

# The Last Mummy

## Representations of Colonialism in Czechoslovak Travelogues about Egypt in the 1950s and 1960s

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Received 11 February 2025 | Accepted 6 October 2025 | Published online 22 December 2025

**Abstract.** This paper analyses travelogues published in the 1950s and 1960s by travellers visiting Egypt during this period, focusing on their role in shaping representations of colonialism, capitalism, and socialism. The narratives used in the travelogues served as a power instrument to depict the socialist regime as the “true path to development” and, in turn, to criticize the “exploitative” nature of colonial regimes and the capitalist system. The study shows the power that travellers’ narratives had in shaping the views of Czechoslovak citizens about events beyond their country’s borders, along with their influence on shaping colonial discourse, even though Czechoslovakia was never an active participant in colonial events.

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Representations, Travelogues, Socialist regime, Czechoslovakia

### Introduction

When Jiří Hanzelka and Miroslav Zikmund, the famous duo also known as H+Z, passed through Algiers, in their travel diaries they gave an unflattering description of the former French colonial territory:

“On the roads, you meet Arabs dressed in filthy carpets, you pass mud huts with toddlers outside them, suffering from hunger and disease, and in the vast vineyards you meet labourers who remind you of the images of the workers of pre-Josephine times. (...) The Algerian land is owned by French capitalists.”<sup>1</sup>

Readers of travelogues and of travel accounts written by contemporaries will not notice much variation in the way colonialism is represented in the travel writings of the 1950s and 1960s. With a few exceptions, they are consistent, and H+Z also draw the same picture the moment they cross the Egyptian border, which held

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1 Hanzelka and Zikmund, *Afrika snů a skutečnosti I*, 38.

a specific position in the imagination of the time. This study deals with that position and, in addition, answers several questions the first of which is a justification of why this study is based on travelogues.

Travelogues had an impact on the power relations in a given country because they gave the stay-at-home reader access to the traveller's view of the distant land. The author of a travelogue is not simply an observer: s/he also shapes and reproduces the image of the landscape and the people for someone<sup>2</sup> who has never (at least in the vast majority of cases) seen it with their own eyes.

First, the writer shares with their readers a system of values that language transfers in their cultural milieu. Stuart Hall defines "culture" in this case as the production and exchange of meanings within a group or society and its members.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, if we refer to this term and say that two individuals belong to the same "culture", we mean that members of the same culture share certain sets of concepts, images, and ideas that enable them to think about the world, and thus to interpret it in roughly similar ways—they share meaning. It is this "shared meaning" which in turn defines "us" as members of one group, community, or society, and the "other"—another group, community, or society—as beyond the boundaries of the milieu we have set out as "ours". Thus, if a traveller goes beyond the boundaries of their home, the way in which they interpret what they see beyond those boundaries gives us not only an idea of what the "other" is but can also provide a great deal of information about what the authors consider their own shared meanings. In other words, in addition to describing whatever there is, travel writing also shows how the travellers themselves interpret their own reality and how this reality is interpreted in the collective imagination and discourse.<sup>4</sup>

Second, readers of a travelogue are dependent on what they read to form an opinion regarding the "other" and to form a basis for the evaluation of that "other". It is for this reason that travel writing may become an effective tool in shaping and guiding the population's opinions in a certain direction within the official discourse of a given era which, in the period under discussion, was the socialist discourse. Mary Louise Pratt argues that the imperial powers, for example, used the portrayal of the civilizing mission as a particular "project", as a strategy that the "West" often used, in particular, to define the "other" as something that required its intervention. The features of a particular landscape are valuable to the traveller's home culture because they are the traveller's discovery, and at the same time the foreign culture's deficiencies suggest the need for social and material intervention in the home

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2 Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 201–29.

3 Hall, *Representation*, 2.

4 Hall, *Representation*, 1–22.

culture. This was one of the main arguments imperial colonial states used to justify their invasion of a foreign territory.<sup>5</sup> Although Pratt refers mainly to Western imperial states, the principle is applicable to other situations as well. The Soviet Union used similar strategies to spread “awareness” and “progress” to Third World states,<sup>6</sup> and so did Czechoslovakia, which is in the focus of this study.

Czechoslovakia came under the Soviet sphere of influence in the post-war years. Around 1947, it began to slowly sink into an economic crisis, aggravated by the growing tension between the Soviet Union and the countries of the West. Refusing to participate in the 1947 Paris Conference, Czechoslovakia was cut off from Western aid and influence and was increasingly considered part of the growing Communist bloc.<sup>7</sup> Especially after a drought and poor harvests, Czechoslovakia had to take a loan from the USSR and buy bread and grain for fodder. Other factors that led to a definitive alignment with the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia were the crisis of the security forces and the repercussions of the Slovak crisis.<sup>8</sup> The victory of the Communist Party in February 1948 marked the definitive incorporation of Czechoslovakia into the Soviet bloc within the Soviet sphere of influence.<sup>9</sup> Thus, any local Czechoslovak tradition after the war was influenced by factors typical of other Soviet satellite states and the Soviet Union itself.

Czechoslovakia was never either an imperial power or a colony. In terms of colonial discourse, it enjoyed an ambivalent and exceptional position via other eastern European states in the Soviet bloc. Sarah Lemmen calls this a situation of “non-colonial orientalism” because Edward Said’s original concept of Orientalism is insufficient to describe the exceptional position of Czechoslovakia: Said does not take into account countries that were not direct participants in the colonial expansion and their travellers, therefore had no need to represent the empire on their journeys. Instead, Lemmen tries to include in the equation states that were not among the Western colonial powers while never being colonies of any of those powers, which places these states in an ambivalent position and seems to leave them in the “outside” category, even though they are an important part of the colonial discourse.<sup>10</sup> Filip Herza adds that connection to the exotic colonial trade networks. The imagination of “exotic” otherness played an important role in the self-definition of the inhabitants of Czechoslovakia as demonstrated, among other things, by the fact that even in Prague, “ethnographic” parades of indigenous Africans were

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5 Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 201–29.

6 The Soviet Union and the third world. *Strategic Survey*, 64–68.

7 Dejmek, *Československo*, 448–65.

8 Dejmek, *Československo*, 448–65.

9 Dejmek, *Československo*, 448–65.

10 Lemmen, “Noncolonial Orientalism,” 209–27.

organised.<sup>11</sup> In his view, interest in what was happening in the colonies was due to the inhabitants of Czechoslovakia feeling part of civilised Europe, which led to their sense of superiority over the less developed part of the world.<sup>12</sup> Although Herza focuses on the earlier period of the Austro–Hungarian Empire, and Lemmen talks about the interwar period of the First Republic, their concepts are relevant also for the later period, the difference being that the sovereignty which Czechoslovak travellers felt over Third World countries in later years did not only stem from belonging to civilised Europe but also, and mainly, from being part of the Soviet bloc, a position suited to enrich colonial discourse from a point of view that had received little attention and has only started to attract interest in recent years.<sup>13</sup> In his discussion of the issue, Róbert Gárfik argues that postcolonial studies should also focus on the situation of (post)communist cultures in Central and Eastern Europe and should take into account their attitude towards non-European cultures.<sup>14</sup>

Soviet Oriental studies played an important role in shaping Soviet approaches to foreign and cultural policy, which were subsequently imposed on other countries of the Communist bloc. Unlike their Western counterparts, Soviet travel writers were not mere tourists: Soviet tourism was an official project. Travel opportunities were carefully determined by the Central Committee, and any author who went beyond their own country's borders was a representative of the Soviet bloc, and their opinion was to a greater or lesser extent shaped by the Soviet Union's attitude and policy toward the Third World.<sup>15</sup> Milica Bakic-Hayden is also inclined to take this view, stating that the “West” and “East” were not so much places as projects. Hayden discusses the applicability of the concept of Orientalism to non-colonial states, especially the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. She argues that just as the colonial states felt superior to their colonies, so did the “civilized” West of Europe feel superior to its Eastern counterpart, and Eastern European states likewise evaluated the countries to which they felt superior—especially the Third World.<sup>16</sup> Barbora Buzássyová elaborates on this issue by adding that, in the case of Czechoslovakia, it was the representations of Africa and Africans that allowed the Czechoslovak population to perceive their own socialist culture as superior to the “developing” South, thanks to the progressiveness of the socialist regime but, at the same time and for the same reason, equally superior to the morally corrupt West. An example of this dynamic is the concept of socialist “missionaries”—socialist experts

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11 Macková and Storchová, eds, “Visualizing the Orient,” 95–106.

12 Herza, *Imaginace jinakosti*, 145.

13 Gárfik and Puckerova, *Postcolonial Europe*, 283–87.

14 Gárfik and Puckerova, *Postcolonial Europe*, 283–87.

15 Gárfik and Puckerova, *Postcolonial Europe*, 315–18.

16 Bakic-Hayden, “Nesting Orientalisms,” 917–20.

who disseminated the values, know-how, and technological advances of socialism to African people under the banner of the socialist regime. Such imposed discursive constructions helped to create a strategy that enabled to cope with the state of “in-betweenness” that for the Soviet world was represented by the label of the “Second World”—that is, not being part of the Western “First World,” but at the same time not being a former colony in the Third World.<sup>17</sup> These representational strategies were largely determined by factors beyond the control of the Soviet world, i.e., the ideological apparatus of the state, which set itself the goal of displaying a “positive national experience.”<sup>18</sup>

Arjun Appadurai uses a term that suitably describes and explains the situation—*ideoscapes*. Appadurai works with the concept of *imagined worlds*, “multiple worlds which are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of people and groups spread around the globe,”<sup>19</sup> one layer of which is the ideoscape. In a world in which the media have a major say in sifting information, the reader is presented with an immeasurable number of images and narratives created by these media, which may change and take shape depending on their audience and the interests of those who own and control them. The boundaries between the ‘real’ and the ‘fictional’ they see are blurred. Therefore, the further audiences are from a direct experience of events, the more they tend to create imagined worlds that are chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastical, especially when judged against the criteria of another perspective, another imagined world—and their form is often related to state ideologies and the counter-ideologies of movements that are explicitly oriented towards the seizure of state power or parts thereof.<sup>20</sup> Alexei Yurchak, who discusses the concept of the “Imaginary West,” adds that in Soviet society (and we can extend the same principle to the socialist countries under Soviet control), there was an interesting paradox that can be described by the term “abroad” (in Russian, *zagranitsa*).<sup>21</sup> On the one hand, Soviet ideals and values were internationally oriented and were directed “outward” from the Soviet Union—they were to be spread beyond the borders of the homeland, to all corners of the world, to the west and to the east.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, during some periods of the regime it was practically impossible for residents of the Soviet Union and other Soviet states to travel anywhere.<sup>23</sup> For example, in the 1950s it was virtually impossible to travel unless one was a member of the Communist Party,<sup>24</sup>

17 Kalczewiak and Kozłowska, *The World beyond the West*, 145.

18 Bassin and Kelly, *Soviet and Post-Soviet Identities*, 73.

19 Appadurai, *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy*, 296.

20 Appadurai, *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy*, 299.

21 Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 158–80.

22 Kalczewiak and Kozłowska, *The World beyond the West*, 140.

23 Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 158–80.

24 Borovička, *Velké dějiny země koruny české*, 622–23.

and even then, the authorities and the executive branches of State Security and the Communist Party were in a position to prevent any travel, and even if one was not prevented by state forces, the actual application for an exit visa was a complicated and long-drawn-out procedure.<sup>25</sup>

The opportunity to leave Czechoslovakia was similarly constrained. Even though in the second half of the 1960s, the restrictions on travel loosened, and around 1965 the number of Czechoslovak citizens travelling to “Western” countries increased, the easing did not last long. In that year, a new law on travel documents was passed which, to some extent, liberalized the opportunity to go abroad and made it much easier to obtain an exit visa. However, this more “relaxed” period, also known as the “melting” period, came to an end when Warsaw Pact troops crossed the border in 1968. Citizens’ free travel abroad was restricted by new laws and norms. In the following years of Normalization, regulatory restrictions were applied, particularly regarding travel documents; before the journey, one had to request essentially an allocation from the bank a so-called Foreign Exchange Pledge, and when it was granted, the sale of the foreign currency had to be required. This complex process was further complicated by interference from the Communist Party. Once a person applied for an exit visa, it had to be confirmed by their employer, school or, in the case of men of draft age, the district military administration.<sup>26</sup> In brief, there was a tightening of both the resources available from abroad and citizens’ movement outside the borders of their home country.<sup>27</sup>

This created an interesting contradictory situation—how was it possible to spread Soviet ideals and values in places where it was impossible to go? Or conversely, how could one know what was “out there” without being able to look? This is precisely why the term *zagraniťsa* in socialist discourse refers to a rather imaginary place: known and unknown, material and abstract, and simultaneously mundane and exotic. Such a place was defined by the fact that it was not precisely defined, not located in any particular place, only “there” and “with them,” thus constituting the opposite of what was “here” and “with us.” In a way, then, it did not exist in the real world, while it was more than present in the minds of the Soviet bloc’s population in the form of narratives. The imaginary West was a local archetypal manifestation that existed only where the “real West” did not. These images were then implanted into Soviet culture, literature, and other spheres. They were integrated into contemporary discourse, and as such contained the laws and principles of organization that gradually shaped certain concepts and understandings in each given discourse.<sup>28</sup>

25 Borovička, *Velké dějiny zemí koruny české*, 622–23.

26 Mašková, Ripka, *Železná opona v Československu*, 27.

27 Zita, “How We Understand the Beats,” 103–18.

28 Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 158–62.

## Czechoslovak travellers in Egypt

Egypt holds a particularly significant place in the context of Czechoslovak foreign relations in the given period. It was the first African country to establish diplomatic relations with.<sup>29</sup> According to Adéla Jůnová Macková, diplomatic relations between Egypt and Czechoslovakia had a long tradition, stretching back to the early 20th century. In the 1920s, a Czechoslovak consulate was established in Alexandria, during World War II Egypt officially accepted the exiled Czechoslovak government, and in 1956 the Czechoslovak office in Egypt was upgraded to embassy status. Moreover, the countries had strong trade relations with each other - Egypt exported cotton to Czechoslovakia in exchange for textile products and consumer goods. During the Second World War, arms exports from Czechoslovakia to Egypt intensified and continued after the war.<sup>30</sup> In the 1950s, relations between the Soviet Union and Egypt strengthened, not only due to the export of arms from Czechoslovakia but also because of the practical Soviet support of Egyptian industrial development.<sup>31</sup> As a result, cultural relations between Egypt and Czechoslovakia, which will be discussed below regarding the Czechoslovak cultural delegation, could also develop.<sup>32</sup>

I will show how the colonial regime in Egypt was represented in the travelogues of Czechoslovak authors, demonstrating how they changed over time, the historical events they corresponded with, and the purposes Czechoslovak socialist discourse used the representations for. The following six travelogues have been selected<sup>33</sup>: *Afrika snů a skutečnosti* [Africa: The Dream and Reality I] by Jiří Hanzelka and Miroslav Zikmund;<sup>34</sup> *Saharou a pralesem* [Through the Sahara and the Rainforest] by František Alexander Elstner;<sup>35</sup> *Pod egyptským půlměsícem* [Under the Egyptian Crescent Moon] by Jaroslav Putík;<sup>36</sup> *Na březích Nilu* [On the Banks of the Nile] by Jaroslav Raimund Vávra;<sup>37</sup> *Lety proti slunci* [Flights against the Sun, the selected short story being *View from the Pyramids*] by Adolf Hoffmeister;<sup>38</sup> and *V Egyptě nejsou jen pyramidy* (There are not only Pyramids in Egypt) by Lumír Hanák.<sup>39</sup>

29 Vavrečková. "Czechoslovakian–Egyptian Relations," 73–87.

30 Jůnová Macková, "A. Journey of Czechoslovak Cultural Delegation to Egypt in 1956," 100–11.

31 Jůnová Macková, "A. Journey of Czechoslovak Cultural Delegation to Egypt in 1956," 100–11.

32 Jůnová Macková, "A. Journey of Czechoslovak Cultural Delegation to Egypt in 1956," 100–11.

33 This is a selection of Czechoslovak travelogues. The absence of Slovak authors is purely accidental, none having been found which met the criteria for the study.

34 *Afrika snů a skutečnosti I*. (1952).

35 *Saharou a pralesem* (1956).

36 *Pod egyptským půlměsícem* (1957).

37 *Na březích Nilu* (1958).

38 *Lety proti slunci* (the story I selected: *Výhlídka z pyramid*, 1959).

39 Hanák and Halaška, *V Egyptě nejsou jen pyramidy*.

Travellers are of different types and backgrounds. Jiří Hanzelka and Miroslav Zikmund, known mainly by the acronym H+Z, probably the most famous pair of Czechoslovak travellers, made two journeys around the world, with Egypt being only one of their first stops. The Czechoslovak authorities and Communist Party supported and actively contributed to Hanzelka and Zikmund becoming cultural icons, because their popularity served as a tool to recruit into Communist ranks others from the intellectual and social elites. According to Jiřina Šmejkalová, their legacy also served as a model for the suppression of the old, truly “popular” culture.<sup>40</sup> František Alexander Elstner travelled through Africa with his wife and son in an attempt to set a long-distance record from Prague to the equator in a Czechoslovak car, an Aero Minor, and their records and reports were subsequently turned into into a travelogue.<sup>41</sup>

The situation of Jaroslav Putík and Adolf Hoffmeister is somewhat peculiar. Both of them were part of the Czechoslovak cultural delegation, and together with František Lexa, the founder of Czechoslovak Egyptology studies, Zbyněk Žába, the artist Andrej Bagár, and the cinematographer Ivan Frič, they visited Egypt. Both Putík and Hoffmeister wrote travelogues about their trip, which were published over the following years.<sup>42</sup> In the 1950s a Cultural Agreement was signed between Egypt and Czechoslovakia with the that Egypt should find new cultural, commercial, and political opportunities in Europe. These included, among others, sharing of gramophone records, exchanging archaeological findings, translating publications, exporting films, and student exchanges. In 1955, a Czechoslovak delegation travelled to Egypt, and in 1956 a cultural delegation was to be sent in the opposite direction as well, creating a very interesting situation. At that time the Oriental Institute worked within the Czechoslovakia Academy of Sciences. Thus, the concept of the “New Orient” was created for the public, which encouraged the population of Czechoslovakia to get acquainted with Oriental countries as much as possible, and Oriental countries were suddenly perceived as partners on the road to progress.<sup>43</sup> The last of the authors in our focus, Lumír Hanák, went to Egypt to establish the first Czechoslovak cultural centre in a non-socialist country.<sup>44</sup> Since this study relies heavily on excerpts taken directly from travelogues, for the sake of clarity they are translated into English by the author.

Importantly, none of these journeys occurred merely for its own sake. Despite the diversity of travellers involved—from cultural delegates to journalists—they

40 Šmejkalová, “Command Celebrities,” 72–86.

41 Elstner, “Introduction.”

42 Putík, “Introduction.”

43 Jůnová Macková, “A. Journey of Czechoslovak Cultural Delegation to Egypt in 1956,” 100–11.

44 Hanák and Halaška, *V Egyptě nejsou jen pyramidy*, 13.

shared one essential feature: a connection to state-sanctioned structures of power. At the very beginning of Vávra's travelogue, it is explicitly stated that at the airport he was met by a delegation from the Czechoslovak embassy.<sup>45</sup>

Whether through official delegations<sup>46</sup> or industrial sponsorship,<sup>47</sup> their travel invariably depended on institutional approval. In the early state socialism, where foreign travel was tightly regulated and exit visas were difficult to obtain, such journeys were generally accessible only to those aligned with, or at least compliant with the regime's ideological priorities.

Moreover, the narratives produced by these travellers were subject to the constraints of a tightly controlled media environment.<sup>48</sup> Publishing houses operated within the ideological boundaries set by the state, and content had to fit within the regime's broader messages. While it is difficult to assess each author's personal convictions, the anti-imperialist and pro-socialist rhetoric in their travelogues cannot be separated from the political conditions under which their texts were written and approved. In this sense, the travelogues must be read not only as records of observations abroad, but also as products of a particular ideological and institutional apparatus.

It is also important to briefly reflect on the terminology used both within these travelogues and in this analysis. Words such as "authenticity" and "developing," while frequently employed in the sources and also by their authors, carry cultural and ideological weight that has shifted over time. Fully aware of their evolving connotations and the need for a critical distance, this study engages with the terms in the context in which they were originally written and circulated.

## Representations of Colonialism in Egypt before President Nasser

In the 1950s and 1960s, there were many similarities between the descriptions of Egypt and other colonies under Western domination. During their travels, Hanzelka and Zikmund<sup>49</sup> mainly criticised the colonial masters for their efforts to keep their colonies undeveloped, an undeveloped population being easier to control. In addition, they alleged that the colonisers robbed the indigenous people of their land and

45 Elstner, *Saharou a pralesem*, 12.

46 Hoffmeister, *Lety proti slunci*: Also: Putík, *Pod egyptským půlměsícem*. Also: Hanák and Halaška, *V Egyptě nejsou jen pyramidy*.

47 Hanzelka and Zikmund, *Afrika snů a skutečnosti I.*, Also: Elstner, *Saharou a pralesem*.

48 Kaplan, Tomášek, *O cenzuře v Československu v letech 1945–1956: studie*.

49 The author has dealt with the representations of colonialism in the travelogues of Jiří Hanzelka and Miroslav Zikmund in another study, see: Chejnová, "Černá kůže – ta je přece levnější než gumové boty."

property, stating that Western colonial armies came and forcibly turned “undeveloped” countries into colonies, while people were forcibly taken as slaves.<sup>50</sup> They seized the lands of the “coloured nations,”<sup>51</sup> “shamelessly sucked them dry,”<sup>52</sup> and took everything that came from their labour in order to “profit as much as possible.”<sup>53</sup> In addition, they forcibly moved the population from place to place and suppressed any protests in a bloody and immediate manner,<sup>54</sup> as we can see in other parts of the travelogues:

“At that time the fellahs refused to pay any taxes at all, for better or worse, and whole villages were burned down and plundered.”<sup>55</sup>

During their travels around the world, Hanzelka and Zikmund repeatedly show the rationale for treating local populations in this way: it is with their sense of superiority that the colonial powers justify their interference in the functioning of the undeveloped territory of the colony. As cited above, Mary Louise Pratt explained that this was the colonial powers’ popular strategy to justify invading someone else’s territory.<sup>56</sup> As a result, especially during the early 1950s and up until 1956, travellers would describe Egypt upon their arrival as follows:

“How different is the view of a North African city! It’s like stepping straight into the Middle Ages! There is a dividing line between temperate Europe and hot Africa, between advanced learning and backward wastelands.”<sup>57</sup>

Hanzelka and Zikmund frequently describe seeing children sleeping on the waterfront next to piles of garbage.<sup>58</sup> Elstner adds that merchants tell him that there is a lot of theft, because people are poor and have nothing, so they need to take from someone else.<sup>59</sup> For Czechoslovak travellers, the reason for such conditions is the colonial regime:

“Africans of colour live under colonial conditions to this day. (...) They have already given so much of their land and sweat to white people that they have every right to demand that their country should not be »the dark part of the world«.”<sup>60</sup>

50 Vávra, *Na březích Nilu: Kapitoly egyptské*, 123.

51 Vávra, *Na březích Nilu: Kapitoly egyptské*, 123.

52 Vávra, *Na březích Nilu: Kapitoly egyptské*, 123.

53 Vávra, *Na březích Nilu: Kapitoly egyptské*, 123.

54 Chejnová, “Černá kůže – ta je přece levnější než gumové boty.”

55 Vávra, *Na březích Nilu: Kapitoly egyptské*, 76.

56 Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 201–29.

57 Vávra, *Na březích Nilu: Kapitoly egyptské*, 69.

58 Hanzelka and Zikmund, *Afrika snů a skutečnosti*, 112.

59 Elstner, *Saharou a pralesem*, 99.

60 Elstner, *Saharou a pralesem*, 55.

They say that Africa lacks transportation links and is underdeveloped.<sup>61</sup> British interference in Egypt is seen as “an outrageous violation of state sovereignty,”<sup>62</sup> and this interference has caused vast inequalities in the social structure of the Egyptian population. On the one hand, we have “the unprecedented poverty of the fellah,”<sup>63</sup> whose lives could be compared to those of servants or slaves in ancient times, as they are illiterate, have no possessions, and have no access to health care; on the other hand, there is a stratum of society abounding in unimaginable wealth—the effendi and royalty.<sup>64</sup> The gap between the wealth of the upper classes and the poverty of common people is due to the upper classes’ apparent favour for the capitalist regime of Western countries. Socialist discourse interprets capitalist societies as a dispute between the “oppressed poor” and the “rich ruling”<sup>65</sup> classes, a dichotomy that is detectable in our example. The rich upper class supported by capitalists is provided for, while children of the lowest society sleep on the waterfront in the garbage. This dichotomy is one of the footholds for the socialist regime to show to society that capitalism is a doomed force, while socialism brings the promise of a happy future, therefore its path to victory over capitalist states must be accelerated.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, unlike the capitalist states, socialists interpreted their efforts as an international effort, an all-encompassing solidarity of the working classes regardless of origin or religion,<sup>67</sup> since the socialist establishment knows no superiority of race or gender.<sup>68</sup> This is why representations of capitalism are closely linked to representations of colonialism.

Hanzelka and Zikmund show their opposition to the capitalist way of life by criticising Western tourists and how Western capitalism robs the places they visit of their authenticity. Thus, their description of the prototypical Western tourist mostly goes like this: “A noisy group of tourists”<sup>69</sup> with a “shrieking voice of a lady adorned with bracelets and necklaces”<sup>70</sup> and a gentleman who yawns twice and then “rolls his cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other in annoyance, and gives a command to leave.”<sup>71</sup>

Their description is based on the fact that tourists, spoiled by capitalism, cannot appreciate the beauty of a given place in the same way as our travellers do. The

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61 Elstner, *Saharou a pralesem*, 55.

62 Hanzelka and Zikmund, *Afrika snů a skutečnosti I*, 124.

63 Hanzelka and Zikmund, *Afrika snů a skutečnosti I*, 126.

64 Hanzelka and Zikmund, *Afrika snů a skutečnosti I*, 126.

65 Maiddin, “The Capitalist Versus Communist Propaganda,” 130.

66 Maiddin, “The Capitalist Versus Communist Propaganda,” 130.

67 Maiddin, “The Capitalist Versus Communist Propaganda,” 131.

68 Nečasová, *Nový socialistický člověk: Československo 1948–1956*, 143.

69 Hanzelka and Zikmund, *Afrika snů a skutečnosti I*, 267.

70 Hanzelka and Zikmund, *Afrika snů a skutečnosti I*, 267.

71 Hanzelka and Zikmund, *Afrika snů a skutečnosti I*, 267.

authenticity of the place is gradually destroyed by imported Western goods. An example of the phenomenon is the aptly named Coca-Colonisation, a name used by Hanzelka and Zikmund to describe how far the influence of American imports had extended—it was simply a matter of assessing where and to what extent advertisements or sales of Coca-Cola could be encountered: “A neon bottle of COCA-COLA, glowing in the dark night; an eloquent omen of America in the land of the pyramids.”<sup>72</sup> Other travellers apply the same phenomenon: for example, Hoffmeister talks of an encounter with American female tourists at the pyramids. He describes the ladies as “especially unruly”<sup>73</sup> and hypocritical, and “of a dangerous age or of undetermined stature.”<sup>74</sup>

Over time, criticism of tourists ceases to be directed at Westerners in general, and tends to be more focused on Americans. Thus, for example, there are situations in which a French tourist in a travelogue condemns Americans for their approach to history and monuments, complaining that nations with no history of their own cannot understand.<sup>75</sup> Hanák adds to this description as he gazes with an ironic smile at American women sitting on camels with their “convulsive movements,”<sup>76</sup> and their “stiff calves, above which you will see the fashionable colour of women’s underwear in America this year,”<sup>77</sup> while heads are covered with scarves which are worn anywhere but Egypt, making them look ridiculous.<sup>78</sup>

The fact that the emphasis was shifted to criticising American tourists in particular is probably related to the balance of power during the Cold War, and to the fact that, after World War II, the Socialist regime’s main enemy was capitalism, represented primarily by Great Britain and the United States, with “capitalism” and “capitalists” referring mainly to the United States because of its intense involvement in the conflict.<sup>79</sup>

Negative representations and criticisms of the capitalist establishment, along with criticisms of colonialism, are subsequently used in the travelogues to highlight the

72 Hanzelka and Zikmund, *Afrika snů a skutečnosti I*. Naše vojsko, 110; However, notes about Coca-Colonisation appear throughout all the travelogues from the first trip of the H+Z travel duo. For example, in the travelogue “Tam zařekou je Argentina” it is mentioned that “The Coca-Colonization of La Paz, however, exceeded even the most imaginative limits of intrusiveness.” (Coca-kolonisace La Pazu však překročila i nejpomyslnější meze vtíravosti.) See “Tam zařekou je Argentina,” 137.

73 Hoffmeister, *Lety proti slunci*, 167–68.

74 Hoffmeister, *Lety proti slunci*, 167–68.

75 Hoffmeister, *Lety proti slunci*, 183.

76 Hanák and Halaška, *V Egyptě nejsou jen pyramidy*, 16.

77 Hanák and Halaška, *V Egyptě nejsou jen pyramidy*, 16.

78 Hanák and Halaška, *V Egyptě nejsou jen pyramidy*, 16.

79 Maiddin, “The Capitalist Versus Communist Propaganda,” 123–24.

progressiveness of the socialist regime, perceived as an “establishment of civilised and free peoples.”<sup>80</sup> The representation of the socialist regime will be discussed further below.

To briefly conclude, the travelogues written before 1956 are marked by a critique of colonial exploitation and the portrayal of Egypt in a phase of stagnation. However, 1956 is a significant turning point - not only in Egypt's political history with the rise of President Nasser and the nationalization of the Suez Canal, but also in the way Czechoslovak travel writing narratives changed. The post-1956 travelogues reflect a shift from colonial condemnation to cautious admiration of Egypt's modernization efforts and alignment with socialist principles. The following chapter explores this discursive transformation, highlighting how changes influenced the structure, tone, and ideological alignment of Czechoslovak travel writing.

### Changes in representations after 1956

In addition to recurring representations, the travelogues written after 1956 by Jaroslav Putík,<sup>81</sup> Jaroslav Raimund Vávra,<sup>82</sup> Adolf Hoffmeister,<sup>83</sup> and Lumír Hanák,<sup>84</sup> introduce changes the study is going to explore as follows.

From the examples below, it will be clear that change is manifested not only in the portrayal of the Egyptian capital, Cairo, which suddenly seems to be the image of modernity, but in many other aspects of everyday life as well. This change is linked to the historical events that took place in the country at that time, primarily the rise to power of President Nasser.

At one point, the travellers go to Egypt and their description of what they see is noticeably different from that of their predecessors:

“The island has been transformed into a residential district of diplomats, with their sports clubs and swimming pools.”<sup>85</sup>

Cairo is described as a global and cosmopolitan city,<sup>86</sup> full of terraced skyscrapers<sup>87</sup> towering over the poorer neighbourhoods with a condescending glare.<sup>88</sup> Travellers feel a great deal of disillusionment with how the city has changed:

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80 Vávra, *Na březích Nilu*, 124.

81 Putík, *Pod egyptským půlměsícem*.

82 Vávra, *Na březích Nilu*.

83 Hoffmeister, *Lety proti slunci*.

84 Hanák, and Halaška, *V Egyptě nejsou jen pyramidy*.

85 Vávra, *Na březích Nilu: Kapitoly egyptské*, 15.

86 Vávra, *Na březích Nilu*, 236.

87 Hoffmeister, *Lety proti slunci*, 162.

88 Hoffmeister, *Lety proti slunci*, 162.

“Where has the Orient gone, the gurgling fountains, the oases of silence, the peace and surrender to the authority of Allah? The streets are a constant stream of cars, huge advertisements [...]”<sup>89</sup>

Some of them speak of this change as the end of an era, as Cairo loses its “Oriental authenticity”<sup>90</sup> with the emergence of modernity and painfully awakens from the gloom of centuries of dreaming in the Orient.<sup>91</sup> “Medieval Cairo”<sup>92</sup> has definitely disappeared from their view of the city and has been replaced by a “modernising building mess.”<sup>93</sup> Travellers are coming to terms with the fact that there is nothing left of the “old” Cairo: its Oriental charm has faded and the city has become “one of the world’s great Western cities, which emerged from the ground at the very edge of the Orient.”<sup>94</sup>

First, this change is equally noticeable, for example, in the female sphere and in the new way women dress. Several travellers give an elaborate description of how they suddenly meet beautiful girls wearing the latest European fashion of Italian and French designers, such as the very same girls wear, for example, in Athens. Such ladies are everywhere, in shops, cafés, and even offices. However, their modern appearance does not detract from their Oriental beauty, with dark oriental eyes and dark wavy hair.<sup>95</sup> The author adds that in his journey through Egypt he never once saw “a truly veiled woman.”<sup>96</sup> Moreover, this is not just about fashion. It shows the improved living conditions of Egyptian women in general: women have started to go out to work, and travellers can see them in pharmacies, at the machines, in the hospitals, and many of them as students attending universities or wearing soldiers’ uniforms.<sup>97</sup>

This description corresponds to the image and characteristics of the “new socialist woman” in Czechoslovakia. The new socialist woman, a term used by Denisa Nečasová, refers to a new variant of the “new socialist man.” She was an ambivalent figure, as her new role did not match much with other variations of the new socialist man, as there were several overlapping types—the woman had her traditional role as a mother and housewife, which did not fit well with her “new” role

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89 Putík, *Pod egyptským půlměsícem*, 9.

90 Vávra, *Na březích Nilu*, 236.

91 Vávra, *Na březích Nilu*, 236.

92 Vávra, *Na březích Nilu*, 16.

93 Vávra, *Na březích Nilu*, 16.

94 Vávra, *Na březích Nilu*, 19.

95 Vávra, *Na březích Nilu*, 18.

96 Vávra, *Na březích Nilu*, 18.

97 Vávra, *Na březích Nilu*, 18.

as a politically engaged worker. Thus, the images of the new socialist woman were not as homogeneous as images of the socialist man. The then/now dichotomy was often used in her depiction.<sup>98</sup> Nečasová lists three variations of this dichotomy: the tediousness of work incompatible with joyful creation; the scarcity of chances for self-employment or lack of public engagement, in contrast with the current potential of socialism; and a grey future, as opposed to the expectations of a happy tomorrow under the Communist regime. Nečasová very aptly mentions Karla Jirků as an example of a woman who, before the war, laboured as a sewing machine operator, dependent on the will of her employer, but in the 1950s a “new Karla” was born who, under the changes, decided give up sewing and pick up the drilling machine,<sup>99</sup> just as the new Egyptian women took to the soldier’s ranks.

Second, a similar situation is related to the art and film industries. The modernity of Egypt is also related to the fact that Egypt is opening up more to the world. This is associated with the emergence of biographies and American films, which are a favourite subject of Czechoslovak travellers who describe the experience of going to the cinema as overstimulating, with jarring bright neon and with vibrant posters offering passers-by an experience in an overcooled cinema as a promise of a short escape from the hot Egyptian summer streets.<sup>100</sup> American films are described as murderous revolvers, crashing cars, the painted smiles of a girl drifting through the big city and ruthless thieves fleeing a robbed bank. Travel writers report that American films are extremely popular and played in cinemas from Alexandria to Cairo:

“Hundreds of thousands of Egyptians today and every day watch the technically and colour-perfectly rendered tales of unruly American school teachers, gangsters, muggings, the careers of famous con men, murder mysteries, kidnappings in lavish bathhouses, barroom brawls, Korean War soldier stories, and manly cowboys, the noblest spectacle yet because the bad guys are bound to sink under an appropriate dose of lead bullets.”<sup>101</sup>

According to the authors, these films inject national enthusiasm into Egypt together with the ferments of apathy, the cynicism and the boredom of the gilded carrousel of America instead of the joy of life.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, they are spreading around the world like “scabies and horrible filth.”<sup>103</sup> Putík, however, and quite surprisingly, also sees the

98 Nečasová, *Nový socialistický člověk*, 127–29.

99 Nečasová, *Nový socialistický člověk: Československo 1948–1956*, 129.

100 Vávra, *Na březích Nilu: Kapitoly egyptské*, 17–18.

101 Putík, *Pod egyptským půlměsícem*, 69–70.

102 Putík, *Pod egyptským půlměsícem*, 69–70.

103 Putík, *Pod egyptským půlměsícem*, 71.

positive side of this, because in his opinion, if people “at home” were to see some of these American films, they would realise the true prospects of the socialist regime:

“Perhaps it would be good to show our people such films as well; it would probably be the best school and hymn of praise for the socialist morality.”<sup>104</sup>

For Putík, socialist films are “good, entertaining, cheerful, clean, and comprehensible to the people,”<sup>105</sup> compared to those coming from the America.

Sahul Hamid Mohamed Maiddin argues that the Cold War was primarily a war of ideologies in order to avoid direct military aggression: explicit and implicit ideological actions associated with the production and distribution of propaganda materials, such as printed communications, broadcast news, films, books and library printings, exhibitions and exchange programs, which enabled this ideological struggle to find its way onto the cinema screen at home and abroad.<sup>106</sup> According to Maiddin, American films were not, as per Soviet films during the Cold War, a direct tool of the state apparatus for the dissemination of state propaganda;<sup>107</sup> he felt that their main aim was to convey and sell the values and benefits of liberal capitalism and to demonstrate them as effectively as possible to people all over the world. The American film industry in the 1950s was characterised by the portrayal of communism as a threat to the United States.<sup>108</sup> Thus, the description of American film is used in this context to show what is wrong with the capitalist regime, while the qualities and the positive aspects of socialist film are highlighted.

Clearly, the period of change corresponds with the time in the mid-1950s when Gamal Abdel Nasser came to power in Egypt and prompted the Suez Crisis by nationalizing the Suez Canal to save sufficient funds for building the Aswan Dam in southern Egypt. Owing to diplomatic and economic pressure, British forces withdrew some 90,000 British troops from Egypt, and Western states saw this development as the first step towards a definitive loss of influence in the colonial states of Africa and Asia, since up to two-thirds of the total European oil supply was being transported through the canal every day. This was therefore an extremely important area.<sup>109</sup>

There is no evidence that the Soviet Union was actively involved in Egyptian affairs from the start, probably because of a clash of beliefs between the two sides: the Soviet Union disagreed with the position which religion played in President

104 Putík, *Pod egyptským pŕlměsícem*, 71.

105 Putík, *Pod egyptským pŕlměsícem*, 71.

106 Maiddin, “The Capitalist Versus Communist Propaganda,” 124–29.

107 Shaw and Youngblood, “Cold War Sport, Film, and Propaganda,” 163.

108 Shaw and Youngblood, “Cold War Sport, Film, and Propaganda,” 163.

109 McDermott, *Risk-taking in International Politics*, 135–37.

Nasser's ideology and vice versa.<sup>110</sup> The Communist Party of Egypt therefore had a special position, since it was not given the opportunity to rise to the top of the leadership, and was kept aloof and strictly controlled. Once Nasser refused to join any Western alliance, thus losing possible support from Western states, the Soviet Union saw a window of opportunity.<sup>111</sup> In 1953, Egypt signed an agreement with the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, and Poland, whereby Egyptian cotton was to be exchanged for grain supplies. In the same year, an agreement was signed also with the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, when they started to export arms to Egypt, and a Soviet embassy was established in Cairo.<sup>112</sup> During the 1950s, Czechoslovakia was an arms supplier to several Third World countries, which many Western states saw as an attempt by the Soviet Union to infiltrate the affairs of these countries, which in turn probably contributed to the one of the most tense moments of the Cold War, the Suez Crisis.<sup>113</sup>

President Nasser cannot be said to have been subsequently sympathetic to the socialist regime or to the Soviet Union, while both Egypt and Czechoslovakia had the western world and the United States as a common enemy. President Nasser believed that he was standing against three enemies: the imperialists, who for him meant Britain and the United States; Israel as the "imperialist base in the heart of the Arab homeland";<sup>114</sup> and the Arab reactionaries. Nevertheless, the United States was seen as the greatest and most powerful enemy when it refused to provide the support the country needed. This is why the travelogues started to show Egypt's slight and gradual inclination towards socialism. Putík describes this situation as follows:

"Like a bolt from the blue, the news struck that Egypt was buying arms in Czechoslovakia in exchange for cotton and rice. (...) At the very moment when Egypt dared to act completely independently—probably for the first time in centuries—it had to turn to the Socialist countries. Not a paradox, but a historical necessity."<sup>115</sup>

By "historical necessity," Jaroslav Putík might have been suggesting that the Soviet Union saw itself as the most advanced state in the world. According to Nečasová, the Soviet Union was "the closest to the goal of all countries on the road to communism, so it had to meet the requirements of the highest cultural maturity

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110 Hussini, *Soviet–Egyptian Relations, 1945–85*, 51.

111 Hussini, *Soviet–Egyptian Relations, 1945–85*, 51.

112 Hussini, *Soviet–Egyptian Relations, 1945–85*, 51.

113 Taterová, "Czechoslovak–Egyptian Relations," 318–39.

114 James, *Nasser and His Enemies*, 23.

115 Putík, *Pod egyptským půlměsícem*, 89–90.

for the sake of the internal coherence of the narrative.”<sup>116</sup> It is possible then that historical necessity was meant to be a forward movement whereby every state would automatically, sooner or later, understand that the socialist regime was the most advanced form of existence to be reached and cultivated.

Even after 1956, travellers sometimes refer to colonialism and colonial states, but in most cases these tend to be remarks connected to a thing of the distant past. They speak of buildings erected by British troops in the city, such as barracks that are now being demolished “with sincere pleasure”<sup>117</sup> and colonial-style hotels that carry “the sadness of a bygone glory.”<sup>118</sup> The British colonial past is still present at every turn, for example in the marketplaces when travellers deal with Egyptian merchants: when the traveller refuses to buy goods from the Egyptian merchant, and when they see the look on his face, they are sure that the merchant secretly sees them as “English monsters.”<sup>119</sup> When colonial states are mentioned or described as active agents, the aim is mainly to describe their inevitable disintegration and the demise of their colonial possessions, a disintegration which will not be stopped by a desperate attempt at attack or intimidation but will, more possibly, be hastened by any independence movement.<sup>120</sup>

Interestingly, the Englishmen still present in Egypt, the remaining British population that had earlier settled there are no longer described as a group of usurpers but are rather seen as competition to Czechoslovakia and the Soviet world in general. Putík, for example, describes his visit to one of the British Egyptian quarters as a meeting with friendly people who treated them with courtesy. On the other hand, he states that their English hosts considered them to be the competition at the time thanks to the friendly relations between Czechoslovakia and Egypt and the commercial ties (literally, lucrative business) that linked the two countries. Putík is also convinced that the Englishmen think they are all communists, and know all too well what they want in Egypt.<sup>121</sup>

Regarding this “lucrative business” between Egypt and Czechoslovakia, all the travellers studied agree on how much Egyptians respected them on their journey through the country, and how they grew friendlier when they found out that they were from Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovak cultural delegation were even offered a plane or even a helicopter sent for them if they were in urgent need. As shown, the motivation behind this commitment was that Egyptians appreciated guests,

116 Nečasová, *Nový socialistický člověk*, 180.

117 Hoffmeister, *Lety proti slunci*, 162.

118 Hoffmeister, *Lety proti slunci*, 177.

119 Putík, *Pod egyptským půlměsícem*, 10.

120 Hoffmeister, *Lety proti slunci*, 224.

121 Putík, *Pod egyptským půlměsícem*, 10.

especially guests from Czechoslovakia.<sup>122</sup> The reason for such friendly relations was mainly the the aforementioned supply of arms from Czechoslovakia during the previous conflict. Putík encountered and engaged with various people who told them that Czechoslovaks and Russians were good for the simple reason that the two countries sold them weapons.<sup>123</sup> Then, in later years, another reason was added to why Egyptians felt so close to Czechoslovakia - Czechoslovakia helped Egypt build a dam.

The need for more consistent water supplies led to the construction of two dams on the Nile in the 20th century—the Aswan Low Dam at the beginning of the century, and the Aswan High Dam in the 1960s.<sup>124</sup> Eva Taterová argues that not only did the Soviet Union offer to help with the financing of the High Dam but also, together with other Eastern European countries, offered to assist in the actual construction, with Czechoslovakia being one of the most active satellite states in the project.<sup>125</sup> In some of the travelogues, the Egyptians speak of the Czechoslovaks as saviours who rushed to the rescue in times of aggression and participated in the construction of the longed-for dam,<sup>126</sup> and it is not just the building of the dam, the travellers suggest. Czechoslovakia, along with China and the Soviet Union, helped Egypt pay for the harvest.<sup>127</sup> Thus, Czechoslovakia is equated with these powers, and the excerpts suggest that our travellers feel superior to the situation in Egypt precisely because they represent themselves as members of a developed socialist state alongside the Soviet Union and socialist China. For the same reason, they also feel a certain moral obligation to spread outside Czechoslovakia the education they have acquired through the socialist establishment because, as Putík states, the needs of the Czechoslovak people are “fortunately fully satisfied”,<sup>128</sup> unlike those of the Egyptian population. Furthermore, although initially the new Egyptian regime’s approach to socialism is fairly cautious from a political point of view, relations between the two states are described as a gradual transition, with Egyptians slowly realising the benefits and progressive ways that socialism brings them. Om Saber’s village is a pertinent example of the process.

Om Saber was a student killed during the anti-British protests. The new administrative and economic centre of the emerging Liberation Province (Egypt.: Mudiriye el Tahrir) was named after him.<sup>129</sup> Om Saber is described as a nice town

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122 Hoffmeister, *Lety proti slunci*, 179.

123 Putík, *Pod egyptským půlmščicem*, 28.

124 Bhatia, World Bank, *Indirect Economic Impacts of Dams*, 237–38.

125 Taterová, “Czechoslovak–Egyptian Relations,” 318–39.

126 Hanák and Halaška, *V Egyptě nejsou jen pyramidy*, 28.

127 Putík, *Pod egyptským půlmščicem*, 90.

128 Putík, *Pod egyptským půlmščicem*, 90.

129 Putík, *Pod egyptským půlmščicem*, 32.

where “everything is new”.<sup>130</sup> As described by Putík, “the eucalyptus avenue that sprouts from the corrosive sand, the fellahs’ houses, the school, the canteen, the hospital pavilion and the mosque that dominates the centre are as if just completed yesterday. The cowsheds, poultry houses, stables and co-operative shops are also new...”<sup>131</sup> He includes the co-operative shops to underline the modernity of the place. When Hanák goes to the same place a few years later, he describes a visit to a member of the cooperative:

“We visit the school, then the tiny dwelling in the one-storey house of one of the members of the co-operative, and from the sandy path we pass through a garden pleasantly shaded by the large leaves of the banana trees to the anteroom, where we are greeted by the lady of the house. In one hand she holds a screaming little boy, with the other she turns down a blaring radio. The other three children are playing right outside with their friends, the husband is at work (...) The apartment is tidy, the floor is so clean that you could eat off it.”<sup>132</sup>

Putík speaks of the new Egyptian regime’s great faith in co-operatives, hoping that they would create a “collectivist morality giving a new community spirit to the village”<sup>133</sup> while, on the contrary, capitalism is seen as an unravelling force, tearing down the structure of the Egyptian village.<sup>134</sup> The co-operative is described here as a “god-send,”<sup>135</sup> and it is one example of the Egyptian population slowly understanding the utility of the socialist system, which is becoming synonymous with democracy in Egypt.<sup>136</sup>

Hanák adds that when travelling throughout Egypt a few years later, the progressiveness of socialism was already the official Egyptian discourse and that, for instance, the Arab Socialist Union had been created to be “the ideological centre for educating the masses to build a socialist society.”<sup>137</sup> The Soviet Union was training Egyptian engineers<sup>138</sup> and the building of a socialist society was the government’s official programme.<sup>139</sup> According to Hanák, other factors also contributed to this

130 Putík, *Pod egyptským půlmšícem*, 32.

131 Putík, *Pod egyptským půlmšícem*, 32.

132 Hanák and Halaška, *V Egyptě nejsou jen pyramidy*, 73.

133 Putík, *Pod egyptským půlmšícem*, 36.

134 Putík, *Pod egyptským půlmšícem*, 36.

135 Putík, *Pod egyptským půlmšícem*, 36.

136 Hanák and Halaška, *V Egyptě nejsou jen pyramidy*, 75.

137 Hanák and Halaška, *V Egyptě nejsou jen pyramidy*, 76.

138 Putík, *Pod egyptským půlmšícem*, 42.

139 Hanák and Halaška, *V Egyptě nejsou jen pyramidy*, 76–77.

development. For example, in September 1961, Syria declared independence from the UAR, the United Arab Republic headed by President Nasser. Hanák describes this event as reflecting hope. He states that it shows how to build a society free from class struggle but, at the same time, without constant battles with capitalists and feudalists. He regards it as an example of how one can live in peace which, as outlined above, was also an idea promoted by the Soviet Union. Hanák states that the events of that day, 21 September 1961 brought the Arabic states closer together<sup>140</sup> and that from that point in time, socialism in Egypt began to be spoken of loudly, chanted and featured in songs.<sup>141</sup>

### Parallels in the Czechoslovak Press

Apart from the fact that this change manifests itself in the various aspects of life outlined above, it is also of note that the Egyptian situation was covered in the Czechoslovak press. For example, *Rudé Právo*, a daily newspaper published from 1920 to 1995 by the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Workers' Party and later by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia,<sup>142</sup> for several days in 1956 reported on the situation in Egypt after Egypt had become an independent country. On Monday 25 June 1956, *Rudé Právo* reported in its foreign section that Gamal Abdel Nasser had been elected president and, at the end of the short paragraph, it also stated that elections for a legislative national assembly would be held in Egypt in October.<sup>143</sup> On the same page, we see the headline 'The Arab peoples have a loyal, reliable, and selfless friend in the Soviet Union',<sup>144</sup> while the Soviet Union condemns the establishment of military bases on foreign territory. According to the article, unlike Western states, the Soviet Union is not looking for a source of mineral resources in Egypt; on the contrary, it is encouraging Arab states to consolidate their national independence. At the same time, it is not trying to provoke a conflict between the Arab countries and the West. The intention is quite the opposite: it is trying to achieve world peace.<sup>145</sup>

A statement published in the *Rudé Právo* newspaper about the loyal friend that the Soviet Union embodied for the Arab countries agrees with the new foreign policy introduced by the freshly installed head of the Soviet Communist Party Nikita

140 Hanák and Halaška, *V Egyptě nejsou jen pyramidy*, 76–77.

141 Hanák and Halaška, *V Egyptě nejsou jen pyramidy*, 76–77.

142 Information taken from Czech National Library: <https://ndk.cz/periodical/uuid:4eac74b0-e92c-11dc-9fa1-000d606f5dc6>

143 *Rudé právo*, 1953, 25th June, 3.

144 "Arabské národy mají v Sovětském svazu věrného, spolehlivého a nezištného přítele."

145 *Rudé právo*, 1953, 25th June, 3.

Sergeyevich Khrushchev.<sup>146</sup> At that point, the Eastern bloc's main interest shifted to Third World states, to a policy of peaceful coexistence and to the search for new economic, political, and cultural ties with post-colonial states. Barbora Buzássyová argues that these manoeuvres, hidden behind ideas of the anti-imperialist struggle and socialist internationalism, were motivated by national interests, the quest for global recognition and access to non-socialist markets.<sup>147</sup>

On 26 June, a short paragraph appeared in *Rudé Právo* reporting that Soviet statesmen had sent a congratulatory telegram to the Egyptian President on the occasion of his election to office:

“We are convinced that the national development of Egypt on the basis of the new constitution and your untiring fruitful efforts for the welfare of your country will bring the Egyptian people the further consolidation of their country's independence, happiness and prosperity.”<sup>148</sup>

On 28 June, the front page of *Rudé Právo* reported that “the Czechoslovak Republic and the Government of the Republic of Egypt had decided to upgrade their diplomatic missions in Cairo and Prague to the level of embassies.”<sup>149</sup> The information the newspaper presented to Czechoslovak readers also included an illustration, dated 26 June 1956. It depicts two men, who resemble ancient Egyptian priests, attempting to mummify the figure of a stocky Englishman and return it to England with the headline “The last mummy of Egypt.”<sup>150</sup> The name on it is “John Bull”—a character from John Arbuthnot's *The History of John Bull*, the name denoting the personification of England and the English nation.<sup>151</sup> Thus, what these Egyptian priests are trying to do is send the half-mummified personification of the English nation back to where it came from. It thus relates to the situation when, after the nationalization of the Suez Canal, Egypt was finally abandoned by British troops and Egypt was freed from its “colonial usurpers”.

## Conclusions

Upon the examination of Czechoslovak travelogues from the 1950s and 1960s, it appears that they are far more than records of exploration or reflections on foreign lands. They were narrative devices deeply rooted in the ideological framework of Czechoslovakia's post-war cultural context, serving as instruments through which

146 Kalczewiak and Kozłowska, *The World beyond the West*, 145.

147 Kalczewiak and Kozłowska, *The World beyond the West*, 145.

148 *Rudé právo*, 1956, 26th June, 4.

149 *Rudé právo*, 1956, 27th June, 1.

150 Translated from Czech, “Poslední Mumie Egypta,” In *Rudé právo*, 1956, 26th June, 4.

151 Hunt, *Defining John Bull*, 121–22.

colonialism, capitalism, and socialism were evaluated, critiqued, and reimagined for domestic audiences. They offered a dual critique: on the one hand, a denunciation of colonial exploitation and the capitalist systems that sustained it; on the other, an ambivalent portrayal of modernization under President Nasser, accompanied by a subtle nostalgia for an “authentic” Orient - tensions that ultimately reflect the ideals and contradictions of socialist discourse.

These narratives did not emerge in a vacuum. They were part of a broader ideoscape, shaped by the pressures and aspirations of a socialist state seeking to define itself both in opposition to Western imperialism and in solidarity with post-colonial movements - while simultaneously pursuing its own interests in strategically positioned Egypt. As previously outlined, in a world where media serve as the principal vehicle of information - and in this case, travelogues were precisely that—the reader was confronted with an staggering number of images and narratives crafted to suit the audience and the ideological goals of those who controlled their production. The boundary between the “real” and the “imagined” thus became increasingly blurred.<sup>152</sup>

The narrative strategies in these texts can be interpreted through the lens of non-colonial Orientalism, a concept articulated by Sarah Lemmen to describe states like Czechoslovakia, which were neither colonial powers nor colonies, still participated in the broader discursive structure of colonialism. Positioned as ideological outsiders, Czechoslovak travellers nonetheless reinforced ideas of cultural superiority—this time grounded not in the imperial conquest, but in socialist development and moral righteousness.<sup>153</sup>

Egypt was portrayed both as a victim of Western colonialism and as fertile ground for socialist solidarity and progress. This duality—critiquing capitalism while endorsing socialist “advancement”—highlighted a vision of the Second World as morally superior to both imperial domination and postcolonial stagnation. The texts reveal a persistent tension between celebrating President Nasser’s modernization efforts and yearning for an “exotic” pre-modern Orient, suggesting that not even the socialist rhetoric was immune to the aesthetic allure of Orientalism.

At the heart of these travelogues lies the construction of imagined worlds. As Alexei Yurchak’s concept of “zaganitsa” reminds us, much of the socialist world’s engagement with the “outside” was shaped by ideology rather than direct experience. Travel writing was a means of accessing that elusive elsewhere, offering controlled glimpses into distant realities that affirmed the values of the socialist homeland while categorizing others in moral and cultural terms.<sup>154</sup>

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152 Appadurai, *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy*, 299.

153 Lemmen, “Noncolonial Orientalism,” 209–27.

154 Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 158–80.

These narratives helped define both the “self” and the “other”: they reinforced the internal cohesion of the socialist identity while presenting Egypt’s postcolonial transformation as validation of socialism’s global relevance. The symbolic alliance—through development aid, dam construction, and cultural diplomacy—allowed Czechoslovak travellers to position themselves not merely as observers, but as participants in a broader historical mission.

In this context, travel writing functioned as a powerful ideological tool. As Mary Louise Pratt argues, depictions of underdeveloped regions in Western travel literature often served to justify imperial intervention by portraying foreign lands as stagnant and in need of external guidance. A comparable mechanism is at play in the case of states aligned with the Second World: rather than legitimizing imperial conquest, Czechoslovak travelogues framed the socialist intervention in Egypt as both necessary and beneficial. They constructed a narrative in which the socialist regime emerged as the natural bearer of knowledge, education, and progress—a civilizing force of a different kind, yet one anchored in cultural and ideological superiority.

In doing so, Czechoslovak authors—whether consciously or not—were able to navigate their country’s peripheral geopolitical status by asserting moral and ideological authority within a global framework. The travelogues did not merely reflect the socialist ideoscape; they actively participated in shaping it. As such, they continue to offer valuable insight into how discourse, ideology, and narrative intersect in the construction of global historical memory.

To conclude, Czechoslovak travelogues offer a uniquely positioned view of colonialism—particularly rare among Eastern Bloc states under Soviet rule. More than simple accounts of travel, they illustrate how media and cultural exchanges created imagined geographies, shaped perceptions, and reinforced ideological boundaries. Above all, they underscore the enduring power of narrative to define identities and influence historical discourse—especially in relation to colonialism and its afterlives.

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