured occasionally in Bachelor's theses with small samples and in local contexts (Buková, 2018; Horáček, 2015). My choice of semi-structured interviews for data collection allowed me to explore and question aspects of the theory while interviewing and analysing the data.

The findings require contextualisation within the sui generis interdisciplinary theoretical framework (see 2.6. or, for a syntehsis, 9.1.2.), another important contribution. This project had to find a solution for the study of Islamophobia within a national context of high anti-Muslim attitudes and unproblematic marginal Muslim presence. Therefore, starting from a critical and cognitivist socio-constructionist perspective, I have focused on the (inter)subjective dimension of Islamophobia by integrating theories from social psychology and cognitive psychology; sociology and political sociology; political science and political philosophy; history; international relations; the philosophy of science; and Islamophobia, migration and discourse studies.

The theoretical framework developed for this study has been instrumental in guiding an analysis that bridges discourse studies and social psychology, offering a nuanced understanding of the mechanisms underlying prejudice formation. The analysis focused on the representation of social actors relevant to the ideology and the discursive strategies that effectively foster prejudice, namely those promoting essentialisations, differentiations and perceived intergroup threat (see scheme in 7.1.). Moreover, the socio-cognitive perspective drove an analysis which differentiated 'Muslims', the stereotypical actor invoked by the category of practice, from Muslims, the (relatively) actual social group invoked by the category of analysis (Brubaker, 2002; Brubaker et al., 2004). This differentiation was enhanced by a case study in

whose context actual Muslims had a relatively low public participation. Consequently, the themes from the interviews and the discursive strategies of politicians could be interpreted at the level of shared representations of social reality, from which, I inferred relationships and, through qualitative induction and abduction, derived conclusions about the stereotypes and prejudices likely held by many Czechs. Additionally, the framework has enabled relatively surprising findings regarding, for example, the normalising function of politicians' representation of 'extremists' and 'fears'; the relational importance of participants' representations of 'Czechia'/'Czechs' for understanding Islamophobic prejudice; or their emphasis on the topos of reality to actualise Islamophobic representations of 'Muslims in the West'.

While the framework has proven effective in fostering novel sociopsychological insights and identifying normalising mechanisms, it is not without limitations. Its application depends on certain assumptions, such as the representativeness of participants for broader societal views and the primacy and precedence of political discourse in shaping public representations over the influences from other actors like news media or anti-Islam activists. Furthermore, it is subject to methodological shortcomings. Some insights derived through the application of this framework diverge from traditional empiricist conventions, leaning instead toward interpretivist conclusions that invite further deductive testing. Moreover, by the end of this study, I have realised that my analysis has empirically built up 'Muslims' as a category of analysis which invokes, not an actual group, but the contents of stereotypes and social representations of the studied population. The potential risks of this transformation should be assessed in future studies. Nevertheless, overall, this framework effectively serves text and discourse analyses mindful about the formation and legitimation of both stereotypes and prejudice.

Several key concepts inform the analysis. Contemporary European Islamophobias are understood as racist ideologies mostly grounded in political conflicts dating back to the 1970s, when the identities 'Muslims' and 'Westerners'/'Europeans' became salient and antagonised. They are regarded as mainly functioning to reject conferring Muslims citizenship and group rights (see 2.2.). Like any ideology, Czech Islamophobia is compounded of axiomatic beliefs about social groups (for instance, 'Europeans', 'Muslims' or 'Western Europe') which inform intrapsychic phenomena, like prejudice or stereotypes, and manifest through practices, such as discourse or discriminatory behaviours – and vice versa (see 2.3.3., 2.4.). Stereotypes contain the category-based information relevant to think about social groups. Their contents, particularly those regarding the outgroup's perceived level of (un)friendliness and relative power, inform prejudice (i.e. the emotional and evaluative component of attitudes towards an outgroup which create or sustain intergroup hierarchies). The main argument of the dissertation is that Islamophobic beliefs can be spread via discourse, becoming adopted by citizens and conditioning shared stereotypes and, consequently, prejudice. Although this influence can be mitigated or heightened by individual factors and intergroup contact experiences. Additionally, the study argues that Czech politicians contributed to normalise Islamophobia, with normalisation understood as an intersubjective process through which previously uncivil discourses, actors or ideas become (effectively) legitimised as acceptable or part of 'common sense' (see 2.5.).

Consequently, citizens' Islamophobic prejudice became not only fostered but legitimised. This normalisation was partly achieved through securitisation, that is, by constructing 'Muslims' as an existential threat which demanded actions falling outside normal politics (Buzan et al., 1998, pp. 23–24).

The analysis of interviews has contributed to the literature on Czech Islamophobia in seven important ways. First, the analysis brought attention to the contingent interpretation of the 'Muslim' category. Researchers might want to understand aspects of attitudes towards Muslims qua category of analysis. However, in context and practice, participants think about 'Muslims' through specific stereotypical traits and understand questions about 'Muslims' through their interpretations of the social situation in which the communicative event takes place (for example, the identity of the interviewer, and when, how and why are they interviewing) (van Dijk, 2014, 2018). Therefore, surveys should acknowledge that respondents perform restricted understanding of 'Muslims' when answering questions about this category (for instance, the question about 'having a Muslim neighbour' is perhaps interpreted by a Czech survey respondent in 2015 to refer to non-White male working-class Arab refugees who recently immigrated) (see Braun et al., 2013). Second, the interviews revealed dynamics of racialisation involved in the prejudice and the ethnic/national groups which are both representative of the 'Muslim' category and trigger negative emotions (see 6.2.). Although some of these processes, notably the role of anti-Arab racism in Czech Islamophobia, had been hinted at in previous writings, thanks to my interviews they now have an empirical basis. Third, the analysis invites the reader to regard opposition to 'Islam' largely as an extension of anti-Muslim racism conditioned by stereotypes of 'Muslims' but also of national understandings of secularity, religiosity and expectations about cultural assimilation. Ethnic or national groups representative of the 'Muslim' category ('Arabs', 'Middle-Easterners') were associated with more problematic forms of Islamic religiosity. Conversely, hypothetical secular Muslims (weakly subscribing to the principles of the religion of 'Muslims') or groups ethnoculturally different from the 'Muslims' who inform the 'Islam' stereotype (for instance, 'white Muslims' or 'Bosniaks') were perceived more warmly. These divergences in prejudice are related to the different public representations of these groups which, in turn, reflect geopolitical worldviews. Fourth, the interviews testify to the influence of political discourse over public opinion, not only at the level of social representations (see 5.3.2., 6.1., 6.2.) but also in shaping lay theories to explain Islamophobic prejudice (see 5.1.). The impact of the discursive shift of 2014/2015 was still evident in 2020/2021, although political talk on events since then (for instance, the 2023 Israeli attacks on Gaza) might be reshaping public opinion. Sixth, section 6.3. described, perhaps for the first time, the situations, processes or groups that reduced Islamophobic prejudice among non-Muslim Czechs. Hopefully, the results will contribute to a future literature on intergroup relations between non-Muslim ethnic Czechs and Muslims. Seventh, although superficially, the analysis addressed the often-understudied aspects of race, class or gender playing into Islamophobic prejudice. These aspects deserve greater attention in future studies.

Because the critical analysis of political discourse builds on a more consolidated strand of the literature, its contributions are often more technical. Chapters 7-8

consciously present a granular discussion of findings to offer a greater level of detail than most analyses of Czech Islamophobic political discourse to date, since these are often synthesised into shorter journal articles. Furthermore, I hinted at important elements in the linguistic realisation of these strategies (for example, grammatical participant roles or the preference for certain word families). Nevertheless, I rarely employed concepts to analyse texts below the semantic and argumentative levels – a rigorous grammatical or lexical analysis should have presented a commentary over the sources in the original Czech language. Furthermore, despite being extremely popular tools in critical discourse studies, the analysis of strategies for representing social actors and topoi in political discourse is a relatively novel addition to Czech Islamophobia studies. Hopefully, the results raise interest about these strategies' linguistic realisation, origins and continuities. These methods also helped explain mainstream politicians' motivations, their influence over public opinion and how they opened the window to less civil discourse. By considering texts in relation to Islamophobic discourse across Europe, the analysis proved that mainstream politicians can also adopt strategies from foreign far-right actors, often after these have been legitimised by other mainstream elites. Therefore, studies of normalisation should also consider cross-national pollination, including distorted intertextual references (for instance, when the Czech centre-right cites speeches by David Cameron or Angela Merkel to justify discriminatory migration policies). Additionally, I have identified a simple representational framework underlying the representation of 'Muslims' (7.1.), 'problems in Western Europe' (7.3.) or popular 'fears' (8.3.) which can be relied on in future theoretical frameworks.

Importantly, the analysis highlighted the role of the Czech mainstream in promoting and normalising Islamophobic rhetoric. Thus, I propose de-emphasising narratives in academia that frame the Czech mainstream as helplessly or opportunistically joining an Islamophobic bandwagon generated by others. Furthermore, problematising the notion that Czech politicians' Islamophobic rhetoric is largely unoriginal, the analysis showed Czech-specific aspects which may differ from many West European variants. The cultural assimilationist framework, its aporophobic elements, the semi-peripheral perspective, its complex relation to populism and Euroscepticism, its reliance on the 'Muslims in the West' narrative, the centrality of opposition to 'quotas', its manufacturing of popular 'fears', its low accountability to national Muslim communities or anti-racist movements, its declinism – an ideological portrayal of the decline of the West (Slačálek, 2021) –, its low responsiveness to pressures from embassies of Muslim-majority states (ČTK & iDNES.cz, 2015), its counterbalancing preference for Ukrainian refugees, its relatively marginal geopolitical impact or its connections to anti-Roma discourse are among the elements constituting the Czech variant.

9.3. Paths forward and limitations

The dissertation opens paths for future research. First and foremost, it proposes that Islamophobic prejudice requires a qualitative understanding of its nature, history or components. This could be achieved through further qualitative interviewing but also surveys. For instance, survey questions could ask about Muslim-majority groups other than those associated with negatively mediatised events (see 4.2.2.a.). Additionally,

surveys can refine their understanding of the identities behind the category 'Muslim' through cognitive interviewing methods, either at the pretesting stage and/or through follow-up probes (Beatty & Willis, 2007; Behr et al., 2020; Braun et al., 2013); through open-ended questions (Døving, 2020); or by establishing common understandings of the category with respondents through definitions or vignettes (Kobayashi et al., 2014). Second, Muslim participants corroborated that there was a shift in politics and attitudes in the early 2010s which remains largely unexplored in the literature. Building a more comprehensive picture of this period could contribute to explain later changes. Third, this dissertation has shown the potential for analyses of race, class and gender in Czech Islamophobic prejudice and rhetoric. Likewise, dominant understandings of religiosity and secularity, and conceptions of citizenship based on cultural assimilation should be considered in future analyses of Islamophobia. Fourth, the uncovered meanings behind Czechs' prejudices can inform experimental interventions to reduce Islamophobic prejudice and stereotypes, still not conducted in Czechia. Fifth, my analysis has pointed to the role of complementary ideologies feeding into Islamophobia, such as cultural assimilationism or liberal individualism. Nevertheless, the trajectories and actors promoting or challenging these complementary ideologies have received little attention (exceptions include Slačálek, 2021; Slačálek & Svobodová, 2018).

Three important limitations of this dissertation also suggest a potential for corrections and alternative inquiries. First, as acknowledged in chapter 1, the broad scope of the project and interest in dominant discourse favoured an oversimplification of the diverse positions and attitudes of social actors. In the future, the differences across and within sociodemographic groups and political actors (including those outside party politics) deserve greater attention. Second, despite its broad scope, the project has a relatively narrow focus that offers a partial characterisation of the process through which Czechs came to hold significantly negative attitudes towards 'Muslims' since 2015. Several elements in the design can be criticised for being insufficiently representative, for instance, its timeframe for analysis, the interviews' sample design or the decision to limit the corpus for chapters 7-8 to texts containing just the keywords 'Muslim' and 'Islam'. However, the greatest shortcoming is that, due to my finite resources, I mostly analysed two debate shows from the public broadcaster. Although televised political debates were extremely formative for public opinion on 'Muslims', there were other shows, channels, platforms (for instance, social media communications or magazines), genres of political communication or socialising agents (notably, school) which shaped attitudes in significant ways. Importantly, my choice of these TV shows also constrained the selection of speakers (for instance, President Zeman or Andrej Babiš were never guests) or strategies that politicians chose to employ. Future research should evaluate the influence of other media or genres to triangulate different sources of discourse to gain a more holistic understanding of the process through which public opinion turned against 'Muslims'.

Third, my interviewing methodology presented some limitations (outlined in 5.1.). Retrospectively, the design of interviews could have incorporated more seriously socio-cognitive, epistemological or communication theories on the correspondence between participants' talk and mental structures/processes; the relationship between

testimonies and actual events or reality; and my interference with these processes as an interviewer. Despite this, the notion that interviewers can access reliable and objective reports of events by participants or gather an unmediated glimpse into their relatively stable attitudes remains a positivistic illusion. In practice, discourse (McVittie & McKinlay, 2017) and other socio-cognitive structures (van Dijk, 2014, 2018) situationally shape talk (or survey responses for that matter) within a communicative event. At my discretion, during the analysis, I considered different stretches of participants' talk as either reports of events, the reproduction of popular narratives, a manifestation of prejudice or, even, false consciousness. This flexibility allowed me to reach unexpected conclusions, which more positivistic designs might have hindered.

9.4. Recommendations based on the findings

This dissertation offers insights into tackling Islamophobic prejudice and rhetoric in Czechia. Prescriptions have been presented across the chapters, but this closing section will reiterate some of the key points. As a caveat, these recommendations have been formulated based on historically situated data and I appreciate that some aspects of public discourse on 'Muslims' might have changed since 2015. For a list of proposals put forward by participants, see 6.4.

First, the thesis stressed the need for extending our knowledge about anti-Muslim attitudes in Czechia by re-adjusting survey methodology (see 4.2.2.a., 9.2.) and conducting more qualitative research. Importantly, combating the Islamophobic bias in public discourse requires challenging prevalent representational and argumentative strategies. These include: 'common-sense' narratives about 'Muslims in the West' (7.2.), the 'death of multiculturalism' (7.5.) or the Clash of Civilisations (8.2.); the populistic argumentation justifying Islamophobia by citing a responsibility to cater to popular 'fears' (8.3) or pre-empt the rise of 'extremists' (7.3.); praising the 'exceptionality' of Czech Muslims (7.2.); or representing Muslim migrants moving towards the EU as an impending threat (8.3., 8.4.). Most urgently, communicators should avoid the pervasive representational scheme outlined in 7.1. that stresses differentiations between two assimilated clusters of associated actors (i.e. 'Muslims' and 'Europeans') – for examples of these practices, refer to 7.1. In this context, it is important to elevate the standards of journalistic rigour and ethics applied to reporting on 'Muslims' to a level commensurate with those dedicated to other politically sensitive subjects. Conversely, fairer representations of 'Muslims' should be promoted by highlighting their heterogeneity and varied interpretations of Islam; acknowledging their multiple identities and establishing common solidarities; including diverse Muslim voices into the debate (rather than an individual Muslim speaking on behalf of 'the community'); and offering more neutral, positive and humanising representations to compensate the negativity of the news. Furthermore, some popular anxieties identified in the interviews (for instance, regarding 'Muslims imposing their norms onto us', 'Muslims creating ghettos' or the threat of Islam for women) should be critically addressed through balanced accounts which foreground the voices of representatives of Muslim civil society and organisations working to protect the rights of Muslims. For those interested in a proactive stance, the Counter-Islamophobia Kit project (Law et

al., 2019) identified effective narratives against Islamophobia based on country studies, including Czechia.

Additionally, the racism informing Islamophobic beliefs and rhetoric needs to be acknowledged, and then addressed, rather than dismissed as a 'fear of the unknown'. In contrast to liberal narratives accusing a xenophobic Czech demos of hampering an elite-driven modernisation (Slačálek, 2016), racism should be first tackled at the elite and institutional levels. Worryingly, the banality of Islamophobia in Czech political discourse has germinated into a public assumption among many non-Muslim citizens about the legitimacy of migration policies that discriminate against Muslims, which begs remedy (5.1.1.). Recognising that Islamophobia is a form of racism affecting the lives of Muslims would facilitate its political contestation. Indeed, the Islamophobic discrimination experienced by and directed at Muslims (particularly women – see 5.3.2.f.) should receive much greater coverage. In this regard, having a Czech media monitoring watchdog for Islamophobia akin to the Spanish *Observatorio de la Islamofobia en los Medios* (https://www.observatorioislamofobia.org) or the British Centre for Media Monitoring (https://cfmm.org.uk) would be beneficial. These institutions produce regular reports, file complaints, ask for corrections to news stories, offer trainings to journalists, produce guidelines or generate non-Islamophobic content on Muslims. Furthermore, intergroup contact experiences should be fostered either by favouring encounters (for example, through community events, student exchanges or tourism) or representing contacts that can vicariously reduce prejudice (see 6.3.). Finally, politicians should engage in a qualified debate on migrant integration that goes beyond a reductionist cultural assimilationism. Despite its shortcomings, Czech integration policy defends a model of civic integration respectful of cultural diversity and coordinated by the state (Dohnalová, 2021), hence its misrepresentation is not only unfair but removes the policy from democratic deliberation.

References (authors' abbreviations)

APPG on British Muslims	The All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BIS	*Bezpečnostní informační služba České republiky* (Security Information Service of the Czech Republic)
CoE Secretariat of the FCNM	Council of Europe: Secretariat of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities
ČT24	*Česká televize 24* (Czech Television 24)
ČTK	*Česká tisková kancelář* (Czech News Agency)
CVVM	*Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění* (The Public Opinion Research Centre)
ECRE	European Council on Refugees and Exiles
EJO	European Journalism Observatory
ESS ERIC	European Social Survey European Research Infrastructure
EUMC	European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia
IEP	Institute for Economics & Peace
IGAC	Ivan Gabal Analysis & Consulting
Insee	*Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques* (The National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies)
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IPM	*Institut politického marketingu* (Institute of Political Marketing)
IVVM	*Institut pro výzkum veřejného mínění* (Institute for Public Opinion)
MUNI	*Masarykova univerzita* (Masaryk University)
Nadace OSF	*Nadace Open Society Fund* (Open Society Fund Prague)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PSP	*Poslanecká sněmovna Parlamentu [České republiky]* (Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic)
RRTV	*Rada pro rozhlasové a televizní vysílání* (Council for Radio and Television Broadcasting)
SANEP	*Středisko analýz a empirických průzkumů* (The Centre for Analysis and Empirical Studies)
STEM	*Středisko empirických výzkumů* (Institute for Empirical Research)
TNS Opinion & Social	Taylor Nelson Sofres' Opinion and Social
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USPCZ	Universal Safety Program

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Annex 1: Participants' basic data

Name	Age	Occupation	City	Gender	Muslim	Was in Egypt	University degree
Adam	44	Unemployed	Prague	M			Y
Adéla	34	Hospital staff	Ostrava	F		Y	Y
Agáta	45	Trader and therapist	Somewhere in Egypt	F		Y	Y
Aneta	56	Entrepreneur	Teplice	F			Y
Barbora	55	Healthcare	Prague	F		Y	N
Beáta	34	Healthcare	Teplice	F			N
Bernard	32	Architect	Small Moravian town	M			Y
Františka	54	Unemployed (caregiver)	Prague	F			N
Hana	24	Student	Small Moravian town	F			N
Jozef	40	Entrepreneur	Ostrava	M			N
Kamil	49	Photographer	Small Moravian town	M			N
Klára	52	School teacher	Small Moravian town	F			Y
Lucie	68	Retired	Ostrava	F			Y
Maleek	51	Unemployed	Prague	M	Y	N/A	Y
Malika	32	Self-employed	Prague	F	Y	N/A	Y
Maryam	26	Student	Prague	F	Y	N/A	N
Milada	43	Entrepreneur	Ostrava	F			Y
Ondřej	20	Student	Teplice	M			N
Radek	31	Theatre	Ostrava	M			N
Robert	19	Student	Prague	M			N
Roman	39	Policeman	Small Moravian city	M		Y	N
Šimon	32	Unemployed	Prague	M			Y
Štěpán	20	Student	Small Moravian town	M			N
Tereza	35	Public sector	Brno	F	Y	N/A	Y
Věra	25	Market research	Teplice	F			Y
Vítek	31	School teacher	Small Moravian city	M		Y	Y
Youssef	47	IT	Town in Central Bohemia Region	M	Y	N/A	Y

Yvona	33	Non-profit sector	Prague	F	Y	N/A	Y
Zain	55	Healthcare	Teplice	M	Y	N/A	Y
Zehra	30	Administrative role	Prague	F	Y	N/A	Y
Žofie	48	Part-time caregiver	Prague	F			N

Annex 2: Political actors (abbreviations)

Acronym	Actor name translated	Ideological position
ANO	Action of Dissatisfied Citizens	Technocratic populism
BPI	Bloc Against Islam	Extreme right
ČSSD	Czech Social Democratic Party	Social democracy
Dawn	Dawn of Direct Democracy	Populist radical right
DS	Workers' party	Extreme right
DSSS	Workers' Party of Social Justice	Extreme right
IvČRN	We Don't Want Islam in the Czech Republic	Extreme right movement (non-electable)
KDU-ČSL	Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party	Christian democracy
KSČM	Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia	Communism
NB-ND	No to Brussels – National Democracy	Extreme right
ODS	Civic Democratic Party	Economically liberal conservatism
SPD	Freedom and Direct Democracy	Populist radical right
SPR–RSČ	Rally for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia	Populist radical right
SPOZ	Party of Civic Rights	Social democracy
STAN	Mayors and Independents	Centre-right
SZ	Party of the Greens	Green party
SZR	Party of Common Sense	Populist radical right
TOP 09	Tradition Responsibility Prosperity	Economically liberal conservatism
VV	Public Affairs	Anti-corruption populism

Annex 3: Bloc titles (Chapter 7)

Aired on	Code	Title of the bloc
28/04/2014	UK1	Intervention at the mosque
15/05/2014	UK2	Debate with the Euroleaders
28/08/2014	UK3	Religious symbols (don't) belong to the school
11/09/2014	UK4, UK5	How to stop the Islamic State | Muslims in Czechia
31/10/2014	UK6	The radicalisation of Muslims
29/12/2014	UK7	Over 50 million people on the run
05/01/2015	UK8	Tensions within Dawn over statements on Islam
09/01/2015	UK9	The end. Terrorists disabled
11/01/2015	OVM2, OVM3, OVM4	The results of terror in France | The spread of fear of Muslims | The contemporary Migration Period (*stěhování národů*)
13/01/2015	UK10	Terrorism, freedom and ethics
14/01/2015	UK11, UK12	Europe and migration| Correctness and freedom
16/01/2015	UK13, UK14	The Czech debate over Islam | Terrorism frightens Europe – Europol: the great risk of terrorism
18/01/2015	OVM5, OVM6, OVM7	Radicalisation of society| The contemporary Migration Period (*stěhování národů*) | Money for secret services
19/01/2015	UK15	Fear and defiance. Europe faces terrorism
21/01/2015	UK16	Immigrants in Czechia
25/01/2015	OVM8	The West's nightmare
27/01/2015	UK17, UK18	Conference at the castle| Together against the Islamic State
27/02/2015	UK19	Millions of refugees at Europe's gates

Annex 4: Bloc titles (Chapter 8)

Aired on	Code	Title of the bloc
09/03/2015	UK20	Libya: One Czech missing
03/04/2015	UK21	More national holidays?
13/04/2015	UK22	PEGIDA in Germany, again on the rise
05/05/2015	UK23, UK24	Europeans among extremists | Okamura: Twilight or new Dawn?
08/05/2015	UK25	Did we learn the lesson from the Second World War? (part 2)
13/05/2015	UK26	The assignment of refugees to all EU countries
18/06/2015	UK27	European solidarity vs. security
24/08/2015	UK28	A day of terror: France, Tunisia, Kuwait
08/07/2015	UK29, UK30	Europe and migration | Migration: Prospects and context
09/07/2015	UK31	Europe about migration, fear of migration
18/08/2015	UK32	The president's spokesperson against the petition of scientists
19/08/2015	UK33, UK34	The elite against "normal" society? | Xenophobia or natural fear?
25/08/2015	UK35	Europe seeks a solution for the Refugee Crisis
04/09/2015	UK36	A domestic opportunity for refugees
15/09/2015	UK37	Three countries against the whole of the EU
09/10/2015	UK38	European migratory movements. Czechia is (not) waiting for refugees
22/10/2015	UK39	A UN commissioner criticises Czechia, are we xenophobic?
29/10/2015	UK40	Protests against Islam
04/11/2015	UK41	The government invites educated Ukrainians
10/11/2015	UK42	European preparations for three million refugees
16/11/2015	UK43	Security in Czechia and Europe, closure of Schengen's external borders?
19/11/2015	UK44, UK45	Fight against terrorism | Anti-Islamic Czechia? Schengen is for some states
20/11/2015	UK46, UK47	The PM vs. the President | Terrorist attack in Mali
23/11/2015	UK48	The threat of terrorism, security and war against terror
01/12/2015	UK49	Fear of refugees and the Islamic State
07/12/2015	UK50	Is Europe in captivity by political correctness?
10/12/2015	UK51, UK52	The future of Europe at the time of the Refugee Crisis | A plan for preventing the radicalisation of immigrants
14/12/2015	UK53	Czechia accepts Iraqi Christians
16/12/2015	UK54	Coordination of foreign policy
30/12/2015	UK55	The most important events of 2015

Annex 5: Discussion guides for interviews

a) Discussion guide for most non-Muslim participants

Section	Objective	Questions	Time
Introduction	To explain the aim of this interview and research.	• First, I would like to thank you for accepting to take this interview today. • This interview will be part of my PhD dissertation and of a larger project called FATIGUE. My main topic is the Czech political discourse about Muslims. Politicians usually claim to speak as the elected representatives of the people. However, they are not the people. That is why, I also want to talk to Czech citizens in several cities across the country and to some Muslims living in Czechia. • Your views and opinions are very important to ensure the success of this research. Some of the issues that we will discuss can feel emotional and this is a natural thing. However, if you feel uncomfortable at any point during the interview, we can always take a break or skip a question. Furthermore, you must remember that you are free to withdraw from the interview at any point if you wish to. • My university and I take your privacy and wellbeing very seriously. If you want any clarification about points in the forms that you signed, you should let me know. Additionally, I would like to remind you that, in the research, your answers will be anonymised so that nobody can reasonably identify you. • The format will be that of an interview, where I will be mostly asking you questions and listening to your answers. There are no right or wrong answers, this is not a test. What interest me the most are your subjective and personal observations. As you can hear, my Czech is not perfect, so I hope that you do not feel bad if at some point I ask you to speak a little bit slower or repeat a question. I hope that you are okay with this. If you do not understand some of my questions, please let me know and I will gladly repeat them.	5 min [Total: **5 min**]

		• Do you have any questions about the research or the interview before we start? If not, I will start recording. Is that okay with you?	
Why do Czechs and Muslims living in Czechia believe that a negative discourse about Muslims became so widespread across Czech society (particularly since 2015)?	Warm up	**In this first big section, we will talk about attitudes towards Muslims in Czechia…** To begin with, … ▪ **What** comes to your mind when you hear the words 'Muslim' or 'Muslims'? ○ PROMPT IF NO ANSWER: Any words, images, videos, articles? ▪ **Who** comes to your mind when I mention 'Muslim' or 'Muslims'? ○ PROMPT IF NO ANSWER: Do you think about, for example, people from specific countries, celebrities? Next, we will briefly travel to your childhood. ▪ Do you remember how you imagined Muslims when you were a child? ○ Where there any characters, stories or personal experiences that influenced this? ▪ Did your image about Muslims change at some point since your childhood? ○ IF YES: When was it? Was it at one point or multiple points? ○ IF YES: What specifically caused you to change your views?	7 min [Total: **12 min**]
	To measure perception about the attitudes of others and how interactions with them went	▪ How do you think that Czech society feels towards Muslims nowadays? Why do you think this is the case? [culture/security] ○ Do you remember noticing personally that attitudes towards Muslims in Czechia changed at some point due to specific events or were they always the same? What could have motivated this change? ○ PROMPT IF NO ANSWER: Some people think that 2015 (i.e. migration crisis, terrorism) changed the way Czechs saw Muslims. What do you think about this claim? ○ Do you think that the Coronavirus has made people change their minds in any way about Muslims?	10 min [Total: **22 min**]

		Thinking about other people in your daily life…
		
		▪ When they talk about Muslims, if they do, who do you think that they have in mind?
		    ○ PROMPT IF NO ANSWER: For example, do they mean people born into Muslim families, are they practising Muslims or very religious people, do they also refer to Czech converts to Islam?
		
		▪ Do you remember listening to friends, colleagues or relatives talking about Muslims in the recent 5-10 years outside of the Internet?
		    ○ IF YES: Did you participate in that conversation? + How did you feel about the conversation?
		    ○ IF NO: Why do you think that is?	

	To see the effect that politicians might have had	Now we will briefly cover how Czech politicians talk about Muslims…
		
		▪ In recent years, Czech politicians have also discussed the topic of Muslims and Islam. Do you remember how they did this?
		    ○ Are there any specific politicians that come to mind who spoke about Muslims? It's ok if not.
		    ○ Why do you think politicians talk about Muslims and Islam?
		
		▪ Do you think that Czech politicians can have an effect on how other Czechs think about Muslims?
		    ○ IF YES: What impact can they have? Is it bigger than that of journalists? Do you remember if anything that politicians said about Muslims made you have a talk with your friends or relatives?
		    ○ IF NO: Why do you think that is?
		
		▪ Who do you trust the most when it comes to information about Muslims? And how does he/she compare to politicians?
		    ○ IF YES: Why this person?
			10 min [Total: **32 min**]

<table>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Why do Czechs and Muslims living in Czechia think that ‘Muslims’ can/cannot successfully become a part of Czech society or their own local communities?</td><td>To check if Intergroup contact existed and had an effect</td><td>In this second section we will cover your interactions with Muslims and issues of integration.

• Did you personally have contact with Muslim people in the past?
  ○ IF YES: When was it? Was it a one-time encounter or a repeated one? Do you have contacts now?
  ○ IF YES: How would you describe the experiences overall?
    ▪ PROMPT: Pleasant or unpleasant?
    ▪ Did your attitudes towards Muslims change as a result of these encounters? If yes, how did they change?
    ▪ PROMPT: For example, to the better or worse?</td><td>5 min
[Total: 37 min</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>• Do you think that most Czechs are willing to accept ‘Muslims’ as residents of their neighbourhoods?
  ○ Why do you think Czechs would/wouldn’t like to have Muslims as neighbours?
  ○ Is this the case of all Muslims or are there groups that Czechs are more favourable towards?
  ○ Do you think there are big differences between different groups of Czechs in their attitudes towards Muslims? What groups are these and what are the differences between them in their attitudes towards Muslims?</td><td>5 min
[Total: 42 min</td></tr>
<tr><td>To discover individual perceptions about integration</td><td>• Do you think that the Muslims that live in Czechia have been able to integrate well into the society?
  ○ Why do you think this is the case?
  ○ IF NOT: What could they do to integrate better?

• Do you think that other Muslims that could come in the future could integrate as well?
  ○ Why do you think this is the case?
  ○ What kind of Muslim migrant do you think that could integrate better?
  ○ Could they integrate well into your neighbourhood?
    ▪ IF NOT: What should they do?</td><td>12 min
[Total: 55 min</td></tr>
</table>

		• If a Muslim person abandoned his/her religion, do you think that they would be able to integrate better? If so, why?
		
		• Do you think that it is generally easy for 'Muslims' to live in Czechia?
		  ○ What are the biggest barriers that they can encounter?
		  ○ Does this also apply to Czech converts?
		  ○ What could the Czech authorities do to help Muslims integrate better?
		  ○ What could Muslims do in order to integrate better?
		  ○ What could Muslims do to make Czech more favourable towards them?
		
		And before we wrap up this section, I'm interested in one last thing.
		
		• Is there, in your opinion, something typically 'Czech' that creates tensions with Muslims or Islam more generally?	

Closing	To make sure that no interesting comments are left out and to thank the participant for his/her time	**This brings us to the end of the interview, thank you very much for your responses.** • Is there anything else that you feel we weren't able to cover today that you would like to raise at this point? • Do you have any other questions or comments? • If anything comes to your mind, please, do not hesitate to contact me at any point. Do you have my contact details? • Thank you very much for your time and your participation. It has been a pleasure talking to you.	5 min [Total: **60 min**]

b) Discussion guide for Muslim participants

Section	Objective	Questions	Duration
Introduction	To explain the aim of this interview and research.	• First, I would like to thank you for accepting to take this interview today. • This interview will be part of my PhD dissertation and of a larger project called FATIGUE. My main topic is the Czech political discourse about Muslims. Politicians usually claim to speak as the elected representatives of the people. However, they are not the people. That is why, I also want to talk to Czech citizens in several cities across the country. In addition, I am interviewing Muslims who live in Czechia in order to understand your experiences and perceptions of the issue. • Your views and opinions are very important to ensure the success of this research. Some of the issues that we will discuss can feel emotional and this is a natural thing. However, if you feel uncomfortable at any point during the interview, we can always take a break or skip a question. Furthermore, you must remember that you are free to withdraw from the interview at any point if you wish to. • My university and I take your privacy and wellbeing very seriously. If you want any clarification about points in the forms that you signed, <u>you should let me know</u>. Additionally, I would like to remind you that, in the research, your answers will be anonymised so that nobody can reasonably identify you. • The format will be that of an interview, where I will be mostly asking you questions and listening to your answers. There are no right or wrong answers, this is not a test. What interest me the most are your subjective and personal observations. As you can hear, my Czech is not perfect, so I hope that you do not feel bad if at some point I ask you to speak a little bit slower or repeat a question. I hope that you are okay with this. If you do not understand some of my questions, please let me know and I will gladly repeat them. • Do you have any questions about the research or the interview before we start? If not, I will start recording. Is that okay with you?	5 min [Total: **5 min**]

Why do Czechs and Muslims living in Czechia believe that a negative discourse about Muslims became so widespread across Czech society (particularly since 2015)?	To register perception of attitudes towards Muslims in Czechia	**In this section, we will talk about attitudes towards Muslims in Czechia… *As a note*, for simplification, in this interview, I will be referring to non-Muslim Czechs simply as 'Czechs', if it gets confusing at some point, please let me know.**
		
		Now, from your personal experience…
		
		• You have been living in Czechia for some time. Do you remember how Czechs felt towards 'Muslims' or people who looked 'Muslim' when you first arrived?
		  ○ Did this apply to you?
		  ○ Was there anything that surprised you in everyday interactions with Czechs?
		    ▪ PROMPT: Share a story that illustrates this.
		
		• Since you have lived here, did you notice any changes in the way that Czechs think, talk about or behave towards 'Muslims'?
		  ○ PROMPT: Some think that 2015 changed the way Czechs saw Muslims, do you agree with this?
		  ○ IF YES: Tell me more about these changes: was it for the better or for the worse? When did that change occur: any specific points in time? And what events and/or actors do you think drove those changes?
		    ▪ PROMPT: Share a story or an example that illustrates these changes.
		  ○ IF NO: Why do you think this is the case?
		
		• Do you think that nowadays attitudes are more positive than before?
		  ○ PROMPT: for example, since you arrived or since 2015
		  ○ Do you think that the Coronavirus has had any effect on perceptions about Muslims?
			10 min [Total: **15 min**]

	To register perception of Czech political discourse	Regarding Czech politicians… • In recent years, Czech politicians have also discussed Muslims and Islam in a variety of contexts. How would you evaluate, generally, how they represented Muslims and Islam in public? ○ Do you find any differences between politicians in the way they represented Muslims and Islam? If yes, what are these differences?	15 min [Total: **30 min**]

		○ Was there something that they said that was particularly damaging for Muslim communities in Czechia? ○ And on the contrary, was there something that was particularly helpful for the communities? • Do you think that the way politicians speak about Muslims has an influence on Czech people's attitudes towards all Muslims, including those living in the country? ○ IF YES: why do you think that politicians' words have this influence? ○ IF YES: Are there other institutions (like the media, education, etc.) more powerful than politicians in influencing people's attitudes towards Muslims? ○ IF NO: Why do you think this is the case? • Did you perceive that the way politicians spoke about Muslims had an effect over the behaviour of other Muslim people that you know? ○ IF YES: In which way did this change and why? ○ IF NO: Why do you think this is the case? • What do you think could make the political debate about Muslims and Islam more balanced in Czechia?	
How has the 2015 change in discourse (if any) about Muslims affected the lives and identities of Muslim interviewees who have	To understand how Muslim identity works and has been affected	**In the next section we will speak about identity…** These are slightly personal questions. If there are any questions you are uncomfortable with, just let me know and we skim through these or skip them. • Initially, how do you identify yourself in a couple of words? • Are there any parts of your identity that you feel that define you more strongly? [e.g. religion, nationality, profession?]	10 min [Total: **40 min**]

been living in Czechia since before 2015?		• I know that 'Muslim' is an umbrella term and that you might feel that you do not have anything in common with other Muslim people. However, what do you think is the main thing that causes you to identify as Muslim? Is this more powerful than a national identity? • Do you think that Czechs would identify you as 'Muslim'? ○ IF YES: what do you think is the main thing that causes them to identify you as such? ○ IF NOT: why do you think that is? • Do you feel connected to the Muslim community in your city? • While living in Czechia, has there been anything that pushed you to re-think your identity or behaviour as a Muslim? ○ If so, tell me more about it. What was it? When did that happen? How did you react to it? • Do you ever speak with your Muslim friends and relatives about Czech attitudes towards Muslims? ○ IF YES: is there any issue that regularly comes up in those discussions? ○ IF NOT: why is that? Have you ever spoken with them about these attitudes in the past?	
Why do Czechs and Muslims living in Czechia think that 'Muslims' can/cannot successfully become a part of Czech society or their	To register perceived effects of IG contact	**Now we will speak about interactions between Czechs and Muslims and the topic of integration.** • Have you experienced Czech people changing their attitude towards you after having some closer personal contact with you? ○ IF YES: how did this change look like? Why do you think it happened? ○ IF NO: why did you think this did not happen?	5 min [Total: **45 min**]
	To understand how participant perceive that Czechs perceive Muslims	• Do you think that Czechs are generally willing to accept the Muslims that live in Czechia as members of the society? ○ Why do you think this is? ○ Do you see that some groups are more welcome than others? [e.g. converts] • Do you think that Czechs are willing to accept new Muslims from abroad as members of society?	10 min [Total: **55 min**]

own local communities?		○ Why do you think this? ○ Are there groups that would be more welcome than others? • Do you think there are any (big) differences between different groups of Czechs in their attitudes towards Muslims? ○ What groups are these and what are the differences between them in their attitudes towards Muslims?	
	To understand how 'Muslim' identity can be a problem for integration	• Did you personally find being 'Muslim' as an obstacle for your life in Czechia? • If a Muslim person abandoned his/her religion, do you think that Czechs would be able to be more open towards them? If so, why?	5 min [Total: **60 min**]
	Few concluding questions	And before we wrap up this section, I am interested in two last things… • Is there, in your opinion, something typically 'Czech' that creates tensions with Muslims or Islam more generally? • Finally, as a Muslim, what would make your life easier when it comes to living in this country?	5 min [Total: **65 min**]
Closing	To make sure that no interesting comments are left out and to thank the participant for his time	**This brings us to the end of the interview, thank you very much for your responses.** • Is there anything else that you feel we were not able to cover today that you would like to raise at this point? • Do you have any other questions or comments? • If anything comes to your mind, please, do not hesitate to contact me at any point. Do you have my contact details? • Thank you very much for your time and your participation. It has been a pleasure talking to you.	5 min [Total: **70 min**]

c) Discussion guide for non-Muslim participants who have been to Egypt

Section	Objective	Questions	Time
Introduction	To explain the aim of this interview and research.	• First, I would like to thank you for accepting to take this interview today. • This interview will be part of my PhD dissertation and of a larger project called FATIGUE. My main topic is the Czech political discourse about Muslims. Politicians usually claim to speak as the elected representatives of the people. However, they are not the people. That is why, I also want to talk to Czech citizens in several cities across the country and to some Muslims living in Czechia. • Your views and opinions are very important to ensure the success of this research. Some of the issues that we will discuss can feel emotional and this is a natural thing. However, if you feel uncomfortable at any point during the interview, we can always take a break or skip a question. Furthermore, you must remember that you are free to withdraw from the interview at any point if you wish to. • My university and I take your privacy and wellbeing very seriously. If you want any clarification about points in the forms that you signed, you should let me know. Additionally, I would like to remind you that, in the research, your answers will be anonymised so that nobody can reasonably identify you. • The format will be that of an interview, where I will be mostly asking you questions and listening to your answers. There are no right or wrong answers, this is not a test. What interest me the most are your subjective and personal observations. As you can hear, my Czech is not perfect, so I hope that you do not feel bad if at some point I ask you to speak a little bit slower or repeat a question. I hope that you are okay with this. If you do not understand some of my questions, please let me know and I will gladly repeat them. • Do you have any questions about the research or the interview before we start? If not, I will start recording. Is that okay with you?	5 min [Total: **5 min**]

<table>
<tr>
<td rowspan="2">Why do Czechs and Muslims living in Czechia believe that a negative discourse about Muslims became so widespread across Czech society (particularly since 2015)?</td>
<td>Warm up</td>
<td>In this first big section, we will talk about attitudes towards Muslims in Czechia…

To begin with, …
▪ What comes to your mind when you hear the words ‘Muslim’ or ‘Muslims’?
○ PROMPT IF NO ANSWER: Any words, images, videos, articles?

▪ Who comes to your mind when I mention ‘Muslim’ or ‘Muslims’?
○ PROMPT IF NO ANSWER: Do you think about, for example, people from specific countries, celebrities?

Next, we will briefly travel to your childhood.

▪ Do you remember how you imagined Muslims when you were a child?
○ Where there any characters, stories or personal experiences that influenced this?

▪ Did your image about Muslims change at some point since your childhood?
○ IF YES: When was it? Was it at one point or multiple points?
○ IF YES: What specifically caused you to change your views?</td>
<td>7 min [Total: 12 min]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To measure perception about the attitudes of others and how interactions with them went</td>
<td>▪ How do you think that Czech society feels towards Muslims nowadays? Why do you think this is the case? [culture/security]
○ Do you remember noticing personally that attitudes towards Muslims in Czechia changed at some point due to specific events or were they always the same? What could have motivated this change?
○ PROMPT IF NO ANSWER: Some people think that 2015 (i.e. migration crisis, terrorism) changed the way Czechs saw Muslims. What do you think about this claim?
○ Do you think that the Coronavirus has made people change their minds in any way about Muslims?

Thinking about other people in your daily life…</td>
<td>10 min [Total: 22 min]</td>
</tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td>

- When they talk about Muslims, if they do, who do you think that they have in mind?
  - PROMPT IF NO ANSWER: For example, do they mean people born into Muslim families, are they practising Muslims or very religious people, do they also refer to Czech converts to Islam?

- Do you remember listening to friends, colleagues or relatives talking about Muslims in the recent 5-10 years outside of the Internet?
  - IF YES: Did you participate in that conversation? + How did you feel about the conversation?
  - IF NO: Why do you think that is?

</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>To see the effect that politicians might have had</td><td>

Now we will briefly cover how Czech politicians talk about Muslims…

- In recent years, Czech politicians have also discussed the topic of Muslims and Islam. Do you remember how they did this?
  - Are there any specific politicians that come to mind who spoke about Muslims? It’s ok if not.
  - Why do you think politicians talk about Muslims and Islam?

- Do you think that Czech politicians can have an effect on how other Czechs think about Muslims?
  - IF YES: What impact can they have? Is it bigger than that of journalists? Do you remember if anything that politicians said about Muslims made you have a talk with your friends or relatives?
  - IF NO: Why do you think that is?

- Who do you trust the most when it comes to information about Muslims? And how does he/she compare to politicians?
  - IF YES: Why this person?

</td><td>10 min
[Total:
32 min]</td></tr>
<tr><td>Egypt</td><td>To understand isolated</td><td>In this second section, we will briefly discuss your trip to Egypt…</td><td>10 min
[Total:</td></tr>
</table>

	effects of Egypt trip	• As I understood, you were on holidays in Egypt. Could you briefly tell me a few things about the trip? Why did you choose Egypt as a destination? When was it? How long were you there? Where did you stay? • What kind of contacts did you have with local people? ○ How would you evaluate these contacts? ▪ PROMPT: Would you describe them as rather positive or negative? • While being in Egypt, did you think that being 'Muslim' was an important part of local people's identity? ○ Did you think sometimes about how Islam or being Muslim influenced their lives? ▪ IF YES: What did you think? • During your stay, do you remember visiting a mosque or local festivity where you could see Muslims actively practising their religion? ○ How did visiting this mosque/event make you feel? ○ Did you expect it to be like this or did it surprise you? • After your holiday in Egypt, would you say that you have changed your mind in some way about Muslims and Islam more generally? If yes, how and why? Would this apply to Muslims living in Europe too?	**42 min**]
Why do Czechs and Muslims living in Czechia think that 'Muslims' can/cannot successfully	To check if Intergroup contact existed and had an effect	**In this third section we will cover your interactions with Muslims and issues of integration.** • Did you personally have contact with Muslim people in the past? ○ IF YES: When was it? Was it a one-time encounter or a repeated one? Do you have contacts now? ○ IF YES: How would you describe the experiences overall? ▪ PROMPT: Pleasant or unpleasant? ▪ Did your attitudes towards Muslims change as a result of these encounters? If yes, how did they change?	5 min [Total: **47 min**

become a part of Czech society or their own local communities?		▪ PROMPT: For example, to the better or worse?	
		• Do you think that most Czechs are willing to accept 'Muslims' as residents of their neighbourhoods? ○ Why do you think Czechs would/wouldn't like to have Muslims as neighbours? ○ Is this the case of all Muslims or are there groups that Czechs are more favourable towards? ○ Do you think there are big differences between different groups of Czechs in their attitudes towards Muslims? What groups are these and what are the differences between them in their attitudes towards Muslims?	5 min [Total: **52 min**
	To discover individual perceptions about integration	• Do you think that the Muslims that live in Czechia have been able to integrate well into the society? ○ Why do you think this is the case? ○ IF NOT: What could they do to integrate better? • Do you think that other Muslims that could come in the future could integrate as well? ○ Why do you think this is the case? ○ What kind of Muslim migrant do you think that could integrate better? ○ Could they integrate well into your neighbourhood? ▪ IF NOT: What should they do? • If a Muslim person abandoned his/her religion, do you think that they would be able to integrate better? If so, why? • Do you think that it is generally easy for 'Muslims' to live in Czechia? ○ What are the biggest barriers that they can encounter? ○ Does this also apply to Czech converts? ○ What could the Czech authorities do to help Muslims integrate better? ○ What could Muslims do in order to integrate better? ○ What could Muslims do to make Czech more favourable towards them?	12 min [Total: **64 min**

		And before we wrap up this section, I'm interested in one last thing. • Is there, in your opinion, something typically 'Czech' that creates tensions with Muslims or Islam more generally?	
Closing	To make sure that no interesting comments are left out and to thank the participant for his time	**This brings us to the end of the interview, thank you very much for your responses.** • Is there anything else that you feel we weren't able to cover today that you would like to raise at this point? • Do you have any other questions or comments? • If anything comes to your mind, please, do not hesitate to contact me at any point. Do you have my contact details? • Thank you very much for your time and your participation. It has been a pleasure talking to you.	5 min [Total: **69 min**]

d) Discussion guide for non-Muslim participants from Teplice

Section	Objective	Questions	Time
Introduction	To explain the aim of this interview and research.	• First, I would like to thank you for accepting to take this interview today. • This interview will be part of my PhD dissertation and of a larger project called FATIGUE. My main topic is the Czech political discourse about Muslims. Politicians usually claim to speak as the elected representatives of the people. However, they are not the people. That is why, I also want to talk to Czech citizens in several cities across the country and to some Muslims living in Czechia. • Your views and opinions are very important to ensure the success of this research. Some of the issues that we will discuss can feel emotional and this is a natural thing. However, if you feel uncomfortable at any point during the interview, we can always take a break or skip a question. Furthermore, you must remember that you are free to withdraw from the interview at any point if you wish to. • My university and I take your privacy and wellbeing very seriously. If you want any clarification about points in the forms that you signed, you should let me know. Additionally, I would like to remind you that, in the research, your answers will be anonymised so that nobody can reasonably identify you. • The format will be that of an interview, where I will be mostly asking you questions and listening to your answers. There are no right or wrong answers, this is not a test. What interest me the most are your subjective and personal observations. As you can hear, my Czech is not perfect, so I hope that you do not feel bad if at some point I ask you to speak a little bit slower or repeat a question. I hope that you are okay with this. If you do not understand some of my questions, please let me know and I will gladly repeat them. • Do you have any questions about the research or the interview before we start? If not, I will start recording. Is that okay with you?	5 min [Total: **5 min**]
Why do Czechs and	Warm up	**In this first big section, we will talk about attitudes towards Muslims in Czechia…**	7 min [Total:

Muslims living in Czechia believe that a negative discourse about Muslims became so widespread across Czech society (particularly since 2015)?		To begin with, … ▪ **What** comes to your mind when you hear the words 'Muslim' or 'Muslims'? ○ PROMPT IF NO ANSWER: Any words, images, videos, articles? ▪ **Who** comes to your mind when I mention 'Muslim' or 'Muslims'? ○ PROMPT IF NO ANSWER: Do you think about, for example, people from specific countries, celebrities? Next, we will briefly travel to your childhood. ▪ Do you remember how you imagined Muslims when you were a child? ○ Where there any characters, stories or personal experiences that influenced this? ▪ Did your image about Muslims change at some point since your childhood? ○ IF YES: When was it? Was it at one point or multiple points? ○ IF YES: What specifically caused you to change your views?	**12 min**]
	To measure perception about the attitudes of others and how interactions with them went	▪ How do you think that Czech society feels towards Muslims nowadays? Why do you think this is the case? [culture/security] ○ Do you remember noticing personally that attitudes towards Muslims in Czechia changed at some point due to specific events or were they always the same? What could have motivated this change? ○ PROMPT IF NO ANSWER: Some people think that 2015 (i.e. migration crisis, terrorism) changed the way Czechs saw Muslims. What do you think about this claim? ○ Do you think that the Coronavirus has made people change their minds in any way about Muslims? Thinking about other people in your daily life… ▪ When they talk about Muslims, if they do, who do you think that they have in mind?	10 min [Total: **22 min**]

		○ PROMPT IF NO ANSWER: For example, do they mean people born into Muslim families, are they practising Muslims or very religious people, do they also refer to Czech converts to Islam? ▪ Do you remember listening to friends, colleagues or relatives talking about Muslims in the recent 5-10 years outside of the Internet? ○ IF YES: Did you participate in that conversation? + How did you feel about the conversation? ○ IF NO: Why do you think that is?	
	To see the effect that politicians might have had	Now we will briefly cover how Czech politicians talk about Muslims… ▪ In recent years, Czech politicians have also discussed the topic of Muslims and Islam. Do you remember how they did this? ○ Are there any specific politicians that come to mind who spoke about Muslims? It's ok if not. ○ Why do you think politicians talk about Muslims and Islam? ▪ Do you think that Czech politicians can have an effect on how other Czechs think about Muslims? ○ IF YES: What impact can they have? Is it bigger than that of journalists? Do you remember if anything that politicians said about Muslims made you have a talk with your friends or relatives? ○ IF NO: Why do you think that is? ▪ Who do you trust the most when it comes to information about Muslims? And how does he/she compare to politicians? ○ IF YES: Why this person?	10 min [Total: **32 min**]
IG contact in Teplice	To understand isolated effects of IG	**Now, since you live in Teplice, in this second section I will briefly ask you about your contacts with Arabs.** • Do you have any day-to-day interactions with Arabs in Teplice?	10 min [Total: **42 min**]

	contact in Teplice	○ If yes, tell me more about them. ○ How would you evaluate these interactions? (e.g. positive, negative) • Would you say that being ‘Muslim’ is an important part of the identity of the Arab residents? Do you think this is the same for Arab visitors to the city? • Do you remember being near a mosque or festivity in Teplice where you could see Muslims practising their religion? ○ How did visiting this mosque/event make you feel? • Did your interactions with Arabs in Teplice led to a change in the way you think about all Muslims? • Do you remember if any friends or relatives came to visit you to Teplice and changed their attitudes towards Muslims after having contact with the Arab population?	
Why do Czechs and Muslims living in Czechia think that ‘Muslims’ can/cannot successfully become a part of Czech society or their own local communities?	To have the participant reflect about the acceptability shown by CZ society	**In this third section we will cover your interactions with Muslims and issues of integration** • Do you think that most Czechs are willing to accept ‘Muslims’ as members of society? ○ Why do you think Czechs would/wouldn’t like to have Muslims in the society? ○ Is this the case of all Muslims or are there groups that Czechs are more favourable towards? • Do you think there are big differences between different groups of Czechs in their attitudes towards Muslims? What groups are these and what are the differences between them in their attitudes towards Muslims?	5 min [Total: **52 min**
	To discover individual perceptions about integration	• Do you think that the Muslims that live in Czechia have been able to integrate well into the society? ○ Why do you think this is the case? ○ IF NOT: What could they do to integrate better?	12 min [Total: **64 min**

		• Do you think that other Muslims that could come in the future could integrate as well?
		    ○ Why do you think this is the case?
		    ○ What kind of Muslim migrant do you think that could integrate better?
		    ○ Could they integrate well into your neighbourhood?
		        ▪ IF NOT: What should they do?
		
		• If a Muslim person abandoned his/her religion, do you think that they would be able to integrate better? If so, why?
		
		• Do you think that it is generally easy for 'Muslims' to live in Czechia?
		    ○ What are the biggest barriers that they can encounter?
		    ○ Does this also apply to Czech converts?
		    ○ What could the Czech authorities do to help Muslims integrate better?
		    ○ What could Muslims do in order to integrate better?
		    ○ What could Muslims do to make Czech more favourable towards them?
		
		And before we wrap up this section, I'm interested in one last thing.
		    ○ Is there, in your opinion, something typically 'Czech' that creates tensions with Muslims or Islam more generally?	

Closing	To make sure that no interesting comments are left out and to thank the participant for his time	**This brings us to the end of the interview, thank you very much for your responses.** • Is there anything else that you feel we weren't able to cover today that you would like to raise at this point? • Do you have any other questions or comments? • If anything comes to your mind, please, do not hesitate to contact me at any point. Do you have my contact details? • Thank you very much for your time and your participation. It has been a pleasure talking to you.	5 min [Total: **69 min**]

Annex 6: NVivo codebook for the thematic analysis (Chapters 5 and 6)

Name of the code	Description
Attitudes (attributed to Czechs)	Participants attributing attitudes to other Czechs
Causes of prejudice, according to participants	*Answers to questions on why participants believe that Czechs hold certain attitudes towards Muslims.*
Czechs lack contact with Muslims	
Islamophobic messages are ubiquitous on social media, particularly Facebook	
Media brainwashing	
Politicians have exploited the issue	
Muslims as hypothetical neighbours	*On whether Czechs would accept Muslims as neighbours and under which conditions*
If Muslims are normal and decent, they will become accepted	
In Teplice, it is mostly about small issues of cohabitation (noise, accumulation of rubbish, etc.)	
Muslims more likely to be accepted in big cities	
People will always be bothered by Muslims' difference	
Nature of the threat, according to participants	*Mostly answers to the first bloc of questions in the discussion guide whenever participants mentioned perceived threats that drove Czechs' prejudice against Muslims.*
Confusion of categories (Muslim, terrorist, etc.)	
Muslim migrants as unskilled, unintelligent or unable	
Muslims as radicals or terrorists	
Muslims want to impose their norms	
Attitudes (self-reported)	Participants' openly expressing their attitudes towards Muslims
Conversations about Muslims	Reports on conversations and interactions about 'Muslims' with other Czechs
Avoid discussing Muslim migration and Islam	

Challenging others' Islamophobic prejudice	
Conversations are uncommon, but negative expressions were frequent during the 'refugee crisis'	
In Teplice, small local issues are discussed	
Islamophobia more openly and blatantly voiced on social media	
Older adults are more negative about Muslims	
Differences in attitudes across social groups	Perceived social cleavages in attitudes towards Islam and Muslims
Big cities as less prejudiced	
Christians as more prejudiced	
Czech society as polarised	
Men as more prejudiced	
Older Czechs as more prejudiced	
University education is not incompatible with prejudice	
Identity issues (Muslim participants)	Issues of Muslim identity reported by Muslim participants
Intergroup contact experiences	Experiences of intergroup contact
In Czechia or the EU	
Contact contributes to humanisation	
'Czechs have become really fond of Muslims who own kebab shops'	
In Teplice	
In Western Europe	
Muslim doctors in Czechia accepted after some reticence	
In Egypt	
Attracting a lot of attention from male Egyptians	
Egyptians are really friendly, 'there were smiles everywhere'	
'Egyptians saw us as cash machines'	
In Muslim-majority countries other than Egypt	
Negative contact experiences reinforced prejudice	
'They were not really Muslim...'	

Muslims as topic of public discourse and changes in attitudes	Participants' perceptions of the history of changes in attitudes towards and public discourse about 'Muslims' in Czechia.
2001-2005 9 11, Madrid and London attacks made Muslims relevant	
2010-2014, something was changing and reactions to the Arab Springs	
2015 as the most significant turning point	
Before 9 11, participants did not think much about Muslims	
Czechs and Slovaks were at war with Ottomans	
Perceived intergroup threat, material	Participants speak of 'Muslims' as threatening material resources. Sometimes they personally believe in this threat, sometimes they attribute it.
Migrants and refugees as unadaptables or like the Roma	
Muslims as terrorists, criminals and radicals	
Perceived intergroup threat, symbolic	Participants speak of 'Muslims' as threatening symbolic resources. Sometimes they personally believe in this threat, sometimes they attribute it.
Muslims can endanger community cohesion	
Religious practices as a threat	
'They' have different forms of family organisation and patriarchal norms	
'They should respect our norms'	
Role of race and religion in prejudice	Is race/ethnicity or religion driving the prejudice?
Race, Muslims as black	
Race, Muslims as Middle Eastern and Arab	
Race, racialisation and foreignisation through the hijab	
Race, white and less Middle Eastern Muslim neighbours are preferred	
Religion, 'Czechs embrace of Christian identity is hypocritical'	
Religion, radicalisation as a major concern	
Social representations, Czechia and Czechs	Instances of representations of 'Czechia' or 'Czechs' (often 'here' and 'we') in relation to 'Muslims'
Czechia as safe, peaceful and prosperous	

Czechs as provincial and distrustful of foreigners	
Czechs as racists	
'We Europeans are in decline'	
'We fear occupation'	
'We like alcohol and pork'	
Social representations, Muslim countries	Instances of representations of Muslim-majority countries
Non visited Muslim countries as places of conflict	
Visited Muslim countries have friendly people	
Visited Muslim countries have unequal gender relations	
Social representations, national Muslim communities	Instances of representations of national Muslim communities
Teplice's multiculturalism as success or failure	
The pleasant experience of the kebab shop	
'They are a small community and, so far, unproblematic'	
'They are well educated and economically active'	
'They keep to themselves'	
Social representations, the West	Instances of representations of 'the West' or 'Western Europe' in relation to 'Muslims'
'Ghettos' in Western Europe	
West European cities as 'cosmopolitan'	
Social representations, women within Islam	Instances of representations of 'Muslim women'
'They are attacked by Czech men'	
'They are oppressed by Muslim men'	
Solutions to prejudice according to participants	What could help Czechs become more accommodating or less fearful of Muslims
Increasing intergroup contact	
Increasing knowledge	
News media should change their reporting	

The identities of Muslims which come to mind	First images of Muslims that come to mind, mostly in relation to the questions in the first bloc of questions in the discussion guides
How Muslims were imagined during childhood	
Mixing social categories (Muslim, refugee, Arab...)	
Other Czechs imagine Muslims as migrants and radical terrorists	
Who and what come to mind when hearing the word Muslim	
What, a polemical Czech debate	
What, Muslims as different	
What, non-somatic markers of Muslimness	
What, objects and practices associated with Islam	
What, reservations by participants	
Who, famous Muslim (mostly Arab) men	
Who, Muslims the participant knew personally	
Who, women in headscarves	
The role of politicians in shaping public opinion	The role of politicians in shaping public opinion
Islamophobia is a profitable tool for politicians	
Islamophobia is present across the political spectrum	
Most memorable politicians - Okamura, Zeman, Babis and Konvicka	
Politicians were influential in shaping public opinion	
The far right is louder when it comes to Muslims	
The rejection of 'quotas' represented popular will	
The role of the media in shaping public opinion	The role of the media in shaping public opinion
Facebook and the Internet is where you find the crudest expressions of Islamophobia	
Islamophobia and Orientalism in books	
News media present Muslims as threatening, aggressive and conflictual	
People don't look for information	
Politicians use the media to influence public opinion	
The media profits from sensationalist news and disinformation	

Annex 7: NVivo codebook for the discourse analysis (Chapters 7 and 8)

Name of the code	Description
ACTORS	Coding instances of these social actors being mentioned
Czechs	
Far right, populists	
Muslims	
The West, Europe	
FALLACIES	Instances of fallacies following Reisigl and Wodak (2005). (Types of fallacies are not coded, since fallacies are only of tangential interest.)
REPRESENTATION OF SSAA	Coding strategies for representing social actors according to van Leeuwen (2013)
Assimilation, Individualisation	
Aggregation (assimilation)	
Collectivisation (assimilation)	
Association, Dissociation	
Exclusion	
Backgrounding	
Suppression	
Functionalisation, Identification	
Genericisation, Specification	
Indetermination, Differentiation	
Nomination, Categorisation	
Personalisation, Impersonalisation	
Abstraction (impersonalisation)	
Objectivation (impersonalisation)	
Role allocation	
Activation	
Passivisation	

THEMES (Chapter 7)	Coding recurrent patterns which emerged from the first reading
Assimilation of 'the Muslim community'	
Associations of 'Muslims' with radicals, terrorists, refugees...	
Collectivisations of 'us' (Czechs, Europeans) and 'them' (Muslims)	
'Czechia' as a small country	
Differentiations between 'Europe' and 'them'	
Differentiations of 'our' exceptional Muslim communities	
Expecting Ukrainian refugees	
Functionalisations of 'Muslims' as migrants, Islamists, terrorists	
Helping in or near countries of origin, or hosting until the war is over	
How 'they' should behave at 'our home' and how 'we' should behave at 'theirs'	
Impersonalisations of Muslims as 'problems'	
Impersonalisations of 'Muslims' as water phenomena or policy objects	
Mixed terms for referring to jihadism	
Moderators call for illegal solutions to discriminate against Muslims	
Moderators citing Islamophobic statements to spark debate	
Moderators presenting the topic through impersonalisation, associations, backgrounding and collectivisation	
'Muslims' activated as pushing norms, coming towards 'us'...	
'Muslims radicalise', activation	
'Our culture', 'our civilisation'	
References to economic migrants	
References to multiculturalism	
Warnings against fearmongering and pre-empting the rise of populists	
'When we look at the West...'	
THEMES (Chapter 8)	Coding recurrent patterns which emerged from the first reading
Czechs	
'Czechia' as loyal to Europe	

'Czechia' under direct threat (its borders being 'attacked', being 'at war' with IS...)	
'Czechs' as solidary	
References to Czechs' religiosity	
References to whether 'Czechs' are nationalistic or xenophobic	
'There is an atmosphere on the streets' (impersonalisations)	
'We're not responsible for this'	
Far right, populists	
'Extremists' as a public threat	
Instances when speakers try to isolate or stigmatise the far right, or establish cordon sanitaire	
'Multiculturalism is dead'	
References to 'opportunists' across the mainstream	
Representations of 'popular fears', 'We should listen to fears'	
'Extremists, populists are rising across Europe'	
Muslims	
Calls for assimilation or integration, 'they should integrate' (activations)	
Calls for humanitarianism and compassion towards 'Muslims'	
'Muslims' represented as illiberal cultural challengers	
References to 'quotas'	
References to 'radicals', Islamism, jihadism...	
References to second generation 'Muslims'	
'Refugees' as 'uncontrolled' or 'uncontrollable' (role allocations)	
'Refugees' as victims of traffickers (passivisation)	
'They have no right to asylum', 'they are not real refugees'	
'We should help them over there'	
The West, Europe	
'A common civilisation' (assimilations)	
Critique of political correctness	
'European values make us tolerant'	

References to free movement	
References to issues with migrants in Western Europe	
'The West is in decline'	
'The West is passive'	
'We should avoid being like Southern Europe'	
'We should protect our borders'	
Western Europe as a model	
TOPOI	Coding instances of topoi in extracts following Reisigl and Wodak (2005)
Abuse	
Advantage, usefulness	
Authority	
Burdening	
Culture	
Danger, Threat	
Definition, Name interpretation	
Exceptionality	
Finances	
History	
Humanitarianism	
Justice	
Law, right	
Numbers	
Reality	
Responsibility	
Uselessness, disadvantage	