

## **Radio Empire? Czechoslovak International Broadcasting to Africa in the 1960s:**

This paper considers the images of Czechoslovakia promoted to African listeners on Radio Prague. Foreign reporters who, of their own admission, had never been to Africa before, used Czechoslovakia (and in particular the country's easternmost part, Slovakia) as a means of understanding Africa, and of transmitting to African listeners what they believed awaited them in a future stage of historical development. While Czechoslovakia was used in international broadcasts as a means of discussing the African continent's past, understanding its present, and indeed predicting its future, Africa was invoked by radio journalists when making claims about Czechoslovakia as well. An analysis of Czechoslovak Radio's Anglophone Africa broadcasts from the 1960s shows the considerable overlap between the institution's foreign and domestic reporters, and the way the radio carved out an important role as a chief producer of knowledge about foreign countries during the Cold War.

As Radio Prague Africa reporter Sylva Součková stated in an interview with Czechoslovak Radio's Africa correspondent Věra Šťovíčková in April 1968, "we meet in the corridors... [shouting] greetings to each other"<sup>1</sup> under the roof of the same institution every day. Foreign correspondents and international broadcasters, then, shared the same physical space and engaged in dialogue away from the microphone. And on the air too, as I will demonstrate, they contributed to and drew from each other's output. While historians have told the stories of international and domestic broadcasting separately; analyzing the former in terms of diplomacy and international

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<sup>1</sup> "For and About Women," April 8, 1968 in box 'Věra Šťovíčková Afrika 1958-1960, 1965, Střední východ 1968.' Czech Radio archive, Prague.

relations,<sup>2</sup> and the latter in terms of popular culture and state-building,<sup>3</sup> the case of broadcasting to and from Africa at Czechoslovak Radio in the 1960s helpfully demonstrates their overlap.

Foreign reporters and international broadcasters embodied the link between media and foreign relations; sometimes acting as relays between policymakers and listeners in target countries, sometimes pushing to have their own expertise recognized, and shaping the course of foreign relations themselves. In a Czech context, it is during the period following the Velvet Revolution that journalists-come-diplomats such as Jiří Dienstbier are perhaps most associated with shaping foreign policy.<sup>4</sup> This paper, however, focuses on Dienstbier's erstwhile colleague, Africa correspondent Věra Šťovíčková and her work in the 1960s, to analyse how journalists influenced foreign policy outside of the Černín Palace, during a period of censorship, in a non-democracy.

Mail sent to Radio Prague by African listeners was harnessed by reporters in the 1960s to influence Czechoslovak policymakers and reinforce journalists' own claims. A particularly important incident examined here, in which reporter Šťovíčková used Czechoslovak Radio to challenge an official arms sale to Nigeria, took place in 1968, which historians have rightly seen

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Gary D. Rawnsley, *Radio Diplomacy and Propaganda: The BBC and VOA in International Politics, 1956-1964* (London, MacMillan, 1996), David M. Abshire, *International Broadcasting: A New Dimension of Western Diplomacy* (Beverly Hills & London, Sage Publications, 1976) and Philo Wasburn, *Broadcasting Propaganda: International Radio Broadcasting and the Construction of Political Reality* (Westport CT & London, Praeger, 1992)

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Jiřina Šmejkalová, "Command Celebrities: The Rise and Fall of Hanzelka and Zikmund in Central Europe" in *Central Europe*, Vol. 13, No. 1-2 (2015) pp. 72-86, Zdenka Kotalová, "Redakce mezinárodního života Československého rozhlasu v rozmezí let 1966 – 1969" MA Thesis. Charles University, Prague. 2012 (in which she claims that Czechoslovak Radio postwar "became involved in the renewal and construction of the state, and became a significant political tool," p. 6), and the chapter "Budovatelský rozhlas" in particular in Eva Ješutová, *Od mikrofonu k posluchačům: Z osmi desetiletí Českého rozhlasu* (Prague, Czech Radio, 2003). Outside of Central Europe, see for example Jean Seaton, *Pinkoes and Traitors: The BBC and the Nation, 1974-1987* (London, Profile Books, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Jiří Dienstbier was a foreign correspondent for Czechoslovak Radio between 1958 and 1969. He was fired from the radio after his involvement in unofficial broadcasts during the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. He signed and became a spokesman for Charter 77. In 1989, he became Czechoslovakia's first foreign minister following the Velvet Revolution.

as an exceptional time in Czechoslovak history. Its origins, however, are found in March of that year, before censorship was formally lifted in Czechoslovakia, and thus might begin to help us examine the place of and forms taken by investigative journalism in “totalitarian” states.<sup>5</sup>

### **Sources:**

Very little audio survives of Czechoslovak Radio’s English-language broadcasts to Africa during the 1960s. A recording of the first ever Anglophone African programme, aired on November 6, 1960, has been preserved, and the transcripts of two months’ worth of programming (from the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, and then the days prior to and following the assassination of John F. Kennedy in November 1963) are filed at the Czech Radio archives in Prague. Program transcripts from November 1963 find the African service marking its anniversary and reflecting upon how far it has developed over the years (which it largely measures in terms of listener numbers and mail). Scripts for Czechoslovak Radio’s broadcasts in English to Western Europe also exist from this time, and will be used here as points of comparison. I draw on audience mail embedded in Czechoslovak Radio’s broadcasts to Africa (most notably in the programme “Mailbag”), although original letters from African listeners from 1968 are also retained at the radio archives, which I am yet to analyse.

Furthermore, Africa correspondent Věra Šťovíčková’s papers are housed at Czech Radio and prove an invaluable source. Among them, two sets of documents are particularly interesting: firstly, her correspondence with Sylva Součková from Radio Prague’s Africa service in 1968 which includes a script from an interview the former conducted with the latter. These documents

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<sup>5</sup> The reason I even refer to 1968 as “totalitarian” is that the period still falls under the research remit of the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes in Prague, which accommodates research pertaining to all aspects of the Communist period in Czechoslovakia, from 1948 to 1989.

show how the two reporters saw their roles within the radio converging and, on the contrary, the areas in which they deferred to each other's expertise.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, documents containing Šťovíčková's criticism of the Czechoslovak government's sale of fighter jets to Nigeria in early 1968 (which she aired on Czechoslovak Radio, Czechoslovak Television, and in print media) shows the role domestic journalists felt they could play in shaping the country's foreign policy at this period. In this instance, Šťovíčková harnesses mail to Czechoslovak Radio from African listeners to endorse her claims which, furthermore, presents the broadcaster as a meaningful institution researching African public opinion by this time.

### **Noncolonial empathy? Czechoslovakia as example in Radio Prague broadcasts:**

Radio Prague was (and is) the name of Czechoslovak Radio's international service. An internal publication from 1982 suggested the broadcaster aimed "to inform the world's population truthfully about the construction of socialism in Czechoslovakia, to influence positively global public opinion to the benefit of the ideas of socialism, and to contribute to the broadening of friendly and equal relations between countries with different social foundations."<sup>7</sup> The publication bears the hallmarks of the Normalization period in which it was published.<sup>8</sup> The language of "friendship" and "equality" it employs, however, very much echoes the vocabulary of the 1960s broadcasts analyzed here.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See "For and About Women," April 8, 1968.

<sup>7</sup> *Co byste měli vědět o Radiu Praha: Stručný přehled činnosti Zahraničního vysílání Československého rozhlasu od roku 1936 do roku 1981* (Prague, Czechoslovak Radio, 1982): 4

<sup>8</sup> Not least in its discussion of developments at Radio Prague in the early 1980s, with the establishment of a new Polish-language broadcast in 1981, its polemicizing against "bourgeois propaganda," which replaces the term "imperialist propaganda," more prevalent in reports from the 1960s and, of course, the amazing retro typeface.

<sup>9</sup> On the third anniversary of Radio Prague broadcasts to Africa in 1963, for example, reporters proclaimed that their goal had always been "to promote friendship and understanding between the people of Czechoslovakia and those of the African continent." (See "Mailbag," October 10, 1963. Document ZV19631110. Czech Radio Archive, Prague. In an interesting commentary from October 9, 1963, meanwhile, journalist Jan Vinář suggested that friendship was a value above all others – indeed constituting power. In Vinář's analysis, it was the Soviet Union's

For all the talk of equality, there was a heavy dose of paternalism present in Czechoslovak Radio's broadcasts in English to the African continent throughout the 1960s. Czechoslovakia was presented as the example for African listeners – a country which had been through the transformations Africa must now itself undergo, and which was one historical stage further ahead. African listeners, it was implied, should listen and learn. This message is particularly apparent in an episode of “Introducing Czechoslovakia” broadcast on October 15, 1962. As in numerous other programs, Slovakia was here presented as Czechoslovakia's own version of Africa.<sup>10</sup> The announcer began by informing the listener “this week... we want to take you just about as far as possible from Prague.”<sup>11</sup> Reporters often anchored their reports on the Africa service spatially, or tried to present Czechoslovakia visually to the listener (describing the country in minute topographic detail in the inaugural broadcast, and sending maps to listeners who wrote in requesting them). Nonetheless, the announcer here seemed not only to suggest the spatial distance between the area to be discussed and Prague, but perhaps also intimated some sort of temporal distance too (with the capital standing for the pinnacle of modernity and stages of lesser development radiating out from that). The report is set in “the extreme South-Eastern tip”<sup>12</sup> of Slovakia, “a part of Czechoslovakia which – until a decade or so ago, had conditions almost comparable to those of a colonial territory. Not that Czechoslovakia ever had any colonies...”<sup>13</sup> With this description, the presenter at once suggests an empathy for the listener in Africa and beats

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great number of friends “all over the world” (and not military clout) that made it “the most powerful country in all the world.”) Equality, meanwhile, was promoted as another value brought to the fore by the Great October Revolution in Russia, now ready for export around the globe (See ZV19631106. November 6, 1963. Czech Radio Archive, Prague).

<sup>10</sup> This point will be discussed in some more depth throughout the paper. Particular programs propounding this trope include “Zahajovací program zahraničního vysílání do Afriky,” November 6, 1960. DF04702\_1, and “Radio Prague Record Club,” November 3, 1963. Document ZV19631103. Czech Radio Archive, Prague.

<sup>11</sup> “Introducing Czechoslovakia,” October 15, 1962. Document ZV19621015. Czech Radio archive, Prague.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

a hasty retreat, stressing the impeccable anti-colonial credentials of the Czechoslovak state from its origins. This prevarication on the topic of whether an independent Czechoslovakia ever had its own colonies is present in earlier domestic broadcasting too,<sup>14</sup> and its reappearance here suggests the issue had not been totally resolved by the time of this broadcast in 1962.<sup>15</sup>

The initially unfavourable conditions in the region, which were “almost comparable to those of a colonial territory,”<sup>16</sup> were caused by “the Austro-Hungarian monarchy”<sup>17</sup> and then consolidated by capitalists in the First Czechoslovak Republic. What was the solution for South-Eastern Slovakia? Heavy industry and land management, ushered in by socialism. The report suggested that “just now two great projects are under way there – one industrial, the other agricultural – and both are already changing the lives of the local people...”<sup>18</sup> The great industrial project discussed was the East Slovak Metallurgical Plant (today U.S. Steel) in Košice, while the agricultural project constituted an irrigation overhaul of the region, brought about by the redirection of its rivers. The report suggested that inhabitants of the area currently needed to travel to sites of existing expertise (to Ostrava, Kladno, Brno, Považská Bystrica and other Czech, Moravian and Slovak industrial centers) so as to learn “their new trades theoretically and

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<sup>14</sup> See “Reportáž z osídlování pohraniční – Frýdlant v Čechách,” October 6, 1945. AF00540\_2. Czech Radio Archive, Prague, in which the reporter Josef Cincibus discusses the arrival of: “... these colonizers [osadníci], as we call them - we can't, of course, use this word as Frýdlant and its surrounds are not a colony...”

<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, historian Sarah Lemmen has identified an uneasy relationship with colonialism in Czech travel writing from the late nineteenth- into the early twentieth-century. Considering how Czech tourists write about their experiences “across the so-called Orient,” she concludes that while writing as if “part of the colonial world,” Czechs’ “‘colonial behaviour’ was not necessarily linked to colonial-rule.” Instead, the use of orientalist language to describe the people and places they saw served to further Europeanise Czechs, who were, in Lemmen’s view, aware of their tenuous position as Europeans. In other words, Lemmen suggests this awkward stance towards a language of colonialism (using it at the same time as denying its applicability) predates the postwar period I examine here. See Sarah Lemmen, “Noncolonial Orientalism? Travel Writing on Africa and Asia around 1918” in James Hodgkinson & John Walter (eds.), *Deploying Orientalism in Culture and History: From Germany to Central and Eastern Europe* (Rochester, NY, Camden House, 2013)

<sup>16</sup> “Introducing Czechoslovakia,” October 15, 1962.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

practically,”<sup>19</sup> just as this Košice plant, and these individuals, “will, in turn, be better able to assist in the industrialization programmes of the newly developing African... countries.”<sup>20</sup> In other words, what Czechoslovakia did first, other countries would do next.<sup>21</sup> African audiences were offered here the opportunity to learn from Czechoslovakia,<sup>22</sup> and the relationship between Czechoslovakia and African states was figured as one of mentorship between teacher and pupil.

Using Czechoslovakia as a setting onto which predicted, future African realities could be mapped negated any sort of idea of geographic particularism. What determined a region’s development was its progress building socialism.<sup>23</sup> Czechoslovakia also offered itself as an example for ideal Soviet relations. My source sample could be skewed as the transcripts I have from both years center on the period surrounding November 7 (the anniversary of the Russian Revolution and the start of “The Month of Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship”). Yet, if these broadcasts were shrouded in a language of friendship, then the model friendship, it was implied, was that between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union.<sup>24</sup> The history of this relationship was discussed in a commentary on November 8, 1963, although, the reporter suggested a shared past

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<sup>19</sup> “Introducing Czechoslovakia,” October 15, 1962.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> This is stated explicitly in an episode of “Introducing Czechoslovakia” on October 25, 1963. The presenter argues that Czechs and Slovaks have an “understanding for the national liberation struggles of the people of Africa.” This, the reporter suggests, is because “the peoples of Czechoslovakia had to go through an identical struggle several generations ago. The last phase of this struggle came to an end only in the recent past – when our country became a socialist country.” In this view, history was processual and Czechoslovakia was several stages ahead of its African listeners. First national consciousness was required, and then socialism. Through the use of the past tense, the reporter alluded here to the Constitution of 1960, which declared that socialism had been achieved in Czechoslovakia. See “Introducing Czechoslovakia,” November 25, 1963. Document ZV19631125. Czech Radio Archive, Prague.

<sup>22</sup> EDUCATION AND ITS VALUE IS A KEY MESSAGE THROUGHOUT THESE RADIO PRAGUE BROADCASTS – STUDENTS IN PRAGUE ARE CONSTANTLY BEING INTERVIEWED BY THE REPORTERS, AND THE TOP PRIZE IN THE AFRICA SERVICE’S ANNUAL COMPETITION IS THE CHANCE TO ATTEND A SEMINAR IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA. I WOULD ARGUE THAT THE TONE OF THESE BROADCASTS IS OVERWHELMINGLY DIDACTIC TOO. HERE, I’D LIKE TO EXPAND UPON RADIO PRAGUE’S EDUCATIONAL REMIT A BIT MORE...

<sup>23</sup> And lest we forget, Czechoslovakia was already there – the country’s constitution of 1960 declared that socialism had been achieved, and the name of the country at the time officially became the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, “Co nás zajímá”/ “Spotlight of the Week,” November 8, 1963. Document ZV19631108. Czech Radio Archive, Prague.

(and “sentiment”)<sup>25</sup> was not as important in this friendship as its “deep rational basis.”<sup>26</sup> The rational basis for Czechoslovak-Soviet friendship was described as the protection offered by the Soviet Union to Czechoslovakia militarily (it guaranteed Czechoslovakia “territorial integrity”<sup>27</sup> and “peace” as it would, it was implied, any other country seeking its friendship).<sup>28</sup> In return, Czechoslovakia as an “industrial country,”<sup>29</sup> served as a “a good partner for the Soviet Union.”<sup>30</sup> A list of products Czechoslovakia sent the Soviet Union was enumerated (with an editor correcting the script to stress that it was largely “equipment”<sup>31</sup> rather than raw materials supplied, in what appears a rather snobby move). This presentation of Czechoslovak-Soviet friendship largely harmonized with further broadcasts trumpeting the quality and array of Czechoslovak goods to potential African listener-buyers.<sup>32</sup>

### **Music Policy:**

The Slovakia-is-our-Africa trope was developed further through Radio Prague’s choice of music in its broadcasts to Africa. Such programmes championed Slovak folk music, juxtaposing it with African music solicited from listeners and African-American music (which accompanied a large number of news stories and commentaries broadcast on racial inequality in the United States of

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<sup>25</sup> “Co nás zajímá”/ “Spotlight of the Week,” November 8, 1963.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, an episode of “Round about Czechoslovakia” from November 5, 1963, in which a pottery collective’s goods made “for export to the Republic of Guinea” were praised (Document ZV19631105, Czech Radio Archive, Prague). Or an earlier episode of the same programme promotes Jawa motorbikes as a fine product made in Czechoslovakia (see “Round About Czechoslovakia,” document ZV19621023, October 23, 1962. Czech Radio Archive, Prague).

America).<sup>33</sup> In the Anglophone Africa service's inaugural broadcast, one Slovak folk song (referred to in English as "Three Painters to Stay Overnight") constituted the only music referenced and played by the presenter, and its performers were styled as the link between Czechoslovakia and the African continent, planning as they were an upcoming tour.<sup>34</sup> In an episode of the music show "Record Club," meanwhile, the Slovak folk song "Veselica na Detve" resounded alongside Miriam Makebe and a blast of Nigerian highlife.<sup>35</sup> A fortnight later, listeners were encouraged to dance to yet another Slovak folk record although, it was quipped, dancing to such music was harder than to the Chubby Checker that followed.<sup>36</sup> That dancing was encouraged suggests Radio Prague reporters understood their listeners as listening in groups (which is, indeed, largely how listeners wrote in to the station). Presenting "lively Slovak folk song and dance"<sup>37</sup> over more melancholic or wistful numbers, and stressing that Slovak folk troupes danced as well as sang when they performed,<sup>38</sup> gave an overall impression of Slovaks as "a dancing people," not so very far away from some earlier images of Africans propounded by Czechoslovak radio journalists such as František Foit.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> In *Cold War Civil Rights*, Mary Dudziak suggests that highlighting civil rights abuses in the United States constituted an important part of Soviet public diplomacy in the decolonizing world during the Cold War. Whether we should see Czechoslovak Radio as towing the Soviet line here is something I am yet to explore adequately. Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton & Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2011)

<sup>34</sup> "Zahajovací program zahraničního vysílání do Afriky," November 6, 1960. DF04702\_1. Czech Radio Archive, Prague.

<sup>35</sup> See "Radio Prague Record Club," November 3, 1963. Document ZV19631103. Czech Radio Archive, Prague. It seems that the majority of African music played on "Record Club" came from Ghana and Nigeria, which is where the majority of listener letters seemed to come from too. Given that Radio Prague did suggest it had a shortage of African music and asked listeners to send in songs, I wonder if this preponderance of East African music reflects the large number of listeners' clubs in Ghana and Nigeria which obliged, or whether instead it reflects the geographic location of a majority of listeners...

<sup>36</sup> "Radio Prague Record Club," November 17, 1963. Document ZV19631117. Czech Radio Archive, Prague.

<sup>37</sup> "Radio Prague Record Club," November 3, 1963. Document ZV19631103. Czech Radio Archive, Prague.

<sup>38</sup> "Zahajovací program zahraničního vysílání do Afriky," November 6, 1960. DF04702\_1.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, František Foit, "Jak jsme natáčeli zvuky na Sahaře" in doc. 63710. June 6, 1948. Box 63. Ministerstvo Informací, 1945-1953. National Archives, Prague. In this report prepared for Czechoslovak Radio, Foit discusses the dancing he witnesses which accompanies the songs he records. This he describes as "erotic" on the

Contrast this with the musical image of Czechoslovakia presented in English-language broadcasts intended for Western Europe: here, the focus was much more on classical music and, specifically, on how well Czech and Slovak musicians played the classical music generated in the listening public's country. A prime example of this comes on the composer Benjamin Britten's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, on November 24, 1963, when an entire show on Czechoslovak Radio's English for Western Europe service was dedicated to Britten's popularity in Czechoslovakia and interpretation of the composer's music by Czech and Slovak musicians.<sup>40</sup> This classical music focus was largely in keeping with the highbrow image of the country that Czechoslovak Radio sought to promote in broadcasts directed westwards. Efforts to present the country as culturally refined could also be found in cultural features in which Czech professors discussed the merits of British authors,<sup>41</sup> and in the inclusion of the reaction of Jean-Paul Sartre (upon a visit to Prague) to the shooting of John F. Kennedy in the Western European news bulletin, which did not make it into the African news.<sup>42</sup>

### **The Role of Czechoslovak Radio's Foreign Correspondents in Radio Prague Broadcasts:**

The 1960s have been remembered as a particularly strong period for Czechoslovak Radio's foreign reporting, dubbed "the golden sixties" by correspondents themselves and radio historians.<sup>43</sup> Radio historian Zdenka Kotalová notes how many of these foreign correspondents spent a portion of their training at Radio Prague, broadcasting internationally before they assumed their posts.<sup>44</sup> These

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part of men and "ecstatic" on the part of women. Throughout the report, he refers to the "innate musical sense" ("vrožený hudební cit") and the "sense of rhythm" ("smysl pro rytmus") of the people he records.

<sup>40</sup> See document ZV19631124. November 24, 1963. Czech Radio Archive, Prague.

<sup>41</sup> See a Professor Vočadlo discussing the oeuvre of Laurence Sterne in document ZV19631126. November 26, 1963. Czech Radio Archive, Prague.

<sup>42</sup> See document ZV19631123. November 23, 1963. Czech Radio Archive, Prague.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Africa correspondent Věra Šťovíčková's memoirs, *Po světě s mikrofonem* (Prague, Radioservis, 2009), Zdenka Kotalová's diploma thesis "Redakce mezinárodního života Československého rozhlasu v rozmezí let 1966 – 1969" MA Thesis. Charles University, Prague. 2012

<sup>44</sup> Zdenka Kotalová, "Redakce mezinárodního života Československého rozhlasu v rozmezí let 1966 – 1969" MA Thesis. Charles University, Prague. 2012: 12.

very personalities embodying the overlap between radio and foreign relations: indeed, a remarkable number of the staff of Czechoslovak Radio's foreign desk from the 1960s took jobs in international diplomacy following the Velvet Revolution in 1989. The most notable example was that of foreign correspondent Jiří Dienstbier, who became democratic Czechoslovakia's first foreign minister in 1989.<sup>45</sup>

Even after their training on Radio Prague, members of Czechoslovak Radio's foreign news desk contributed to the station's international broadcasts as well as providing domestic radio with a constant stream of foreign news. In other words, cross fertilization took place between domestic and international broadcasts because of them. United States and United Nations correspondent Karel Kyncl prepared special commentaries in English for broadcast to Africa (in one particular example preserved, he talked about the violent protests and white-supremacist resistance sparked by James Meredith's attendance of the University of Mississippi in 1962).<sup>46</sup> On another occasion, Kyncl interviewed head of the Czechoslovak delegation at the United Nations, Jiří Hájek, about the country's stance towards decolonization, and its efforts to this effect at the UN.<sup>47</sup> This constitutes a traditional instance of Czechoslovak Radio acting as mouthpiece, or relay, for the country's foreign policy.<sup>48</sup> In London correspondent Vladimír Kučera, meanwhile, interviewed

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<sup>45</sup> Věra Štovičková recalls in *Po světě s mikrofonem* how Dienstbier attempted to recruit her, as he did a number of former radio colleagues, for the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry following the Velvet Revolution. She discusses how she declined this offer, opting to continue working as a professional translator instead.

<sup>46</sup> See "Oč jde v Oxfordu," October 3, 1962. Document ZV19621003. Czech Radio Archive, Prague. That this commentary was written with Radio Prague's Africa service in mind is evinced by Kyncl's claim that the United States' government has a lot riding upon Meredith's success at University of Mississippi "for that same government is expending considerable sums to win the sympathies of the newly developing countries of Africa and Asia." This report was largely in keeping with Kyncl's other contributions to Radio Prague's Africa service, which often highlighted the institutionalized and deep-seated racism present in the United States. This reporting stance could be a product of what Mary Dudziak has argued was a broader, Soviet-led, initiative to highlight American civil rights abuses as a tool of public diplomacy in the decolonizing world. See Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*.

<sup>47</sup> See document ZV19631111. November 11, 1963. Czech Radio Archive, Prague.

<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, the lack of autonomy of Radio Prague from its partial sponsor, the Czech Foreign Ministry, has recently made the news. On June 19, Czech newspaper *Hospodářské noviny* reported that the Ministry was interfering with the international broadcaster's programming in a way which "would not be tolerated in Britain,"

anti-apartheid activist Michael Harmel for Radio Prague in November 1963.<sup>49</sup> Most interesting is the role played by Africa correspondent, Věra Šťovíčková, in these Anglophone Africa broadcasts: her reporting on the arrival of Algerian president Ben Bella is drawn from and credited by Radio Prague news staff in May 1964.<sup>50</sup> This constitutes, in fact, a rare occasion when Czechoslovak Radio's reporters are referenced in the news as opposed merely to the news wires ČTK and TASS.<sup>51</sup>

At the peak of her career, on April 8, 1968, meanwhile, Věra Šťovíčková appeared on Radio Prague's Africa service, where she talked about how her role as a foreign correspondent diverged from the work done by her colleagues in the international broadcasting section of Czechoslovak Radio. Šťovíčková's interviewer, Sylva Součková, began by stressing the shared institutional framework enjoyed by the two reporters, indeed the physical space in which the two reporters meet, declaring "at most times, we meet in the corridors, and just shout greetings to each other, rushing from one thing to another"<sup>52</sup> within the Czechoslovak Radio building. She introduced Šťovíčková as a foreign reporter who has focused ever more on domestic questions in

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see Kateřina Šantúrová, "Černínský palác se snaží ovlivňovat vysílání rozhlasu pro cizince. Jen informujeme novináře o svých akcích, brání se" (<http://archiv.ihned.cz/c1-65337850-cernicky-palac-se-snazi-ovlivnovat-vysilani-rozhlasu-pro-cizince-jen-informujeme-novinare-o-svych-akcich-brani-se> - last checked July 3, 2016)

<sup>49</sup> See document ZV19631129. November 29, 1963. Czech Radio Archive, Prague.

<sup>50</sup> They reference a commentary prepared by Šťovíčková for domestic Czech broadcast, stating at one juncture that "our correspondent adds that Czechoslovakia has had good economic and cultural relations with Algeria since the creation of independent Algeria" in document ZV19640511. May 11, 1964. Czech Radio Archive, Prague. The Czech-language original broadcast has, in fact, been preserved and one can here Šťovíčková make these claims in "Navštěva alžírského prezidenta Ben Belly v ČSSR," May 11, 1964. DF0462. Czech Radio Archive, Prague. Upon Ben Bella's departure from Prague on May 14, furthermore, it appears that Radio Prague uses a snippet of sound recorded by Šťovíčková during the Algerian president's visit. See document ZV19640514. May 14, 1964. Czech Radio Archive, Prague.

<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, it seems that Xinghua was also used in Radio Prague's Africa broadcasts, and this is following the Sino-Soviet split in 1960. Other sources of news cited in Radio Prague Africa broadcasts include Malian paper *L'Essor* (see document ZV19621031. October 31, 1962. Czech Radio Archive, Prague).

<sup>52</sup> "For and About Women," April 8, 1968.

the “exceptional”<sup>53</sup> political atmosphere in the country in 1968.<sup>54</sup> Součková also placed great importance on the fact that Šťovíčková was a woman (perhaps not surprisingly, given that this was a show titled “For and About Women”).<sup>55</sup> Šťovíčková discussed the recording trips she has made to the African continent, and her approach towards journalism in Africa (after a period of “enchantment,”<sup>56</sup> Šťovíčková said, “I realized what was actually the task of a reporter and journalist from a Socialist country in Africa: to free oneself from any romantic notions one might have about Africa and then attempt to shatter the outdated conceptions our European listeners have about the continent.”)<sup>57</sup> One “frees oneself” from romantic notions for Šťovíčková by talking to absolutely everybody, “the presidents and rulers, the workers of the Savana and the forests, ministry officials, market people, anyone who cares to give me an answer.”<sup>58</sup> The resultant reports should not be eulogistic, nor overly critical, showing instead “Africa in all its complexities, controversial facts and painful development.”<sup>59</sup>

This prompted Šťovíčková’s interviewer Součková to stress the difference between the two reporters’ jobs: Součková continued “you probably know the African people better than I do, I haven’t been to Africa yet, perhaps you could explain to them better than any of us here, in the African service of Radio Prague, why it is that the Czechoslovak people are today striving for yet

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<sup>53</sup> “For and About Women,” April 8, 1968.

<sup>54</sup> I THINK THERE IS MORE TO SAY HERE ABOUT USING AFRICA AS A MEANS OF TALKING ABOUT CZECHOSLOVAKIA (THE PUBLISHER OF VERA STOVICKOVA’S BOOK, *BOURE NAD ROVNIKEM*, 1967, SUGGESTS THAT SHE IS DOING AS MUCH IN THE BLURB...)

<sup>55</sup> Rather than championing Šťovíčková as an example that women are capable of and do perform every type of role in the Czechoslovak media, Součková reads Šťovíčková’s exceptionality as quite the opposite, as proof “that women are still not on the same level of political knowledge as the men.” See “For and About Women,” April 8, 1968.

<sup>56</sup> ...Which Šťovíčková says is “usual” for a European visitor to the continent, and a “stage” one has to go through (classing Czechs and Slovaks who visit the continent squarely as ‘Europeans’ in the process, and understanding one’s reaction to a place in a very dialectic, processual way). “For and About Women,” April 8, 1968.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

more democratic forms of socialism?”<sup>60</sup> Součková’s question suggested knowledge about the African continent was linked to time spent there.<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, as we will see, Šťovíčková later suggested to the contrary, that knowledge about Africa came in the form of mail from the continent, and thus was amassed by and contained within the Czechoslovak Radio building itself. Here, Součková also hinted that she understood the purpose of Radio Prague to be explaining to African listeners the case of Czechoslovakia as something to which they should aspire. Šťovíčková echoed this tone when she offers a message to African women at the end of the broadcast, urging them “not to make the same mistakes that we, the women of Europe, have in the past.”<sup>62</sup> In this interpretation, Africa was most certainly moving forward (rather than remaining stagnant), along a defined historical course, but could look to European countries (to which Czechoslovakia here squarely belonged) for an example of what was to come several steps down the line.

### **A Repository of African Public Opinion? Radio Prague Listener Mail:**

Mail was actively solicited in most of Radio Prague’s programmes, and listeners who wrote were promised maps, magazines, and devotional items in return.<sup>63</sup> That listeners’ questions would be aired and then answered in future broadcasts was another enticement offered to prospective correspondents. Questions mailed by listeners which suited the reporters and the station’s aims (“to inform the world’s population... about the construction of socialism in Czechoslovakia... and

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<sup>60</sup> “For and About Women,” April 8, 1968.

<sup>61</sup> And indeed, outside of the radio, Šťovíčková comes to be considered an expert on the African continent, ask to appraise books on African countries by a number of Czechoslovak publishers, and asked to talk about African issues on Czechoslovak Television. That Šťovíčková is asked for her opinions by these prominent Czechoslovak cultural institutions suggests that the radio played a central role in both gathering and creating knowledge about the African continent in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s.

<sup>62</sup> “For and About Women,” April 8, 1968.

<sup>63</sup> For example, a report about the “Pražské jezulátko” (“Infant Jesus of Prague”) ends with the offer of a woven version of the figure for anyone who writes in requesting this. See ZV19631128. November 28, 1963. Czech Radio Archive, Prague.

to contribute to the broadening of friendly and equal relations between countries with different social foundations”),<sup>64</sup> were researched and then answered in some depth in the weekly programme “Mailbag.” In one instance, Africa service staff put a listener’s questions directly to deputy foreign minister Ladislav Šimovič and, in so doing, deferred to lawmakers’ expertise, offering radio as a direct platform for Czechoslovak foreign policymakers.<sup>65</sup>

Mail volume was taken as a measure of interest in the station, and of the ultimate success of Radio Prague’s Africa service, with the third anniversary programme reflecting upon the number of letters the station now received.<sup>66</sup> “The first response to our English language broadcasts in November 1960 came from Ethiopia,”<sup>67</sup> the presenter reminisced, “but very soon we had letters coming in from Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and other West African countries, from Uganda, Kenya and Tanganyika, from the United Arab Republic, from the South African Republic, and later from the island of Malta in the Mediterranean.”<sup>68</sup> Here, the geographic spread of letters was evoked to impress the listener, and letters were taken as proof of “our ability to interest our African friends.”<sup>69</sup> This broadcast and the Radio Prague handbook from 1982, however, dissuaded people from assuming listener mail accurately reflected the scope of the station’s reach; letters poured in from “thousands of listeners, and [yet there were] thousands more unable to write...”<sup>70</sup> claimed the station in November 1963. Two decades later, the Radio Prague brochure claimed that anti-communism and illiteracy both limited the numbers of letters the station received.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *Co byste měli vědět o Radiu Praha: Stručný přehled činnosti Zahraničního vysílání Československého rozhlasu od roku 1936 do roku 1981*: 4

<sup>65</sup> Document ZV19621011. October 11, 1962. Czech Radio Archive, Prague.

<sup>66</sup> Document ZV19631110. November 10, 1963. Czech Radio Archive, Prague.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Co byste měli vědět o Radiu Praha*: 30

Regardless, listener mail became a tremendously important bargaining tool for radio reporters, as demonstrated by one incident involving Africa correspondent Věra Šťovíčková. Indeed, Šťovíčková invoked mail received by Czechoslovak Radio from African listeners as an effective measure of African public opinion. Having criticized the Czechoslovak government for selling fighter planes to Nigeria, which was engaged in a civil war in which neither side fought expressly for socialism, Šťovíčková claimed on Czechoslovak Television and then on Czechoslovak Radio that such a move “damaged the reputation of Czechoslovakia in Africa and in developing countries more generally.”<sup>72</sup> Šťovíčková bolstered her claims by suggesting that “I heard numerous criticisms at the Organization of African Unity in Kinshasa last autumn, in Nigeria itself, and the same viewpoint is held by letter writers from among the many African listeners of Czechoslovak broadcasting to Africa.”<sup>73</sup> That Šťovíčková’s reports on television and radio about the arms sale resulted in demonstrations outside the Černín Palace, the seat of the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry,<sup>74</sup> suggests that journalists used their position to influence Czechoslovak foreign policy, rather than just to report on it, at least during 1968. From her files, furthermore, it seems that Šťovíčková first wrote to officials about the questionable arms deal,<sup>75</sup> and only then used the fora of Czechoslovak Radio and Television as a last resort in order to change policymakers’ minds. In other words, foreign correspondents such as Šťovíčková were aware of their position as regional experts in Czechoslovakia in 1968, and were willing to use their positions as journalists to leverage politicians towards their own views. Last but not least, the reference to listener mail as support for Šťovíčková’s claims here posited Czechoslovak Radio as a center of expertise on the African

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<sup>72</sup> Věra Šťovíčková, Letter to an unnamed “soudruh” (“comrade”) dated March 19, 1968 in box ‘Věra Šťovíčková Afrika 1958-1960, 1965, Střední východ 1968.’ Czech Radio archive, Prague.

<sup>73</sup> Věra Šťovíčková, Letter to an unnamed “soudruh,” dated March 19, 1968.

<sup>74</sup> See “Čs. letadla nebombardují” in *Svoboda*, April 28, 1968, p. 1

<sup>75</sup> The first letter she writes to an unnamed comrade is on March 19. Newspaper *Svoboda* suggests protests at the Foreign Ministry follow reports Šťovíčková has broadcast in April of that year.

continent and the public opinion of its inhabitants. Knowledge about Africa was, in this view, both generated by and stored within the radio building, within the thousands of envelopes the station received.

### **Conclusion:**

I have argued that Czechoslovakia was evoked by Radio Prague reporters in broadcasts as a means by which they felt they could understand Africa. Such evocations reinforced a rather Pragocentric view of the country which posited the capital as the pinnacle of modernity, and the easternmost realms of Slovakia as Africa, in a comparison that was highly unflattering to both territories (accompanied as it was by Orientalising tropes and civilizational claims). And inversely, Africa was invoked by Czechoslovak Radio's foreign reporters as a means of talking about Czechoslovakia. Nowhere is this more apparent than when Šťovíčková raises the concerns of African listeners as a means of criticizing the Czechoslovak government's arms trade. When Šťovíčková does so, she suggests that Czechoslovak Radio has become a foremost institution gathering African public opinion, to which Czechoslovak "comrades" should pay heed.

Gary Rawnsley has suggested that radio, and specifically international broadcasting, can have a tremendous effect upon foreign policy, but he largely looks at civil servants' involvement in and negotiations surrounding radio broadcasts and jamming. I have argued here that *reporters themselves*, autonomously of the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry, used radio to bend foreign policy towards their own ends - and this in a communist country, (shortly) before we have generally spoken of the press becoming "free" with the formal abolishment of censorship in late June, 1968. The case of Šťovíčková and the fighter jets complicates a binary which pits a free, democratic

press against a censored, totalitarian, uninvestigative media. What we can replace this binary with is for further investigation.

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