THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POPULISM AND PORTRAYALS OF WOMANHOOD IN CZECH FAR-RIGHT IMAGERY, 2015-2025

By

Anna Flaišmanová

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Supervisors: Prof. Michael Stewart
Dr.Phil Julia Sachseder

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ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to understand how far-right actors in the Czech Republic, specifically Tomio Okamura and Eva Hrindová of the Freedom and Direct Democracy party and the Angry Mothers group, respectively, use visual media and populist narratives that facilitate attacks on what they label as a harmful "gender ideology" and societal inclusion of sexual and ethnic minorities. Using Roland Barthes and Charles Sanders Peirce's frameworks of visual semiotic analysis, this thesis breaks down and analyses examples of visual materials from 2015 to 2025, in particular relating to prominently discussed themes including immigration, sexual violence, Czech traditional culture, and the European Union. These analyses argue that despite repeatedly claiming to be defenders of women's freedoms and equality, both these actors act as examples of the Czech far-right's tendency to reduce women to nothing other than symbolic embodiments of Czech national purity, which reinforces conservative gender roles and denies women agency to define their own position within ideas of patriotism and their ways of engaging national pride, while vilifying progressive "Western" ideas of gender equality. Furthermore, these images and their messages actively promote the exploitation of women's insecurities towards exclusionary ends, especially when they arise in the context of major crises, such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, Anna Flaišmanová, candidate for the MA degree in Nationalism Studies declare herewith that the present thesis titled "The Relationship between Populism and Portrayals of Womanhood in Czech Far-Right Imagery, 2015-2025" is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright.

I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Vienna, 20 May 2025

Anna Flaišmanová

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1.1 - The Czech Republic's political landscape and gender discourse

In the Czech Republic, a complex and intersectional issue has been rising to the surface of political debates. Alongside broader trends of far-right surges in popularity in recent years, the Czech Republic has seen increasingly open discussion of threats to national sovereignty and cohesion through previously less publicly acceptable language and lenses. Namely, these are the discussions of outsiders in increasingly racist, sexist, and animalistic terms. Groups comprising the Czech far-right, rising in the aftermath of the Velvet Revolution, are described by authors such as Josef Smolík[1] as taking shape as reactionary forces to what Smolík says they interpret and label as "communism", "internationalism" and "multiculturalism" - often blatantly associating totalitarianism and authoritarianism with the globalisation of the world around the Czech Republic. While many groups exist that promote these ideological rejections of a more internationally-connected and open society in the Czech Republic, few stand out in terms of how they choose to characterise inclusionary and exclusionary boundaries, and to invoke populist rhetoric to an extremely racist, misogynist and authoritarian degree as the foremost far-right political party, the SPD[2], or Freedom and Direct Democracy Party. This party, led by Tomio Okamura, a Japan-raised half-Czech half-Japanese politician who went from organising tourist trips between the Czech Republic and Japan to being the face of Czech anti-EU, anti-immigrant, anti-NATO conservative politics. Though controversial for many reasons with regards to his

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[1] Josef Smolík, "Tomio Okamura's Dawn of Direct Democracy and Freedom and Direct Democracy," in New Political Parties in the Party Systems of the Czech Republic (Peter Lang, 2022), 105–48, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/359107704_Tomio_Okamuras_Dawn_of_Direct_Democracy_and_Freedom_and_Direct_Democracy.

[2] Svoboda a přímá demokracie

politics, the SPD under Okamura has been of note in recent years because of the party's racist and xenophobic visual materials as part of their political campaigns, which have even led to legal actions taken against Okamura and the party.

While not a political party, there is another group which has similarly captured the attention and concerns of the Czech population and beyond for their incredibly inflammatory messaging, and notably for their reliance on gender as the basis for their activism: the "Naštvané matky" (NM), or "angry mothers". Founded in 2015 out of the critical response to a now well-known blog post written by Eva Hrindová, a Slovak immigrant to the Czech Republic, the campaign group has held protests supporting far-right politicians and been a large source of racist and anti-feminist online materials. These materials have tackled many themes including migration, vaccines, the erosion of the nuclear family model, sexual crimes targeting women, ongoing wars and the general perceived failure of the social system and government at large to protect the integrity of the Czech nation and state. The group could be characterised as blazing a grassroots trail that the SPD has capitalised on, in the sense that the SPD's legal troubles over their public visual materials took place recently, in 2024, while the NM's troubles over their messages began much earlier, in 2018, with the group, described by journalist Lucie Kocmanová as "Okamury v sukních" (Okamura in skirts), eventually being banned from Facebook (today known as Meta) for their harmful content - a fate which is also being debated today for Okamura and the SPD's controversial imagery[3].

Both groups have found common ground in the censure and backlash their content has received, both of which were criticised primarily for the anti-Islam, anti-immigrant, and overtly

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[3] Lucie Kocmanová, "Skupina Naštvané Matky Končí! (Nejen) Rasistické Žvásty Utnul Sám Facebook! - Expres.cz," iDNES.cz, August 28, 2018, https://www.expres.cz/nastaveni-souhlasu?url=https%3a%2f%2fwww.expres.cz%2fzpravy%2fnastvane-matky-eva-hrindova.A180827_152443_dx-zpravy_luci.

racist messages this content promoted. These visualisations have been critical to Czech political discourse over what is considered part of the "mainstream" right-wing, the extreme right, and what deserves censure or not based on the message promoted within such material. More interestingly, while both groups have common ground in their anti-Islamic, anti-vaccine, and anti-globalist views, they have also managed to find common ground in a shared contempt for their perception of the widely accepted idea of progressive, liberal feminism. In their visual materials, both the SPD and the NM use depictions of women that hold up an idea of womanhood that is rooted very much in a conservative ideal of what is considered feminine and what isn't, while simultaneously constructing images of threatening outsiders which are convenient to characterise as threats not necessarily only to the community as an entity, but to the patriarchal idea of a defenceless, traditional housewife and mother who fits the conservative ideal and relies on the nuclear family model – including strong, protective male partners.

The Czech Republic/former Czechoslovakia has had a long and complex road to its current democratic state, much like many of their neighbouring post-communist nations. Within this turbulent evolution, the opening of society to discourses such as feminist ideologies beyond the tenets of gender equality within the communist ideals of the former Czechoslovak state both laid the grounds for the reactionary fears of internationalism that the SPD grew out of while also offering new domestic interpretations. Ferber and Raabe encapsulate this discourse as it occurred in the decade after the Velvet Revolution by arguing that the disdain for Western feminism as a label, compounded by what they observed as a sense of increased independence among Czech women at the time of their study and historically justifies a distinct "Czech-style" feminism

which, even if there were ideological overlaps with Western feminist thinking, was distinct[4]. As a result, the (re)introduction of Western feminism to Czech gender and political discourse created a situation where, unlike many neighbouring countries, far-right perceptions of a harmful Western feminist ideological import spurred on those like Okamura and Hrindová not to label themselves merely as the ultimate anti-feminists, but on the contrary as the ultimate feminists by fighting imported ideological frameworks.

Furthermore, these groups have not only taken heavy stances on issues related to gender identity and female liberation at the societal level but have continued to situate women and their security as a demographic and as an important talking point within their overall political debates. Okamura, for instance, has highlighted feminist movements across the world, including pivotal, early Western suffragette movements such as the New York seamstress strike of 1909, from which the supposedly predatory "internationalist" feminist ideologies they wish to repel originated, while simultaneously using these women's achievements as grounds to decry "gender fascism", as "distracting (us) from the essence", and reaffirming the binary existence of men and women - but nothing more or in-between[5]. Hrindová, similarly, has outright attacked feminism in her writing, arguing that in the current liberal democratic climate, women are true equals, and the proclamation of an existing lack of equality between men and women is false. In an article entitled "Feminism sucks", Hrindová states that "Women are not discriminated against by men…" and that "Women discriminate against their own"[6].

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[4] Marianne A. Ferber and Phylliss Hutton Raabe, "Women in the Czech Republic: Feminism, Czech Style," International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society 16, no. 3 (2003): 407–30, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20020174.

[5] Tomio Okamura, "Tomio Okamura: Za Práva Žen - SPD - Svoboda a Přímá Demokracie," SPD - Svoboda a přímá demokracie, March 10, 2017, https://www.spd.cz/tomio-okamura-za-prava-zen/.

[6] Eva Hrindová, "Feminismus Je Na Nic... | Naštvané Matky," Nastvanematky.cz, 2023, https://www.nastvanematky.cz/feminismus-je-na-nic.

The approach that the individuals whose messages I am focussing on are deeply rooted not only in the "culture wars" of 21st century American far-right populist origin but in a fundamental internal conflict among populist women: the struggle between working-class feminism and the idea of the feminist elite. Sahar Abi-Hassan discusses this issue as a core principle of the relationship between gender and populism, offering a critical theoretical platform for the aims of this thesis. In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, Abi-Hassan states that one of the major paradoxes of populism is that "while populism has the potential to undertake feminist issues due to the excluded nature of the group, its antagonistic nature is too keen on portraying feminists as elitist, overly educated people who do not fit the construction of the real woman in populist terms"[7]. Abi-Hassan discusses the construction of the populist real woman, and the gender equality Western democratic societies have achieved for women as the ground by which they seek to exclude those such as Muslim immigrants from their society. Abi-Hassan also importantly reinforces Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser's notion that in the relationship between gender and populism, what is more important is the "us" vs "them" distinction, rather than the differences exacerbated by the categorisation of people into different groups. This foundational principle of how gender and populism intertwine is critical not only because of its utility in approaching how to understand the visual semiotics of Okamura and Hrindová's materials but because it prompts us to ask what the populist "real woman" is in the Czech context.

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[7] Sahar Abi-Hassan, "Populism and Gender," in The Oxford Handbook of Populism (Oxford University Press, 2017). 439.

1.2 - Frameworks, open issues, and research questions

The choice to engage feminist theoretical frameworks has been made because they provide important analytical tools for understanding how gender operates within political discourse and populist movements - especially since the Czech Republic's unique cultural relationship with feminism requires that at a very minimum the social consideration of feminism as desirable or undesirable, important or unimportant informs our consideration of how women and men, as the socially accepted gender lenses through which discourse is framed allows us to approach the research questions. Gender, in the course of this investigation, is therefore not merely descriptive, but analytical. It is an intersectional lens through which power dynamics, national identity, and social inclusion or exclusion are understood and potentially reconstructed as the public's acceptance or rejection of narratives from different segments of society, including the far-right, are debated. The intention is not to describe how women are depicted, but to actively interrogate how gender has vested itself as a site of ideological struggle in far-right rhetoric. With this in mind, it is notable that the exclusionary rhetoric surrounding the protectionism of Czech women morphed together with other right-wing extremist ideas at the advent of early 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic began spreading across the world - thus cementing the importance of the populist idea of the "real woman" in Czech political discourse.

The Czech Republic, like many countries, experienced lockdowns, forcing many women to stay home with abusive partners in some cases and to suffer the economic hardships that many women worldwide did. Throughout this time, women as an entity in the political discourse of the SPD and NM continued and arguably were amplified. Criticisms of Covid-19 vaccines were not only based on imported right-wing conspiracies that argued vaccines were a population control mechanism, some form of poison, or otherwise clandestinely beneficial to nameless societal

elites, but that traditional ideas of femininity, in the form of motherhood, were being threatened by a vaccine that harmed fertility in an effort to control or decrease the population size and its health[8]. The pandemic therefore signalled a more general shift in the discourse that followed what was being portrayed in visual media by these two groups, with women being a critical topic to create division on the basis of harms to women being harmful to the nation, and traditional femininity seen through a patriarchal lens being the only "acceptable" womanhood. In other words, a misogynistic social programme where women are forced into losing a certain degree of ownership over their own bodies and identities to the nation as a whole, and in a totalitarian, far-right context, potentially even to the state.

As a result of this intersection, this thesis will focus on understanding the way the portrayal of women in Czech far-right media represents populist myth-making in the Czech context. These processes will be understood by analysing the ways in which women are discussed by the SPD and NM, as consequently as portrayed in their visual media from 2015-2025. Comparing these two groups would provide us not only with an intriguing point of comparison, considering they both have faced social outrage and legal challenges because of their visual content's harmful nature, but also due to their different and gendered approaches to common far-right debate issues over which they have much in common. The period for this study is significant not only because 2015 marks the establishment of the NM group, but also because it is the year in which Okamura established the now-prominent far-right SPD. By tracing the ways in which women are portrayed as a tool of discourse are portrayed throughout the years in their messages, I hope to answer the following research questions:

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[8] Denisa Charvátová and Petr Just, "'They Want to Implant Chips into Our Bodies': Covid 19 Conspiracy Theories and Their Impact on Czech Society," Journal of Comparative Politics 17, no. 2 (2024).

- How does the portrayal of women in Czech far-right imagery during this period challenge or corroborate the self-afforded position of the SPD and NM as defenders of Czech womanhood against what they characterise as harmful imported gender ideologies?
- How did the realities of restricted life during the Covid-19 pandemic prompt insecurities around women's safety to be exacerbated in how the far-right characterise the relationship between women, the state, and their safety?

To answer these questions, this thesis will use a two-pronged analytical approach to better understand the wealth of materials available from both the SPD and NM on issues relating to women's security. Guided by publicly-available written materials that have been published in the aftermath of the 2015 refugee crisis, before NM's Facebook ban, after the ban and before the pandemic, during the pandemic, after the pandemic and in the midst of the SPD's legal case against their racist campaign posters, I will use Roland Barthes' approach to visual semiotic analysis to conduct a study on a series of public images posted to the social media accounts and websites of both groups from the same aforementioned chronological series of periods. Discussing visual traits in these images will better allow this study to demonstrate what the shifts in spoken messages represent and create a better picture overall of how and why women act as a key tool for the legitimisation and mainstreaming of exclusionary populism in the Czech Republic's unique case.

FEMINISM AND GENDER IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC: AN OVERVIEW

2.1 - Feminism and its historical development in the Czech lands

Women's rights and feminism as a concept have not been absent in Czech society historically, as first-wave feminism was a notable cultural import to interwar Czechoslovakia, with famous promoters including Charlotte Masarykova, the American-born wife of Tomaš Masaryk, Czechoslovakia's first president and a notable first-wave feminist alongside his wife. As subjects of Imperial rule under the Habsburg Empire and as an independent state as the First Czechoslovak Republic, Czech women have acted as proponents of women's liberation and equality within contexts of national revival, as proponents of women's suffrage in a similar vein to their counterparts in the English-speaking world, and later, after further industrialisation had occurred in the Czech lands, of Czech women's place in the "dual role".

This "dual role" as discussed by Ferber and Raabe is notable in that it is representative of women situating themselves outside of larger movements and beginning to move away from earlier trends of following dynamics observed elsewhere in their cultural and political spheres of influence rather than emulating them and importing other country's ideas and approaches to women's social positions more broadly. Even in the prelude to what many scholars consider as first-wave feminism in the late-19th to early-20th century, Czech women, such as Božena Němcová, commonly held as a pioneer of the Czech feminist movement, had no small role in the Czech linguistic and cultural revival for hundreds of years. This movement critically existed as part of a broader nationalist movement that sought to counteract Austrian, German-speaking cultural hegemony in the Empire. The context in which the First Czechoslovak Republic, and thus the first independent Czechoslovak democracy, recognised women in political and social

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discourse as being fundamentally informed by women being vessels of national and cultural independence and safeguarding.

2.2 - Literature considerations

There is an existing corpus of literature which discusses Czech gender politics and far-right populism, though often exploring these themes separately with only minor overlap, if at all. Scholarship by authors who have made notable foundational contributions to postsocialist Czech gender research, like Ferber and Raabe, and Fellegi, have given us insight into the unique trajectory of Czech postsocialist feminism and women's social roles as rooted in the countries 20th 20th-century history of postcolonialism and experience as a repeatedly dominated nation[9]. Meanwhile, the analyses of the far-right as an entity in Czech contemporary politics, such as by Smolík, have made clear the importance of heteronormativity for the far-right given the reactionary nature of groups like the SPD and NM to globalism as a perceived harmful political import. However, there is very little scholarship that outright combines these topics into intersectional studies of gender and populism within the Czech context. As a result, such a thesis would contribute to the existing literature of Czech gender and politics by beginning to address this gap, most usefully for broader applications by other by engaging with a combination of both contemporary feminist scholarship on populism, such as through the work of Abi-Hassan and Farris, which have extensively detailed the othering of brown and Muslim men as misogynist, repressive and violent, and of brown and Muslim women as not conventionally attractive and

[9] Ondřej Slačálek, "Czech Republic: Populism without Culture Wars?," in Central European Culture Wars: Beyond Post-Communism and Populism (Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2021). 184-186

complicit in cultural decay alongside Czech context-specific scholarship that deals with feminism as a cultural and social phenomenon such as Ferber and Raabe, Šiklová and David.

Among all this literature, it is arguable that women, being portrayed in literature and arts as vestiges of cultural autonomy and dissent from oppressive foreign dominators which seek to maintain cultural and linguistic supremacy, is not unique to the Czech people. However, Ferber and Raabe point out that there are some unique factors in Czech society for hundreds of years and its transition from Imperial subject to an independent nation that helped create this unique atmosphere for furthering women's equality that did not exist in many other transitioning societies of the time. For Ferber and Raabe, these are a combination of the aforementioned role that women took as leaders in the linguistic and cultural revival sphere due to the limited opportunities for women to enter political arenas while men could, a strong presence of women in socialist and counter-imperial social and political grassroots movements of the late-19th century, the lack of an armed struggle or war for Czech/Czechoslovak independence, and the lack of an established Czech aristocracy outside of Austria's[10].

In these cases, Czech women were able to cement themselves in the progressive elements of society in ways that many, including Ferber and Raabe, would argue was counter to the experiences of many women within national revivals of this age. By being prominent in the cultural sphere and promoting Czech language use, women were on a more even playing field to men by participating in the wider nationalist struggle in a separate realm to men, creating a wider front for the movement, even if it didn't allow for fluid movement of all genders between the two spheres as individuals felt fit. In other cases, such as the case of the French Revolution, both

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[10] Marianne A. Ferber and Phylliss Hutton Raabe, "Women in the Czech Republic: Feminism, Czech Style," International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society 16, no. 3 (2003): 407–30, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20020174.

prominent regime and counter-regime figures tended to be largely, if not exclusively, men, and in the same way, the thinkers and writers of the era from whom such movements drew their philosophical ground tended to be men as well.

In the same way, an armed struggle leading to a national rebirth would also result in the champions of national renewal being those who fought for it on the battlefields; again, cementing a patriarchal system that did not allow for women to have prominence given the widely held belief that women were not warriors and therefore were excluded from the battlefield. Lastly, the presence of an aristocracy in the Habsburg Empire may have been a multiethnic one, but its traditions and cultural canter was in Vienna - and thus even those noble families of Czech origin were highly integrated and Austrianised. A consequence of this was that upon independence, this aristocracy tended to gravitate towards maintaining their ties to Austrian culture and politics as a whole, rather than breaking away and establishing an independent Czech aristocracy, and thus did not create a new sociopolitical dominant class that would have a significant impact on the top-down diffusion of gender roles.

While these factors listed above have been fundamental to creating a recognisable, contemporary feminist psyche in the Czech Republic, the historical legacy of women's progressive ideologies in Czech history cannot be overlooked. For the purpose of understanding how feminism has presented itself in Czech social discourse, Ferber and Raabe's analysis of historical legacies of nominally feminist movements is limited in scope. Zuzana Fellegi's work is crucial to compounding Ferber and Raabe in that she reframes the aforementioned movements and periods not as the ideological origin but as a major ideological milestone in the modernisation of such trends in Czech society throughout centuries[11]. While Czech women

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[11] Zuzana Fellegi, "Feminism and Understanding of the Gender Roles in the Czech Republic.," ResearchGate, September 2019,

continued to participate in Czech cultural life continuously, Fellegi breaks down the major milestones of Czech feminist progress into five specific periods which were the most influential for Czech feminist ideological evolution:

- The Hussite movement and wars of the 15th century, which not only advocated for critical protestant ideas such as popular access to the bible in vernacular tongues, but advocated and practised within its circles an enhanced level of gender equality by the standards of the time, where "women enjoyed a rather good social status, they fought alongside men, and the movement's radical faction (the Taborites) even allowed women to become preachers"[12],

- The era of Czech National Revival which, as mentioned above, not only saw women take charge in the revival of Czech culture but also saw the peaceful transition to a democratic republic without as many lasting vestiges of feudal or Imperial hierarchies in social life such as an aristocracy, creating a "certain egalitarian tradition among the ethnically Czech population that was reinforced during socialism and has persisted until today"[13],

- The democratic birth of independent Czechoslovakia which saw women gain the right to vote, the right to education, and the ability to stand for public office under its founding father, Tomaš Garrigue Masaryk,

- The period of Communist rule in Czechoslovakia, which saw Czechoslovak men not as dominators of women as proxies of the patriarchal regime, but as similarly emaciated

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https://www.researchgate.net/publication/362318136_Feminism_and_Understanding_of_the_Gender_Roles_in_the_Czech_Republic.

[12] Zuzana Fellegi, "Feminism and Understanding of the Gender Roles in the Czech Republic.," ResearchGate, September 2019, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/362318136_Feminism_and_Understanding_of_the_Gender_Roles_in_the_Czech_Republic.

[13] Ibid. 53

victims of communism who were engaged in a "humble partnership" with women against communism as they had been against Nazism[14],

- The Velvet Revolution and the new Czech Republic's adoption of a capitalist economy and identity that brought it in line with NATO, the EU, and Western schools of gender thought for the first time in decades.

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[14] Zuzana Fellegi, "Feminism and Understanding of the Gender Roles in the Czech Republic.," ResearchGate, September 2019,
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/362318136_Feminism_and_Understanding_of_the_Gender_Roles_in_the_Czech_Republic.

THE FIRST CZECHOSLOVAK AND CZECHOSLOVAK SOCIALIST REPUBLICS IN NATIONAL MEMORY

3.1 - The symbiosis of women's rights, the nation and the state

While all of these periods are crucial, the lasting legacy of the First Czechoslovak Republic and the Socialist Czechoslovak Republic are of particular note in their impact due to the foundations laid by the former for the progressive Czechoslovak experiment and the lived memories experienced by the population under socialism in the case of the latter. In the case of the former, the leadership of Tomaš Garrigue Masaryk, as noted in the above milestones, has become central in the context of how memory construction with regard to the Republic he is often credited with founding operates in the national memory of the post-Czechoslovak context. In Czech political discourse today, Masaryk is often cited as a foremost example of a progressive, and in the gender context, even more so due to his marriage to an American feminist who continued popularising Western first-wave feminist ideals throughout her life in Czechoslovakia. Masaryk's own internalisation of his wife's ideals and thus his own support of female equality in the political, social, and economic domains were openly expressed, often within the context of ensuring that Czechoslovakia would attain the level of civil society and social order that would make them peers to Western countries perceived as developed[15]. Even then, this wasn't a perfect advancement, as the progress of Czechoslovak women's liberation was often framed by Masaryk and his supporters as a project of the state as opposed to a popular movement, making women's liberation contingent on the success of his approach to the Czechoslovak state's experiment in liberal democracy. As such, women's liberation was thus seen as exemplary of the democracy's

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[15] Jiřina Šiklová, "Feminism and the Roots of Apathy in the Czech Republic," Social Research 64, no. 2 (1997): 258–80, https://doi.org/10.2307/40971185.

maturity and progressiveness rather than as a true social challenge to the patriarchal status quo in gender dynamics that many countries in the Western world continued to embody[16]. In more cynical terms, feminism was dependent on the state, and women themselves did not own that success or future.

Perhaps one of the most concerning outcomes of this fusion of women's liberation into the progress of the national state was the lack of space made available by the new social and institutional regime for gender issues within the discourse of the country, meaning that with the legacy of the interwar Republic as something of a success story in the minds of Czechs, many Czechs characterised the issue of gender discourse in the new Czech Republic as a non-issue. By coupling the new post-communist Republic to the legacy of the interwar Republic due to their shared features of being democracies in a century rife with foreign domination under fascist and socialist systems, the country relied on legacies of progressive gender discourse from the past in place of groundbreaking new moves to secure women's political and social freedoms. This served to continue the cycle of coupling women's rights to the state's maturity, effectively stifling new debates in wider national discourse and simultaneously prioritising the glorification of Czechoslovakia's exceptionalism compared to their neighbours on a historical basis rather than prioritising more radical actions in the present which would make the country exceptional by contemporary standards[17]. This lack of empathy towards women and their insecurities in the post-communist period was further solidified by the national reversion to glorifying the memory of interwar Czechoslovakia, which in turn contributed to the lack of taste for Western feminism by many women in the Czech Republic after feminism.

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[16] Katherine David, "Czech Feminists and Nationalism in the Late Habsburg Monarchy: 'the First in Austria,'" Journal of Women's History 3, no. 2 (1991): 26–45, https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2010.0081.
[17] Ibid.

It is this narrative of creating a relatively egalitarian gender dynamic out of the legacies of past progressive experiments in Czech society that allows Ferber and Raabe's theory of a Czech-style feminism to come to fruition. With the foundations for participation in more spheres of public life, than many other countries allowed even up to the fall of communism in the 1990s, socialist industrialisation of the country and use of it as a supplier of goods and services to the Soviet Union forced women into a status quo where they were not only politically active mothers and housewives who participated in political and social movements outside of the home, but they were now labourers alongside men too. While one could nominally take the narrative of Czechoslovak communists as realising gender equality under Marxist ideals, in reality this was framed as a socialist gender role for women, with communist ideology rejecting the recognition of women in public life and being far from progress in women's liberation[18]. They argue it was the opposite: women under socialism were forced to be full-time workers, mothers, housekeepers, and conform to expectations of feminine presentation all at the same time. Instead of having agency over this dichotomy, women were rendered effectively unable to customise or outright change this nexus as they desired, given the lack of individual rights and freedoms communism brought for many, regardless of gender.

Even with communist ideology in its theoretical form advocating for full gender equality, its implementation in the Czech Republic/Czechoslovakia saw a strict regime of labour segregation, with women occupying "clerical, service, and teaching jobs", while men were afforded more free reign to find a career path that suited their strengths and the state's needs and were better paid, with better opportunities for promotion to senior levels of business and

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[18] Marianne A. Ferber and Phylliss Hutton Raabe, "Women in the Czech Republic: Feminism, Czech Style," International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society 16, no. 3 (2003): 407–30, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20020174.

government[19]. After all the milestones of women's equality that Czech history has seen, Ferber and Raabe succinctly roll up Fellegi's breakdown of history into being the origin of Czech women's defining "dual role", which they put as a "blend of their belief in women's special role in the family, with complete acceptance of their role as wage earners"[20]. Czech-style feminism is, in short, the role of women as traditional housewives and mothers, as well as workers, with both being crucial to a woman's full adherence to a Czech societal expectation beyond political orientation. It notably set a framework for the labour-centric expectations that the upcoming Czechoslovak Socialist Republic would have of its women under the guise of state-centric gender equality, which nominally, but not fully, sought to afford women space for the flourishing of Czech-style feminism.

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[19] Marianne A. Ferber and Phylliss Hutton Raabe, "Women in the Czech Republic: Feminism, Czech Style," International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society 16, no. 3 (2003): 407–30, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20020174.
[20] ibid.

ORIGINS OF THE SPD AND NAŠTVANÉ MATKY

4.1 - The rise of Okamura as the far-right figurehead of the Czech Republic

When considering the two organisations that are being compared in this thesis, it is important to understand their origins. The SPD, for instance, did not begin life as the Freedom and Direct Democracy party. Instead, it began life in 2013 as the "Dawn of Direct Democracy" Party, founded by none other than its well-known contemporary leader Tomio Okamura[21]. As the sole leader of this party, Okamura had plenty of cautionary tales to look to regarding the fate of post-communist parties that could be labelled as either far-right, extremist nationalist, or populist. This cautionary tale came primarily in the form of the SPR–RSČ, short for "Sdružení pro republiku - Republikánská strana Československa", or "Rally for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia", founded in 1990 by Czech populist politician Miroslav Sládek. The party, founded to advocate anti-immigrant, anti-NATO, and anti-EU viewpoints, is attempting to channel the frustration of the population towards "real and imaginary enemies" - in Smolík's words: "First, Germans, then Roma and Vietnamese; but foreigners in general served as the enemy, and were often presented as 'economic migrants'"[22]. While the SPR–RSČ had some initial success, its popularity waned in 1998, and by 2001, it was no more due to internal conflict and bankruptcy. Other smaller successor parties that tried to occupy the far-right space that had been left vacant by the SPR–RSČ, such as the National Party, the Workers' Party, and its

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[21] Josef Smolík, "Tomio Okamura´S Dawn of Direct Democracy and Freedom and Direct Democracy," in New Political Parties in the Party Systems of the Czech Republic (Peter Lang, 2022), 105–48, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/359107704_Tomio_Okamuras_Dawn_of_Direct_Democracy_and_Freedom_and_Direct_Democracy.

[22] Ibid.

successor, the Workers' Party of Social Justice, all "did not win significant support from the electorate", and instead left the position of a noticeable far-right challenger for political legitimacy in the Czech Republic vacant.[23]

What Okamura learned was that parties needed broad messaging beyond the traditional focuses of far-right parties, such as small government, lower taxes, and banning migrants. For a party of this calibre to succeed in the new Czech Republic, he needed to ensure one thing: a populist rhetoric that could tap into the everyday lives and insecurities of the Czech public. In Smolík's own words, it is no coincidence that upon co-founding the new SPD with Radim Fiala in 2015, Okamura "always emphasised his relationship to the town of Bystrice pod Hostynem" despite being born and raised in Japan to a Japanese father and Czech mother, and later establishing a career facilitating Japanese tourism to the Czech Republic once he moved from Japan as an adult[24]. Despite his multicultural background, Okamura immediately set to work promoting ideas of anything but multiculturalism. He advocated for direct referendums on more issues than had ever had precedent and for transition to a direct democracy, rather than a representative democracy, and he and his co-founder, Fiala, introduced the party to the Czech population by immediately demanding referendums. These referendums including those on a Czech exit from the EU, the tightening of border controls, and the outlawing of radical Islamic ideology in the Czech Republic - a policy echoed by movements such as Eva Hrindová, the founder of Naštvané matky[25]. The ultimate message was that of Czech nativism - the special quality which would, given enough popular support, allow for the SPD to recreate the Czech

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[23] Josef Smolík, "Tomio Okamura´S Dawn of Direct Democracy and Freedom and Direct Democracy," in New Political Parties in the Party Systems of the Czech Republic (Peter Lang, 2022), 105–48, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/359107704_Tomio_Okamuras_Dawn_of_Direct_Democracy_and_Freedom_and_Direct_Democracy.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Naštvané matky, "Kdo Jsme?," www.nastvanematky.cz, 2016, https://www.nastvanematky.cz/kdo-jsme.

Republic as something of an enclave defined by its protective unity, rather than just by its cultural and geopolitical attributes. With the emphasis of non-native elements as the "other", the undesirable attributes of Czech life could be attributed to them, including the gender violence which is persistently used to demonise migrants[26].

4.2 - Eva Hrindová's political trajectory and the gendering of Czech far-right discourse

Eva Hrindová, in her own words, was a reluctant immigrant to the Czech Republic due to the rise of Slovak nationalism post-Velvet revolution that she characterised as "threatening"[27]. Originally a centrist who joined the Liberal Democratic Party, she found herself in an environment where she felt she didn't quite fit ideologically, and after a short and unsuccessful centrist political career, Hrindová found herself looking to facilitate more discussions, bringing her to the new social power tool of the contemporary world: social media. Initially creating Facebook groups and pages for the Liberal Democratic Party called "ODS Discuses" (ODS being the abbreviation of the Liberal Democratic Party's name, Občanská Demokratická Strana), one day she found herself writing a blog post in 2015 wherein she calls upon angry mothers to form a movement, marking the beginning of the Naštvané matky group as it is known today.

The blog post in question can be interpreted as a founding document of sorts when it comes to pinpointing the unique ideological origins of Naštvané matky. In this post, Hrindová highlights 5 fundamental points that she marks as sources of her political and societal discontent,

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[26] Jan Beneš and Jakub Charvát, "The Extreme Right in Central Europe: The Ideological Elements of Movement SPD, Party Kotleba-ĽSNS and Movement Jobbik," Civilia: Odborná Revue pro Didaktiku Společenských Věd 10, no. 1 (June 15, 2019): 23–49, https://doi.org/10.5507/civ.2019.002. 23.
[27] ibid.

and which she feels are general trends in society that warrant immediate correction for the sake of women's and mothers' rights and liberties across the Czech Republic and the world. Namely, these are: the purported interference of the state in brainwashing children through state education, the societal emphasis on hospitals and vaccines rather than home births and vaccine abstention, the damage of ongoing wars such as through the lack of a response to the annexation of Crimea from Western powers, the "twisted" nature of Islamic religion and culture and its supposed normalisation of rape and sexual violence, and the dishonesty of the press[28].

4.3 - the SPD and NM as peers at the head of the Czech far-right's resurgence

On their own, these topics are varied and not necessarily deeply intertwined, and Hrindová's 2015 post arguably lacks solid structure. And yet, this ideological treatise is an incredibly useful resource for us to understand the anxieties of women on the right wing. It also helps us understand how these anxieties can act as markers of insecurities which warrant further study when it comes to understanding the anxieties felt by Czech women who either hold right-wing views or who are consciously or subconsciously legitimising exclusionary political actors. The overarching themes that the far-right is known to espouse are on full display in Hrindová's writing, such as a lack of trust in institutions, who want to take away children from their parents, dictate to parents how to raise and give birth to/care for the health of their children, who won't stop the wars of the world, such as by being weak and cowardly against Putin, and a rejection of

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[28] Eva Hrindová, "Naštvané Matky - Spojme Se! | Eva Hrindová - Naštvané Matky," Evahrindova.cz, 2015, https://www.evahrindova.cz/nastvane-matky-spojme-se?fbclid=IwY2xjawGyt09leHRuA2FlbQIxMAABHUHWnSEqh3ESuuesX4dktpI-L1MLKONxKXA3J0PKnwysAN_j-Ww3-LH5Vg_aem_NacTqHqttj44rfZLl85P8Q.

inclusion and multiculturalism. If nothing else, the piece can be interpreted as an argument towards the failure of contemporary society to sufficiently secure the nation in such a way that vulnerable groups, such as women, could thrive. Regardless of subjective thoughts or opinions, this work does represent at least a certain segment of society which is growing with the far-right's popularisation and thus warrants further attention today. More interestingly, however, are the attempts by women and men espousing views along the above lines to co-opt "feminism" or female liberation as a general concept into their own ideology and proclaim themselves as the true defenders of women.

Czech-style feminism, as Ferber and Raabe understood it in the decade after communism collapsed in Czechoslovakia, was first and foremost a rejection of Western feminist schools of thought that existed in countries like the United States and the countries of Western Europe at that time, specifically the third wave of feminism[29]. Third-wave feminism, while an incredibly varied ideological field for women across many different contexts, was fundamentally defined by some key core tenets, one of which was sex positivity. This accompanied a wider discussion and advocacy for increased reproductive rights for women and marked an important milestone in the proliferation of conversation around women's bodily autonomy. Sex-positive attitudes insofar as rigid gender equality on an ideological level had been a feature of early Czechoslovak state policies towards male-female relationships in the 1950s and 1960s, with emphasis on the importance of sexual satisfaction for both partners equally.

Many interpreted this as a complex method of advocating for what became more explicit in the 1970s, which was the emphasis of successful heterosexual marriages and sexual

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[29] Marianne A. Ferber and Phylliss Hutton Raabe, "Women in the Czech Republic: Feminism, Czech Style," International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society 16, no. 3 (2003): 407–30, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20020174.

relationships for the sake of ensuring each could perform their gender roles best, thus creating a status quo where women's sexual needs were largely secondary issues. It further and implicitly tied women's needs to the labour needs of the state through their role in serving the male workers of the state-controlled workforce[30]. The legacy of this approach to women's sex-positivity created a situation where, with the sudden void of a powerful state which had a strong role in sexual conversation and roles among the population in 1989, women were reemphasising and asserting agency and ownership over the status quo of women being homemakers, housewives, and mothers as well as members of the labour force as being the "Czech-style" of feminism.

This rejection of feminism as the west viewed it and the assertion of a culturally distinct form of female empowerment was certainly unique but was limited in several regards. One issue was that the continued emphasis on heteronormative, binary understandings of gender continued to preserve a conservative approach to the sexual status quo in Czech discourse, meaning that Czech-style feminism did not account for women who felt empowered to leave abusive spouses or failing marriages that were either dysfunctional or toxic. This would ultimately continue creating new waves of single mothers who, despite being mothers, homemakers, and workers, suddenly did not fit the image of an empowered Czech-style feminist in a happy, heterosexual relationship anymore. This further prompted questions for the sustainability of this ideological approach to empowerment when the state began slowly reemerging as a more powerful and omnipresent force in people's lives. Regardless of the validity of any of these claims, Czech-style feminism may have been so limited in scope and dependent on the unique transitional context of post-1990's Czech society that the stage was set not only for the potential limits of Ferber and

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[30] Kateřina Lišková, "Sex under Socialism: From Emancipation of Women to Normalized Families in Czechoslovakia," Sexualities 19, no. 1-2 (January 24, 2016): 211–35, https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460715614246.

Raabe's ideological theory but for the state's inevitable alienation of liberal women who did not fully recognise the implications of the societal position they had been dealt after 1989.

BUILDING FEMINIST FRAMEWORKS AFTER CZECHOSLOVAKIA

5.1 - Gender as an arena for Czech far-right resurgence

Beyond the notion that female equality had been solved by the progressive ideals of the First Republic, Ferber and Raabe offer another explanation for the trajectory of what one might call "feminist" frameworks in the post-Velvet Revolution that acts as a compounding factor of sorts. "Czech style" feminism, as they understand it, was highly dependent on the sociopolitical context of the new Czech Republic as it existed from the Velvet Revolution to the Czech Republic's ascension to EU membership on the 1st of May, 2004. The social state of the country, as reflected in progressive-reactionary political discourse, is a major indicator for understanding the Czech Republic's aversion to political volatility and, therefore, ideologies associated with political extremity of any sort. Coming out of decades of authoritarianism, where the political regime saw relatively little change compared to new implementations of democratic governance, many in the new Czech Republic sought to survive its early days by continuing with the status quo as far as not destabilising the political, social, and economic status quo as much as possible could be achieved. As Smolík[31] describes, far-right political parties were, in a sense, one of the targets of this popular rejection of widespread or extreme change from established, stable political systems or groups, with parties like the SPR–RSČ never gaining major traction and ultimately failing. Simultaneously, on the ideologically opposite extreme end of the spectrum, third-wave Western feminism as an ideology was victim to a similar popular aversion.

[31] Josef Smolík, "Tomio Okamura´S Dawn of Direct Democracy and Freedom and Direct Democracy," in New Political Parties in the Party Systems of the Czech Republic (Peter Lang, 2022), 105–48, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/359107704_Tomio_Okamuras_Dawn_of_Direct_Democracy_and_Freedom_and_Direct_Democracy.

Feminism, being perceived by many women as a "Western" ideology, was born in a place where ideological debate was considered to be an attribute of Western democracies that had their own host of problems - problems which could also be introduced to Czech society should such ideologies be welcomed on a large scale. In other words, feminism was perceived to be a destabilising force by nature. In Ferber and Raabe's words, in 2003 at least, "almost all (Czech women) are hostile toward ideologies such as feminism, for a number of reasons, including Czech women's skepticism of its perceived leftist leanings."[32] Such a wariness of the perception of feminist movements as being politically left-wing is also compounded by a hesitation to threaten the status quo for fear that women's fortunes may change, since many women had hope that economic policy would see the resulting social changes that would bring women closer to men as a byproduct[33]. It is worth considering that for many women, a crucial part of "Czech-style" Feminism was not only the dual-role of women as traditional mothers and homemakers as well as workers, but as inherently marked by the freedoms that women were afforded by that dual role in a new capitalist experiment that socialist prescriptions of male-female relations never afforded neither men nor women: individual freedom or efficacy.

This efficacy became an invaluable core of female liberation in the post-communist Czech context. The ability of women to be freer to define their choice of work and work-life balance, something previously regulated highly by the state, allowed women to find their balance between labour participation and motherhood[34]. This also allowed more opportunities for lateral or vertical movement through labour hierarchies that had previously been reserved for men. This

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[32] Marianne A. Ferber and Phylliss Hutton Raabe, "Women in the Czech Republic: Feminism, Czech Style," International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society 16, no. 3 (2003): 407–30, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20020174.

[33] ibid.

[34] Alexandria Wilson-McDonald, "Do Czech Women Need 'Gender'?: A Conceptual History of 'Gender' in Czechia," Feminist Review 134, no. 1 (July 1, 2023): 21–37, https://doi.org/10.1177/01417789231166412. 26-28.

new capacity for women to define their work role was welcomed not only because it allowed

women more choice in their work, but because it allowed them to do their work "without

reducing their primary role in the family"[35]. As a result, women's individualistic interpretations

and applications of such balance was the act of being feminist, as opposed to adhering to an

ideological monolith that was defined by outside forces in the west. Besides being perceived as a

pseudo-Imperialistic imposition of Western women, such a dynamic of adopting cultural

standards of women from the former Cold War enemy was interpreted by some as an imposition

akin to state socialist policies, should the new democratic government play an active role in

promoting such ideologies[36].

These key tenets of feminism for Czech women may have rested upon the tenets of the

dual role of women, choice in labour participation, and individual self-determination; however,

they were formed by and reliant on the context of the time. One of the main ways this is evident

is through the sociopolitical position women hold in Czech discourse. It should be noted that

despite low levels of explicit female representation or numbers of female politicians in office at

that time, Czech women were by no means inactive political participants. On the contrary, part of

the way in which Czech women were able to express or practice their individual initiative was by

keeping politically informed and through voting, resulting in a dynamic of low representation but

high sociopolitical impact. Furthermore, at this time Czech ideas of women's freedoms remained

dependent on more tangible aspects of the state's liberal prowess, namely after the Velvet

Revolution the social care and healthcare system, which despite lacking needed funding, was a

recipient of much higher levels of funding relative to the Czech GDP compared to other

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[35] Marianne A. Ferber and Phylliss Hutton Raabe, "Women in the Czech Republic: Feminism, Czech Style," International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society 16, no. 3 (2003): 407–30, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20020174.
[36] ibid.

neighbouring countries such as Slovakia, Poland or Hungary, whose social care systems

underwent harsher financial setbacks after the fall of communism[37].

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[37] Marianne A. Ferber and Phylliss Hutton Raabe, "Women in the Czech Republic: Feminism, Czech Style,"
International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society 16, no. 3 (2003): 407–30,
https://www.jstor.org/stable/20020174.

COVID-19 MEASURES AS A FORM OF RESTRICTING WOMEN'S INDIVIDUALITY

6.1 - The Covid-19 pandemic and the popularisation of gender-based discourse

In the previous section, a few themes were highlighted which are relevant to understanding the abnormalities introduced to Czech life and societal discourse by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. Specifically, these are the increased strains for economically marginalised demographics, such as single mothers, the freedom of women, and the social care system's ability to handle the increased problems women might face in light of the pandemic. There is an existing and expanding body of literature which deals with these themes globally and in the Czech Republic, though with more focus on the former. However, to understand the dynamic between women's insecurity and the far-right parties in the post-covid era, studies that seek to understand the root causes of a notable increase in pandemic lockdown-related domestic and sexual violence directed against women are a critical and major element in any such study.

In terms of how different societies have discussed these issues, some authors have argued that the traditional media and social media spaces are just as important a site of discourse to unpack as more traditional non-digital spaces.[38] This debate, according to the arguments of authors such as Marhánková et al. didn't just bring the issue of gender violence caused by lockdowns to the forefront of people's minds, but it also had the potential to, and in some cases did misrepresent the effectiveness of the state in combating this by emphasising that social

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[38] Jaroslava Hasmanová Marhánková, Anna Durnová, and Ondřej Císař, "Pandemie Jako Sociologický Problém: Krize Institucí," Czech Sociological Review 58, no. 5 (2022): 474–75, https://esreview.soc.cas.cz/pdfs/csr/2022/05/09.pdf.

services intended to help stop and mitigate such things from happening being set up during the lockdowns. However, this often did not account for the variety of ways in which women may be blocked from accessing such services in practice. Marhánková et al. briefly summarise this issue as an example of what they view as post-covid-19 Czech society experiencing a "crisis of institutions", which in turn has exacerbated the condition of people, especially women, in their ability to maintain their individual efficacy and their dual role as participators in the labour market and as mothers or stay-at-home partners[39].

This institutional crisis and its relation to the above issues does not only manifest itself in the sphere of increased gender-based violence but also in the economic and political trajectory of the country within the broader trend of far-right gains in popularity across Europe. In the Czech Republic's case, the pandemic led to a disruption of the labour market across the board, with varying degrees of severity. It is worth noting what Černohorská et al. show in their study, which is the location of the most severe impact in the market. This was in many consumer-facing and social sectors, including retail, education, healthcare, and domestic work, all of which are areas where women are a prominent demographic[40]. In this report, women aren't only victims of violence, but also the victims of the pandemic's economic impact to a disproportionate degree, which in hand with high rates of gender-based violence, creates a situation in which the role of women as worker-mothers is suddenly less tenable than it had been in previous decades.

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[39] Jaroslava Hasmanová Marhánková, Anna Durnová, and Ondřej Císař, "Pandemie Jako Sociologický Problém: Krize Institucí," Czech Sociological Review 58, no. 5 (2022): 474–75, https://esreview.soc.cas.cz/pdfs/csr/2022/05/09.pdf.

[40] Vanda Černohorská, Zuzana OČENÁŠOVÁ, and Ágnes Kende, "The COVID-19 Pandemic and Gender+ Inequalities in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia: The Heteronormativity of Anti- Pandemic Measures and Their Impact on Vulnerable Groups," Gender a Výzkum 24, no. 1 (2023): 114–34, https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=1171277.

Another way in which the dual role can arguably be shown to have been augmented beyond women's needs or control was the issue of childcare during the pandemic. A key factor in enabling the modern working woman was the social service of childcare, such as nurseries, kindergartens, and after-school programmes that made raising a child and working full-time a tenable proposition for women who did not feel suited to operating as housewives or within more heteronormative gender roles. While some, like Černohorská et al., state that Czech democratic institutions did not begin to falter to the same degree as those in neighbouring Hungary and Slovakia, the Czech Government's Working Group on the impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Gender Equality issued some recommendations to alleviate the situation. Namely, these were "pertaining mainly to education, the precarious situation of families with children, and rising social tensions, and accompanied them with concrete recommendations on how to mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic on vulnerable groups."[41] What this highlights is much more significant for the breakdown of our conception of Czech-style feminist values because Černohorská et al. describe a reversion to a more authoritative government, which is now issuing aid and forming policy on the basis of the heteronormative model.

6.2 - The cementing of gender and politics as intertwined in the age of political progressivism

In the Czech Republic in particular, the issue of women's rights and needs is understood as fundamentally political, as described by Ferber and Raabe in their understanding of women's

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[41] Vanda Černohorská, Zuzana OČENÁŠOVÁ, and Ágnes Kende, "The COVID-19 Pandemic and Gender+ Inequalities in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia: The Heteronormativity of Anti- Pandemic Measures and Their Impact on Vulnerable Groups," Gender a Výzkum 24, no. 1 (2023): 114–34, https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=1171277.

approaches to feminist movements, and as a result is often seen as an inflammatory political discussion[42]. Instead, since these actors don't subscribe either to the notion that women's issues are important and require attention, or that these issues had been addressed in the First Republic and through its legacy, such actors instead advocate for gender-neutral approaches to crises like the pandemic, where instead acknowledging gender issues could strengthen aid for women rather than creating a situation where women receive nominal equality, but not egalitarian support[43].

Given this lack of consideration for egalitarian, rather than equal approaches, Černohorská et al. describe a paradoxical impact that reports composed by gender and women's rights bodies had on government organs regarding policy impact, as "the expertise produced by the advisory bodies has a low status in political-knowledge dynamics also because they are partly made up of representatives of feminist organisations and gender experts, whose knowledge is perceived as 'politicised' and 'biased'."[44] Despite the difference in time when both studies were conducted, the common theme remains that women's advocacy can continue to have a low impact on policy but high visibility in the social arena, and further reinforces that the issue remains that Western, organised feminism continues to be perceived as disruptive and not representative of a majority of Czech women.

The issue of those who label themselves as feminists or are representative of institutions or organisations related to Western constructs of feminism is only one of the ways in which the state has created a scenario with the pandemic that alienates women and causes a decrease in

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[42] Marianne A. Ferber and Phylliss Hutton Raabe, "Women in the Czech Republic: Feminism, Czech Style," International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society 16, no. 3 (2003): 407–30, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20020174.

[43] Vanda Černohorská, Zuzana OČENÁŠOVÁ, and Ágnes Kende, "The COVID-19 Pandemic and Gender+ Inequalities in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia: The Heteronormativity of Anti- Pandemic Measures and Their Impact on Vulnerable Groups," Gender a Výzkum 24, no. 1 (2023): 114–34, https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=1171277.

[44] ibid.

trust[45]. It must be remembered that Czech-style feminism was formulated by Ferber and Raabe in a time when the state was relatively weak, and so its guidance was not the main source of interplay with what Czech women placed their pride and trust in. As opposed to the guidance of the state, which, throughout the era of communist leadership, had been detrimental to women's identity expression and sexual health, it was trust and pride in a strong social democratic system of support for women's needs that Czech women sourced national feminist pride from. Using Sylvia Walby's approach to gender regimes, Jančíková outlines this state failure in the Czech case by contrasting the Czech regime with the Austrian social democratic regime, which statistically was much more successful than the Czech Republic in creating a system that provided support to women facing a lack of economic independence or gender violence taking place predominantly during Covid-19 lockdown periods[46]. In short, while Austria's system did exhibit shortcomings in capacity, the system was highly centralised, with a "centralized system of shelters and the state-wide 24/7 women's helpline,... (and) the effective cooperation between the police and women's organizations", compared to the lack of such a system in the Czech Republic, which saw an "increase in demand for support from smaller women's NGOs… in addressing gender-based violence."[47]

With such a stark contrast, further combined with the disproportionate economic damage female-heavy and dependent sectors saw, including state social and healthcare services, women's trust in the social system was damaged, with a core principle of the social democratic principles

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[45] Alena Macková et al., "ČEŠI NA SÍTÍCH, DŮVĚRA a POLARIZACE v DOBĚ PANDEMIE VÝZKUMNÁ ZPRÁVA, 2021," 2021, https://is.muni.cz/publication/1778238/Cesi_na_sitich__duvera_a_polarizace_v_dobe_pandemie_2021.pdf.
[46] Natálie Jančíková, "The Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis on Meeting the Objectives of the EU's Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 in the Czech Republic and Austria" (2023), https://dspace.cuni.cz/bitstream/handle/20.500.11956/182818/120445144.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.
[47] ibid.

which Czech-style feminism had been conceived, arguably being proven to have failed. With the state failing to provide social care as they are expected to by many, far-right actors capitalise on this by arguing that the failures are across the board, allowing them to shift people's insecurity related to the social care failure to other purported failures, such as the failure to stem illegal migration.

For some women, this can manifest itself in the form of a decision-making process whereby the choice of a security-based strongman candidate is seen as the best short-term solution to external threats. The creation of such a thought process is notably not only recognised in study as a step in the facilitation of fascism's rise in democratic systems, as seen in fascist Germany and Italy in the past, but for our case plays into a complex web of gender dynamics between women, the state, and even transnational actors such as the EU. According to Sachseder and Stachowitsch, the EU, having inherently gendered and racialised security strategies, creates a situation where security discourses, both literal and metaphorical in the sense of the EU's security and the sense of security that members of the population, such as women, feel, are reflections of inherently masculinised power structures that position women as peripheral factors in the course of crisis strategy and management[48]. In using their analytical approach to the transnational example of the EU, their arguments surrounding the EU's tendency to marginalise such groups could be positioned as a force that the Czech Republic's state apparatuses reflected in their own execution of Covid-19-related crisis measures, notably with regards to the failure to uphold programmes that ensured social and economic security for women in the face of the pandemic. Specifically, they continue to argue that the EU achieves this marginalisation in times of crisis by

[48] Julia Sachseder and Saskia Stachowitsch, "Gendering EU Security Strategies: A Feminist Postcolonial Approach to the EU as a (Global) Security Actor," European Security 32, no. 3 (July 3, 2023): 404–24, https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2023.2232742.

maintaining a guise of "technocratic neutrality", which in the wider nexus of entrenching masculine, white, and apolitical rationality into the governance of entire countries, is constructed on a set of principles. Specifically, these principles include positioning as an apolitical manager and analyser of economic rationale and market trajectories, depoliticised managerialism and a reliance on emphasising innovative solutions, even when proven solutions may already exist.

METHODOLOGICAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS AND APPROACHES

7.1 - Methodological approaches and applicability

The previous sections discussed would support the argument that the mass media strategies of far-right actors such as Okamura and Hrindová have increasing prominence in public discourse over the consequences of the lockdowns experienced during the pandemic, even if the political power of such individuals remains relatively marginal. As such, this thesis requires a methodological framework which would allow for the study of rhetoric observable in their social media imagery and statements regarding this issue. Given that such research would have a wide scope of considerations in terms of the samples chosen for study and the methods used to conduct objective research, this thesis will undertake a study grounded in the theoretical approach of visual semiotics, using the approaches of scholars such as Roland Barthes or Arthur Asa Berger, who used visual semiotic analysis to deconstruct messaging in spaces such as fashion media and televised mass media, respectively. Such iconographic focus would present a potentially novel understanding of how far-right narratives both implicitly and explicitly construct boundaries of "Czechness", womanhood, and of societal tolerance through visual symbolism as opposed to only through written forms of social media. Understanding the implicit connotations of visual, as well as textual components of social media narrative presentation, would further allow us to understand the emotional tools harnessed to various narratives common in Czech far-right messaging.

To find answers to such a research question, this analysis will follow the thematic structure of what Hrindová herself explicitly labelled as her major qualms with centrist and leftist ideologies when discussing her experiences as a woman in the Czech Republic: state interference

in family life, medical autonomy, geopolitical weakness and war, the threat of Islam, and a lack of trust in traditional mass media. While the texts these actors have written have been incorporated into academic discourse and study, the controversial images they both have created and promoted have garnered less attention, which I believe can provide valuable insight into the answers to these research questions. In his seminal work *The Photographic Message*, Roland Barthes explains that images are, by definition, not neutral; rather, they are symbols of messages embedded into a code throughout the image, constituting an evolving set of ideological messages that vary depending on the political and cultural context of the audience interpreting in question[49]. As such, analysing these images through a visual semiotic lens does not only open understandings of commonalities and differences in narrative construction between two major Czech far-right figures but act both as reflections of anxieties about external and internal threats to an interpretation of societal order while simultaneously actively constructing them to a captive audience.

While one person alone, such as Hrindová, is by no means the definitive gauge of popular beliefs held by most in the Czech far-right, she does represent a major figure in the popularisation of the far-right among women, and of legitimising the use of women as rhetorical and narrative tools to solidify exclusionary ideologies by other far-right figures. As such, I will use visual semiotic analytical structures to seek out commonalities and deviations in how these themes are presented in the social media presences of both Hrindová and Tomio Okamura, which together constitute male and female, non-party, and party actors for comparison alike, respectively.

It is further worth stating why this study will focus specifically on the social media presences of Okamura and Hrindová. As previously stated, part of the intention of the study is to

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[49] Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag, A Barthes Reader (New York: Hill And Wang, A Division Of Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Dr, 2015).

compare and contrast how party and non-party actors frame their messages and whether there are indications that being in an entity such as a political party could be demonstrated to have a tempering or exacerbating effect of narratives used by different people online. However, these two individuals not only represent these two groups respectively but are some of the most prominent, if not the most prominent, actors of such a kind on Czech social media. While the content seen on both his Facebook and Instagram pages often overlaps or is reused, his page is the most followed page of any Czech far-right politician, with his Facebook and Instagram amassing 408,000 and 44,600 followers, respectively, as of February 2025. Hrindová is in a similar position among those outside of political parties, who due to the lack of presence as a politician running for offices, has a relatively smaller following of 6,200 followers, while her Naštvané matky Facebook group remains the largest group aimed at Czech women specifically, with 4,200 members as of February 2025.

These two individuals also have commented many times on the 5 themes from which this thesis will derive data for analysis, with Hrindová being particularly known for the images posted by herself or Naštvané matky sporting photoshopped women being shown as symbols of Czech womanhood, being hypersexualised or even being shown as victims of violence, while Okamura and the SPD became well known for a controversial AI-generated image of a sub-Saharan African man wielding a knife with a menacing facial gesture being used as an anti-immigrant poster advertising the SPD for upcoming elections. The poster and the image within it, despite drawing outrage from many in the Czech Republic since its release, has continued to be used by Okamura on his social media pages.

7.2 - The application of chosen analytical methods

To guide the different aspects of a visual semiotic analytical framework, I will use Charles Sander Peirce's model of semiotic interpretation[50]. Specifically, the model in question is a triadic one, which can be used to categorise Okamura and Hrindová's samples into three different types of methodological approaches to ideological transmission:

- Icons: those images which explicitly symbolise and utilise images related to the themes they are commenting on (eg: using images of women to make a comment on women)[51],

- Indexes: those images which use images that implicitly comment on the themes they are aimed at (eg: using images of a heteronormative nuclear family to make a comment on women)[52] [53],

- Symbols: those images which are broadly associated or have an overarching relationship to the themes they are commenting on (eg: using images of a woman waving a Czech flag, implying patriotic or popular rallying to make a comment on women)[54].

While Peirce's triadic model is useful for categorising and distinguishing the images being analysed in terms of the method of narrative diffusion, Barthes provides more structure for us to further deepen our analysis through his distinguishing of denotative and connotative levels

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[50] Albert Atkin, "Peirce's Theory of Signs," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, October 13, 2006, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/peirce-semiotics/.

[51] Brian Curtin, "Semiotics and Visual Representation," 2009.

[52] ibid.

[53] Drew Huening, "Symbol, Index, Icon," csmt.uchicago.edu, 2006, https://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/symbolindexicon.htm.

[54] Brian Curtin, "Semiotics and Visual Representation," 2009.

of narrative diffusion[55]. Specifically, this signifies the difference between literal connotations in messaging and subtext connotations in messaging, providing two different forums of interpretation that must be considered. It must be considered that nuances can often be found in the connotative levels that may have completely different meanings at the denotative level and can be useful in understanding whether an image falls into the category of icons, indexes, or symbols.

7.3 - Pitfalls and considerations of chosen analytical methods

While all of this addresses the visual, Brian Curtin also explicitly notes that semiotic analysis takes note not only of the visual but also of language, whether it's visual language or broader thought over how we describe and ascribe ideas to something[56]. As such, this semiotic analysis should consider both the textual language within and accompanying any image and the design languages present in an image: does the image evoke the aesthetic languages of a certain school of art? Is its intention to convey information rather than to evoke emotional responses? Is the message being transmitted through invoking negative or positive perceptions and affiliations? Considering such a relationship between language, both figurative and literal, in the context of these social media posts not only serves to create a new point of comparison between Okamura and Hrindová but also serves as a new forum for potential sites of narrative reinterpretation and discourse. By following this system of categorising and analysing the messages and methods of message diffusion in these posts, it is possible to better understand not only potentially differing

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[55] Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag, A Barthes Reader (New York: Hill And Wang, A Division Of Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Dr, 2015).
[56] Brian Curtin, "Semiotics and Visual Representation," 2009.

approaches to narrative construction and manifestation but also the methods of populist rallying that both actors position themselves within.

Understanding the trajectories of populist narrative construction is also crucial to such a study because a large part of how such images work to portray certain ideas to their audiences is inherent to the large narrative built over time across posts and images, rather than ideas and narratives present within individual posts themselves without any other context. Laaksonen et al., citing the theories of social media as a site of storytelling of Papacharissi, approach the issue of analysing the visual content of social media platforms by not only offering the audience a set of ideas that can be interpreted within their own political and cultural views but offer augmenting experiences such as "the feeling of being present"[57]. This is crucial above all else because of what they also argue about the end goal of such content, which is to entrench such narratives in the minds of their audiences to the point that it is not an element of discourse but an element of creating and entrenching group feeling.

Given that such ideologies are entrenched and emboldened in the minds of far-right actors and audiences through their repeated use, I would also posit that it is important for this study to consider not only the visual languages and messages of these posts but also their relative prevalence. This study has stated the importance of the 5 points of concern listed by Hrindová in her seminal blog post laying the foundations of Naštvané matky's ideology but has not yet considered which of these themes may be more prominent in discourse than the others. Understanding this further allows us then to consider all the above, and then to further derive not only how and why the far right can use all these themes to harness women's insecurities, but to

also understand which of these themes has become the most effective method of exacerbating insecurities of women or of issues the population feels insecurity about in which women are perceived as primary victims.

7.4 - Visual semiotic and discourse analysis

A critical aspect of Hrindová's visual rhetoric, as seen in the concerns she has prominently stated, is the role of the state in "interfering" with the raising of the child and the indoctrination of the child through state-regulated schooling and the erosion of a family-centric lifestyle in favour of more cosmopolitan individualism. Some of Hrindová's visuals enshrine this, such as in Figure 1, where we see a parent holding a shield up to a rainbow wave coming towards the children, in a literal sense "shielding" them from this prominent symbol of LGBTQ+ people. While the implied message of keeping children from what right-wing extremists have labelled as a harmful LGBTQ+ ideology, which they demonise as predatory towards children, the denotative image is just as, if not more important. In this image, the adult's action isn't just staving off a supposedly intrusive force with a shield, but in doing so, they are restoring a "natural" environment. Without the shield and the rainbow, the picture is otherwise an unassuming depiction of family safety.

The image acts as a prime example of the Peircean category of index, given the reliance on implicit messaging to convey the anxiety and concern that Hrindová and the Naštvané Matky are reinforcing by portraying this symbol of the LGBTQ+ spectrum as a fundamentally invasive force to the visual, let alone ideological harmony of the image. What is perhaps most intriguing about the image is that it is trying to appeal to a paradoxical message of gender dynamics. On the one hand, the image is evoking a protective, maternal message pattern to appeal to women by

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arguing their political beliefs on the basis of a desire to protect children and foster safe environments for them. On the other hand, despite the maternal foundation of the message, women are not present, with a man in the position of parent only here, and in this position acting out the heteronormative role of the family protector by holding up the shield.

Similar appeals to the maternal instinct to protect one's child are arguably seen as much, if not more, viscerally in the SPD and Okamura's imagery, as seen in Figure 2, where we see two different posted images side-by-side. These two images were posted independently of each other but break down what has been consolidated into two elements in Figure 1 into two separate images, each with more extreme representations of the same hypothetical situation seen in Figure 1. In the image in Figure 2, we see a young white girl crying as she is yelled at by a crowd of angry black men. Aside from the clear racial themes that underpin this image's message, its implied message and path to it compared to Figure 1 is critical from a gender stance: In Figure 1, the threat is not made manifest through any corporeal element; rather, it exists as a non-human force (the rainbow). In this image, the threat is made manifest through a crowd of people sharing racial attributes in common, and being depicted as animalistic, such as through their facial expressions and lack of clothing, in contrast to the white child, who is clothed and attempting to hide her emotions from public view by covering her face. Furthermore, in this image, there is no protector, unlike the father with the shield in Figure 1 - emphasising that the situation is dire to its audience and evoking a sense of immediate, rather than passive or peripheral threat, seen in Figure 1.

These principles also apply to Figure 3, where we see a representation of the LGBTQ+ spectrum once again - but this time as part of the wider context of what has been termed in American politics as "woke" ideology, which in this case has been associated with "neomarxism". Unlike the more benign representation of the LGBTQ+ spectrum in the image

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posted by Hrindová, where the rainbow is implicitly harmful in the image's context but denotatively not very threatening given it is a non-human entity which can also be viewed as a positive image, especially in the children's domain. However, in this case, the entity showing the LGBTQ+ symbol is a humanoid, almost zombie-like, physically unhealthy human sitting at a computer, emphasising the danger of the modern internet through the portrayal of someone "woke" as depraved using it. As we can see, both Hrindová and Okamura touch on their perception of family values being eroded and tools of modern society and education being vectors for the transmission of ideologies which threaten the welfare of children, symbolised in these cases by emblems of the LGBTQ+ community. Critically, both employ imagery which appeals to a maternal populistic instinct to protect children while emphasising a protective, paternal populistic need for heteronormative parenting as the dominant authority and "protector"[58].

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[58] A. James McAdams and Samuel Piccolo, Far-Right Newspeak and the Future of Liberal Democracy (Taylor & Francis, 2024).

Figure 1: Image posted by Eva Hrindová on Facebook[59]

Figure 2: image posted by Tomio Okamura on Instagram with the caption "What have you allowed to happen? Stop the EU's Migration Pact!"[60]

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[59] Eva Hrindová, "Eva Hrindová Photos," Facebook.com (Meta, July 2022), https://www.facebook.com/eva.hrindova.77/photos.

[60] Tomio Okamura, "Tomio Okamura SPD (@Tomio.cz) • Instagram Photos and Videos," Instagram.com, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/tomio.cz/.

Figure 3: image posted by Tokio Okamura on Instagram with the caption "If Trump, truth and love prevails over lies and hate. Neomarxists of all nations, kiss your ass!"[61]

With regard to how semiotics are employed in formulating messages that demonise vaccines and the medical system, the Covid-19 pandemic was a focal point for far-right actors such as Hrindová and Okamura to take aim at the medical system not on the basis of inaccessibility or inadequacy, but on the basis of supposed authoritarianism. These approaches all require some level of fearmongering to be associated with them, and in the examples below, taken from the Facebook and Instagram posts of both Hrindová and Okamura, the denotative messages across the board are just as emotionally charged as the implied ones, if not more. In the case of Figure 4, we see a focus on regimes in both photos, with the profile of an SS man being altered so that his collar tab shows an icon associated with medical imagery of germs, and the letters behind the two prominent 'S's of what would have been "Schutz" and "Staffel" instead

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[61] Tomio Okamura, "Tomio Okamura SPD (@Tomio.cz) • Instagram Photos and Videos," Instagram.com, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/tomio.cz/.

being rewritten to spell "Sanitary Guard/Force" in Czech. When in reality the people attempting to enforce vaccination regimes were healthcare workers, here public service is recast as being associated with strict authoritarian regimes by using the image of a Nazi SS paramilitary soldier. The invocation of figures of military or pseudo-military enforcement (in the form of a police officer in the right image) are critical denotative markers of what would be termed as index and icon simultaneously, one might argue. The implicit messages of state tyranny by portraying vaccine enforcement as akin to Nazi authoritarianism, or through the act of physical enforcement and repression through a mother being held back as policemen forcibly vaccinate her baby are the primary focus, but there is more to be seen.

In both cases, there are also iconic and index themes of what Barthes termed the mythic signifier - which for Barthes is an icon of some sort that implicitly denotes in the minds of people some form of innocence or purity[62]. The woman and the baby in the right image of Figure 4 embody this in this case, standing out as resistant and innocent beings in an otherwise repressive and fearful image of extreme repression and state overreach. This iconic utilisation of innocence to contrast and amplify the portrayed brutality of the opposite (in the case of the restrictive health measures of the state) is made to be the primary emotional tool of some of Hrindová's imagery, as we can see in the left image of Figure 5. Here, innocence is again portrayed through a young child, but this time, the setting is idyllic - the child is a well-dressed young girl at school doing work. The visuals portrayed are ideal in the sense that the child is being portrayed in a societally-appropriate situation and way for someone their age and gender: sitting at school, being well-dressed in feminine clothing, and smiling. The text, however, takes the emotional charge of this

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[62] Roland Barthes, Mythologies (New York: The Noonday Press, 1957). 120-127.

image and contrasts it with a reality which may cause alarm by stating that the SPD is demanding an end to school mask mandates.

When given a picture of an ideal school setting denoting innocence and purity and contrasting it with restrictions, we are seeing in action what Curtin describes as affective reasoning: the audience is being asked to put aside the thought of why a mask mandate would be enforced and to feel the innocence of the child in view being infringed on[63]. In the same way, audiences are being prompted to feel when seeing the image on the right in Figure 5 - a hazmat suit-clad person with glowing eyes, denoting some eerie, non-human element to the manifestation of health controls, being surrounded by visualisations of viral germs. The text, much like the image on the left in Figure 5, is a call to action without context and without providing justification that informs people to think and question the message and its implications. Without curating such images along lines of benign and malicious intent and refusing to contextualise the calls to action beyond this, the visual power of how healthcare operates as a tool of the state becomes weaponised and even demonised if such images are received with far-right presumptions about a lack of the state's goodwill.

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[63] Brian Curtin, "Semiotics and Visual Representation," 2009. 52-60.

Figure 4: a pair of images posted by Eva Hrindová on Facebook. The left image is captioned "I serve the people", and "Sanitary Guard"[64]

Figure 5: A pair of images posted by Tomio Okamura on Instagram. The caption of the left image reads "We demand an end to compulsory masks for children in schools!", and the caption of the right image reads "Stop the emergency system! Lockdown is not a solution![65]

[64] Eva Hrindová, "Eva Hrindová Photos," Facebook.com (Meta, 2020-22),
https://www.facebook.com/eva.hrindova.77/photos.

[65] Tomio Okamura, "Tomio Okamura SPD (@Tomio.cz) • Instagram Photos and Videos," Instagram.com, 2020,
https://www.instagram.com/tomio.cz/.

When we observe how geopolitics and political weakness or inadequacy are presented, we also observe some of the most prominent overlaps with critiques of gender equality, despite Czech far-right populists proclaiming to be defenders of women's rights. Given the period of time, many posts criticising and attempting to satirise and mock contemporary Czech government responses to the energy crisis sparked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the general state of Czech defence policy have focussed on the leader of the centre-right political party and speaker of the chamber of deputies, Marketa Pekarová Adamová. In one of the most prominent examples, seen on the left in Figure 6, Okamura superimposes Pekarová's head over a painting of Marie Antoinette, and attributing the oversimplified sentiment of citizens needing more sweaters to stave off the high heat prices caused by the lack of Russian oil and gas - being over-reductive and misleading about Pekarová's defence of going away from Russian energy, and painting her as out of touch with the masses and their problems. This geopolitical weakness, in the eyes of populists like Okamura, is a wide-reaching problem, as evidenced by his use of national defence in history to invoke the idea that migration is an invasion in the image on the right of Figure 6. Substituting the tank for a boat in this case, literally and figuratively, serves to emphasise that any vessel making its way towards EU and Czech borders carries unwelcome people who are deserving of scrutiny, not support.

The image in Figure 6 and Figure 7 on the left, in both cases, serve as examples of Peircean index, painting Pekarová, and more broadly, the non-populist bloc of Czech politics, as elitist and unable to resonate with the insecurities of the Czech public - and more than that, the audience[66]. In these cases, a female party leader has been chosen, which exacerbates the "feminist

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[66] Seongcheol Kim, "Between Illiberalism and Hyper-Neoliberalism: Competing Populist Discourses in the Czech Republic," European Politics and Society, February 28, 2020, 1–16, https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2020.1709368.

as elitist" narrative which far-right populists, in particular Hrindová and the Naštvané matky have been fervent supporters and promoters of. These elitist themes are particularly present in the denotative, rather than the implications in the image's message transmission, making it more blatant of a criticism. This is made even more explicit in the image on the right in Figure 7, where "genderism" is explicitly denoted as a sign of weakness. This is not only because of a comparison between men and women, although this is still a critical aspect of the image. In the top part of the image, the female Defence Ministers of four European countries are seen together, but specifically in a setting where there is a lack of uniforms or military iconography, and all are sitting looking up at a camera wearing dresses and makeup, enunciating their femininity. They are then contrasted with the image of Russia's defence minister, who is depicted looking straight ahead with a serious demeanour, as opposed to the smiles of the European defence minister, and in a Russian military uniform, with other uniformed military personnel making up the background of the image, as opposed to the trimmed interior of a building in the European minister's case.

This image alone is one of the foremost examples of gender and national strength through militaristic terms overlapping in a denotative, explicit way. The European defence ministers are portrayed as happy, unresolved, elite, feminine, and non-militaristic women, while the Russian defence minister is portrayed as stern, resolved, and militaristic due to his appearance and surroundings in contrast. Accompanied by a caption that explicitly highlights "genderism" as the differentiating factor between these two contrasts, the implication is that gender equality, as a byproduct of Western liberal democracy, is a weakness. The implied message of gender creating and maintaining feminine and weak defence structures in the European Union and NATO, being contrasted with hyper-masculine Russian themes, is more critically not just a method to criticise liberal democratic gender equality values, but an implicit endorsement of Russian-style

authoritarianism as a way to achieve national strength through militaristic means. In other words, it is a direct message to the audience of the strongman populist style - advocating for populistic rallies around an extremist and authoritarian leader who will defend the nation through exclusion and authoritarian means, even if unsavoury.

Figure 6: a pair of images posted by Tomio Okamura on Facebook and Instagram. The caption on the left reads "Just get another sweater!", followed by "Mrs. Pekarová Adamová's energy crisis solution", and the caption on the right reads "Not every invitation is welcome. Stop the migration pact!"[67]

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[67] Tomio Okamura, "Tomio Okamura SPD (@Tomio.cz) • Instagram Photos and Videos," Instagram.com, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/tomio.cz/.

Figure 7: a pair of images posted by Eva Hrindová on Facebook. The caption on the left reads "Raw potatoes fill you and saves precious energy!", and the caption on the right reads "Destructive genderism", while showing a picture of four women and their titles as the Ministers of Defence of Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands and Germany, and Minister of Defence of Russia under the picture of Sergei Shoigu.[68]

One other aspect of the previously discussed Figures is that they target what are portrayed as elitist, feminist, and liberal individuals, who in turn are being used as representatives of the system that Okamura and Hrindová attempt to breed discontent with through such inflammatory imagery. However, the issue of women's rights, as previously stated, is paradoxical. This paradox reveals something of a class and social background dependency, since there is equally imagery created by these far-right populist groups that both explicitly and implicitly encourage women to be able to defend themselves, and by extension, to wield a certain level of power to exert violence. This denotative messaging changes significantly in the sense that it does not use elitist, political, and governmental imagery to convey a message about national defence but focuses on the more individual, layman side of the concept of strength and national character. Gender continues to be a prominent factor in contextualising these arguments, as seen in Figure 8, where both the images posted explicitly advocate for gun ownership as a self-defence mechanism. In the

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[68] Eva Hrindová, "Eva Hrindová Photos," Facebook.com (Meta, 2020-22), https://www.facebook.com/eva.hrindova.77/photos.

left image, the text and the image both denote that by having access to firearms, women will be able to fend off male attackers who would otherwise physically dominate them. The image on the right takes this a step further, equating the control of firearms with the act of stopping rape through extreme methods such as castration.

The importance of these images is that they are using not only indexes but also Peircean ideas of symbols. In this case, the objects being both discussed and presented (firearms, and in the case of the right image, firearms and the penis) hold value as symbols of potential violence that could be carried out between individuals. Furthermore, the symbolism is further entrenched from a gender standpoint since the left image portrays the person holding a gun as being incredibly feminine by exaggerating female sexual features on the body of the gun's holder. And yet, this ability to wield violence being presented as a necessary measure to prevent the implied sexual violence and explicitly discussed act of rape glosses over the issue of why such events occur and places the burden of preventing actions on the female victims, rather than emphasising the need to stop male perpetrators. As a result, we return to the issue of strongmen and the far-right populist endorsement of nominal gender equality meaning women need to compete with men for physical security without any exceptions or accommodations. For the far-right populist, the emphasis on firearms as a deterrent to sexual violence perpetrated by men is a demand that women portray themselves as feminine while adopting hypermasculine and psychosexually-charged methods of inflicting interpersonal violence as a defence mechanism. To secure themselves from physical and sexual harm in the world envisioned as an antithesis to feminist elitism, women are effectively required to adopt guns as a form of metaphorical phallus, and therefore to be able to protect their womanhood from those men who metaphorically and literally

would seek to forcibly penetrate that womanhood or femininity[69]. Perhaps most importantly is that the womanhood and femininity being secured, building on the works of Farris previously discussed, in that in femonationalist trends across European femonationalist or far-right women's groups, gender equality is treated in a possessive manner wherein it's application at the societal level is not presumed to be inherent or uniformly applicable. Using examples from policymakers belonging to Austria's FPÖ and ÖVP (respectively far-right and centre-right) parties, Edma Ajanović argues that in the Austrian case, gender discourse has shifted to enough of a point of racialisation that the increasingly used narrative is that Austria (and other Western countries like it) are not just more equal for women, but have "achieved" gender equality, emphasising ÖVP politician Juliane Bogner-Strauß' rhetoric that gender violence and inequality had been imported by non-Western migrants[70]. In the view of her and her ÖVP colleague, these migrants have supposedly reintroduced gender inequality and violence to Austria through importation of "patriarchal honor cultures" - which has become increasingly visible in Western media as a basis for gender violence in societies that either are cultural practitioners of or legally enforce extremist interpretations of Islamic religious law.

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[69] James William Gibson, Warrior Dreams: Violence and Manhood in Post-Vietnam America (New York: Hill And Wang, 1995). 92.

[70] Edma Ajanović, "Femonationalism, Neoliberal Activation, and Anti-Feminism—the Shifting Discourses on Gender Equality and Women's Issues in Austria," in Blurring Boundaries – "Anti-Gender" Ideology Meets Feminist and LGBTIQ+ Discourses, 1st ed. (Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2024), https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.8692983. 79.
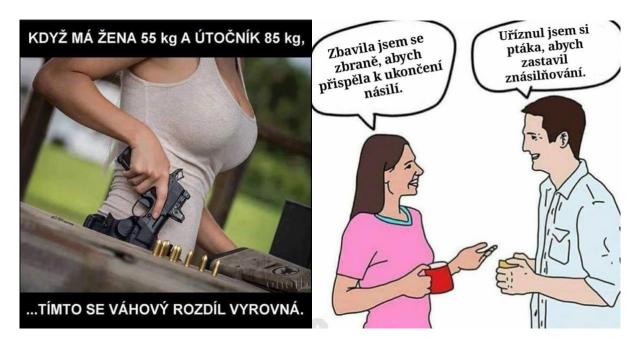
Figure 8: images posted by Tomio Okamura and Eva Hrindová, respectively. The image on the left contains the caption "if a woman is 55 kg and a male attacker is 85 kg, ... then the weight difference is equal.", and the image on the right portrays a woman saying "I got rid of guns to decrease violence", with the man responding "I chopped my dick off to stop rape"[71].

Perhaps the most potent and prominent visualisation of all in the visual messaging of Okamura's SPD and Hrindová's Naštvané matky is the image of the violent male third-world immigrant and the submissive Islamic woman. These two images serve a common purpose of villainising immigrants - but through very different social and gender paradigms. One of the most common themes we see among male immigrant archetypes in these visuals is that they are violent and bloodthirsty - as seen in Figure 9's left image, which famously landed Okamura in legal trouble due to the defamatory and racist nature of the image. And yet, the image is tongue-in-cheek, with the caption making a pun out of the fact that the visual subject is covered in blood and holding a knife, referring to him as an "imported surgeon".

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[71] Eva Hrindová, "Eva Hrindová Photos," Facebook.com (Meta), https://www.facebook.com/eva.hrindova.77/photos.

The denotative shock value of the image is asking the audience to accept the idea of black and non-white migrants generally as being violent in nature in order for there to be a common context through which the joke being made can be perceived. This is reinforced in the right-side image in Figure 9, which takes a snapshot of Muslim men screaming to show them as threatening and mad - denying these people any context or agency. As we have seen in other images, including Figure 2 and in the left image of Figure 10, white Europeans are portrayed with a certain emotional upstanding quality, or reservation, whereas those from non-white backgrounds who are men are always portrayed as emotional and hooligan-like. While this is characteristic of far-right depictions of Muslims, what is most important here is the connotative layer of the images in Figure 10. Muslim women, despite being Muslim like the male counterparts portrayed, are not shown in places of emotional uproar - instead, they are also calm and reserved in these images. Non-Western men, according to Farris' discussion of femonationalism, are the characteristic element of dehumanising outsiders in contemporary European far-right ideologies. In practice, this has become exemplified through niche far-right groups which have advocated for a range of measures including the necessity of women to be able to physically defend themselves through martial arts or weapons ownership, through more culturally imposing laws that allow the state to interfere in religious spaces that could be labelled as promoting misogyny, and more generally through the stemming of non-Western immigration. An example aside from NM would be the French women's-only far-right group Collectif Némésis, which explicitly labels themselves as "identitarian feminists" and criticises mainstream feminist schools of thought as skirting the issue of sexual violence's racialised nature, and failing to acknowledge that the increase of non-white immigrants, particularly of Muslim origin, has led to the increase of gender-based violence

in France and Europe generally[72]. Such rhetoric contributes to the dehumanisation of both male and female non-Western migrants, putting non-Western migrant women into a paradoxical position of being the victims of repressive non-Western gender hierarchies, while also being somewhat complicit in this system themselves due to their non-Western cultural affiliation, particularly through symbolic actions like continuing to embrace hijabs and religious head coverings, an act which has become increasingly associated with patriarchal oppression of women by those in Western societies[73].

However, they are not being portrayed as allies and equals to Czech women. Rather, their portrayal of wearing the hijab, or Islamic headscarf, renders them into a highly gendered warning of sorts. For the audience, their portrayal is less about their place as women and the victimisation that is often discussed by anti-Islamic voices in populist media but about their aesthetic: the hijab is a symbol of cultural decline and collapse. In these portrayals, unlike what is upheld in the rhetoric of the Czech far-right regarding the defence of female rights and womanhood, womanhood does not act as a cross-cultural site of solidarity-building for Czech and Muslim women. Muslim women, as those othered on the basis of their religion and national origins, are also the others of what Fassin and Surkis label the European "sexual democracy", since they "can be identified both as "them" (since they are Muslims) and "us" (since they are women)."[74] In this paradigm, women's bodies are compared and contrasted by virtue of the cultural traits and stereotypes they espouse and are pitted against each other in a battle for ideologies. The visual

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[72] RPRN, "Interview: Far-Right Women's Appropriation of Feminism in France (Charlène Calderaro) - Reactionary Politics Research Network," Reactionary Politics Research Network, March 25, 2025, https://reacpol.net/farright-feminism/.

[73] Sara Farris, In the Name of Women's Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

[74] Éric Fassin and Judith Surkis, "Introduction: Transgressing Boundaries," Public Culture 22, no. 3 (October 1, 2010): 487–505, https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2010-006. 498.

semiotic strategy here is to fundamentally use women's bodies to invoke a sense of disgust and fear among the viewers by trying to invoke the viewer's sense of kinship towards on type of woman as opposed to the other, and in doing so breed a distrust of the one they are not familiar with.

In the case of this visual message, womanhood is not just a site of appropriation and dehumanisation but is fundamentally understood as a value by which one can be judged. While white European men are sometimes presented as an archetype in these images, they are not as often compared to Muslim men in the same way that Muslim and European women are. In most cases, they also appear in the context of a heterosexual nuclear family, such as in Figure 1. As a result, womanhood can also be understood not only as a tool of othering but as a form of national manifestation: by being positioned on the arms of hypermasculinised Czech men, and being pitted against foreign men and women, often from Africa or of Muslim origin, women become themselves the vestige of the country's purity and are held to rigorous conservative and heterosexual standards in the minds of those who hold these views.

Figure 9: a pair of images posted by Tomio Okamura on Instagram, with the left image bearing a caption reading "The shortcomings in the health sector won't be solved by 'imported surgeons'. Stop the EU Migration pact!", and the right image's caption reads "The number of Jihadist attacks in Europe has doubled. We promote the protection of borders and banning hateful Islamic ideology."[75]

Figure 10: A pair of images posted by Eva Hrindová, with the left image displaying two women side by side, and the caption "Western" under a woman with a hijab, and "Eastern" under a woman in vaguely European traditional clothing, and the large image caption of "the future of Europe". The image on the right bears text stating "They hate Europeans, Christians, Buddhists,

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[75] Tomio Okamura, "Tomio Okamura SPD (@Tomio.cz) • Instagram Photos and Videos," Instagram.com, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/tomio.cz/.

Jews, atheists, dogs, homosexuals, pork, alcohol, our civilisation and culture and traditions and us… but they wonder why we don't love them.", with the group's name "Angry Mothers" below[76].

Finally, distrust of the mass media is another major theme which implements the populist policies of groups such as Naštvané matky and the SPD. Their criticism of major media outlets in the Czech Republic, predominantly of the public television producer Česká Televize (Czech Television), has continuously insinuated that media institutions such as Czech television routinely like to the wider public and take actions which are beneficial to the policy aims of the liberal elite government. However, the dichotomy we see in imagery criticising the media here bears some stark contrasts. In Figure 12, we can see that the criticisms levied against Czech television are on the basis of them whitewashing violent Muslims, as we have seen and discussed as a prominent theme in other sections, or of simply not being "objective" in their reporting, finalising with a call to action - namely the promise to hold a direct election for the next president of Czech television. The criticisms here are framed and portrayed within the context of the SPD and its political goals. Criticism of Czech television may be important to the images, but the imagery is not as emotionally charged as we have seen with other themes. Unlike other images, the visual semiotic strategy, especially in the right image, is secondary to the primary goal of relaying the message that change is needed. Even in the left image, the Czech television man painting a whitewashed picture of a blood-stained, rifle-wielding Arab man is being portrayed in such a way that the Czech television man is independent of the Arab man - he is an accomplice of the wrong action being portrayed in this image, but he is nevertheless not an Arab, and separable from him, therefore allowing for him to be the target of the change the audience perceives as

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[76] Eva Hrindová, "Eva Hrindová Photos," Facebook.com (Meta, 2025), https://www.facebook.com/eva.hrindova.77/photos.

necessary, rather than warranting immediate exclusion as the Arab does in the populist audience's mind.

Meanwhile, not driven by advocacy of political platforms for political gain in the same way, Hrindová's example in Figure 11 is an incredibly potent example of the Peircean symbol. There is nothing to focus on other than the image of a television, the portal through which we consume information offered by the mass media, which is now crossed out by a recognisable crossed-out circle denoting prohibition or warning. It isn't prompting a discussion, nor is it offering evidence of any kind, it is a shibboleth of sorts. Furthermore, the television resembles old tube-style television sets which would resemble those of the mid-to-late 20th century - a period which for Czech audiences represents communist authoritarian repression. In this case, to be the audience is to be an insider having your beliefs confirmed and strengthened by finding mutual belief among other faceless entities, such as a group sharing your beliefs promoting their belief in this same idea. The simplicity and graphic focus of the image is the core of this visual semiotic strategy of symbol usage, with the lack of anything else and the stark contrasts between different dark, serious colours denote a sense of urgency, of importance, and of gravity. The image exists, if nothing else, to embolden the audience in their existing beliefs. This visual role derives its power from what Laaksonen et al. describe as affective reinforcement of collective identity through repetition, making an image such as in Figure 11 a powerful visual piece of narrative strength that seeks unifies and intensifies the beliefs of far-right populists who are seeking to eradicate any doubt as to their understanding of the mass media's objectives[77].

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[77] Salla-Maaria Laaksonen et al., "Affective Visual Rhetoric and Discursive Practices of the Far-Right across Social Media," in The Far-Right Discourse of Multiculturalism in Intergroup Interactions (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 189–216, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-89066-7_8.

Figure 11: an image posted by Eva Hrindová on Instagram showing a crossed out television set with the caption reading "the media are lying!!!"[78]

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[78] Eva Hrindová, "Eva Hrindová Photos," Facebook.com (Meta), https://www.facebook.com/eva.hrindova.77/photos.

Figure 12: a pair of images posted by Tomio Okamura on Facebook and Instagram, with the caption of the right image reading "Czech Television is not objective - We will hold a direct election for the Czech Television Director".[79]

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[79] Tomio Okamura, "Tomio Okamura SPD (@Tomio.cz) • Instagram Photos and Videos," Instagram.com, 2023-2024, https://www.instagram.com/tomio.cz/.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has attempted to understand how major actors in the Czech far-right space, namely Tomio Okamura and Eva Hrindová of the SPD party and the Naštvané matky far-right advocacy group employ visual narratives and semiotic strategies to situate women as a focal point for exclusionary rhetoric and anti-immigrant populist narratives, often while using very gendered ideas and textual and verbal language. This thesis has given a detailed contextualisation of how Czech women's rights have progressed, and discourse around women and their views of feminism as an ideology have set the course for how Czech women associate with the ideas of female liberation in their own right. This has included considerations of regime change and their impact on how the relationship between women and the state has caused major evolutions in what women perceive as their role in society and the home, and whether these two spheres should fuse together in creating a feminist aspiration, or should remain separate from each other in order to compete with men in their own spheres, specifically within the labour market. This background has been critical to understanding how Czech societal discourse has characterised what the boundaries are within which Czech women can be considered or can consider themselves "liberated", and therefore why the SPD and NM have decided to employ the notion of defending a status quo which enforces heteronormative ideas of womanhood as a method of attacking moderate and left-wing feminists, and to place themselves in their stead.

Through the thesis' analyses and investigation, I would argue that these analysed portrayals demonstrate a distinct lack of attempts to defend women and their rights and freedoms and instead reduce women to symbolic beings for the justification of xenophobia and anti-feminism within a wider anti-globalist context. Groups such as the SPD and NM have deliberately co-opted language of the progressive left that had traditionally been used by

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feminists to portray themselves in a paternalistic nature but with maternal qualities, caring about women and their freedoms, and rather than controlling them, nurturing them through their exclusion of what they portray as an evil, violent and repressive global world. In reality, these narratives serve to uphold conservative and patriarchal structures where women are perpetual victims and national icons held to rigidly heteronormative and traditional standards, not allowing them to choose who they want to be and demanding they act as proper symbols of Czech national purity.

The study has also shown how major crises such as the pandemic intensified their use of visual tropes and stereotypes to viciously attack those things and people they view as their opponents - such as feminist politicians, who are portrayed as weak, globalist and elitist stooges, and depicting the very idea of maternity being under fire, with babies being ripped from their mothers by faceless policemen preparing to inject the babies with vaccines. These images serve not only as fearmongers but are demonstrative of the pandemic being a catalyst of the far-right populist narrative of the state's betrayal of its people and allowing the far-right to inhabit a space where they, and they alone, are the protectors of traditional family structures to their audiences. As a result, in these visual semiotic strategies, women are effectively reduced to scenery, and despite people like Eva Hrindová proclaiming to be for the liberation of women, peddle narratives that strip women of political agency, reducing them to curated myths of idealized womanhood.

Furthermore, this thesis has demonstrated the Ferber and Raabe's understanding of a "Czech-style feminism" is far from irrelevant today; rather, we can understand that the nationalised idea of feminism that depends on issues such as labour market participation and traditional notions of heterosexual motherhood have allowed an idea of womanhood to exist which equates femininity with national attributes. By creating a standard whereby women being

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present in public and private life prominently is the basis for gender equality in the country, far-right actors have been afforded a unique opportunity to exacerbate an attitude of rejecting women the ability to demand gender-specific rights and protections on the basis that equality has been achieved, and therefore all that must be done is to defend it from foreign actors. Unlike major figures of denigration by the far-right, such as Markéta Adamová Pekarová, the "real" Czech woman has become the supportive mother and homemaker, or even the armed defender - but only of their bodies from unchecked male predatory acts, or of their children and home - but never of anything more than that.

While the thesis specifically focussed on examining the Czech far-right's portrayal of women, such findings resonate far beyond the Czech Republic's borders. Within the context of broader far-right political rises across the European political landscape, this study can serve as an important source for comparing how women exist in the visual messaging of other countries' far-right imagery. This is arguably especially the case for understanding how postcolonial and postsocialist dynamics paint women as threatened vestiges of national purity in the Visegrad 4 countries of Poland, Slovakia and Hungary, where shared histories of communist dominations led to a variety of postsocialist political trajectories in the 1990s and beyond, ultimately stemming from similar rejections of the Eastern Bloc's political models.

Ultimately, this thesis has attempted to better understand the complex interplay between gender and populism in the Czech Republic and has shown that a more direct, localised study of how women have been restricted in their lives as the far-right makes political gains and garners more power is required. Ongoing critical inquiries of imagery depicting women from politically extreme actors are of the utmost importance, as this study has shown, and scrutiny of them can contribute to better dialogue about how to include women in conversations of their role in national policy processes and political discourses, empowering them to be autonomous political

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agents in their own right. Once women are afforded the ability to command the narratives of their rights and lives, Czech political discourse may then be much better equipped to normalise moderate understandings of feminism and disallow actors such as the SPD and NM to successfully co-opt the protection of women and their rights as points for political gain, and in the event of their taking power, of gendered subjugation.

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