ARAB STUDENTS INSIDE THE SOVIET BLOC : A CASE STUDY ON CZECHOSLOVAKIA DURING THE 1950S AND 60S

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the phenomenon of students from the so-called less developed countries in communist Czechoslovakia, specifically Arab students in the 50s and 60s of the twentieth century. The first part of the paper focuses on a broader political and social context. Because it was the first wave of Arab scholarship holders supported by the Czechoslovak government to arrive at the end of the 50s, it is crucial to describe the shape of negotiations between the Czechoslovak and Arab sides. The second part of the paper emphasizes cultural agreements and types of studying in Czechoslovakia. Arriving abroad, preparatory language courses, everyday life of Arab students in Czechoslovakia and the conflicts they had faced are analyzed in the following subchapters. The problem of Arab student adaptation to the new environment and troubles caused by cultural differences are illuminated in the framework of these thematic sections. The final part of the paper outlines the Arab absolvents' fates and their contacts with Czechoslovakia after ending their university studies and returning to their homeland.

Keywords: Students, universities, Czechoslovakia after 1948, Communism, everyday life, cultural history

Introduction

The phenomenon of students from the so-called less developed countries in the Soviet Bloc is a part of history, where a lot of topics and possible methodological approaches meet. Beside the postwar course of divided Europe we have the reality of colonial decease in the "Third World". Both The Eastern Bloc and The West, obsessed with their Cold War rivalry were trying to create a map colored according to their own interests. The postcolonial countries balanced their options between the two big players. In search of a new national identity these countries supported the idea of modernization and a boost of the level of education. From there on we come to the topic of modernization as a western concept and observe the importance of university education as a value for newly established systems. We move methodologically from political history towards cultural aspects and social sciences. Thanks to which we gain a whole new point of view at the social history of communist countries. Our main focus is to present the everyday quality of Arab student life in socialist Czechoslovakia.

I
Political and social context

The Czech foreign policy followed the Soviet one in all causes including the Middle East. The short episode of Czechoslovakian military support for the newly established state of Israel in 1948 characterizes the postwar tactics of Soviet foreign policy. The following shift towards the Arab republics in the second half of 1950s was yet another move in the same strategy. In this sense, the Soviet Union and its puppets signed many economic, military, cultural or scientific agreements from 1955. (table 1) The signing of the well known contract

between Egypt and Czechoslovakia in 1955, guaranteeing Egypt army supplies created a precedent and made an example for similar agreements signed with other Arab republics. Cultural agreements followed not long after. In the 1960s we can detect an annoyed tone from Soviet side toward Arab states. The result of these expensive contracts did not live up to Soviet expectations.

This cooperation surely meant a start of a totally new relationship between the Soviet bloc and the Middle East. Army supplies were included in the contract and completed by military training which took place in Czechoslovakia. This could last from short term training up to two years spent in the Military Academy in Brno. At the same time experts from the Soviet bloc were present in Arab states: In 1956 there were 127 Czechoslovakians and 215 Russian advisers present in Egypt.[47] This army support was not the only export. The construction of entire factory complexes, particularly in Egypt, Syria and Iraq was not less important. This was an important business for Czechoslovakia, which was to be instrumentalized for propaganda purposes. Archive documents from this period show many references about official military delegations in Czechoslovakia, mainly from Egypt. Meanwhile there were Arab artistic groups visiting the International film festival in Karlovy Vary and a football match between Dukla Prague and the Syrian military team in Aleppo.[48] These examples show the wide variety of cooperation and ways how could Soviet bloc strove to gain strategic positions in the Arab world. The focus of this paper will not lie on the failure of these intentions. However, the Czechoslovakian perception of these visits should be stressed well as the resulting presence of Arab students and soldiers.

By the 20th century the Czechoslovakian public was influenced by specific stereotypes, drawing the picture of a wide "Orient". This had emerged from its own historical context, geographical position, the image of the Turk[49] and the nonexistence of a sea border. Some Czech orientalists do not hesitate to call this cultural conservatism "typical Czech provincialism" which strongly contradicted the changing reality of the 20th century.[50] After entering the Soviet sphere, Czechoslovakia became a part of the "friendly allied states." Within this capacity it had to agree to many ways of support under the flag of ideological brotherhood. In 1964 there were 331 students´ delegations received by the Czechoslovakian youth federation.[51] This was not only dictated above but partly influenced by the mood of the society. In the 1950s young Czechoslovakian communists held an enthusiastic belief that colonial and postcolonial countries would turn towards socialism. Newspapers from this time period are laden with articles with this topic.

International scholarships and other possibilities

The Czechoslovakian government offered students from countries with "potential" the possibility to apply for university scholarships. This was presented through their Foreign Offices or at the gathering of international organizations. The official name of this campaign was "The operation 90 – help for the less developed countries."[52] The number 90 implies the actual number of government scholarships. The first one was offered in 1956, when Czechoslovakia reached out to Egypt and Syria. Considering the international political situation, the fact that this transpired in 1956 is not surprising. The practical aspects of

[47] Petr Zídek, Karel Seiber, Czechoslovakia and the Middle East in 1948-1989, Prague 2009, page 67.
[48] AMZV, Syria TO-T 1955-1959, box 1, 116/215 covering 8, Cultural report Damascus, May 27. 1957.
[49] Although there were never actually any Turkish military intervention, the concern about Ottoman Empire was common in the whole Europe, especially for the countries under the Austrian reign. The image of the Turks is a subject of several Czech historical books. For example: Tomáš Rataj, The Czech land in the shadow of the Crescent, Prague, 2002.
[50] Miloš Mendel, Bronislav Ostřanský, Tomáš Rataj, Islam in the heart of Europe. The influence of Islamic civilization on Czech history, Prague 2007, page 136.
[51] NA, ČSM – Central Committee Fund, Praha, box 1580, Promotional activity, 1964.
[52] NA, KSČ-ÚV-100/3 Fund , The international section Prague, volume 13, a. j. 39, Prague, March 3. 1960.

choosing the candidates (promotion and interviews) were under the Arab´s competence. The final list was received by the Czechoslovakian Foreign Office, which usually respected the choice of recommended candidates. The format of these interviews is not reconstructable. We can easily deduct that contacts and family origin were important, especially in case of the military academy. The Czechoslovakian Foreign Office favored children from military and high officer´s families, in order to gain important economic contracts.

This type of scholarship was one of three possibilities to study in socialistic Czechoslovakia. The second was the communist party´s scholarship. The cooperation between European and Arab communist parties is a chapter of socialist international solidarity which is unknown to Czech historiography. No specific study has been conducted on the topic, although there is a sufficient amount of archive documents proving frequent mutual communication in the observed period of time. The Czechoslovakian side always required a recommendation from a local communist party or from some left wing authority. Without a recommendation students had no hope for obtaining the party´s scholarships. Thanks to these documents we can make interesting profiles of these young left wing sympathizers. From the mentioned characteristic we can reconstruct the values which were important to left wing movement and that they differed in each region. For instance, we can hardly find a young man in the Arab world in this time period, who was not full of nationalist emotion. This did not represent a contradiction to being a communist. On the contrary, Czechoslovakian communists were not found of any sign of nationalism, which was considered as reactionary. Same attitude was toward religion and town origin. Czechoslovakian officials were presumably unimpressed when reading about a young Lebanese communist, who came from a Muslim nationalistic bourgeois family[53].[54] The number of scholarships for Arab communists remained the same for the entire period.

The only group whose number rapidly increased during following years were Arabs paying for their study by themselves. Bilateral cultural agreements included a clause concerning this possibility. The Czechoslovakian side allowed a certain amount of students to study at their own expense in the first period from 1957-1964. Usually these students were treated with suspicion. Constant paranoia was distinctive to this era and these students did not fit the profile desired by the Czechoslovakian side. Most of these students came from urban environments, whit a bourgeois family background and strong nationalistic tendencies. Investing into education was obviously important for them. Choosing Czechoslovakia for this purpose was not motivated by sympathy for socialism, but most likely by finances and the good reputation of Czechoslovakia in Middle Eastern region. Studying in the Soviet bloc was simply cheap and the geographical position of Czechoslovakia convenient due to the possibility of traveling to West Germany. In 1966 the number of scholarships for Syrian students stayed below 20. The number of students who applied at the Foreign Office in Damascus to study at their expense was 870.[55] And most of them were successful.

The University of the 17th of November

The founding of The University of 17th of November[56] in Prague in 1961 proves the importance of ideological influence on the so-called Third World for the Soviet side. It wasn't the first institution of this nature in the Soviet bloc. The first one could be found in Russia called as a Peoples' Friendship University of the USSR founded in Moscow in 1961 and was

[53] AMZV, TO-T Lebanon, 1955-1959, k. 1, 115/113, covering 3, Lebanese students, Beirut April 28. 1958.
[54] The story of Arab communist in the Soviet bloc is not a part of this paper, but it is a part of author´s PhD. research.
[55] AMZV, TO-T, Syria 1965-1969, box 1, 116/113, covering 7, Report for the Ministry of Education, 1967.
[56] The date of 17th of November is referring to the International Students´ Day.

dedicated to Patrice Lumuba.[57] These universities were open mainly to foreign students and concentrated left-wing activists from Africa, Asia a South America. This stands in the wider concept of ideologically taking control in countries still struggling to find a new identity in the postcolonial era. The University was established not only to provide courses in Marxism-Leninism for foreign students but also to be responsible for the administration and language courses. The number of foreign students in the Soviet bloc rapidly increased at the turn of 1950s and 1960s, especially of these from the less developed countries as they were called in official Czechoslovakian documents. In Czechoslovakia in 1960, 760 out of almost 2000 students were from less developed countries, 400 were Arabs.[58] But already in 1963, there were 2183 students from less developed countries out of 3500 foreign students.[59] The largest part of them (657) studied at the University of 17th November. During the 1960s this number constantly increased, with Arab students forming the majority of foreign students in Czechoslovakia.

The University was supposed to secure all parts of student life in Prague. The increasing number of foreign students caused problems with controlling them. The Czechoslovakian side tried to cover student´s leisure time and especially regulate their political activity. Students unions divided by nationality were established at the University. They were responsible for receiving newly arrived students and integrating them into social life. Thanks to the unions we have approximate numbers of Arab students, since most of them (even outside the University of 17th November) were members. Of course there were individuals who refused to join such organizations mostly because unions were closely controlled by representative embassies and usually some of the members were secret agents. The Czechoslovakian intention to entirely cover the lives of Arab students contrarily intensified their isolation from the society and more importantly raised the level of political activism.

In the late 1950s the biggest group of Arab students came from the Egyptian part of the United Arab Republic. With the beginning of 1960s they were replaced by a dominant group of Syrian students and an increasing number of students from Iraq. We could assume that Egyptian students ,being scholarship "pioneers" in the Soviet bloc, started preferring the western countries and were not interested in investing in eastern diplomas. The number of students from Algeria, Yemen and Lebanon didn't exceed 50.[60] The Palestinians did not create a separate union and were dispersed in other Arab unions. Although the number of students from less developed countries including Arabs increased during the 1960s, the Soviet bloc became skeptical about the actual ideological impact in the late 1960s. High investments in scholarships and in operation of the University were not paid for by factual socialist revolutions orchestrated by university graduates back at home. On the contrary, the Czechoslovakian side was more troubled by the presence of foreign students, which will be discussed in the part dedicated to everydayness. This disillusion and money caused that the university was shut down in 1974.

The University of 17th of November is highly significant not only for the student life in Prague in 1960s and the beginning of 1970s, but also completes the image of social life in socialist Czechoslovakia during this period. Along with state scholarship this shows how the regime tried to put an institutional shield on the intention of gaining influence in strategically important countries.

[57] Patrice Lumumba was a politician, who fought for the liberation of Congo from Belgium. He was elected as a first independent Prime Minister of The Republic of Congo in 1960. After dramatic events he was executed the same year. Patrice Lumumba became immediately a face of the anti-colonial struggle.
[58] NA, KSČ-ÚV-100/3 Fund, The international section Prague, volume 13, ar. j. 39, March 3. 1960.
[59] Pavel Urbášek, Jiří Pulec, University systém in 1945-1969, Olomouc 2012, page 354.
[60] NA, The Univesity of 17th November´s Fund, box136, Number 261, Reports about unions1962-1968.

The dimension of everydayness

A one year long course of Czech language was obligatory for every foreign student. The Czech authorities were strict about it, although a lot of students tried to avoid prolonging their studies by a year. Usually each student began their classes at the time of arrival in Czechoslovakia. The patience of Czech authorities was often tried the by students who postponed the final arrival date until the latest possible. We can find many proofs of irritated conversations between the Czech Foreign Office in Cairo or Damascus and The Ministry of Foreign Affairs. All of them deal with delayed arrivals, incorrect lists of students, insufficient explanations of demands and offers which were supposed to be included in the scholarships. We can easily deduce that the communication between both sides failed in setting clear terms concerning the conditions of the students´ every-day life.

The Czech-language courses were usually situated in former holiday resorts Czechoslovakian regional areas. This meant that Arab students were confronted with a provincial environment upon their arrival. The first serious conflict concerning Arab students arose in such a language course in the the first group of Syrian scholarship holders in 1957 staying in Unčín, a small town near the German borders. Most likely this group was transferred from France and England after the international crisis in 1956. We can deduce this from very indignant language used by students themselves. Although annoyed references about the facilities in these dormitories were expressed later by students who had consciously chosen Czechoslovakia, this case was quite outstanding. Documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affair describe that a group of Syrian students went on strike, refused to stay in Czechoslovakia and demanded the presence of Syrian ambassador.[61] It is interesting that the pattern of communication that appears in this debate is present in later cases as well. Students arrived to Czechoslovakia with expectations influenced by the image of an industrial European country, including full material conveniences. The Czechoslovakian side on the other hand was surprised by the nature of the students´ demands. The opposite image of students from less developed countries trying to define themselves against colonial past was drawn by naïve expectations based on clichés. This mutual image of other is a methodological tool with which we can reconstruct the values of each side. In constructing the other the observer uses shared ideas anchored in collective identity. The concept of us and them is a social construct emerged from mutual participation.[62]

Conflicts concerning the aspects of everydayness were present during the students´ entire stay and were naturally strongest in the first years. One of the most interesting cultural contradictions was relation towards food. Food is a part of a wider culture concept as a combination of tradition, practice including innovations. As Massimo Montanari summarizes his concept "Food is culture when produced, prepared and eaten".[63]

Quite naturally, Arab students behaved in their normal way even when studying in Czechoslovakia. However, what they considered natural turned out to be eccentric and provocative in Central European milieu and the Czechoslovak citizen of the 1950s automatically associated their behaviour with luxury, i.e. something inadequate. A good example is fruit: While common in the Mediterranean diet, it was very exotic in Central Europe. What was typical of socialist Czechoslovakia was a certain moderation and utilitarian approach to food, the primary aim, to put it simply, being to satiate hunger. It is no surprise, then, to read in the report describing excessive demands of Syrian students living in the Unčín

[61] AMZV, TO-O Syria, 1945-1959, kr. 2, 116/38, Covering 26, Report about the visit of Syrian secretary, July 16. 1957.

[62] Martina Krocová, Miloš Řezník, Boundaries and Identities in Academic Discourse, In: Crosiing Frontiers, Resisting Identities, Pisa, 2010, page 5.

[63] Massimo Montanari, Food is Culture, Columbia University Press, 2006.

dormitory that *they are used to using a lot of sugar and buying fruit, i.e. having products which are more expensive in Czechoslovakia than in Syria.*[64]

In contrast with the Arab students' complaints about the lack of products they were used to at home, the privileges that they enjoyed – and Czechoslovak students and citizens never experienced – were becoming more apparent. The most glowing example were Tuzex tokens,[65] paid for with the money sent over from abroad. Furthermore, Arab students were free to travel to foreign countries, where they kept social relations with their compatriot students. Czechoslovak authorities were naturally irritated by such practice, but there was nothing they could do to prevent it. Having the opportunity to shop in Tuzex, Arab students differed in their clothing, too, which was completely out of reach for the common citizen.

Arab students differed also in the way they spent their free time. In any foreign country, the need to socialize with fellow countrymen is a common and understandable feature and foreign students studying in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s and 1960s were no exception. For the most part, Arab students spent their free time together and they kept extensive contacts with their embassies as well. This isolation from Czechoslovakian society started at the Czech-language courses, where they were isolated in small towns. Both the dormitory parties and the official union social occasions were held in the spirit of Arab culture. The students' Prague life was affected by political development in their home countries, in particular through the employees of Arab foreign offices who were constantly checking on them.

In the late 1960s, the negative public opinion on foreign students began to escalate, nourished by bar conflicts which often ended in physical violence and police intervention. The so-called inside-out racism, applied by Czechoslovak authorities in such cases, incurred huge displeasure as well.[66] Consequently, Czechoslovak citizens accused their government of sponsoring the foreign students' studies and of favouring them to the detriment of domestic students – an opinion fostered not only by the physical collisions, but by the aforementioned eccentric, western-style clothing as well.

Graduates

After graduating from a university, Arab students had to leave Czechoslovakia. In coactions with the Arab Foreign Office, they were denied a prolongation of their stay, therefore they could not remain in the country. Such a solution was in the interest of both the Czechoslovak and the Arab side. Former students could qualify for the permanent residence permit in two ways: Either they found a way to be useful for the Arab Foreign Office in Prague, e. g. they became its employees, or they had to please the Czechoslovak side. That was achieved most commonly by signing to the Secret Police. However, most former students opted for returning home. Syrian graduates of Czechoslovak universities, the focus of an analysis carried out by the Czechoslovak Foreign Office in Damascus, were praised in the analysis for their good professional fulfilment.[67] Especially graduating from foreign technical universities seems to have resonated well in Syria and to have enabled individuals to find employment more easily. In 1965, there were altogether 42 Syrian graduates of Czech universities who returned to their home country.[68] Forty-two is the first number we have come across when speaking of the Syrian students' success rate. The period in question is the time when the first Arab students who had begun to make use of official scholarships, offered since

[64] AMZV, TO-O Syria 1945–1959, box 2, 116/38, covering 27, Syrian scholarship holders: An opinion on the issue of discontent, September 2, 1957.
[65] The Tuzex chain of shops was a special network of shops offering foreign goods. The products were paid for only by special tokens which were not freely available.
[66] Urbášek, Pavel and Pulec, Jiří, *Vysokoškolský vzdělávací systém v letech 1945–1969* (Olomouc 2012), p. 357.
[67] AMZV, TO-T, Syria 1965–1969, box 1, 116/113, covering 6, Damascus, January 11, 1965.
[68] Ibid.

the late 1950s, were finishing their studies. Ideally, the whole study period took 6 years (7 years for medical studies), including a one-year Czech language course. Therefore, the year 1965 was one of the first years that the Czechoslovak authorities took interest in with regard to the fates of the Arabs who returned home. Unfortunately, it is not known how many Syrians stayed in Czechoslovakia after completing their studies. If we are to assume that most of them did return to Syria, the number (42) speaks volumes about the graduates' relative success rate. Already in 1966, the Damascus Foreign Office registered a minimum of 105 graduates.[69]

The aforementioned report is interesting not only because it helps us get a better idea about the number of Syrians returning with a diploma from a Czechoslovak university, but also because it partly clarifies the intentions of the Czechoslovak side. According to the instructions given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Foreign Office was to stay in touch with the graduates, invite them to official social functions, involve them in the Commercial Department's projects, employ them as teachers of Arabic or hire them during the organization of an international trade fair.[70] The graduates from foreign universities were expected to form new social elite in Arab countries, at least to take up positions in state authorities. The Czechoslovak government was hoping for their friendly attitude and all sorts of business connections after the graduates assume more important positions.[71] However, it turned out that the simple equation would not be as straightforward. Most graduates worried about keeping friendly contacts with the Czechoslovak Foreign Office for fear of arousing suspicion on the part of domestic authorities. Arab governments obviously feared that communism would infiltrate local politics.

Some of the graduates were probably nostalgic. They wanted to keep at least some contact with the country where they had spent several years studying. Naturally, the relations with left-wing graduates were the strongest. Even the 1965 Damascus Foreign Office report on the graduates' relationship to Czechoslovakia indicates that while most graduates had reservations about local conditions during their studies, they found it difficult to unlearn the European way of life after their return to Syria.[72] Thus, not always was their return smooth and some of the graduates had troubles getting used to Arab conditions anew. Nevertheless, it might be said that in most cases they returned home with a positive attitude to Czechoslovakia, although the Foreign Office does mention *exceptions*.[73]

Taking into account complaints received by the Dormitory Administration in Prague, which expressed discontent with frequent female visits at Arab male students' rooms and with noisy parties also attended by members of the opposite sex, it is safe to assume that many of those relationships could have resulted in marriage and in the couples leaving the country. In 1966, one third of the Syrian graduates' wives were of Czechoslovak origin, which strikes as a high number.[74] It is a great pity that the fates of the married women are impossible to map, as they must have experienced a much bigger culture shock than their husbands after arriving in Czechoslovakia. In the 1960s Czechoslovakia, women were an equal part of the milieu, not only due to the communist efforts to emancipate women particularly in labour relations, but also thanks to the trend of equalizing the rights of men and women in most parts of Europe.[75]

[69] AMZV, TO-T, Syria 1965–1969, box 1, 116/113, covering 6, Damascus, October 7, 1966.
[70] AMZV, TO-T, Syria 1965–1969, box 1, 116/113, covering 6, Damascus, January 11, 1965.
[71] For example, the FO report mentions that one of the graduates acts as the Mayor of Homs, while others hold important positions at ministries or in economic enterprises agencies, such as the Euphrates Dam Construction Agency, or Homs refinery. The contacts were important particularly for the FO commercial department, which tried hard to keep in close touch with the graduates. AMZV, TO-T, Syria 1965–1969, box 1, 116/113, covering 6, Damascus, October 7, 1966.
[72] AMZV, TO-T, Syria 1965–1969, box 1, 116/113, covering 6, Damascus, November 11, 1965.
[73] AMZV, TO-T, Syria 1965–1969, box 1, 116/113, covering 6, Damascus, October 7, 1966.
[74] Most of them kept their Czechoslovak citizenship as well. Ibid.
[75] On the issue of emancipation of women under communism, see e.g. Květa Jechová's study on motherhood and unwanted children in *Opozice a společnost po roce 1948* (Prague, 2009).

For a number of the wives, the new life in Arab milieu, where male authority is accented, must have been traumatizing. Because of the language barrier, those women also tended to establish relations only among themselves and with the Czechoslovak Foreign Office. They seem to have been uninterested in politics and rather to have been seeking friendships which could make their new lives more pleasant.[76]

In conclusion, it might be said that most information on the graduates were gathered by the University of 17th of November which, in cooperation with the Promotional Committee of the Communist Party and the Czechoslovak Youth Federation kept not only their addresses, but also brief characteristics; such activity resulted from the very reason for the University's existence.

Conclusion

Since 1956, Egyptian and Syrian students could study in Czechoslovakia thanks to the scholarship policy stipulated by cultural agreements. The agreements were made in the wake of political events in the late 1950s which forced Egypt to cooperate internationally with the Soviet Union and its allies. This was the first wave of the Czechoslovak government's Arab scholarship holders, students from the so-called less developed countries. Over the years, Czechoslovakia made similar agreements with other Arab countries, too, although at times it had to deal with suspicion arising from the fear of communism being spread. Czechoslovak government scholarships were not the only possibility of studying in the country; e.g. Arab communist parties provided scholarships as well. Students who paid for their studies themselves were another important group among Arab students in Czechoslovakia, in fact they outnumbered the scholarship holders in the 1960s. Arab countries witnessed increased interest in obtaining diplomas from European universities, and Czechoslovakia would be chosen for several reasons. In addition to the country's prestige earned by arms and material deliveries, the fact that studying in Czechoslovakia was cheaper in comparison to Western Europe played a role. Due to the increasing importance of African and Asian students from countries *prioritized* by the Czechoslovak foreign policy, the University of 17th of November was founded in Prague in 1961. Consequently, the University took over the organizational structure of language courses which were mandatory for the students after their arrival. It was significantly involved in the students' lives and even provided patronage for their associations, whose activities it monitored systematically.

Since the early 1960s, Arab students formed one of the largest groups of foreign students in Czechoslovakia. They studied predominantly technical or medical branches or natural sciences but there were a handful of artists and students of the humanities, too. Their studies would be made more difficult by the language barrier which was difficult to overcome even after completing the language course. Another possible reason for failure was the complicated mutual interpretation of the behaviour on both sides. While Arab students expected maximum helpfulness from Czechoslovak authorities, they met with incomprehension from the other side. The way they communicated was considered arrogant and their demands were regarded as excessive. The Czechoslovak side was also surprised by their huge political engagement which it tried to adjust with the help of student unions. For the most part, the graduates returned to their home countries and continued to keep in touch with the Czechoslovak Foreign Office; the relationship was intense and mutually beneficial. The graduates of Czechoslovak universities became a part of the newly forming social elite in modern Arab countries.

[76] That is, at any rate, what the FO report on Czechoslovak wives shows. According to the report, the wives were too stupefied by the inferiority complex arising from their new environment, therefore not politically ready for the country; the husbands were more natural and heartier in their relation to the FO than the wives. AMZV, TO-T, Syria, 1965–1969, box 1, 116/113, covering 6, Damascus, October 7, 1966.

The distinctive paradox pervading throughout the work is the contradicting idea of an Arab student coming over under a project to help economically underdeveloped countries, and the same student walking the streets of Prague having a reputation of an eccentric dandy. The picture of an everyday Prague life in those "grey" times thus gets enlivened.

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