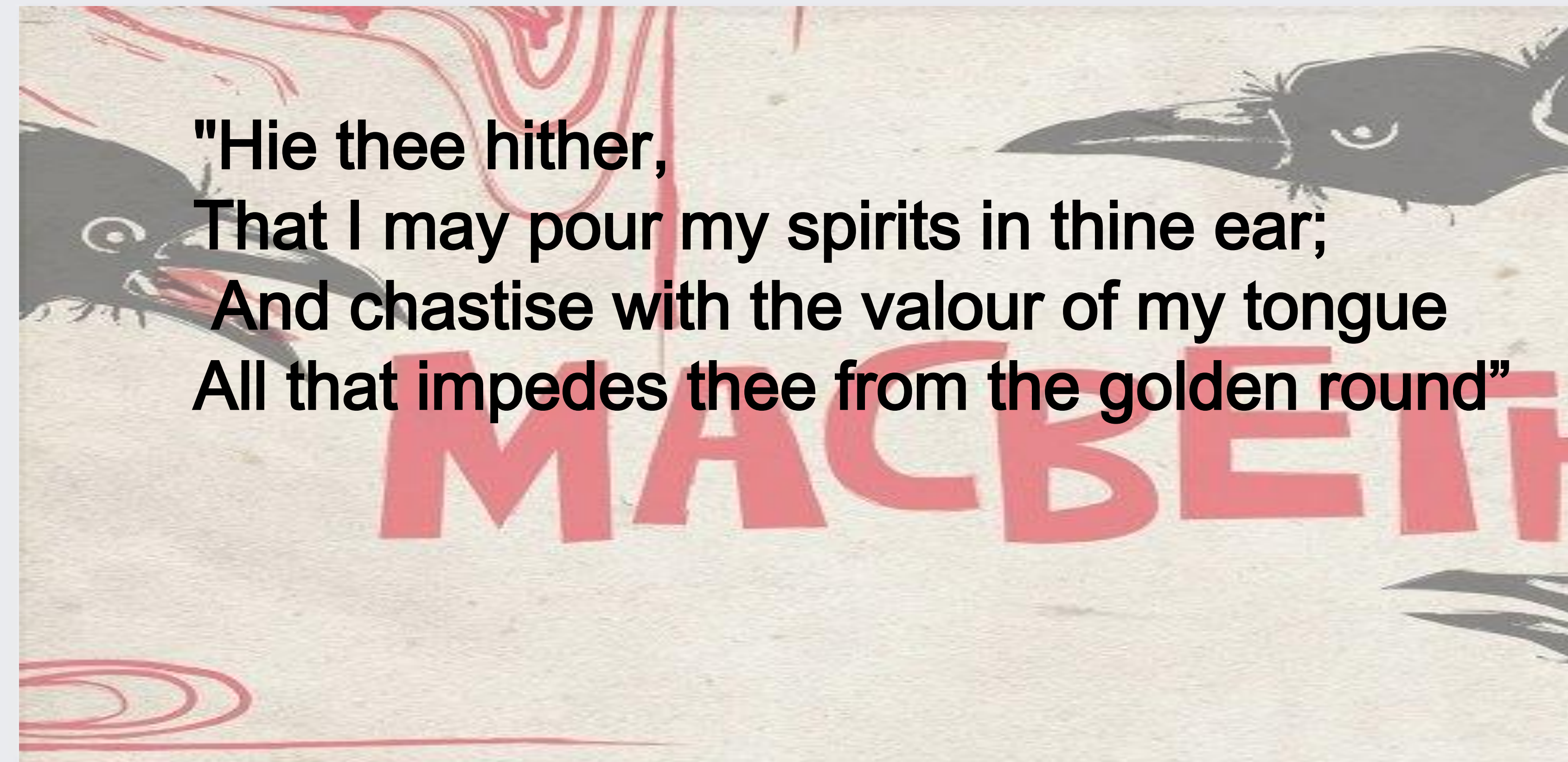




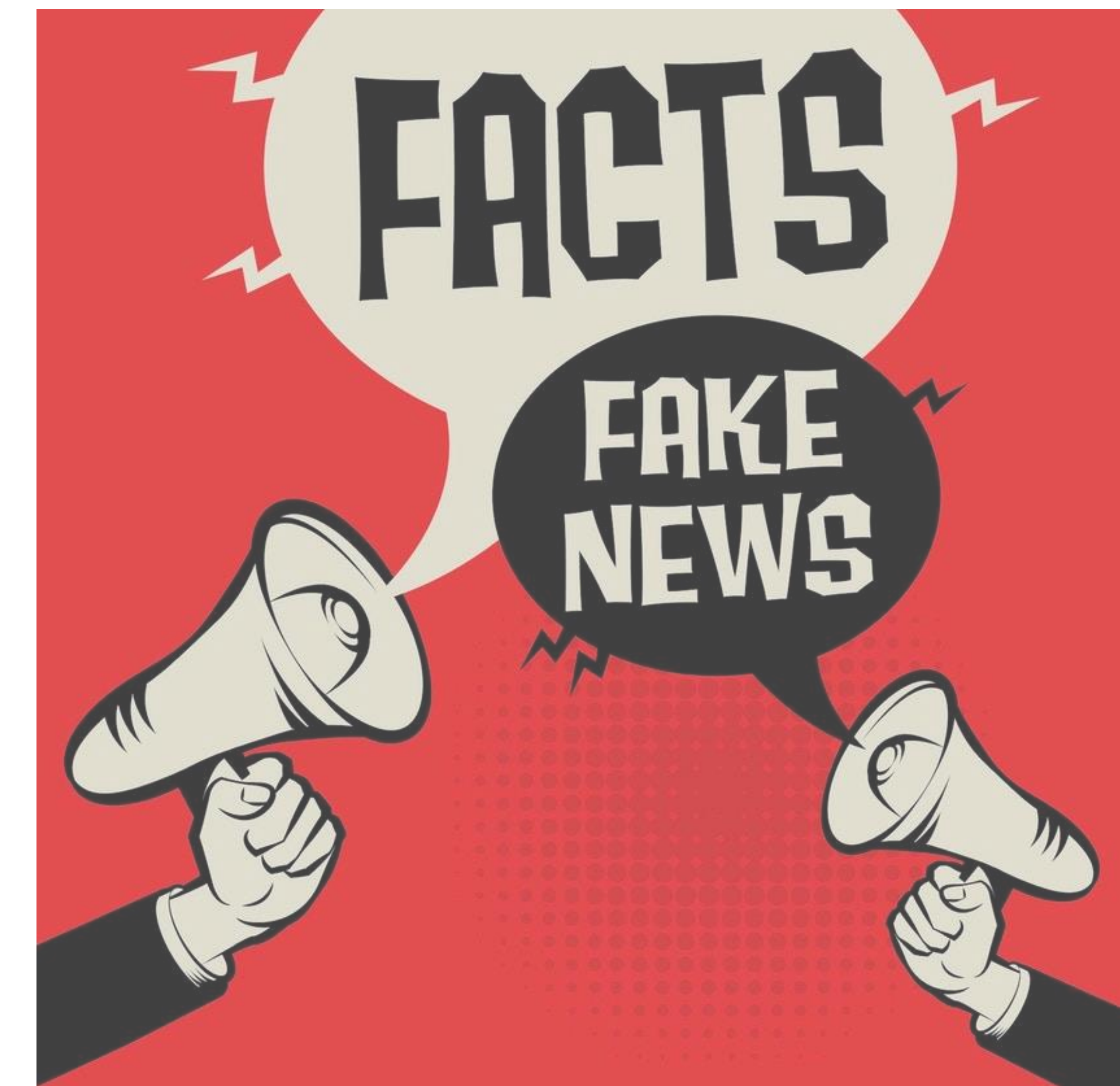
These and other whispers from Lady Macbeth to her husband promise to alleviate his doubts regarding his right to the throne. The ripples they cause bring about the death of the king and the downfall of Macbeth, thane of Glamis. Lady Macbeth is well aware of the seed of ambition which was planted in Macbeth by the witches of the forest, but Macbeth's honorable spirit impedes her desire, forcing her to use manipulative language to attain her personal objectives and gain power. The ways in which Lady Macbeth abuses Macbeth's doubts, how she exploits his insecurities and appeals to his sense of pride are prototypical examples of the strategies of manipulation, the likes of which can be seen throughout the current political climate of Europe. Whether it be "fake news" or the ill-use of social and regular media, crises in Europe are increasingly often employed for personal or political gain. Lady Macbeth's manipulation of Macbeth shares some connection to the political manipulation exerted on the people by those who aspire to power. Lady Macbeth and Macbeth both were convinced by false promises of Macbeth's claim to the kingdom, but their attitude to the prophecies was different. While Macbeth was passive, Lady Macbeth, recognizing her husband's weakness and driven by her own ambition, decided to act in order to ensure that the witches' promises would come true. She did not trust the power of the witches – she only used the prophecy to further her agenda. The tropes of manipulative language she used can be linked to the language used in the modern political environment, where people or parties attach their agendas to misinformation and pour their spirits in the ears of Europe, by taking advantage of people's uncertainties, and, urging their sense of national pride, they set forth their schemes.



Člověk v Tísni (People in Need)

We wanted to find out more about this Macbethian spread of misinformation in the Czech Republic, and especially how media manipulation affects organisations whose primary objective is to help the disadvantaged. That is why we visited People in Need (Člověk v tísní), a non-governmental, non-profit organization founded on the ideals of humanism, freedom, equality and solidarity. They uphold the fundamental values of human dignity and freedom, they fight for the right of everyone to make decisions about their own lives, and promote the rights included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Their activities include humanitarian aid, support of human rights, social work, and education and awareness, which includes their Migration Awareness Programme. Because they work in underprivileged areas and places of conflict, they, much like many other NGOs, are often targeted by misinformation and manipulation. We sat down with Tomáš Urban, People in Need's Head of Media Department, to discuss their experience with misinformation and manipulation in general. He briefly described how misinformation originates: "These [manipulative] outlets take a snippet of information and place it into a context that benefits them." He went on to describe a case when a Syrian-paid journalist used People in Need's work in the north of Syria to claim that they work with Al-Qaeda. "People who do not uphold journalistic standards simply write an outraged post, but the website makes it look like a news article." Urban said, and continued: "These days it is not difficult to build a media website. Suddenly you make the impression of writing news, while you are writing whatever you want." He said that these websites along with email chains are the primary channels through which they encounter misinformation, but he also added that these outlets are not necessarily political. "Some of the people who run these sites do so to make money, but for others, it's their hobby."

Find out more at:



When we asked him how misinformation tends to be used for political purposes, and if populist political parties are the perpetrators of misinformation he said: "Not quite. But politicians do give these manipulative reports the greatest panache. They see that people are reacting to something – for example that people dislike NGOs – and that people will vote for them because of it, therefore they make it their agenda." Finally we asked him if there is a way to face misinformation: "I think large sites like Facebook or YouTube are now realizing how the mechanism works and they, for example, delete fake profiles on their websites. Sometimes governments react to these events and initiate changes, like we have seen after the American elections and the affair with stolen Facebook data and Cambridge Analytica. Of course there are groups that are specifically dealing with this issue, and finally it just takes the effort of active young people."

From this point of view, much like in Macbeth, some of the greatest crises we encounter are not the results of some form of an inevitable fate, but it is rather the perception of this supposed inevitability that allows people to manufacture the crisis to begin with. While the civil war in Syria and the subsequent migration from the region are real and tangible issues, the crisis around the acceptance of people from the Middle East in Europe reveals itself as manufactured in this circular Macbethian mode. In fact, the construction of the xenophobic discourse around migration is particularly apparent in the Czech Republic, a country with negligible immigration from the Middle East but one of the highest levels of Islamophobia in Europe.