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LOCATING THE NATION IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD:
DEBATES ON THE GLOBAL POSITION
OF INTERWAR CZECHOSLOVAKIA

“In the time of the telegraph, the telephone, the radio, [...] of airplanes, tractors and electricity, in the economic sphere one cannot think but globally”¹: thus argued engineer Karel Doležel in 1931 in the weekly journal *Přítomnost* (The Presence), making his case for Czechoslovak participation in economic globalization *avant la lettre*. He was by no means the only person at the time who stressed the importance of global thinking for the Czechoslovak economy. And it was not just in the economic field that such commentators considered contemporary issues from a global perspective. In fact, I intend to argue that Czechoslovak debates on the risks and opportunities of the globalized world, but also on the “necessity” for the nation to interact on the global stage, not only located Czechoslovakia on a global map, but also touched upon some of the central political, social, and economic questions of the interwar period.

With the arguments that follow, I would like to make a plea for linking Czechoslovak history of the 1920s and 1930s into the wider global history of the time. This may seem counterintuitive at first, as Czech(oslovak) history has so far tended to be written in a regional or, at its broadest, in a “Western” context, concentrating mainly on relationships within Central Europe with Germany, Russia and the regions of the former Habsburg empire, but also – with less frequency – on relations with the “West”, especially with France, Great Britain, or the USA. A truly global perspective has been generally overlooked by scholars of Czechoslovak history.² At the same time, scholarship on global history has not only mostly ignored its Czech component, but has generally – though not uncontroversially – tended to consider the interwar period as a time of ‘deglobalization’.

Global history as understood for our purposes combines two perspectives. Where it is understood as the history of globalization, the discipline traces the growing interconnectedness of the various world regions, traditionally focusing foremost on

¹ Doležel, Karel: O těch, kteří rozkouskovali svět [About Those Who Fragmentized the World]. In: *Přítomnost*, 07. 10. 1931, 680-682, here 680.

² The missing link between East Central European and global history has been discussed already by Hadler, Frank/Middell, Matthias: Auf dem Weg zu einer transnationalen Geschichte Ostmitteleuropas. In: Hadler/Middell (eds.): *Verflochtene Geschichten: Ostmitteleuropa. Comparativ. Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung* 20 (2010) 1-2, 8-29, here 15. – One article that links Central European and global history in an exemplary manner – albeit for the preceding period during the Habsburg monarchy – by taking a maritime perspective is Frank, Alison: Continental and Maritime Empires in an Age of Global Commerce. In: *East European Politics and Societies* 25 (2011) 4, 779-784.

economic entanglements (and their closely related infrastructural connections), but also on increasing political, social or cultural exchanges. If we take the term literally, global history also potentially encompasses the entire globe. Not only does global history therefore discuss the phenomenon of increasing international contacts generally, but it also traces out the growth in the relations between (world) regions that previously had no or only marginal interaction with one another before the era of globalization.³

It is reasonable to locate the “first wave of globalization” in the late 19th century, with the growth in economic networks that occurred during the period. But this age was most profoundly affected by transport and communication revolutions that literally spanned the entire world, with the result that it now seemed prudent to globalize hitherto local matters, such as harmonizing time zones, organizing postal services, or setting up telegraph systems. This ever tighter-knit global network provided the impetus for public debates on the role, the place and the interactions of European nations worldwide, whether or not they were involved in the colonial endeavors of the time. According to this narrative, the First World War may be seen as the climax of these worldwide developments, while the interwar period that followed it is by comparison characterized as a period of “deglobalization”, that featured a strong re-orientation back towards national (or even nationalist) concerns. The US Immigration Act of 1924 (which was in fact rather more an anti-immigration act) and the growth in economic nationalization might serve as obvious examples of this “deglobalization” process in action.⁴

I would like to argue that it was precisely during this apparent period of “deglobalization” between the wars that debates took place in Czechoslovakia on the importance of dealing with the wider world in the economic sphere. And it was not only the so-called “West” that was considered important in these debates. In fact, I

³ For an early discussion on global history, the history of globalization, and world history – and the role of nation-states in this context – see *Mazlish*, Bruce: Comparing Global History to World History. In: *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 28 (1998) 3, 385-395. – As well as *Geyer*, Michael/*Bright*, Charles: World History in a Global Age. In: *The American Historical Review* 100 (1995) 4, 1034-1060. – See also *Conrad*, Sebastian/*Eckert*, Andreas: *Globalgeschichte, Globalisierung, multiple Modernen: Zur Geschichtsschreibung der modernen Welt*. In: *Conrad*, Sebastian/*Eckert*, Andreas/*Freitag*, Ulrike (eds.): *Globalgeschichte. Theorien, Ansätze, Themen*. Frankfurt am Main 2007, 7-49.

⁴ Niall Ferguson argues for a first globalization from about 1870 to World War I, followed by what he terms a “sinking globalization”. *Ferguson*, Niall: Sinking Globalization. In: *Foreign Affairs* 84 (2005) 2, 64-77; Robert Boyce goes so far as to call this phase the “collapse of globalization”, see *Boyce*, Robert: *The Great Interwar Crisis and the Collapse of Globalization*. Basingstoke 2009. – In contrast, Adam McKeown argues with a focus on global migration against the narrative of “deglobalization” at the time, pointing at another peak in global migration during the 1920s. *McKeown*, Adam: *Global Migration, 1846-1940*. In: *Journal of World History* 15 (2004) 2, 155-189. – Skeptical of the concept of the interwar period as a phase of deglobalization in a more general context are *Kunkel*, Sönke/*Meyer*, Christoph: *Dimensionen des Aufbruchs: Die 1920er und 1930er in globaler Perspektive*. In: *Kunkel*/*Meyer* (eds.): *Aufbruch ins postkoloniale Zeitalter: Globalisierung und die außereuropäische Welt in den 1920er und 1930er Jahren*. Frankfurt am Main 2012, 7-33, here 9-10.

would like to focus on debates on Czechoslovak relations with Asia, Africa and South America. It was these debates, I would argue, that put Czechoslovakia on a truly global map. I aim to show, first of all, that a high level of global awareness was a widespread feature in the Czechoslovak society of the 1920s and 1930s. Secondly, I aim to stress the importance that the contemporary actors attributed to these debates, as engagement with Africa, Asia and South America was spoken of as no less than a “necessity” for national survival, as well as also being thought of as a solution to purely internal problems at home.

The debates I am referring to took the form of discussions among intellectuals over issues that mostly related to potentialities rather than concrete realities. They were led by economists, Orientalists, and businesspeople, as well as by representatives of the government and leaders of financial institutions and trade organizations. Some of the remarks relevant to my study were self-published, while some were printed in governmental papers or well-known journals. It is, I believe, the quantity of evidence, the heterogeneity of the people involved, and the urgency of the pleas made that give a hint of the importance assigned to the topic by those active in the debate.

I will use three case studies to illustrate my argument: Firstly, debates on the “necessity” for economic expansion into non-European markets give an indication of how relevant participation in economic globalization was perceived to be. Secondly, contemporary reflections on the founding of an Oriental Institute in Prague (along with several other institutions whose activities were focused on relations with non-European regions) stress the importance assigned to dealings with the non-European world and to the specific role of Czechoslovakia on the global stage. And thirdly, pleas to set up Czechoslovak settlements or colonies, particularly in locations well beyond Europe, were seen as offering solutions at a global level to urgent domestic social and political problems.

Debating Economic Globalization

The promising start of the newly founded Czechoslovak republic and the strength of its economy are by now well-recognized elements in the repertoire of the standard state narrative. With about a fifth of the territory, a quarter of the inhabitants, and an impressive 40% of the economic output of the former Habsburg monarchy, and especially considering the fact that the latter figure included two thirds of the region’s heavy industrial production, Czechoslovakia was soon able to count itself among the ten most powerful producers of industrial products, and among the top seven exporters of weaponry worldwide.⁵ Indeed some “Made in Czechoslovakia” products were quickly becoming global success stories: By 1930, Tomáš Baťa had become the most successful shoe exporter in the world. The machines and weaponry

⁵ Kosta, Jiří: Die tschechoslowakische Wirtschaft nach der Staatsgründung. In: *Lemberg, Hans/Heumos, Peter* (eds.): *Das Jahr 1919 in der Tschechoslowakei und in Ostmitteleuropa. Vorträge der Tagung des Collegium Carolinum in Bad Wiessee vom 24. bis 26. November 1989. München 1993 (BWT 17) 63-91, here 63.* – *Teichová, Alice*: *Wirtschaftsgeschichte der Tschechoslowakei 1918-1980. Wien 1988, 24.*

produced at the Škoda Works were global export hits,⁶ while the Pilsner Urquell brewery had even begun by the 1930s to advertise its liquid wares against the backdrop of scenes filmed in Berlin, Vienna and Paris, but also in New York and even Bombay!⁷

While these firms were surely the international stars of the Czechoslovak export industry throughout the interwar period, the majority of economic relationships were and remained within a framework that had already been established at the time of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, so that commerce had a strong focus on South-eastern Europe and was developing a growing economic dependency on Germany.⁸ This discrepancy between the global reach of a few internationally successful products and the majority of the firms, which continued to concentrate on their traditional regional export markets, was noted and discussed by the economic experts of the time. Karel Doležel's plea – quoted at the beginning of this article – for the Czechoslovak economy to reach out to global markets was only one of many such appeals.

However, such demands for a stronger economic engagement in the non-European markets were not purely theoretical. In fact, they were matched by actual developments in the country's overall trade figures. While Czechoslovakia exported only a little more than 5% of all its goods to Asia, Africa and South America in 1924, this share had increased to almost 9% by 1929. During the economic crisis of the 1930s, the share of exports accounted for by non-European markets continued to rise at least until 1937, by which time it had reached almost 17%.⁹ This growing share of non-European trade was partly due to the fact that the country's traditional markets – mainly Germany and Southeastern Europe – had been severely affected by the economic Depression. It nonetheless shows that trade with non-European

⁶ *Vavrečka Kempná*, Lucie: Škodovky do celého světa: export automobilů L&K a Škoda v letech 1905-1991 [Škoda Cars for the Entire World: The Export of Cars Made by L&K and Škoda 1905-1991]. Praha 2013.

⁷ The advertisement is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=crezpk6Vk4A> (last accessed 15.05.2016), with its slogan "The Entire World Knows Pilsner Urquell". – While the temporal ascription of the advertisement and its placement in the 1930s is admittedly no more than an educated guess, eyewitness accounts from that time recall the existence of Pilsner Urquell, as well as of Budweiser, in places as far apart as Calcutta, Cairo and Shanghai. *Doubek*, Jaroslav: Dvě cesty Spexoru do Afriky a Asie [Two Trips by Spexor to Africa and Asia]. Plzeň 1933, 31-32. – *Kořenský*, Josef: Cesta kolem světa 1893-1894. Díl 2: Čína – Malajské ostrovy – Cejlon – Indie – Rudé moře – Egypt [Trip Around the World 1893-1894. Part 2: China – Islands of Malaysia – Ceylon – India – Red Sea – Egypt]. Praha 1897, 405. – *Pospíšil*, Bohumil: Čínou za revolučního varu. Dojmy z cest po jižní a střední Číně [China during the Time of Revolutionary Upheaval. Impressions from Travels through South and Central China]. Praha 1935, 132. – Cf. also *Kejba*, Josef/*Janouškovec*, Jiří/*Jurina*, Vladimír: Plzeňský Prazdroj: 1842-2012: Příběh, který nepřestává inspirovat [Pilsner Urquell: 1842-2012: A History That Does Not Cease to Inspire]. Plzeň 2012.

⁸ *Teichova*, Alice: Die Tschechoslowakei 1918-1980. In: *Fischer*, Wolfram et al. (eds.): Handbuch der europäischen Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte. Bd. 6: Vom Ersten Weltkrieg bis zur Gegenwart. Stuttgart 1987, 598-639, here 617.

⁹ *Kosta*: Die tschechoslowakische Wirtschaft 83 (cf. fn. 5). – *Teichova*: Die Tschechoslowakei 617 (cf. fn. 8).

regions became an increasingly important element in the figures for economic development over the years. The experience of the economic crisis had also inspired the country's economic actors to acquire an understanding that developing a broad base of markets would be the safest bet in times of insecurity, as lawyer and East Asian specialist Rudolf Cicvárek (1860-1950) argued: “[...] the best principle is to pursue trade with all states of the world”.¹⁰

It was no coincidence that it was during the economic recession when the Prague-based Oriental Institute (Orientální ústav) – an institute with a focus on economic, academic, and cultural relations with the “Orient”, understood in a very broad geographic sense – launched a lecture series exploring the economic opportunities presented by such Asian and North African markets as Siam and Malaysia,¹¹ Indochina,¹² India,¹³ and Morocco.¹⁴ The idea of extending trade relations to non-European markets was not confined to the Orient, but spanned the entire world: prospects in other world regions, including South Africa¹⁵ and South America, were also discussed during the interwar period.¹⁶

This lecture series by the Oriental Institute comprised ten public lectures published successively between 1931 and 1933. The speakers invited to give the lectures were – unsurprisingly – all regional specialists. Some had acquired their expertise during lengthy stays in Asia or Africa. This category included Rudolf Cicvárek, who had spent seventeen years working in the wood trade in China, as well as on Sumatra, Java and elsewhere, before returning to Czechoslovakia in 1925. Jan Kořínek (1904-1984) had travelled widely in Morocco and was considered the “pioneer” in Czechoslovak-Moroccan relations and the country's best established expert on the historical, cultural, economic and political situation in that part of North Africa.¹⁷ Sir Albion Banerji (1871-1950), a civil servant in India and for a short term prime minister of Kashmir, was the only foreigner invited to take part in the public economic debate at the Oriental Institute.

¹⁰ *Cicvárek, Rudolf*: Obchodní poměry ve východní Asii [Trade Conditions in East Asia]. Praha 1931, 3.

¹¹ *Millner, Vladimír*: Obchodní poměry v Siamu a Malajsku [Trade Conditions in Siam and Malaysia]. Praha 1932.

¹² *Penc, Antonín*: Obchodní a hospodářské poměry v Indočíně [Trade and Economic Conditions in Indochina]. Praha 1933.

¹³ *Banerji, Albion*: O možnostech přímých hospodářských styků mezi Indií a Československem [On the Prospects for Direct Economic Relations between India and Czechoslovakia]. Praha 1932.

¹⁴ *Kořínek, Jan*: Francouzské Maroko z hlediska hospodářského a náš obchod [French Morocco from an Economic Viewpoint and Our Trade]. Praha 1932.

¹⁵ *Blabovský, Antonín*: Hospodářské poměry v Jihoafrické Unii [Economic Conditions in the South African Union]. Praha 1938.

¹⁶ *Kýbal, Vlastimil*: Jižní Amerika a Československo. S přehledem obchodní, finanční a emigrační činnosti jiných národů [South America and Czechoslovakia: Including an Overview of Other Nations' Trade, Finance and Emigration]. Praha 1928.

¹⁷ [š, kš]: Kořínek Jan – český afrikanista, publicista, cestovatel [Kořínek Jan – Czech African Specialist, Journalist, Traveller]. In: *Filipský, Jan* (ed.): Čeští a slovenští orientalisté, afrikanisté a iberoamerikanisté [Czech and Slovak Orientalists, African and Ibero-American Specialists]. Praha 1999, 265.

A comparison of these lectures reveals, despite the very diverse choice of regions to be covered, that the various arguments given for Czechoslovak economic engagement in these different countries had a strong resemblance to one another: Markets in Asia, but also in Africa or Latin America, were considered as yet unsaturated, and therefore offered huge potential to Czechoslovak exports. Jan Antonín Baťa (1898-1965, inheritor of the Tomáš Baťa shoe-empire) formulated this view quite bluntly, declaring just before taking off to a trip around the world that “There are 1,100 million barefoot people in this world – we want to leave for this world.”¹⁸

At the same time, reaching out to these “open markets” was considered more than simply an opportunity for rich rewards; it was also seen as a necessary measure to compete with other nations. If such an effort is not made, the argument went, the young Czechoslovak state will lose out on its share in the world market. “The need to set up export houses has never been as strong as now, because without such trading houses overseas it will not be possible to increase industrial production [...]”, was how Rudolf Cícvárek argued in favor of the conquest of the international markets.¹⁹

So far, however, the Czechoslovak state had not fared too well, because their international competitors were – as several economists stressed – starting from an unfair advantage: While even medium-sized and small countries such as Belgium or Liechtenstein were represented overseas, some authors noted a shortage of Czechoslovak infrastructure, which posed obvious disadvantages for Czechoslovak firms and products.²⁰ Vladimír Millner (dates unknown) noted that the volumes of economic exchanges with Siam had been falling for years for the lack of a trading agent, while even “small Switzerland” could count on no less than two import companies in Bangkok.²¹ Even more devastating, Karel Erban (1901-1982) claimed that Czechoslovakia was exceptionally weak in terms of economic representations, complaining that “we find in the [Dutch East] Indies companies from all nations active in the global trade, it is [therefore] all the more striking that Czechoslovakia is not represented there yet”.²²

Apart from witnessing the perceived need to maintain economic bureaus abroad, these comments give a hint at the sort of countries with which the Czechoslovak republic was expected to compare itself, and against which it was expected to compete. In his lecture on the potential prospects for Czechoslovak-Indian economic relations, for example, Albion Banerji criticized an Indian state publication that listed thirteen European countries separately in terms of their economic relations with India, “even including European Turkey”, while it relegated Czechoslovakia, despite its fairly strong business ties with India, collectively under the heading

¹⁸ Baťa, J.A.: *Za obchodem kolem světa. Baťova letecká obchodní výprava kolem světa 6. 1.-1. 5. 1937* [Around the World for Trade. Baťa's Trade Expedition around the World by Plane 6. 1.-1. 5. 1937]. n.p.

¹⁹ Cícvárek: *Obchodní poměry* 28 (cf. fn. 10).

²⁰ Millner: *Obchodní poměry* 4 (cf. fn. 11).

²¹ *Ibid.* 15.

²² Erban, Karel: *Obchod s nizozemskou Indií* [Commerce with the Dutch [East] Indies]. Praha 1931, 9.

“other countries” – an affront that the Prague chamber of Commerce would surely need to look into!²³ Even worse, when Czechoslovakia was finally given a separate mention in the Indian brochure, it was grouped with Austria and Hungary, “although it could perfectly well be compared in this context with Sweden”.²⁴

It may seem a bit disproportionate to make such a fuss about some random official Indian brochure. However, the argument hit a nerve with the home audience: Such comparisons with other European countries placed Czechoslovakia on a mental map of where it economically should be and of where it actually stood. National expectations required Czechoslovakia to compete in the same economic league as Switzerland, Liechtenstein, or Sweden (if not Great Britain, France, or Germany), and certainly not with Austria or Hungary, let alone with Turkey. The comments suggest that the Czechoslovakia of the early 1930s was not as well established internationally as contemporary commentators had hoped. This discrepancy provoked demands for improved state support of export businesses, with suggestions ranging from setting up trade organizations, through bilateral trade agreements to opening Czechoslovak trade representations in overseas regions.²⁵

Institutionalization: The Oriental Institute in Prague

It was no coincidence that the lecture series on economic relations with the Orient discussed above was organized by the Oriental Institute in Prague.²⁶ In fact, a belief that developing relations with the Orient was of essential importance for the newly founded Czechoslovak republic was the main impetus behind the founding of the Oriental Institute. The first plans for such an institute were already being sketched out in 1919 by the internationally renowned Moravian Orientalist Alois Musil (1868-1944), who had earlier established his professional reputation in Vienna both as member of the Imperial Academy of Sciences and as a professor of biblical studies and the Arabic language at the University of Vienna.²⁷ He had also earned merits as a personal advisor to the Habsburg family and had famously become a sort of opposite number to British Orientalist T. E. Lawrence in Near Eastern politics during World War I, a position that had earned him the nickname “Lawrence of Moravia”.²⁸

²³ *Banerji*: O možnostech 3 (cf. fn. 13).

²⁴ *Ibid.* 4.

²⁵ *Cicvárek*: Obchodní poměry 3 (cf. fn. 10). – *Erban*: Obchod s nizozemskou Indií 18 (cf. fn. 22).

²⁶ The goals and development of the Oriental Institute have been analyzed in more depth in *Lemmen*, Sarah: “Unsere Aufgaben in der Orientalistik und im Orient.” Die Gründung und die erste Dekade des Prager Orientalischen Instituts in der Zwischenkriegszeit. In: *Lemmen/Born*, Robert (eds.): *Orientalismen in Ostmitteleuropa. Diskurse, Akteure und Disziplinen vom 19. Jahrhundert bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Bielefeld 2014 (Postcolonial Studies 19) 119-143.

²⁷ For a more thorough account of his life cf. *Bauer*, Karl Johannes: *Alois Musil: Wahrheits-sucher in der Wüste*. Wien 1989.

²⁸ *Gellner*, Ernest: Lawrence of Moravia. In: *Gellner* (ed.): *Anthropology and Politics. Revolutions in the Sacred Grove*. Oxford, Cambridge 1995, 212-228. – On Musil’s deeds in Vienna, cf. *Bečka*, Jiří: *Alois Musil, duchovní otec Orientálního ústavu* [Alois Musil, Spir-

Musil had also already developed the idea of an institute for the study of the Orient on behalf of the Emperor, but the outcome of the First World War had rendered the project hopeless. His pre-war experience in scholarly Oriental studies and his ideas for its institutionalization, however, were readily incorporated into the design of the Czechoslovak Oriental institute now in planning.²⁹

The other founding father of the Oriental Institute was the recently appointed head of state, President Tomáš G. Masaryk (1850-1937), who had not only invited Alois Musil – in the teeth of strong opposition due to his former associations with the Habsburgs – to join the efforts to develop the new state by appointing him professor at the Charles university, but had also provided an incentive for the foundation of the Oriental Institute in Prague by asking Musil to submit a conceptual design for the endeavor. Masaryk's involvement alone could be thought of as evidence enough that, in the throes of establishing the new state, relations with the Orient were seen as an important building block in the effort to position Czechoslovakia in the wider international context. And the resources put into the Institute were extraordinary. Aside from the Oriental Institute, only one other regional institute of a similar size was planned with a similar level of presidential support, the Slavic Institute (Slovanský ústav).³⁰ The two sister institutions were planned to be housed together and to be structured according to a similar hierarchy, and both bodies were to be financially supported by the presidential fund.³¹ This was a clear signal that the Slavic region and the Orient were the two global regions to be given priority in the effort to develop the international relations of the newly founded Czechoslovak republic.

In close consultation with President Masaryk, Alois Musil published a memorandum in 1920 – which he later called the “founding manifesto” of the Institute³² – in which he explained in detail the need for such an institute in Czechoslovakia in the new world order. Musil argued that the new state “must and will deal in global

itual Father of the Oriental Institute]. In: *Veselý, Rudolf* (ed.): *Alois Musil – český vědec světového jména* [Alois Musil – Czech Scientist of World Fame]. Praha 1995 (Rozpravy Orientalia 1), 29-32.

²⁹ Although somewhat antiquated, the following monograph gives an overview of Alois Musil's tasks as the Emperor's Orientalist: *Bauer*: Alois Musil (cf. fn. 27). – On the Oriental institutions in Vienna in pre-1914, cf. *Lemmen*: “Unsere Aufgaben in der Orientalistik und im Orient” 121-125 (cf. fn. 26).

³⁰ The Slavic and the Oriental Institute were designed as two parts of a joint operation. In March 1921, President Masaryk expressed a wish that both institutes would be founded “as soon as possible”. *Zpráva důvodová z vládního návrhu zákona* [Explanatory Statement on the Government's Draft Bill], 27.05.1921. In: *Ročenka slovanského ústavu za rok 1928*. Praha 1929, 2-4. – The law that founded the Slavic and Oriental Institutes was passed on 25 January 1922. Cf. *ibid.* 1-2.

³¹ *Masarykův ústav a Archiv akademie věd České republiky, v.v.i., Praha* [Masaryk Institute and Archives of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, v.v.i., Prague, hereafter MÚA AV ČR]. Fond Orientální ústav (hereafter OÚ), box 2. Letter from Zdeněk Fafl to Alois Musil, 25.07.1921 (copy).

³² MÚA AV ČR. Fond OÚ, box 2. Letter from Alois Musil to Zdeněk Fafl, 17.02.1925 (copy).

politics”,³³ and that the Oriental Institute was an indispensable part of such efforts. In Musil’s words,

Our young state is trying to arrange its relations with other countries, and must therefore build the foundations for these relations at home. A great number of the countries that are important to us are located in the Orient, both Near and Far. The Near East is of especially great importance for us and always will be.³⁴

In his memorandum, Musil presented Czechoslovakia as the ideal cooperation partner for countries in the east. According to Musil, not only was Czechoslovakia able to offer such countries urgently needed skills, manpower and refined products better than any other European country could, and would in return provide a market for raw material from the East. Czechoslovakia – with its current problem of “overpopulation” – was the only country that could afford to send much needed skilled workers to the Orient, while most other European countries were either suffering a shortage of workers themselves or needed them for their own colonies.³⁵

There was also – perhaps most importantly – a political quality that highlighted Czechoslovakia as a suitable partner for Eastern states above all other European countries, namely that Czechoslovakia lacked any colonial or imperial history, and therefore “[t]he Orient will welcome us gladly, because it knows that we have no hidden agendas, be they political or religious”.³⁶ Here, the country’s relatively small size and lack of imperial power were turned into an asset for the purposes of modern politics. At the same time, however, Czechoslovakia’s lack of a colony was acknowledged to be a competitive drawback, as “only the Orient”, as Musil put it, would be able to “substitute for the colony that we don’t own, despite our need of it”.³⁷

The plan, for the moment, remained no more than a conjecture on a piece of paper. In a search to widen the range of supporters and active members of the institute, his memorandum was published in 1920 in the monthly journal *Naše doba* (Our Times), for (as the subtitle reads) “research, art and social life”. Simultaneously, one thousand copies of the document were printed separately and sent to experts and assorted specialist institutions in various relevant fields in Czechoslovakia.³⁸ All this publicity was to prove successful. From very early on, supporters of the effort from various fields became engaged in the foundation of the institute. The list of supporters, and later members, of the institute reads like a Who’s Who of figures from commerce, finance, government and research. Apart from the figurehead of the President, the state was represented by three ministries as well (Foreign Affairs, Education and Culture, and Trade). Representatives of the Chamber of Commerce, such as Musil confidant Zdeněk Fafl (1881-1961), and of the banks, and figures from the business world, such as successful shoe-entrepreneur Jan Antonín Baťa or

³³ Musil, Alois: *Naše úkoly v orientalistice a v orient* [Our Tasks in Oriental Studies and in the Orient]. Praha 1920, 9.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 2.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.* 3.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 16.

³⁸ MÚA AV ČR. Fond OÚ, box 2. Letter from Alois Musil to Zdeněk Fafl, 17.02.1925 (copy).

founder of the Koh-i-noor company Jindřich Waldes, all became members of the Oriental Institute. Last but not least, leading Orientalists, especially the experts at Charles University, supported the project from its beginnings, actively contributing to its various projects. Besides the founder and honorary member Alois Musil, Indologists Vincenc Lesný and Otakar Pertold, Egyptologist František Lexa and well-known travelers Jan Havlasa and Josef Kořenský were among many others who played an important role in developing the Institute.³⁹ Financially, generous support of over 4 million crowns had already been provided in the early 1920s by President Masaryk, while both the ministry of Trade and the ministry of Culture and Education also provided substantial support.⁴⁰

In spite of the broad support it attracted, the Oriental Institute only opened its doors as late as 1928. A number of disagreements between the various actors as to the mission of the institute – with some calling for an academic institution engaged in economic and cultural research and others defending the vision of an educational institution predominantly geared to the teaching of Oriental languages – had caused a delay of almost ten years, but had also forced the establishment of a number of other institutes to take on some of the tasks proposed for the Oriental Institute in the meantime. These alternative institutes were seen to some extent as a threat to the plans for the Oriental Institute, but they are also an indication of how urgently an institute of the sort proposed was needed.

When the Oriental Institute was finally founded, it was divided into two sections. The Institute's economic section supported relations between Czechoslovak firms and the Orient by disseminating information and contacts, and by providing travel stipends for young entrepreneurs. The cultural section, by way of contrast, was endowed with a strong Orientalist research agenda, gathering Czechoslovakia's most renowned Orientalists under its roof. Its journal *Archiv Orientální* (Oriental Archive) soon became an internationally acclaimed publication in Oriental studies, but was also acknowledged to be a "propaganda" tool "for our republic throughout the entire Orient" – a fairly necessary role, it would seem, as "our republic is only very little known" in the region.⁴¹ Language courses, a library and general information on the Orient completed the range of services it provided to the interested public. Interestingly, the concept of "the Orient" as a subject of study was never clearly defined. However, the Institute's choice of lectures, languages taught and approved travel grants all suggest a very broad geographical interpretation, taking in a range that extended from south-eastern Europe and North Africa to both near and far-eastern Asia (with the exception of Russia, which would be covered by the Slavic Institute).

³⁹ Bečka, Jiří/Krása, Miloslav: On the History of the Oriental Institute, 1922-1952. In: *Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences* (ed.): *The Oriental Institute Prague* (Basic Information). Prague 1991, 18-33, here 21.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 21-22.

⁴¹ Hrozný, Bedřich: President osvoboditel Masaryk, jeho vztahy k orientu a orientálnímu ústavu v Praze [President-Liberator Masaryk, his Relations with the Orient and with the Oriental Institute in Prague]. In: Lesný, Vincenc/Fafl, Zdeněk (eds.): *Věstník orientálního ústavu v Praze za desetiletí 1928-1938* [Bulletin of the Oriental Institute in Prague for the Decade 1928-1938]. Praha 1938, 5-8, here 7.

As we have already seen, the Oriental Institute was not the only body that concerned itself with regions of the world beyond Europe. The Association for Economic and Cultural Relations with the Black Sea region and the Orient (Společnost pro hospodářské a kulturní styky s Černomořím a Orientem), or the Black Sea Association for short, which was founded in early 1928, was intended to concentrate mainly on economic and cultural relations with the Black Sea region and the Orient. One of the founders of both institutes, general secretary of the Czechoslovak Chamber of Trade and Commerce Zdeněk Fafl, wrote hopefully to Alois Musil in an attempt to explain how this particular institute would not get in the way of the other. "It should concentrate on those tasks in economic and cultural relations that the Oriental Institute will not deal with" was how he put it.⁴² This purpose was eventually explicitly stated in the statutes in an act of confirmation of the active and close cooperation between the two institutions.⁴³

Just as with the Oriental Institute, the register of members of the Black Sea Association suggests a strong interest in its goals of "studying, researching, and professionally assessing the Black Sea region and the Orient in both economic and cultural terms",⁴⁴ as, apart from Orientalists like Jiří Daneš, Karel Domin, Vincenc Lesný, and Felix Tauer, the membership rolls also included representatives of companies as well known as the Baťa shoe company and the Škoda Works, as well as of institutions in the financial sector, such as the Slovak Bank, the Bohemian State Bank and the Czechoslovak Chambers of Trade and Commerce.⁴⁵

Nor were these two the only associations founded with a focus on regions beyond Europe. Even though the remaining organizations never gained the importance or social recognition as the two aforementioned bodies, their existence nonetheless hints at a broader interest in the world outside Europe among Czechoslovaks. Both the Association for the Trade with the Orient (Společnost pro obchod s Východem), founded as early as 1920, and the Club of Friends of the Far East (Klub přátel dálného východu) concentrated on economic issues, while the Circle of Friends of Africa (Kruh přátel Afriky) or the Club of Friends of the Orient (Klub přátel Orientu) focused more on cultural exchange, the former engaging in active ethnographical research,⁴⁶ while the latter busied itself mainly with organizing public lectures as well as study trips to "Turkey, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Greece, Tunis, Al-

⁴² MÚA AV ČR. Fond OÚ, box 2. Letter from Zdeněk Fafl to Alois Musil, 02.06.1927 (copy).

⁴³ Archiv Hlavního města Prahy [Prague City Archives, hereafter AHMP], Spolkový katastr (hereafter SK) XXII/1582. Stanovy Společnosti pro hospodářské a kulturní styky s Černomořím a Orientem [Statutes of the Association for Economic and Cultural Relations with the Black Sea Region and the Orient]. 7 pages.

⁴⁴ AHMP, SK XXII/1582. Stanovy Společnosti pro hospodářské a kulturní styky s Černomořím a Orientem [Statutes of the Association for Economic and Cultural Relations with the Black Sea Region and the Orient].

⁴⁵ AHMP, SK XXII/1582. Undated list of the officials of the Společnost pro hospodářské a kulturní styky s Černomořím a Orientem.

⁴⁶ AHMP, SK IX/927. Stanovy Kruhu přátel Afriky [Statutes of the Circle of Friends of Africa] (undated copy).

giers, Spain, Morocco, Italy, the Balkans, and is planning a trip to India and to Ceylon”, thus betraying something of a concentration on the Mediterranean Orient.⁴⁷

The Emigration Problem and the Search for Czechoslovak Colonies

Other debates in the interwar period show that the urgency of the need to deal with the non-European world was linked to more than just economic questions, nor was it solely directed towards the Orient. In fact, the non-European world played a distinct role in other discourses as well, as the debate surrounding the issue of “one of the most urgent economic, national and social problems ever”,⁴⁸ namely the issue of emigration, shows.

Emigration had already been an issue in the region since the nineteenth century, a phenomenon affecting the mainly rural parts of Upper Hungary more than the more industrialized regions of Bohemia and Moravia. The Habsburg monarchy had opted to take a largely *laissez-faire* attitude towards emigrants, conforming to a generally positive attitude in Europe towards freedom of movement during the “golden era of (e)migration”, an attitude which came to an end only with World War I. In the interwar period, new migration regimes all over Europe and beyond reacted to the migration concepts of a new era. The newly-founded nation-states of Central Europe were keen on keeping their population inside their borders, while the classical destinations for immigration began closing their borders to unwanted migrants.⁴⁹

At its very beginning, the Czechoslovak republic looked as if it could do well out of migration processes, as many of those who had earlier emigrated from the Habsburg monarchy were eager to return to the newly founded Czechoslovakia. However, emigration began to climb again after only a couple of years, especially with the peak in unemployment reached in 1923.⁵⁰ Both state institutions and civil society became active on the issue, making efforts to understand, control and, where possible, limit emigration.

In 1928, Dr. Lev Zavřel of the Ministry of Social Affairs spoke at a Conference on Emigration in Bratislava:

Among the acute problems of our time is also the question of emigration [...]. [W]e understand that we are facing a question of great relevance, which not only involves a social problem, but also represents a momentous economic, national, and political problem.⁵¹

The urgency of this issue was measured in numbers of emigrants. The power and importance of a state was assessed by the size of the population, and therefore the

⁴⁷ AHMP, SK XXII/1807. Letter from the Czechoslovak embassy in Greece to the police department in Prague, 13.07.1934.

⁴⁸ *Zavřel, Lev: Vystěhovalectví [Emigration]. In: Československé vystěhovalectví. Jeho příčiny, důsledky a vyhlídky [Czechoslovak Emigration. Its Causes, Consequences and Prospects]. Praha 1928, 5-22, here 5.*

⁴⁹ On migration regimes in East Central Europe in the interwar period, cf. as an overview *Zabva, Tára: The Great Departure. Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World. New York, London 2016, 105-142.*

⁵⁰ *Průcha, Václav: The Labour Market in Interwar Czechoslovakia. In: Teichová, Alice (ed.): Der Markt im Mitteleuropa der Zwischenkriegszeit. Praha 1994, 213-229.*

⁵¹ *Zavřel: Vystěhovalectví 5 (cf. fn. 48).*

loss of a great number of people – participants of debates on the issue spoke of up to one fifth of all Czechs and one third of all Slovaks permanently living outside Czechoslovakia⁵² – was feared mainly for its effect in weakening Czechoslovakia, in contrast to the destination countries, which would gain correspondingly in strength.⁵³ Even more serious was the threat that emigrants would become alienated from their home country through the loss of cultural or economic ties with it.⁵⁴ The most frequent destinations of emigration, especially the United States of America – but also Canada or France – tended to integrate the newly arrived immigrants so well that the new citizens lost all ties with the former homeland, for both themselves and their descendants, with the ultimate effect that “our countrymen everywhere abroad have already denationalized in the second generation, and at the latest in the third”.⁵⁵ Dealing with the emigration problem, therefore, meant both reducing emigration as far as possible, and maintaining close ties to those who did emigrate despite these efforts.

A number of different institutions were responsible for dealing with the issue of emigration. In 1923, the Masaryk Academy of Labour (Masarykova akademie práce) founded a Department for Economic Relations on Emigration and Colonization (Ústav pro hospodářské styky emigrační a kolonizační), whose task was to work “theoretically on emigration questions in accordance to the scholarly character of the activities of the academy”.⁵⁶ The government soon took up the issue too. One relevant government body was the ministry of Social Affairs, which had an interest in the emigration process in respect of transportation, health, and information policies – though, as a memorandum issued in December 1924 dealing with issues of emigration stated, its tasks “[s]tart with a passport application and end with the emigrant entering the territory of the country of destination”.⁵⁷ The tasks of protecting and maintaining contact with the emigrants did not fall within its responsibilities. That role was played by the ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its Economic, Political, Social and News division was entrusted with the task of monitoring emigration and

⁵² *Strejček*, Karel: Význam československého zahraničí [The Meaning of the Czechoslovaks Abroad]. Praha 1938, 8.

⁵³ *Cicvárek*, Rudolf: V čarovných tropech jest naše budoucnost [Our Future is in the Magical Tropics]. Praha 1929, 3.

⁵⁴ Vystěhovalecká politika Československé republiky. Výroční zpráva číslo 1 – komise pro vystěhovalectví a kolonisaci za r. 1926 [Emigration Politics of the Czechoslovak Republic. Annual Report No. 1 – Commission for Emigration and Colonization for the Year 1926]. Praha 1927, 3.

⁵⁵ *Cicvárek*: V čarovných tropech 5 (cf. fn. 53).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ MÚA AV ČR. Fond Masarykova Akademie Práce [fonds Masaryk Academy of Labour, hereafter MAP], Emigrační Ústav [Emigration Institute, hereafter EÚ], box 353. Memorandum Ústavu pro hospodářské styky emigrační a kolonizační při Masarykově akademii práce a Národní rady československé v Praze a jejího odboru pro československé zahraničí o otázkách vystěhovaleckých, přistěhovaleckých a osadních [Memorandum of the Institute for Economic Relations on Emigration and Colonization at the Masaryk Academy of Labor and the Czechoslovak National Council in Prague and its Department for Czechoslovaks Abroad on Questions Relating to Emigration, Immigration and Settlement], 03.12.1924, 4.

of organizing an information and advocacy service abroad.⁵⁸ The memorandum listed another two dozen institutions – mostly voluntary associations inside and outside Czechoslovakia – that dealt with questions of emigration from various perspectives, among them the Czechoslovak National Council (Národní rada československá) and the Czechoslovak Red Cross (Československý Červený Kříž).⁵⁹ The topic of emigration was to remain a hot issue throughout the interwar period. In the second half of the 1920s, further governmental institutions were created in an effort to deal with the issue. In 1926, an Inter-Ministerial Commission for Emigration, Immigration and Colonization (Meziministerské komise pro vystěhovalectví, přistěhovalectví a kolonisaci) was set up. Seven ministries were involved, most prominently the ministries of Social Affairs and of Foreign Affairs, as well as a number of non-governmental institutions with expertise in emigration and immigration. The aim of the commission was to work as an advisory board for the ministry of Social Affairs on matters regarding “the practical solution of questions related to emigration, immigration and colonization abroad, as well as [...] interior colonization”.⁶⁰ The Czechoslovak Institute Abroad (Československý ústav zahraniční), founded in 1928, was another non-governmental institution active in the field.

The growth in the number of organizations in both the public and private sector founded with the purpose of reducing, influencing and organizing emigration and related matters, points to the importance and urgency attached to the “emigration problem”. Throughout the interwar period the authorities remained unable to find an acceptable solution to these problems at home. It was only logical, therefore, to look for a solution abroad. Right from the earliest years following the foundation of Czechoslovakia, and continuing throughout the interwar period, public debates came up with an answer to the two urgent and intricately linked social questions of unemployment and emigration by looking outside Czechoslovak borders, an answer that did not pose any threat of assimilation. And that solution was to be found in the regions of the world outside Europe. What various participants of these debates came up with was none other than to establish Czechoslovak settlements or colonies in non-European regions considered both large enough to allow settlements to develop and unpopulated enough to avoid any danger of assimilation with the native population, with the associated loss of national identity. These colonies would, it was stressed, have the effect of channeling all emigrants to a single destination, thus keeping them within nation’s reach. They would also create a secure market for Czechoslovak goods. A final argument, albeit one used only infrequently, was that such a scheme would enhance the international prestige of the republic, as the possession of a colony was widely seen as a “necessity”⁶¹ for every “grown up” country;⁶² and

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 6-7.

⁶⁰ MÚA AV ČR, MAP, EÚ, box 353. Protokol o schůzi meziministerské komise pro vystěhovalectví, přistěhovalectví a kolonisaci [Protocol of the Meeting of the Inter-ministerial Commission for Emigration, Immigration and Colonization], 11.06.1926, attachment p. 5.

⁶¹ *Cicvárek*: V čarovných tropech 101 (cf. fn. 53).

⁶² *Němec*, Vilém: Je-li nám třeba kolonisace? (Ze zkušeností v Habeši) [Is Colonisation Necessary for Us? (From Experiences in Abessinia)]. Praha 1923, 4.

therefore would serve as a symbol that Czechoslovakia had reached that stage of maturity.

The colonies that the debaters were talking about were quite an amorphous thing. The Czech term “kolonie” could mean anything from a political colony similar to those of the colonial powers France and Great Britain to a mere settlement of Czechoslovak farmers cultivating a stretch of the vast lands of Argentina or Russia. The various state institutions that featured the adjective “kolonisační” in their titles tended to refer to the latter meaning. However, the use of the ambivalent expression “kolonie” or “kolonisace” (colonization) – instead of the more precise term “osídlení” (settlement) – left the possibility of discussing any form of colonization hanging open, allowing speakers to avoid discriminating between the various possible interpretations of the term, or even the need to be all that precise on the form of settlement under discussion in the first place.

The first claims asserting the need for a colony were made as early as the foundation of the Czechoslovak republic: in 1919, Jan Havlasa (1883-1964), journalist, Czechoslovak delegate to the peace conference in Paris and some years later ambassador to Brazil, argued for the creation of “Czech colonies overseas”⁶³ as possible destinations for Czechoslovak emigration that would have the potential to save emigrants for the nation.⁶⁴ Geographically, he proposed Kamchatka as a host location, which, as he pointed out, was separated from Czechoslovakia “by only one country, albeit a huge one”, but he also suggested either Togo, a “Czech West Africa”, or a “Czech New Guinea” as suitable locations for settling of willing emigrants, as well as for sourcing raw materials.⁶⁵ He had even brought this proposal to the attention of the Czechoslovak delegation at the peace conference in Paris, although it remains uncertain whether this claim was ever tabled during the actual negotiations.⁶⁶

Nor was Jan Havlasa the only one calling for the creation of colonies. Only a few years later, in 1923, long-time resident of Egypt and Sudan Vilém Němec (1857-1942) published a booklet entitled “Is colonization a necessity for us?”.⁶⁷ Colonies, according to Němec, would both provide secure markets and solve the “emigration problem”, which, he claimed, “befalls every country that lacks colonies”.⁶⁸ The fear of emigrants becoming assimilated in other countries, and the prospect of keeping them, if not at home, then at least in a safe territory, provided a “serious reason for every grown state to strive to obtain a colony”.⁶⁹ Němec proposed a Czechoslovak

⁶³ As the title of this publication states: *Havlasa, Jan: České kolonie zámořské* [Czech Colonies Overseas]. Praha 1919.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 13.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Archiv Ministerstva zahraničních věcí [Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, hereafter AMZV], Pařížský archiv [Paris Archive, hereafter PA] 1918-21, book 54, doc. 5210. Memorandum o zájmu Československé republiky na mezinárodní úpravě otázky kolonií [Memorandum on the Interest of the Czechoslovak Republic in an International Arrangement on the Colonial Question].

⁶⁷ *Němec: Je-li nám třeba kolonisace* (cf. fn. 62).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 4.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

settlement in Abyssinia, which – so he said – had an agreeable climate, the beginnings of a European infrastructure, and mineral resources from which the colony could profit.⁷⁰ It also was the one country in Africa that had not yet been colonized by any European power.

Similar plans and claims continued to be made throughout the interwar period, locating suitable territories for Czechoslovak colonies or settlements in Africa, but also in Asia and South America. Rudolf Cicvárek argued in 1929 for a “deserted colony overseas” for the Czechoslovak state, possibly in the tropics. For him, the size of the country’s population was fundamental for the further development of the state. Therefore, he argued, “[a] colony of our own is the only safe ‘outlet’ [...] for our surplus population in the future.”⁷¹ This colony was imagined as being capable of peaceful settlement and would therefore not require military protection.⁷² Just as how Alois Musil had sketched the role of Czechoslovakia in the Orient, Cicvárek emphasized the different character – and moral superiority – of Czechoslovakia as an overseas actor in comparison to European empires, albeit one that proposed to become another – but better – colonial power: “All European colonies are built on an aggressive, imperialistic and strongly capitalist foundation. Our colony would have to be the exact opposite.”⁷³

The global economic crisis that followed the 1929 crash hit Czechoslovakia quite late but all the stronger and put a stop to speculation on the prospects for Czechoslovak colonies overseas. It was only in the late 1930s, now under very different political circumstances, that the related questions of emigration and colonization arose once more. Journalist and leading specialist on Morocco, Jan Kořínek (1904–1984), commented in retrospect:

We also have longed for our own colonies, where we could have settled and where we could have preserved the surplus of our population for our nation. After the war our dream seemed to come true. American newspapers reported that we were to obtain a certain territory in Africa, namely Togo.⁷⁴

Due to the changed political circumstances, instead of making another new demand for a Czechoslovak colony, Kořínek published a “Health guide for Czechoslovak tourists and colonists in French North Africa”, designed to prepare emigrants, admittedly not for life in colonies possessed by their own country of origin, but for colonial life abroad nonetheless.⁷⁵

As we now know, Czechoslovakia was destined never to acquire any colonial territory. The appeals made in favor of having one, however, were neither as illusory nor as far removed from the reasoning of the state as they may appear at first glance. Government institutions were actively involved in the search for a solution of what

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 5–6.

⁷¹ *Cicvárek: V čarovných tropech* 67–68 (cf. fn. 53).

⁷² *Ibid.* 68.

⁷³ *Ibid.* 74.

⁷⁴ *Kořínek, Jan: Koloniální otázka zítřka* [The Colonial Question Tomorrow]. Praha 1939, 17.

⁷⁵ *Kořínek, Jan: Zdravotní příručka česko-slovenského turistů a kolonistů v Severní Francouzské Africe* [Health Guide for Czecho-Slovak Tourists and Colonists in French North Africa]. Praha 1939.

they called the “emigration problem” abroad, and – once the main destination country of Czechoslovak emigration, the USA, had reduced the number of immigrants to be admitted from that source drastically, from more than 13,500 in 1922 to little more than 2,500 in 1924⁷⁶ – began looking outside either Europe or North America for prospective alternative destinations for emigration and settlement. Specifically, the ministry of Foreign Affairs looked into the conditions under which a Czechoslovak colony in Tahiti might be feasible, while the commission for emigration was “studying the possibilities for colonization in Brazil and in the rich Portuguese colony of Angola” as well as in Ecuador.⁷⁷ While these endeavors by no means constituted efforts to establish a colony in any political sense, they could nonetheless be described as searches for officially approved settlements in overseas territories.

None of these plans were to come to fruition, and they could in hindsight be said to have been rather unrealistic. Neither did emigration from Czechoslovakia to most of the regions in question grow to any extent, with the exception of South America: While Brazil and especially Argentina became important destinations for emigrants from Czechoslovakia, emigration to Africa and Asia remained insignificant throughout the interwar period.⁷⁸ However, if we read these plans and debates as a history of possibilities, they do tell us about what contemporaries considered to be desirable, feasible or – to use an expression coined by Achim Landwehr – as “sayable”.⁷⁹ In this case, the debates on the prospects for acquiring colonies abroad indicate the high expectations of Czechoslovak society for the new Czechoslovak republic to become a “grown-up”, western state, complete with the prestige apparently brought at the time by possession of a colony.⁸⁰

Conclusion

In this article, I have offered a perspective that describes interwar Czechoslovakia as forming part of a globalizing world through examination of the various debates that went on in the country at the time as to how Czechoslovakia could and should relate to the world outside of Europe (i.e. to Africa, Asia and Latin America) in economic, migration, political and cultural matters. Some of these debates – especially those on economic expansion – were to find an echo in later developments, while others – such as those on Czechoslovak colonies – never came even close to realization. However, such debates show the importance that was attached to taking a

⁷⁶ Vystěhovalecká politika Československé republiky 9 (cf. fn. 54).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 5, 16. – Further details on the history of the Czechoslovak colony on Tahiti is provided by *Ustohal*, Vladimír: Češi na Tahiti a Markézách [Czechs on Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands]. Brno 2005.

⁷⁸ A publication dedicated to compiling the addresses of fellow countrymen and of Czechoslovak institutions worldwide announced in 1938 that a total of only 2,000 Czechoslovak emigrants were scattered over the whole of Asia, Africa, Australia and Oceania. In contrast, the number of Czechoslovaks living in Argentina and in Brazil was put at 25,000 and 5,000, respectively. *Strejček*, Karel: Průvodce po čs. zahraničí [Guide to Czechoslovaks Abroad]. Praha 1938, 103–104, 114.

⁷⁹ *Landwehr*, Achim: Geschichte des Sagbaren. Einführung in die historische Diskursanalyse. Tübingen 2001.

⁸⁰ *Kořínek*: Koloniální otázka 4 (cf. fn. 74).

global perspective on a variety of issues. In an age of global competition, such a reaching out to the world was deemed a necessity.

These debates show that dealings with the world beyond Europe was not a domain reserved for “rich Englishmen and Frenchmen”, as Alois Musil made a point of stressing.⁸¹ On the contrary, it was considered a viable option to look to regions outside Europe to help resolve central social and economic problems at home, including overpopulation, unemployment and the task of finding suitable markets for Czechoslovak goods. These Czechoslovak debates could certainly be said to have framed the future of the country within a global perspective.

This interest in and reaching out to the world outside Europe was not something unique to the Czechoslovak republic; other central European states were eager to venture in this direction as well. Vienna also supported further research on the Orient and Berlin continued to entertain colonial ambitions even after the two great central European empires had crumbled into mere nation-states.⁸² Not only did Poland found its own Oriental institute as early as 1922, but it also created a “Maritime and Colonial League” in 1930.⁸³ So it seems having a global reach and harboring colonial ambitions were considered part of what it meant to be a “grown-up” state in interwar Europe.

Finally, this contribution should also be considered a plea to include what may appear to have been merely “failed projects” in the research agenda, including the Czechoslovak aspiration to acquire its own colonies. The history of interwar Czechoslovakia has often been discussed in the knowledge of how it ended after only twenty years of existence. This perspective to some extent lent Czechoslovakia the aura of a (relatively) small and vulnerable state. Yet this picture was clearly not how contemporary Czechoslovaks saw their country. The possibilities that they explored and self-assertion that they engaged in, regardless of their chances of becoming realities, inspired particular evaluations, expectations, actions, and world views. The decisions and actions that resulted from such thinking become comprehensible only in the context of this broad spectrum.

⁸¹ *Musil*: Naše úkoly 2 (cf. fn. 33).

⁸² *Heyn*, Susanne: Deutsche Missionen. Der Kolonialrevisionismus und seine KritikerInnen in der Weimarer Republik. In: *iz3w* (2006) 42-45.

⁸³ *Hunczak*, Taras: Polish Colonial Ambitions in the Inter-War Period. In: *Slavic Review* 26 (1967) 4, 648-656.