Chapter 11
The Dark Side of Laughter: Humour as a Tool for Othering in the Memes of Czech Far-Right Organization *Angry Mothers*

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Abstract Far-right grassroot organizations were early adopters of the internet and social media and have been using it to spread their ideologies, mobilize people and network since the 1990s. With the increased usage of social media, their communication style has naturally changed. Due to the interactive nature of social media, the far-right groups started to communicate in a savvy style based on meme and DIY aesthetics. This style allows these groups to blurry the line between serious and irony (Shifman, L., *Memes in Digital Culture*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2014) but also between facts and misinformation (Klein, O., The Open Journal of Sociopolitical Studies 154–179, 2020). There is a burgeoning body of literature investigating the way and for what purposes such organizations use the internet in which the researchers look particularly on memes (Klein, O., The Open Journal of Sociopolitical Studies 154–179, 2020) but also humour (Billig, M., Comic racism and violence. In S. Lockyer, & M. Pickering (Eds.), Beyond a joke. The limits of humor (pp. 25–44). New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005a; Billig, M., Laughter and ridicule. Towards a social critique of humor. London: SAGE Publications, 2005b). However, not many studies explored the link between humour and morality. The aim of this exploratory study, in which humour is viewed as a means of claims making and negotiation of political views, is to deepen the knowledge of how humour in memes produced and reproduced by far-right organizations can serve as a tool for constructing a moral order. To do so, I analysed memes used on the far-right Facebook page run by Czech organization *Angry Mothers* which engage in anti-Islam and anti-gender activism. Based on Michael Billig's (2005) distinction between rebellious and disciplinary humour, I argue that the organization used rebellious humour to present themselves as an alternative to mainstream media and resistance to the alleged dictatorship of liberal elites and disciplinary humour to put minorities (both sexual and ethnic) "in their place".

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Introduction

"So, members of Ku-Klux-Klan have a sense of humour", remarked Polish journalist Katarzyna Surmiak-Domańska, expressing her surprise when attending a Ku Klux Klan gathering and noticing her respondents' merchandise decorated with the tongue-in-cheek *We Dream of White Christmas*.

Her surprise demonstrates the fact that far-right groups and their activities are usually deemed as being humourless and associated with darkness, aggressivity, hatred and violence. On the other hand, humour is often considered to be something fundamentally positive and perceived as a desirable quality in people. The reality, however, can be quite the opposite. While the far-right's communication undoubtedly consists of all the negativity listed above, their communication can often be humorous, witty and playful. Indeed, right-wing propaganda frequently includes material that is jokey in its intent (Billig, 2005a, 2005b). In fact, the data used for the analysis in this contribution was originally gathered in order to examine the way Czech anti-feminist, far-right groups used their social media to spread moral panic and construct the members of LGBT+ minority and feminists as folk devils. However, what struck me the most after coding and analysing the collected data was the number of jokes, irony and satire present on the analysed Facebook pages. It turned out that humour was an essential discursive strategy present in the communication of the studied group (by far the most frequently used reaction to the posts of the group was "haha"), and it was used for more than merely entertaining the page's followers. Humour was also being used to frame a minority group of people as a threat to moral values of the majority within the society.

The nature of the internet and the way people use it undoubtebly affected the style of the communication of the studied organization. It is a well-known fact that far-right groups were early adaptors of the internet using various forums to disseminate their ideology as early as the mid-1990s (Muis et al., 2021). Since then, the internet has served these groups as a public space for debating, exchanging positions, showing support to each other and networking (Caiani & Wagemann, 2009). In the beginning, such actors predominantly operated in the shadows of their own websites and discussion forums and mostly reached the people who deliberately looked them up, in other words, the people who were already agreeing with their ideology and political views or were at the very least interested in knowing more about it. However, around 2010, using forums such as 4chan and 8chan and social media such as Facebook, far-right activists managed to reach a mainstream audience, and their posts became much more widely viewed and disseminated (Nagle, 2017).

This achievement can be explained by the change in their communication style, as a broader audience would be out of reach if the groups kept posting only ideological manifestos and pictures of swastikas (Nagle, 2017). Instead, grassroots

organizations and activists (not only the far-right oriented) started to communicate in a savvy style based on meme and DIY aesthetics. This style allows these groups to blur the line between seriousness and irony (Shifman, 2014) but also between facts and misinformation (Klein, 2020). Although on social media memes and funny visuals are often dismissed as shallow entertainment, their affordance allows their users to participate in a public sphere and negotiate their political and moral views and identities (Shifman, 2014). After all, the US election campaign 2016, during which Donald Trump's supporters used memetic aesthetics to infiltrate sites from The Donald subreddit to mainstream internet culture, proved that the memes of the new online right-wing movement should be taken seriously (Nagle, 2017). Accordingly, I understand humour as a means of claim making that can serve as a tool for negotiating moral values in the society by putting people with "undesirable behaviour" into their place.

In this exploratory study, I scrutinize how the far-right activists use humour to negotiate morally desirable and undesirable identities online. To do so, I scraped two Facebook pages run by a Czech far-right group known by the moniker *Angry Mothers*. While we already have some knowledge about the usage of memes by far-right groups in the US and Western European contexts, they remained rather overlooked in the context of Central and Eastern Europe. In said areas, the memes are partly influenced by the Western branches of far right but also draws on local contexts, historical settings and collective memory of the region. As Billig (2005a, 2005b) correctly points out, humour manifests differently in different times and places, and different groups may deem something funny or unfunny. The production and reception of humour are essentially dependent on not only on the producer of the joke and the audience but also on the specific culture and social group to which they belong. Therefore, the contribution of this study lies in providing a deeper understanding of the usage of humour as a communication tool of far-right actors in Czechia. To analyse the material, I draw on the theory of rebellious and disciplinary humour (Billig, 2005a, 2005b) and the theory of moral boundaries (Lamont, 1992), i.e. symbolic lines that people draw to make distinctions between people with whom they identify and between people with whom they do not want to be associated. In other words, between "people like us" and social categories, they perceive as violating moral norms (Lamont, 2000). Lamont (2000) argues that studying moral boundaries of individuals allows us to reconstruct how, for instance, workers come to adopt racist positions (p. 5). While partially agreeing with this statement, I argue that the racist position does not arise only from the cultural and material worlds the workers inhabit, but it is a two-way street: the supply side provides the supporters with ideological content which often precedes the formation of opinions by the demand side. Therefore, it is important to study the ways in which the supply side serves its ideological content to its supporters.

I will start this article by briefly introducing the group that is in the focus of this study and continue by discussing the role of humour in social movements. Afterwards, I will discuss the relationship between humour and morality. Later, I present the methods I used to collect and analyse my data. I finish with the presentation of my findings.

Angry Mothers

On its website, the group presents itself as a group of middle-aged, conservative women who are dissatisfied with the liberally oriented development of Czech society and do not feel represented by the political elite. While some members of the group have been active on the internet since 2009, the group gained visibility mostly due to their emergence in the Anti-Islam protests in 2015 during which they discursively exploited their motherhood and women's identity to oppose the acceptance of refugees in Czechia in the name of women's rights. However, later they stated that the group consists of politically aware citizens—both men and women—and the usage of the word *mothers* in their name has a symbolic value referring to parental instincts and traditional values. In doing so, the group capitalizes on the members' supposed women sex identity to portray themselves as morally superior since women are often portrayed as morally pure individuals. These associations are derived from the value placed on caring and nurturance, the importance of mother's love and the overriding value of peace (Tronto, 1993). Accordingly, *Angry Mothers*' chairperson Eva Hrindová claimed in one of her speeches: "we, women, are more sensitive to injustice" (Svatoňová, 2020). When I interviewed her in October 2018, she admitted: "despite the fact that both, men and women, can become members of the organization, we chose the name Angry Mothers to symbolize the powerful energy a mother can develop when she is worried about her children and wants to protect them".

According to its website, the organization has approximately 5200 members and was officially registered in February 2016. However, during the interview, the chairperson of the group claimed that the core of the group consists of approximately 20 active members. The group engages in a diverse range of activities which includes publishing books, sending letters to politicians and organizing public events, but the organization's main activity is running websites and social media pages.

While they became visible through their activity in the Czech anti-Jihad movement, their agenda consists of a wide range of issues. Among them are some rather obvious themes such as opposing sexual education in elementary schools, opposing LGBT+ rights, supporting white supremacism and promoting heteronormative order in Czech society, but they also promote alternative medicine and support the right to give birth at home. Their Facebook page *Angry Mothers* which was founded in 2016 and followed by more than 45,000 people (making it one of the most followed far-right pages in the Czech context) was shut down by Facebook authorities in August 2018 due to the spread of hatred and misinformation. Two months later, in October 2018, the same group started running another Facebook page with a new name—*Antifeminist Strike*. During the few months of its existence, it managed to gather more than 10,000 followers. However, it was officially shut down by Facebook authorities in March 2019. While the group became known as opponents to Islam and immigration, their later activities rather focused on opposition to women's rights and LGBT+ rights that they united under the label "gender ideology". By focusing on this theme, the group joined the global trend known under the label

"anti-gender campaigns" that engage in spreading a conspiracy theory about a dangerous "gender ideology", the aim of which is to diminish all differences between men and women and genocide of white people (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017).

There are three types of activists involved in the anti-gender campaigning in Czechia, and each group uses different styles of rhetoric. The first group consists of official representatives of the Catholic Church and those activists that are directly associated with the Church and, thus, frame their arguments in religious terms. The second group are activists, who avoid being associated with the Church and pay particular attention to present their arguments as based on sound scientific research and economic theories. The last group, to which *Angry Mothers* belong, consists of activists that have direct links to far-right and anti-Islam organizations, both political parties and social movements. These activists use populist strategies and target mostly working-class people while opposing "corrupted elites, media and cosmopolitan liberals" (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017). This particular group has no justification for religious arguments in Czechia, where most of the population identify as atheists, neither they can support their arguments through scientific evidence as they use a low, "closer to people" discursive style. Therefore, these groups, active mainly on social media, draw on language of morality and use a communication style reminiscent of tabloid media, using powerful images accompanied with short, emotionally coloured comments and exclamation marks. However, as the analytical section of this article shows, besides angry emotions, they often attempt to trigger positive emotions in their followers and high among them is laughter.

Humour as the Weapon of the Powerless

Social movements are defined as a collective effort to make or prevent a change in society (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). Therefore, social movements, by their definition, express dissatisfaction with the way things are and aim to establish the legitimacy of a specific claim about a social condition and to then put that interpretation of reality into action (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009). They do so by using various strategies.

Since social movements are "outsiders" in the mainstream political process (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009), these actors suffer from a lack of direct access to lawmakers as well as to media gatekeepers. To affect lawmakers or at least change the mindset and values of populations, they need to choose some other ways of reaching their audience. With this goal in mind, they often frame their claims as a question of morality (Snow & Benford, 2000). Thus, they often draw on moral shocks (Jasper & Poulsen, 1995) or moral panics (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009) by which they try to affect the moral judgement of the people who they could potentially mobilize into action. While these rhetorical techniques have already attracted some scholarly attention, the usage of humour as a means of changing the public mindset is rather an under researched area (Hart, 2007) despite the fact that witty

and humorous slogans, banners and merchandise, as well as playful performances, have always been somewhat present in protests (Kuipers, 2008; Hart, 2007).

In sociology, humour as a means of political protest was first taken into account by Obdrlik (1942) who described the Czech jokes about Germans as gallows humour and political resistance during the period when Czechoslovakia was occupied by Nazi Germany. Later, in the early 1980s, humour became a matter of study in the history of protests. Most of the historians who studied social movements drew on the theory of Michail Bakhtin (1984) and the carnival festivals during which political protests were possible as long as they were done by joking. Such carnivals, however, got out of hand sometimes and ended up in outright rebellious movements (Hart, 2007). Charles Tilly (1986) further showed how the practice of charivari, a form of ritual manifestation related to carnivals, turned into a direct political protest against the local authorities in the seventeenth century in Dijon (p. 32–33).

Later, scholars mostly studied humour as the weapon of the weak. Christie Davies (2007), similarly to Obdrlik (1942), showed how oppressed people used jokes in precarious situations, in this case people living under the dictatorial regime of the Soviet Union. She described such jokes as the "jokes of the powerless against the absolutely powerful" (p. 291). Additionally, Thomas Olesen (2007) argued that humour can function to bridge a distance. He claims that "humour as a symbol in framing across distance can be powerful because it often evokes human frailties and imperfections that are universally recognizable" because when "a communicator uses humour in that way he opens himself to the recipient of his message by implicitly saying: 'I am only human just like you'" (p. 25). Nghiem Lien Huong (2007) showed how the collective nature of humour in the workplace can foster the perception of community in the social movement of the working class. Krista Cowman (2007) demonstrated that while manifestation of feminized politics performed by suffragettes became the butt of contemporary jokes among an uncomprehending public, suffragettes also used humour as a deliberate tactic, to diffuse hostility, to gain suffragettes a hearing or to emphasize the ridiculous aspects of their opponents (Cowman, 2007). Harry H. Hiller (1983) demonstrated that humour is an important means of communication intimately related to conflict in social movements. Finally, Rachel V. Kutz-Flamenbaum (2014) discussed how humour can be used as a communicative and emotional strategy for social movement activists and organizations. She distinguished between humour directed outside the group in the forms of tactics and frames and the humour that was used inside movement in regards to leadership, collective identity and emotional labour. Knight (2015) showed how ironic humour was used in slogans as a reaction to neoliberal measures in Greece and how it questioned the relationship between wealth and democracy and reframed the political debate.

All these mentioned studies focused on humorous protest performances of people with whom the researchers rather sympathized and described humour as a form of resistance: a boost for the oppressed and the means to undermine their oppressor. However, humour is also used by the social movements whose ideological views are less favourable. There are a few studies examining the humour within the discourses of far-right grassroots organizations. For instance, Michael Billig (2005a, 2005b)

looked into websites of Ku Klux Klan supporters and classified their violent racist jokes into categories and highlighted the blatantly cruel and bigoted aspects of racist jokes. In his earlier study of three extreme right websites, Billig (2001) showed that the organizations use a meta-discourse that allows them to justify their content as "just jokes," arguing that the extreme language of racist hatred is a matter of enjoyment, as the websites he studied portrayed the imagining of extreme violence as a matter of humour. The body of the literature on far right and humour is further burgeoning due to the fact that far-right organizations thrive especially in the online environment that require a witty communication style. As Nagle (2017) showed, certain online platforms allow the alt right to use the meme-based, DYI aesthetics that help them to cover their ideology in a jokey way and reach wider audiences than only like-minded groups of followers.

Following these scholars, I argue that humour in the communication of social movements should be taken into serious consideration, because, as Tanja Petrović (2018) puts it "the ambiguity of political parody, its reflexivity, and its capacity to build or reconfigure affective communities are workings of political humor that enable individuals to embrace their own involvement and vulnerability and the ambiguous and unpredictable moral consequences of their complex positioning as an authentic and potentially productive form of engaging with political reality" (p. 201). It is no coincidence that comedians such as Beppe Grillo or Jimmy Morales have managed to make a career in politics and that there is massive consumption of parodic media content which citizens often treat as a more accurate source of information than mainstream, corporate media (Petrović, 2018, p. 202). In short, there is an intimate relationship between humour and politics. Not only has humour remerged as an innovative political tool (Klumbytė, 2014), it also became politics itself, performatively inhabiting the very practice of politics (Petrović, 2018). As Kuipers (2008) rightly argued, political humour becomes part of the political landscape since it highlights social rights and disagreements and can sometimes spill over into serious political discourse (p. 371).

To summarize, I understand humour and jokes as a discursive tool that allows social actors to engage with their target audience and fuel emotional responses to political issues through a repetition of specific themes, framings and extremist ideologies, under the guise of entertainment.

Humour and Moral Boundaries

I believe that the existing research studying the transnational anti-gender discourse overlooks the importance of the specific socioeconomic background of the audience to which the humorous discursive style is supposed to appeal. Based on the data analysis, I argue that the Catholic anti-gender campaigners draw mostly on religious arguments; conservative, neoliberal anti-gender campaigners target their middle-class audiences with scientific and economic arguments; groups such *Angry Mothers* use the low political style based on humiliation, ridicule, powerful images

and tabloid style news to appeal to less educated, working-class people (Ostiguy, 2017). Previous research pointed out that workers put more emphasis on moral criteria than their upper middle-class counterparts (Lamont, 2000). Therefore, it is not surprising that the humour of such organizations often draws on moral boundaries which serve as a means to separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and group membership among the followers of the page (Lamont, 2000; Lamont, 1992). Such moral boundaries often work to provide people with a space in which they can affirm their worth and preserve their dignity, a space in which they can express their own identity and competence (Lamont, 2000, p. 4).

As I demonstrate in the analytical section, morality and dignity lie in the centre of the perception of social hierarchies constructed by the discourse of *Angry Mothers*. Their populist distinction between "us", morally pure Czech people, and "them", corrupted elites and immoral minorities, was integral to all jokes they made. The link between morality and humour is hardly surprising. Morality of humour and laughter has been a subject of a scholastic debate since Ancient Greece. The question was mostly whether it was moral or not to laugh at jokes that made fun of someone else's misfortune. For instance, Socrates claimed that since people are laughing at the false conceits of their friends, they were taking pleasure in evil (Billig, 2005a, 2005b, p. 40), and both Freud and Bergson highlighted the cruelty and aggression in humour (Ibid). On the other hand, humour can also serve as a tool to express what is morally right or wrong and symbolically put people to "their place".

In this article, I draw on the theory of humour that was developed by Michael Billig in his book *Laughter and Ridicule* as he pays particular attention to the moral aspects of humour. Billig (2005a, 2005b) distinguishes between two types of humour, or rather ridicule. His classification is based on who is ridiculing whom and from which position. He calls the first type "disciplinary humour" which he defines as humour that "mocks those who break social rules, and thus can be seen to aid the maintenance of those rules" (p. 202). In this case, ridicule functions as disciplinary tool creating a morally good society.

He calls the second type of humour "rebellious" and defines it as the humour which "mocks the social rules, and, in its turn, can be seen to challenge, or rebel against, the rules" (p. 202). While the former is used by superiors to maintain their power, the latter is used by subordinates to challenge the authority. The disciplinary humour contains an intrinsic conservatism, whereas the rebellious humour is associated with radicalism (Billig, 2005a, 2005b, p. 202). Billig's (2005a, 2005b) distinction proves particularly useful while analysing the communication of a far-right grassroots organization. On one hand, as representatives of the "normal majority" (as they call themselves), they use humour to discipline people such as sexual and ethnic minorities who deviate from the heteronormative lifestyle desirable within the system of the nationalist ideology. On the other hand, they are a grassroots organization that is trying to turn people against the official political system and democracy and present themselves as the real resistance in the time of a new liberal dictatorship. They do so by using the rebellious humour mocking the representatives of the political system.

Data and Methods

The aim of the article is to identify which social categories the organization perceives as violating moral norms and what moral standards the group uses to evaluate other people. In other words, I explore how the far-right organization concretely defines "us" and "them" and draws the lines between the worthy and the less worthy. To understand what themes and categories emerged among the jokes and memes published on the studied Facebook pages, I first used the application Netvizz to scrape the pages and gather all visuals that were published during the period of 12 months, starting in February 2018, when I began conducting the research, and ending in February 2019. In October 2018, I conducted an interview with the chairperson of the organization who gave me a permission to use the material published on their social media. In total, I worked with 400 images. The database consisted of both images reposted from other websites and images that were made by the members of the organization themselves.

After I created the corpus of images, I used inductive coding to detect patterns and regularities among the visuals. I went through the images several times and categorized them into clusters—I was particularly interested in who was the butt of the joke and what means were used to make fun of them. Since the meaning of the joke was very often conveyed through an interplay of words and images, I was interested in the interaction of these two dimensions of the jokes. Informed by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Wodak & Meyer, 2016), I focused on the underlying messages behind the jokes, specifically their moral dimension. Through the analysis, I attempted to interpret the images in the context of far-right discourse that was informed by academic literature on far right as well as by a long-term ethnographic observation of the Facebook group. I decided to present three posts for each identified theme. The aim of the analysis is, however, not to claim a strict sense of representativity. Instead, my analysis is mainly descriptive and exploratory, and I attempt to present an illustrative example.

Those Who Laugh Together, Belong Together

"Us, the victims of the system"

The humour used by the organization was based on the populist division "us" against "them". When portraying the "us", the admins used light-hearted jokes that made fun of the shared joys and sorrows of everyday life of the working class people. In such jokes, the admins deliberately put themselves and their followers into a rebellious position. They ridiculed the system in which they were helpless citizens with no power. Such jokes were thematically centred around the lifestyle and misery of the low-income class and wittily portrayed the inequality from the point of view of those who struggle. Such jokes seemed to serve as the symbolic glue for the people who followed the page as they could laugh about the very issues they had to

deal with in their everyday lives. These jokes were political; however, they were not based on humiliation and ridicule, but they played on stereotypes that were supposed to criticize and highlight the incongruities in the society. They mainly pointed out that Czech people are being robbed of basic resources such as water, that public services do not work, that the public institutions such as post offices do not function and that the Czech government is not able to maintain the roads effectively enough for safe driving. While such jokes can seem innocent at first, and might seem not to explicitly represent the far-right ideology, they are very serious claims about the dissatisfaction with state affairs. Through such jokes, the group shaped their identity as "we", the people who struggle and are left behind by our elites.

These jokes were further fed by the Czech collective memory. In post-communist countries, such jokes have a long tradition. Under the communist rule, they served as a critique of the political system—"since the state controlled the economy and claimed responsibility for the welfare of its citizens and repeatedly told them how well off they were" (Davies, 2007, p. 297) despite the fact that the housing and working conditions were not satisfactory and the collectivized agriculture could not provide enough food. With such jokes, the group emphasize how out-of-touch Czech politicians are with the needs and everyday life of ordinary citizens and portray themselves as vulnerable citizens punching up (Figs. 11.1, 11.2, 11.3).

"The Corrupted Elites"

In contrast to their own position which was defined as the underdog, the group often drew boundaries against politicians and people working in the media that were judged as lacking personal integrity and sincerity. While these people achieved a high socioeconomic status, they were portrayed as lacking moral worth. This is because in the workers' understanding of the world, work signals a form of moral purity and is often mobilized to draw boundaries between decent people and the others (Lamont, 2000, p. 24). The liberal elites were often portrayed as lazy and untrustworthy but also as manipulative and actively using their resources, such as access to media gatekeepers, to brainwash the ordinary citizens (Figs. 11.4, 11.5, 11.6).

"The Silenced Majority"

In contrast to these elites, the admins of the Facebook page positioned themselves as the "resistance" to the "liberal dictatorship". Through this kind of humour, they portrayed the current political regime in Czechia, and more generally in the European Union and Western democracies, as the "Absurdistan" in which "normal people" still retaining "common sense" were "victims" of the political abuse. As Kuhar and Paternotte (2017) rightly observed, members of the anti-gender movement tend to present themselves as "the heirs of Ghandi or Socrates", that is, as the "members of a movement of resistance" (p. 1). They do so by blaming elites, technocrats, gender scholars and feminist activists and international and supranational powers, often reduced to the metonymy "Brussels", for imposing perversions on powerless peoples. Obdrlik (1942) showed that Czechs in Czechia occupied by Nazi regime used humour as a symbol of resistance, joking in order to bolster

Fig. 11.1 "Next week, we will install radar measuring the pace"

morale and hope for the oppressed, making the fear and the tragedy of the moment seem only temporary (Martineau, 1972). However, the group analysed in this article used humour to construct an impression of living in a situation similar to the World War II regime and presented itself as the "resistance of modern times", the "voice of the helpless people" and the alternative to the mainstream media, portrayed in the memes as "brainwashing machinery". They strategically used irony to highlight that in the "dictatorship of multiculturalism and gender ideology", it is enough to be white or heterosexual to be labelled as an extremist. With such jokes, the admins can fuel the feelings of injustice. The fact that the group's Facebook pages were shut down several times by Facebook authorities for spreading hatred was further exploited by the organization to strengthen their narrative of being silenced in the era of "liberal totalitarianism" (Figs. 11.7, 11.8, 11.9).

"The Islamized Elites"

Furthermore, the elites were portrayed as immoral and corrupt, not only in the economic realm but also as those who betray their people in the name of unnatural,

Fig. 11.2 "Keep rowing, man! Water! Don't you want way too much from life?"

multiculturalist ideology. In such jokes, European leaders were portrayed as "overly politically correct", or in other words "subordinate to the demands of the Muslim world". The basis of the humour was highlighting the supposed irony in which Western civilization, proud of its tolerance, seems to be more backwards in regards to women's rights than countries in the East. This manoeuvre was a smart move which helped the racist organization to cover their racist agenda. Instead of ridiculing the minorities themselves, they reframed themselves from their privileged position to the naughty, powerless side. Instead of simply ridiculing the ethnic and religious minorities, they made it seem as though they are rebelling against the demands of political correctness and that they despise the hypocrisy of "western elites" that in the name of political correctness abandon women's rights. While

Fig. 11.3 "I would tell you a joke about a Czech mailing service… but I am not sure you would get that"

Fig. 11.4 The sign on the billboard says: "Everybody can go f*ck themselves" The lady in the picture reacts with a remark: "Finally a politician whom we can trust!"

Fig. 11.5 The lady from the TV greets the audience with a following sentence: "Today's debate is over. In a moment we will tell you what you should think about it"

criticizing "modern feminism" for creating non-men and non-women, they presented themselves as the last defenders of European women whose safety and freedom were left behind by the immoral, dishonest elites. While the members of the organization portrayed themselves as punching up and criticizing immoral elites, they were ironically also punching down by marginalizing, disrespecting and ridiculing Muslim women (Figs. 11.10, 11.11, 11.12).

"Folk Devils"

Finally, as I demonstrated earlier (Svatoňová, 2021), a lot of the communication of anti-gender campaigners is based on creating moral panic in society. Moral panic is a condition or episode, during which a person or group of persons become viewed as a threat to moral values and interests. Such goal was achieved by using persuasive

Fig. 11.6 "Pets very often look like their owners" A meme that shows that liberal political elites represented by Hillary Clinton are under control of powerful rich such as George Soros

images of so-called folk devils, the deviants who served as the embodiment of the decadent moral values of contemporary society (Cohen, 1972, 2011, p. 1). The type of jokes targeted and humiliated the enemies who represent the "freaks" threatening the values and structural order in society. In such posts, the admins used disciplinary humour to humiliate sexual and gender minorities whose performance of masculinity and femininity was viewed as perverse. However, the aim of such jokes was not only to make fun of the individuals depicted in the images. Instead, the aim of the memes was to suggest that the entire society is going in a wrong direction, "driven by ideologies" such as feminism due to which traditional femininity and

Fig. 11.7 "Test—Are you a nazi? Are you white? Yes? Do you hate yourself? No? You are a nazi." In this test, basically everybody who is white and does not suffer of white guilt is portrayed as a nazi

masculinity are dying out. As such, they suggest, we are witnessing the "genocide" of white, Western civilization as with the death of traditional gender roles, the traditional family model dies out as well because people no longer follow what is natural and do not reproduce "as they should". While the members of the sexual minority were the butt of the jokes, they were also presented as victims of the system. These types of jokes, however, revealed that despite the members of the organization identified with the underdog, they were further reproducing the marginalization of an already marginalized group of people from a position of members of the dominant strata of society (Figs. 11.13, 11.14, 11.15).

Fig. 11.8 "The group of anonymous heterosexuals. 'Hi, I am Josef and I have a problem. I like women' Soon in the European Union"

Concluding Remarks

Throughout this article, I argued that the group *Angry Mothers* used humour and jokes to promote their ideological views through entertainment. In fact, the organization themselves made it very clear that they use humour in order to communicate their political views. After their second Facebook page reached 5000 followers, the chairperson made a status to thank them:

Fig. 11.9 "Typical extremists. Son is a boy. Father is a man. Mother is a woman. Daughter is a girl"

> "Thank you so much for your interest and we hope that through the occasional laughter we can better understand the absurdity of activism these days. After all, it is not so funny, but it seems that making fun of it helps to spread the word :-) Thank you!"

Based on the findings of the analysis, I argued that the organization *Angry Mothers* attempted to build an affective community distinguished by the shared moral views through their communication online. The aim of the analysis was to identify the moral boundaries between those who laugh and those at whom they laughed. The findings showed that the group used their Facebook page to present themselves as "the resistance" and an alternative source of information and a "common reason logic" in the time of corrupted liberal media. Moreover, the humorous nature of their communication and political parody provided them with the opportunity to construct a discourse outside of the realm of conventional political speech.

The humour was, in general, used to ridicule the group's opponents and people who were deemed undeserving of a place in Czech society. Those people were either presented as politicians ignoring people and lacking dignity, or minorities lacking traditional moral values. While other researchers (Weaver 2011; Billig, 2005a, 2005b) pointed out that the humour used in the communication of right-wing organizations is based on ridiculing minorities, the findings of my analysis also showed that the admins often posted jokes that made fun of the "subordinate

Fig. 11.10 "Can you draw me as one of the French girls?" In this joke, the author makes fun of the "fact" that girls in France that used to be deemed a secularized country are very often covered in hijabs nowadays
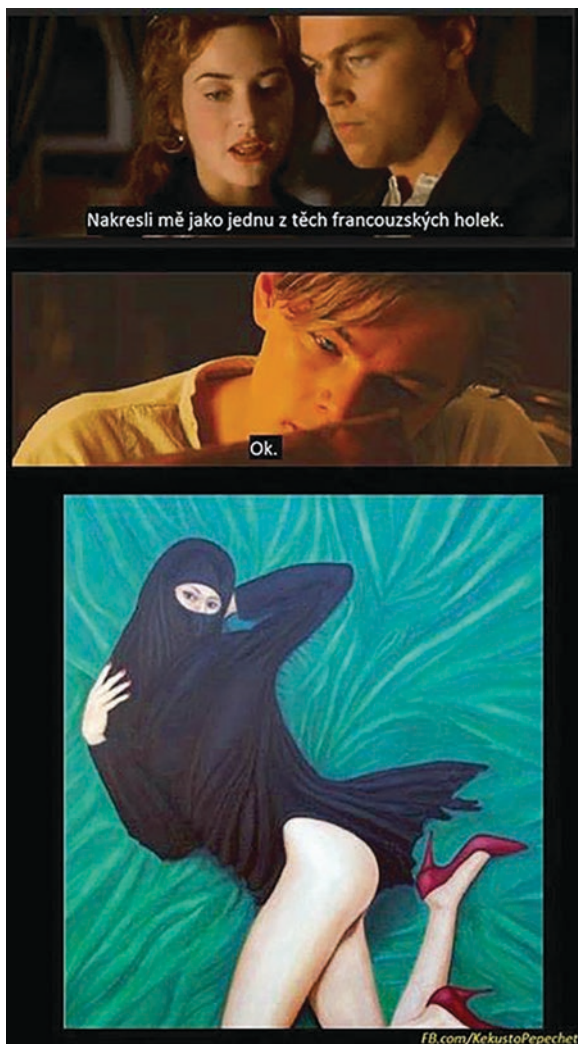
position" of the target audience and their demands being not met by the system. In that sense, humour was presented as a coping strategy to deal with something one cannot change: if ywe cannot fight the system, at least we have to laugh at it.

In fact, in the case of the community following the page, it remains a question whether we can talk about the humour as the weapon of the weak. On one hand, it is obvious that the intended audience of these Facebook pages is people living outside of the capital, belonging to the working class, having lower education and income and ultraconservative attitudes. On the other hand, they display the qualities that represent the majority of Czech society, i.e. whiteness, Czech nationality and heteronormative lifestyle. They often identify virtues such as working discipline, dignity and moral purity, as providing them with certain capital that "the others"

Na horní fotografii je Abdullah II.,
jordánský král a jeho rodina -
- přímí potomci proroka Mohameda

Na spodní fotografii jsou švédské
ministryně z "první feministické vlády na
světě", během návštěvy Iránu.

Fig. 11.11 "Abdullah II., the King of Jordan and his family, direct descendants of the prophet Mohamed vs. Swedish ministers from the first feminist government in the World during their visit in Iran

lack and therefore deserve to be mocked. One could argue that the humour used in the discourse draws on the white privilege of the followers of the page and therefore they use it as a quality which puts them above others.

While far-right organizations and the jokes they publish are often criticized for the lack of moral goodness and therefore described as unfunny, one cannot deny that there was certain appeal to "moral belief systems" of the audience. All the jokes had

Fig. 11.12 "Future of Western and Eastern Europe (respectively)"

strong moral dimension, dividing the society into groups of "morally pure people" who are the victims of the system, "immoral corrupted elites" and "immoral, pervert deviants" who want to impose their decadent lifestyle on the rest of the society. It is, however, clear that the jokes were not harmless, especially in the case of the jokes that ridiculed sexual and ethnic minorities—their repetition can clearly serve to cement stereotypes in the public mind, and thus perpetuate prejudice and discrimination (Husband, 1988). While racist and misogynist websites often use the strategy of defending themselves by claiming that "they are only joking", *Angry Mothers* used a reverse strategy trying to convince their audience that the "jokes might be funny but ought to be taken seriously" as they depict the real threats and problems.

Finally, it is important to point out that while the jokes posted by *Angry Mothers* were not innocent, they were much less violent and much more moderate than jokes published on other extremist websites such as Ku Klux Klan (Billig, 2005a, 2005b). This fact supports the hypothesis that women's participation in far-right political organizations often helps to soften the "public face" of the far-right extremism as well as helps to make the accusations against feminism and femonationalist

Fig. 11.13 "The consequences for human body—alcohol, heroine, metamfetamin, feminism"

Fig. 11.14 Men and
women in 2019

arguments more legitimate. The fact that the humour used in the posts was less vio-
lent than the one Billig (2001, 2005a, 2005b) described in his studies, nonetheless,
does not mean the studied Facebook page was less dangerous and did not engage in
structural violence. It did consist of posts that were based on misinformation and
exaggerated reality in which particularly Muslim men and transgender people were
depicted as dangerous, violent individuals and deviants. These messages were not
conveyed in a humorous way but rather in the forms of "alternative news that
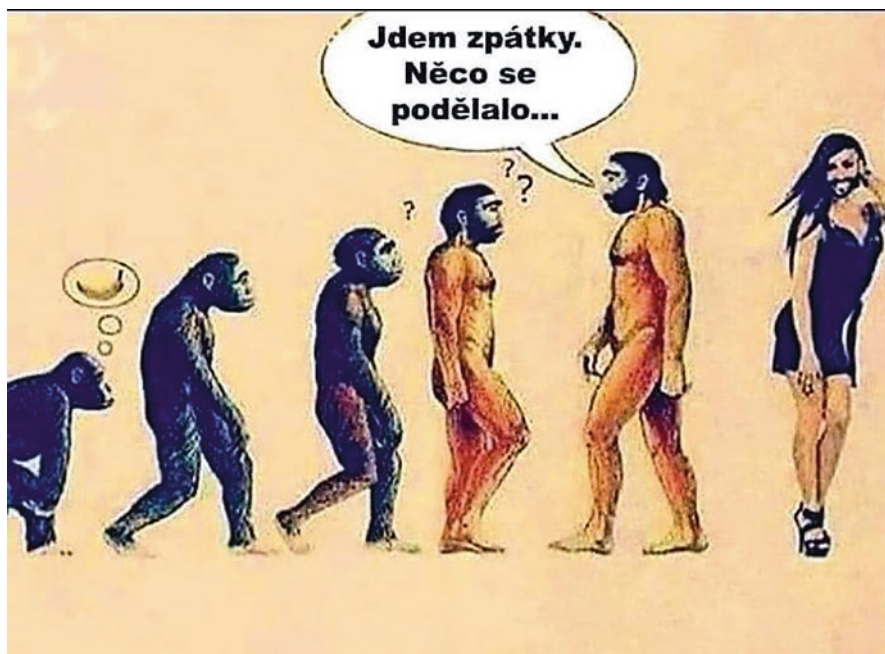
Fig. 11.15   "Let's go back. Something has f*cked up"

official media do not publish" mostly reposted from international anti-jihad, white supremacist websites and websites with pro-Russian propaganda and, therefore, not presented in this article.

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