



# **'Jakeš's Children'. Media Portrayal of Namibian Child Refugees in Slovakia<sup>1</sup>**

MARTINA JAKUBCOVÁ

Department of Sociology, Andragogy and Cultural Anthropology,  
Palacký University in Olomouc, Czech Republic  
*[jakubcovaa.martina@gmail.com](mailto:jakubcovaa.martina@gmail.com)*

## **ABSTRACT**

The paper provides an insight into 'Slovak group' of Namibian children taken to Czechoslovakia. As a form of a communist solidarity help to the country fighting for its freedom, the children were raised and educated in newly established boarding school in Považská Bystrica from September 1989. Their stay, and particularly their sudden unexpected repatriation in 1991, raised questions not only among general public, but also in print media of those days. The article therefore discusses the media portrayal of the Slovak group of Namibian children with a special accent on the shifts in media interpretations in time. The overall research combines a biographical and historical design with the use of the qualitative analysis of print media outputs.

**KEY WORDS:** qualitative content analysis, exiled children, Namibia, media analysis, post-socialist media

## **Introduction**

As a manifestation of international solidarity of socialist states towards countries oppressed by colonial regimes, 120 Namibian child war refugees were granted custody by Czechoslovakia<sup>2</sup> between years 1985-1989. The first group of Namibian children (i.e. 56 of these accompanied by seven tutors) was received by the Czechoslovak government in November 1985 and since that time stayed in village Bartošovice (Czech Socialist Republic).

The second group, of total 64 child war refugees, was received in September 1989 in the Slovak Socialist Republic. They were accompanied by four Namibian tutors and, after getting off the plane in Bratislava, subsequently transported north to the city Považská Bystrica. At its outskirts, there was a newly established facility for their accommodation, upbringing and education – the primary boarding school, located in state hotel and restaurant property – Motel FIM. The group was the last one out of several others, consisting of exiled Namibian children, sent to safety abroad due to the war of independence. Apart from both parts of Czechoslovakia, they were also relocated to Cuba since 1978 (GLEIJESES 2013:91) and German Democratic republic since 1979 (SCHMITT et al. 2014:243).

This paper presents a part of my overall current research – it aims to provide an analysis of print media coverage on the stay of the group in Slovakia, also emically referred to as Jakeš's children.<sup>3</sup> These were supposed to receive primary and secondary education, and after finishing those meant to return to Namibia. However due to the changes in political situation in both countries,<sup>4</sup> they were repatriated already in 1991 and, together with the exiled children living in Bohemia, they flew back there. The larger objective of the current research is therefore to reconstruct the children's stay in Považská Bystrica and set it into a wider social and historic-political context.<sup>5</sup> Media analysis, when detailed, can firstly serve as a data triangulation for overall research. Secondly, since it is possible to consider the media discourse as a part of societal one, the construction of media portrait can fruitfully contribute to the reconstruction of historiography of the group of Namibian children in Slovakia. Apart

---

<sup>1</sup> The research was supported financially by the Department of Sociology, Andragogy and Cultural Anthropology (Faculty of Arts, Palacký University Olomouc).

<sup>2</sup> The former state Czechoslovakia was divided in two parts: the Czech Socialist Republic and the Slovak Socialist Republic by the Constitutional Law of Federation of 28 October 1968, which went into effect on 1 January 1969.

<sup>3</sup> Miloš Jakeš was the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in years 1987–1989. The use of his surname as a connotation to the children was based on presumption of his responsibility for their stay.

<sup>4</sup> Namibia gained independence in 1991 and the communist regime in Czechoslovakia collapsed as a result of Velvet Revolution of 1989.

<sup>5</sup> In order to achieve that, several data sources are involved, such as archives (on regional, national and former federal level), narrative biographies (of "children" themselves, their Slovak care givers, teachers and temporary foster families), personal documents (e.g. personal correspondence and photographs) and print media (newspapers distributed on daily, weekly and bi-weekly basis). The planned outcome of my field research is to produce a coherent chapter in prepared comprehensive publication on the Namibian child war refugees transferred to Czechoslovakia and raised there in years 1985–1991. Guidance is provided by Kateřina Mildnerová PhD. whom is also the primary author of the writing mentioned.

from that, the media analysis may provide information about receivers of the construction, i.e. the contemporary Czechoslovak society.

### **Theoretical background**

When considering reality to be a social construction, it is necessary to view media as institutions – human products experienced as possessing a reality of their own, seemingly independent from the individuals that actually embody them. They imply the control of human behaviour by setting up a pattern of the conduct (BERGER – LUCKMANN 1991:72-76). Based on the etymological origin of the word *media* in Latin (meaning *in between* or *the centre*, something *central*) we can consider media to be an agent whose primary role is to mediate communication as “*a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed*” (CAREY 2009:19). Mediation, as a course of action consists (among others) of information gathering, their processing and distribution by the formal organisations. Above all that, it is necessary to understand, that the mediation itself is basically a course of interpretative action, therefore not only the content itself is of importance, but so is the source (JIRÁK – KÖPPLOVÁ 2007:41-43). The source is a part of objective reality<sup>6</sup> as well as its creator. The ability to co-create reality (and conduct human behaviour in the meantime) lies in formation of discourse, i.e. “*practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak*” (FOUCAULT 1972:49).

Producing discourse by theme selection can be equalled to agenda setting<sup>7</sup> on two levels. The first level of influencing the audience is based on transmission of object's importance, onto which comes another level – emitting the attributes of its salience. The result is not only something to think about, but also the way how to think about. Agenda setting therefore merges with the framing on both levels – presentation as well as the attributes (McCOMBS – GHANEM 2001:67), and combination of these can be considered to be a social control factor. The distribution of re-presentation of 'objective reality' is media's final step in its

---

<sup>6</sup> Berger and Luckmann (1991) find the subjective reality as a part of the objective one, while the relationship between them is dialectical and in a constant search of symmetry. The conversation (i.e. direct or symbolic human interaction) serves a crucial role in its maintenance, re-evaluation or reconstruction (BERGER – LUCKMANN 1991:153-172).

<sup>7</sup> „Agenda setting is a theory about the transfer of salience from the mass media's pictures of the world to those in our heads“ (McCOMBS – GHANEM 2001:67).

installation.<sup>8</sup>

Minor though necessary detail one keeps forgetting about is that the institutions were created by humans and humans simultaneously do embody them. Humans are also part of certain society in a way that they not only create it, but in the meantime are created by it. When it is possible to observe a relationship between a man and a society as a dialectical process, then so is the relationship between society and media. Following this stream of thoughts, one has to find the notions of institutional agenda setting, ideology assertion and thought navigation as important to consider, though at the same the notions are also bit oversimplifying, especially when considering the complexity of reality. I find it important to comprise that it is essentially the society (which we are vital part of) that is doing so, or to put it more precisely, it's certain part. In order to eliminate unnecessary overgeneralisations, it may be worth specifying.

In correspondence to what is stated above it is crucial to conceptualise the journalist's role as well as slightly rethink the notion of audience. In case we equal the latter one to only a passive recipient of presented content, we are at fault by not only its homogenisation, but also by denying its members' autonomy and power of agency. The active audience conception, as an opposing theory, assumes that the receivers are not only able to select out of variety of sources and contents available, but also to interpret the obtained information based on their own experiences or individual predispositions (HALL 1980; MORLEY 1992; LIEBES – KATZ 1995). Nonetheless, there are two problematic aspects interconnected, firstly the wide range of possible conceptualisation of the activity itself (BIOCCA 1988). Secondly, the variety of possible interpretations of mediated statements is also disputable, especially when dealing with newspapers. Contents of these can be referred to as closed texts due to the author's latent recommendation how the readers should grasp it (ECO 1979; MILLER – PHILO 2001; McQUAIL 2010). Eventually it is therefore possible to conceive the audience as more or less heterogeneous unit, which interprets about the presented content in a variety of ways based on its experiences and abilities. However, when given a uniform media message, notwithstanding what their responses are, the interpretation remains (more or less) uniform as well.

---

<sup>8</sup> According to Donohue et al. „the control of knowledge is central to development and maintenance of power“ (DONOHUE et al. 1973:652). From this point of view, it is possible to find communication of any type as containing the control factor, more or less latent. In their paper they emphasize not whether, but how and in what part of the communication process the control is applied and with what effects on social system.

The journalists can be therefore considered to be not only the interpretation suppliers, or information mediators, but also objective members of the media institution. They are its embodiment; its norms and practises are internalized within them. Apart from these, they can be assumed to be also vital part of the initial society, whose (as well as for which) spokesmen they are. Due to the fact that the analysed data are basically articles (among others) from regional and local print media, it would be wrong to without any consideration exclude the authors from being an integral part of the society. On the other hand, this does not eliminate possibility of external influence or power exercised. Their role is therefore grounded within specific time and space. As for the spatiality, one can presume societal factors to be of a strong impact on the role self-awareness (ZHU et al. 1997; VAN DALEN et al. 2012).

As for the temporality, an important aspect coming to the overall image is the fact, that vast majority of data comes from the period of transition caused by the Velvet Revolution of 1989. Due to the specific time setting, the Janowitz's model of journalist roles *gatekeeper vs. advocate* (1975) is valid only temporarily and has to be reconsidered. In the remaining time range (i.e. in the period after the Velvet Revolution), the *civic/public journalism* perspective can be applied (ROSEN, 1999:22-23) however this one itself does not prevent gatekeeping<sup>9</sup> in the process of mediation.

## Methodology

Out of 25 articles gathered, the final sample contained 20 of these. The selection was based on two criteria: 1) the article was published while the Namibian group was still present in the facility of the boarding school or shortly after their departure, 2) the source can be classified as a universal journal (TUŠER 1999:25), i.e. newspaper distributed on the national or regional level.

The articles' size varied from 65 to 1500 words, they were subsequently manually transcribed for further analysis conduction.<sup>10</sup> In order to provide a detailed construction of the media

---

<sup>9</sup> The term gatekeeping refers to a process, by which from the large amount of information available only a part is eventually distributed to the audience. The selection may be guided (or enforced) by several agents, e.g. the journalists themselves, the workplace, audiences, third parties etc. (McQUAIL 2010).

<sup>10</sup> The articles were identified in newspapers distributed on regional (Obzor, Smer) and national level (Pravda, Národná obroda, Slovenský denník, Sloboda, Smena, Zmena). Four articles were impossible to identify of their source, however due to the use of Slovak language and evident ties to case *in situ* it is possible to enhance them as well.

portrayal of the Namibian group staying in Slovakia, there was a need for systematic description of the selected aspects, i.e. the parts of construction. I was aware of the necessity to identify and interpret the latent meaning hidden in the available content. Based on these demands I decided to conduct qualitative content analysis.<sup>11</sup>

This procedure involves sequence of steps, such as formulation of the research question and material selection followed by building the coding frame which generally contains several *dimensions* (= main categories). The frame itself (i.e. the construction of children's mediated image) comprised of the *main categories* (visualized as *layers*) – these were identified in order to produce a complex and detailed interpretation in a wider context. The assumed structure of the portrayal contained two dimensions, the *group's portrayal* and the *purpose of the stay*. After deciding on the frame and main categories, I began the coding process during which the units of transcribed text were assigned inductive codes. When this was done, the categories were merged altogether according to the main one they fit.

From this stage of coding I moved onto a conceptual one analysing emerging latent content, including less explicit notions. All the material was re-read and preliminary assumptions taken. Then another reading had to be done, in order to double-check the articles for approval or denial of those.

### **Results of the research**

The coding not only reduced gathered data for the second time, but also conceptualized the dimensions in a way that it highlighted two following aspects, and a need for reconsideration of the originally designed construction:

#### ***Gradual linear shift of media discourses re-occurring as a matter of transformation in contemporary society***

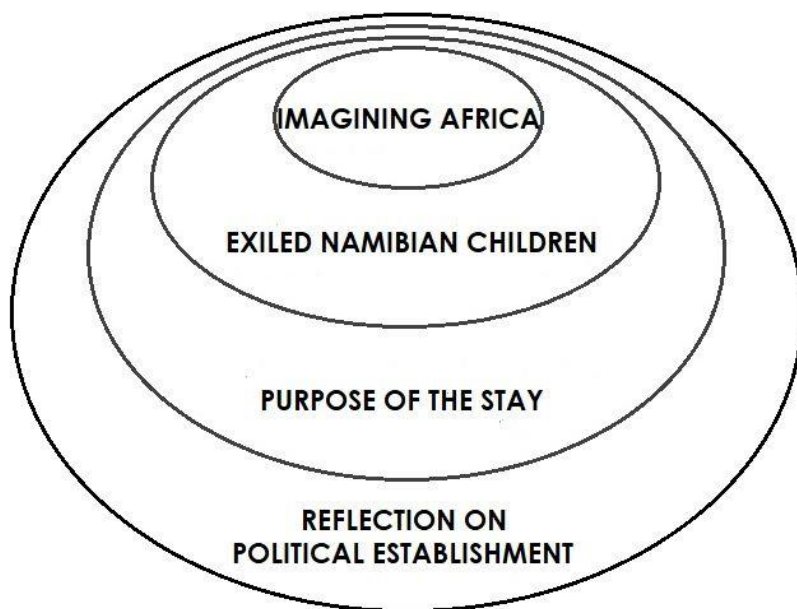
Based on spotting the fluid continuous change after the event of Velvet Revolution on November 17<sup>th</sup> 1989, it became possible to roughly divide the analysed period into three short time segments (this division is just analytic and cannot be estimated to be something fixed

---

<sup>11</sup> Qualitative content analysis can be defined as a detailed and systematic approach to analysis and interpretation of data of textual nature. It aims to identify their manifest as well as latent meanings (LUNE – BERG 2017; NEUMAN 2014; SCHREIER 2012). Its gradual development started as a matter of Kracauer's critique of the established quantitative content analysis in 1950's. The main assumption of such action was need for reconsideration of the "obvious verbalized meaning"(SCHREIER 2012:13).

due to the fact that overall transformation is a linear process). The first one, starting from the arrival of the group in September 1989 and finishing by the end of the same year, exhibits the socialist rhetoric. In general, this segment seems to be unaffected by the event of the Velvet Revolution – the transformation of political regime is openly reflected in the second one, dated according to contents gathered from March 1990 until March 1991.

In this sub-period, it is possible to notice not only the shift in rhetoric, but also manifest attempts to reflect upon and eventually come to terms with past and former political regime. The third time segment contains data from July to October 1991. It focuses primarily on the departure of the group, whereas the political events serve as a specific framing background.



**Figure 1:** *The revised structure of construction.* Source: author 2018

### ***The static centre of the construction as a result of historically formed knowledge***

Despite the manifest shift in political discourse, the central part of the construction of the portrayal of Namibian children remained the same throughout the period under analysis. This might be interpreted as relatively consciously shared worldview of African continent (and its

inhabitants) by Slovak society, which is reproduced and transferred over generations.

On the one hand, these highlighted aspects demonstrated that construction itself is simultaneously a product as well as a process, therefore not hundred percent stable, rather of fluid nature. On the other hand, since the attempt of the paper is still to provide a complex media portrayal, it is necessary to enhance the original dimensions by incorporating not only the manifest static centre (as mentioned in bullet 2), but also the latent layer named as *the reflection on political establishment*. This category emerged out of data and its significance for understanding the society in transformation had to be recognized. The adjusted construction structure eventually could be visualized as seen on Figure 1.

In-depth analysis of articles was then followed by interpretation of meanings inside following categories:

### ***Imagining Africa***

The unchanging notion of *Africa as a homogenous entity* is flowing throughout the entire media content (e.g. cit. 1, 2). The simplification of the diverse geographical and cultural location up to these days serves as a valid demonstration of the dominant representation of Africa in Western (media) discourses (IŽÁK 2016:27). The roots of this discourse can be traced back to the Victorian era, when the metaphor “Dark continent” first appears in Henry M. Stanley’s treatise of 1878. The label “Dark”, referring not only to the blackness of the skin of East Africans Stanley observed, but mainly to the spiritual and mental inferiority of Africans, was then taken up by other travellers and missionaries. Another parallel is also to being of contrast nature to the (in 19<sup>th</sup> century quite recent) period of Enlightenment (JAROSZ 1992). The dominant European reasoning then was based on premises of reassessing the government system as well as individual (and societal) way of thinking. Onto this one, the shared idea of constant scientific and technological progress was present. The encounter with different cultures thus led to interpreting these as underdeveloped, hence primitive.<sup>12</sup> This perception was strongly influenced by the general intellectual climate of the periods of Enlightenment and later Victorian era promoting the myth of European superiority

---

<sup>12</sup> This etic optics was also adopted in the territory of Czechia and Slovakia due to the distribution of these information in Europe from Western (European) travellers. For those (as well as the audience), it was nothing uncommon to build up images of the whole continent and its inhabitants based on knowledge of only a small portion of it. On one hand, such generalization combined with etic perspective led to alleged superiority. On the other hand this superiority did not legitimised colonialism what was already reflected in Slovak print media since 19<sup>th</sup> century (PAWLIKOVÁ-VILHANOVÁ 1987, 1991).



and ethos of civilisation (MILDNEROVÁ 2016:180). The backwardness though relates to idealisation and exotization when Africans were imagined as untamed people inhabiting wild continent, with their lives interconnected to untouched nature. As such, they provide an absolute contrast to us; cultivated Europeans living in advanced society (cit. 4, 5).

The exotism thus serves as a reassurance of our superiority. Following extracts therefore present the incorporation of mentioned stereotypes into the medial construction of otherness.

Citation 1: *...children coming from hot Africa...*<sup>13</sup>

Citation 2: *...to achieve the primary education [in Slovakia] and to teach them all habits of social life which was impossible to enhance in their country of origin.*<sup>14</sup>

Citation 3: *They found toys under the Christmas tree and they had no idea how to play with them up to now, and girls wrap their dolls into small blankets and tie them to their backs, as do their mothers in Namibia.*<sup>15</sup>

Citation 4: *...but also the rest of the children present that although they wear European clothes and speak lovely Slovak language, they still possess the gift of motion typical for black race.*<sup>16</sup>

Citation 5: *...we are responsible for whom we tame.*<sup>17</sup>

The metaphor of "Dark continent" can be also associated to concept of Africa as a space full of danger and ambush permanently awaiting for its victim. No matter whether the untamed nature is involved (such as wild predators) or the space itself is categorised to be the location of violence, armed conflicts and therefore politically instable (as presented via citations 6 and 7). Michira states in his paper that despite these negative media representations one has to realise that Africa is not only about dangerous animals, bloody wars of opposing "tribes", dictators and epidemics; and above that, these mediated images (and many others) do not relate to Africa exclusively (MICHIRA 2002).

Citation 6: *Gunshots and echoes from hand grenades were replaced by a monotonous melody*

---

<sup>13</sup> Smer 20.9. 1989.

<sup>14</sup> Smer 20.9. 1989.

<sup>15</sup> Práca 27.12. 1989.

<sup>16</sup> Source unidentified though based on its content it is evidently written shortly after the group's departure.

<sup>17</sup> Národná obroda 3.7. 1991.

*coming from cars on the exit road to Trenčín.*<sup>18</sup>

Citation 7: *An European might find Africa too adventurous or exotic, though this does not apply to an African, who can expect violent death everywhere. We shout at each other while they stab each other. We slap each other, but they go for submachine gun.*<sup>19</sup>

### ***The representation of exiled Namibian children in media content***

The central part of media construction is reflected in prevailing description of the children. The idealisation of the *noble savage* dwells in over-generalising depiction of their physical attributes and in the context of specific activities. The typical traits of Africans as such are for example their easy-going attitude and motoric skills (cit. 11, 12). The important factor while receiving the offered media portrayal is our social perception, which follows certain guidelines. Relying on indirect clues we ascribe specific set of attributes to other people and under the impression of these we shape attitude towards them. In this case, the first element in the process is the childish physical appearance and what we associate with the idea of childhood, i.e. innocence and urgent need for protection and guidance (cit. 9, 10). Adult responsiveness towards (especially young) children is an implicit mechanism of the brain physiology (SENESE et al. 2013), and this is reflected not only in our emotional reactions, but also in stance we take and demonstrate. In case the stimuli are visual (e.g. the article includes photographs), our response of child – protection association is faster (cit. 8). The stereotype itself is generalizable and practically culturally universal (ZEBROWITZ et al. 2012). There is doubt that Western media participate on its maintenance, e.g. through its representations of children as victims (PARKER et al. 2001; KUNKEL – SMITH 1999).

Citation 8: *...John takes my hand and we walk on the creaking snow. By winking at my face he is signaling that he likes me.*<sup>20</sup>

Citation 9: *At no cost they [the children] did not want to turn off the lights. They are also stressed by the noise of planes. Lots of them have sadness in their eyes even when playing.*<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Pravda 25.9. 1989.

<sup>19</sup> Source unidentified though based on its content it is evidently written before the group's departure.

<sup>20</sup> Práca 27.12. 1989.

<sup>21</sup> Pravda 25.9. 1989.

Citation 10: *Beautiful, helpless and abandoned black children.*<sup>22</sup>

Citation 11: *They reveal joy more spontaneously than our children. They are also very sport gifted. What our children train for month, black children dance at once.*<sup>23</sup>

Citation 12: *...they found an empty bucket that suddenly made sound as authentic African drums. The real show started – they don't need more than their hands, legs and voice. Whole body is dancing and so a soul.*<sup>24</sup>

The second clue is our perception of the situation – we are aware that the children suffered in SWAPO refugee camps during the struggle for independence of Namibia, and that they were transferred to Czechoslovakia in order to be raised and educated there. The information certainly lacks specific details, nonetheless it does not matter. We are reassured that how we perceive the continent of Africa to be, proves right again (as seen on cit. 14 and 15).

Citation 13: *On request of UN and International Red Cross, Czechoslovakia granted custody [...] over the group of 64 children and 4 tutors. [...] The children are orphans of deceased SWAPO fighters, an organization trying to defeat colonial establishment and set the people's rule in Namibia.*<sup>25</sup>

Citation 14: *In Slovakia we protect the helpless ones from the violence of the South Africa directed towards Namibia.*<sup>26</sup>

Combination of these two motives leads us to the presented media portrayal within the children category, which is following: *the children from unstable African country we have to take care of.* Czechoslovakia's position of the saviour corresponds not only with the central stereotype of European paternalism towards Africa (i.e. Africa is not peaceful because its people think in a whole different way than peaceful Europeans, see cit. 14, 15), but also with the contemporary agenda of geopolitical world division. Within the latter, the capitalist bloc was assigned collective fault of colonisation of African continent while the socialist bloc was seen as supporting various national liberation movements. In the second time segment, based on the social, political and economic transformations started by the Velvet revolution, the reconsideration of the former regime and attempts to come up to reconciliation with the past occur. At the same time, the journalist practise is under revision as well. Not only they were

---

<sup>22</sup> Práca 27.12. 1989.

<sup>23</sup> Sloboda 19.5. 1990.

<sup>24</sup> Práca 21.9. 1991.

<sup>25</sup> Obzor 21.9. 1989.

<sup>26</sup> Práca 27.12. 1989.

no longer viewed as means of control and propaganda (GULYÁS 2001:74), they are also freed from institutional censorship.<sup>27</sup> This change is reflected in the transformation of journalists' role in society; they were no longer viewed as passive bridge of information between points A and B, they became active information gatherers and hunters.<sup>28</sup> The verbalisation of the category changes in a slight but important way, such as the portrayal is accompanied with the notion of *but*...It is not sure whether the reinvention of the role of journalist in society led to the explicit increase in them being interested in the case (though I cannot deny it). What can be certainly assumed is that the range of questions to be answered was getting wider, and those were not only asked by the journalist, but also by the local community or larger society (such as cit. 15 and 16). The raised questions concerned the issues of financing the facility where the children stayed, the process of their education and of course, the purpose of their stay. This specific question comes to the light, especially since Namibia already gained the independence in 1991. Also the status of children was revised in the media content – shortly after their arrival, the group is no longer presented as a collective of orphans. The information about one of the Namibian care givers, about her party and military engagements, was also added. What we can genuinely observe is the transformation not only of society, which becomes more interrogative and open to receive new types of information, but also in journalists' role perceptions. They became *public representatives* (PATTERSON in DONSBACH 2008:2606).

Citation 15: *When the new director arrived and regional national board's personnel started being replaced, it became clear that no one really knew who invited the black children nor who should finance this lovely mission.*<sup>29</sup>

Citation 16: *Where will be the parentless children returned? [...] two years nobody cared about them. What chance to survive do they have when they will be sent back to refugee camps, infection and starvation...*<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> This control institution in Czechoslovakia was embodied by Federal Office for Press and Information, that ceased to exist on July 31st 1990 by Act No. 166/1990 Sb. act cancellation No. 180/1980 Sb. about establishment of Federal Office for Press and Information

<sup>28</sup> Transformation of media role in society was reflected also in discussions about ensuring their autonomy from agenda from third parties (see WYKA 2008). Nonetheless I have to add to this matter that the discussions are not over yet.

<sup>29</sup> Smena 21.3. 1990.

<sup>30</sup> Národná obroda 3.7. 1991.

*Purpose of the stay*

As the primarily presented information about the group was being revised, so is the mediated category of the purpose of their stay. During the first months, the manifest message in the contents is verbalised via catchphrase *international solidarity* (cit. 17, 19). Despite that this simple formulation may nowadays convey an impression of neutrality and being apolitical, when living in a socialist state one used to associate slightly different meaning. The programmatic catchphrase was emitting meaning of international help towards and cooperation with countries under the burden of capitalist aggression (see cit. 19) (SCHMITT et al. 2014:242). This, being part of socialist countries' foreign policy, was an economical and ideological strategy to a large extent shaped by Soviet interests (OPRŠAL et al. 2016:327-328).

Citation 17: *SWAPO's demand is to provide education for children the way only we, living in socialist countries, can do.*<sup>31</sup>

Citation 18: *They [the Portuguese] were not interested in colonization of the hostile country. However, after more than three and a half centuries, it [i.e. Namibia] found itself at the centre of European colonial attempts.*<sup>32</sup>

Citation 19: *On Sunday September 3<sup>rd</sup>, the group of 64 children and 4 tutors from Namibia arrived to our county as a matter of an international help...*<sup>33</sup>

The help was given by various means (such as financial and material aid, assistance in exile etc.) but that was only a small manifest demonstration of the solidarity principle (cit. 18). The strategy involved also certain "mutually convenient" economic cooperation; meaning that inaccessible raw materials and agricultural products (such as phosphates, ores, fruits, cocoa beans etc.) were meant to be imported in exchange for industrial or consumer goods (ZÍDEK – SIEBER 2007). Based on these notions it is possible to suppose some sort of reciprocal relationship, but with regards to the gathered print material only on latent level. Due to the absence of detailed official documents discussing the admission of the group (and elaborate explanation of this action, and its financing), the manifest messages concerning

---

<sup>31</sup> Obzor 21.9. 1989.

<sup>32</sup> Práca 27.12. 1989.

<sup>33</sup> Obzor 7.9. 1989.

possible reciprocity remain more speculative than objective (cit. 20, 21).<sup>34</sup>

Citation 20: *African fighters have chosen reliable communist countries and transferred the children to Cuba, GDR and Czechoslovakia. Rumours about loaded dollar check have never been confirmed...*<sup>35</sup>

Citation 21: *The exact content of the deal between SWAPO and leaders of Czechoslovakia can be only a subject of estimations. Rumours about millions in dollars are going around [...] but there are no accessible documents to prove it.*<sup>36</sup>

With regards to reconsideration of the actions of the former regime, the case as such is later on ostentatiously re-presented as directly related to it, i.e. our shared socialist past. It is therefore possible to summarize the shifted content of the analysed category by assigning another description: *foreign policy of former regime*. Whole layer becomes framed by the reflection of shared past. The previous regime is depicted as confusing and chaotic, especially when discussing the responsibility for certain actions. Above that, if the contemporary objective reality (i.e. the stay of the group) is connected to former political regime, subsequent indication has to be considered – in attempts to achieve complete transformation of society and politics, there is no room for children's upbringing and education in the (no longer state) facility (cit. 22).

Citation 22: *The Ministry of education is drowning in financial problems and the black children, to be honest, are perceived as miserable heritage after communist regime.*<sup>37</sup>

### ***Reflection of the political establishment***

The temporality of the group's stay in North West Slovakia can be re-identified (among others) also by post-socialist discourses of facility privatization and funding. Since the very beginning of the media's attention to this issue, it was explicitly mentioned that the upbringing and education were only for a given (though not clear) period of time. The initial length was stated to roughly 10 years, nonetheless in the third time segment that was no longer valid and in a sudden haste there were notions of few days, weeks' time (see cit. 23

---

<sup>34</sup> Due to the fact that the freedom of press in Czechoslovakia was "discovered" in the period of transition, this newly created media space got loaded with information of various quality and personal agenda (O'NEIL 2013).

<sup>35</sup> Národná obroda 3.7. 1991.

<sup>36</sup> Source unidentified though based on its content it is evidently written before the group's departure.

<sup>37</sup> Národná obroda 3.7. 1991.

and 24, the latter was distributed not even 2 years after the first one, cit. 26).

Citation 23: *As we have already mentioned, during their 10-12 year stay [in Slovakia] they are supposed to receive primary education and learn all the habits of social life that were impossible to enhance in their country of origin....*<sup>38</sup>

Citation 24: *NOTHING IS CLEAR! When will the children leave, who will take them, who will pay for the journey and where to? This does not stand in the way for being on "alert" in their substitute home in Považská Bystrica, meaning the termination of facility and keeping children ready.*<sup>39</sup>

As presented in the last citation, the absence of clear and structured information from any official institution (neither government nor education board) effused insecurity not only among the staff and children, but this feeling also spread among "foster parents". Such a tense situation (cit. 24, 26) is represented in media content, which became continually more and more emotional. The children are depicted as passive objects – traumatized war victims whom people from near or further want to take care of, yet whose fates are questionable. The "foster parents" engagement is reflected in appealing to official institutions for help with matters of their repatriation or clear information at least (cit. 25). The entering emotional motive, of the contents in the second segment, is for reason stated above the feeling of insecurity, however starting from summer 1991 (i.e. during the 3<sup>rd</sup> time segment) it shifts towards frustration (cit. 25, 27).

Citation 25: *Families who decided for adoption or for foster care do fight however don Quichotean fight with bureaucracy.*<sup>40</sup>

Citation 26: *It [the Ministry of Foreign Affairs] demands Namibian side for the financial assistance for their stay [of the children]. The Namibian government reaction arrives quickly – and demands the children back.*<sup>41</sup>

Citation 27: *Here comes the farewell. All involved got used to – children, tutors, their friends taking them home for weekends or holidays. Not only from Považská Bystrica, but also from elsewhere. Some children cried when they found out they were leaving for good. The older ones said, that they went home only for holidays.*<sup>42</sup> These affective framings, reflecting the

---

<sup>38</sup> Smer 20.9. 1989.

<sup>39</sup> Národná obroda 3.7. 1991.

<sup>40</sup> Národná obroda 3.7. 1991.

<sup>41</sup> Source unidentified though based on its content it is evidently written before the group's departure.

<sup>42</sup> Slovenský denník 1.10. 1991.

moods in community throughout the stay of the children, lead me to consider the description of this final category. When acknowledging the shift in the journalists' role in society towards the public representative, the emotion representation serves as a form of background to do so. In the first time segment there was no prevalent emotional underpinning identified. This though can be interpreted in two directions: 1) the content was not meant to be subjected to further negotiation, meaning that what was written had been considered to be undisputable truth – emotionless, responseless; 2) there might have been hostile emotions and attitudes from the local community identified, but these were not written about due to self-censorship of the author. These two assumptions can be valid at once, therefore the represented imagined reality could be considered as an ideological tool – a propaganda of happiness and safety under the socialist establishment. The first estimated reflection therefore must be verbalized through such optics, thus in this way: *the state will take care of us all* (cit. 28, 29).

Citation 28: *Everything is ready for the stay of the Namibian children, orphans of deceased freedom fighters.*<sup>43</sup>

Citation 29: *At the beginning there was a telegram about an arrival of the children from hot Africa and within four days it was pretty clear where they would be accommodated, who would take care of them, what they would eat, what they would wear. Well done!*<sup>44</sup>

Identified notions of insecurity lead not only to certain general awareness of the situation in both parts of the former republic, but also to a specific community (or rather “parental”) mobilization. Journalists, as public representatives, cover this issue and not only they represent the voices of parents, they also demand answers and action. The revolution convinced people of their strength and as a consequence, the idea of vague hope got vital, especially after the departure of the group in July 1991 failed. The meta-message of this period in between can be presented as following: *we can help ourselves* (cit. 30, 31).

Citation 30: *We demand the government of Czechoslovakia [...] to stop [children's] repatriation and started immediate action in order to solve out their situation [...] in correspondence to treaties and laws for human rights protection.*<sup>45</sup>

Citation 31: *The initiative of mothers from Považská Bystrica reversed the decision of all institutions, whether ours or from abroad, and the Namibian children who were supposed to*

---

<sup>43</sup> Obzor 7.9. 1989.

<sup>44</sup> Smer 20.9. 1989.

<sup>45</sup> Source unidentified though based on its content it is evidently written before the group's departure.



*fly back home remained in Czechoslovakia.*<sup>46</sup> The widespread enthusiasm and optimism among the Czechoslovak citizens after the Velvet revolution created an illusion of everything seeming to be possible (SZTOMPKA 1993:85), but in this specific case very soon proved the opposite was truth. The people's expectations of government's active engagement, in order to meet their demands met legal reality. Swiftly spreading frustration from disillusion replaced the previous feeling insecurity (though still with reflections of agitated hope) and therefore the final narration of the category contains this latent meaning: *the state is unable to help us thus we cannot help ourselves* (cit. 32, 33, 34).

Citation 32: *Adoption? That is supposed to be very complicated. If the child was about to be adopted by a Namibian citizen, that would „take few minutes”. However, the interest in child by a European is legally interpreted as a child trafficking.*<sup>47</sup>

Citation 33: *It is very difficult to communicate with this country [i.e. Namibia] since there is no embassy in Czechoslovakia, only in Brussels. This is definitely not pleasing information for Johnny's Slovak parents who already bought him a bicycle and a skateboard. It is also not satisfactory for other “white” parents.*<sup>48</sup>

Citation 34: *Unfortunately, these misunderstandings out of love [...] started several human tragedies. One of those can be also a future destiny of small Mweengo and his “almost mother”.*<sup>49</sup>

### **GDR children of Namibia**<sup>50</sup>

The results achieved by conducting qualitative content analysis of print media material correspond to a certain measure with findings from the media analysis of the “GDR children of Namibia”<sup>51</sup> conducted by Niekrenz et al. in 2014. The centre of German team's interest

---

<sup>46</sup> Národná obroda 14.9. 1991.

<sup>47</sup> Source unidentified though based on its content it is evidently written before the group's departure.

<sup>48</sup> Source unidentified though based on its content it is evidently written before the group's departure.

<sup>49</sup> Národná obroda 14.9. 1991.

<sup>50</sup> GDR is an abbreviation of the German Democratic Republic (1949-1990), also known as East Germany in context of the division of the whole territory of contemporary Germany. The other abbreviation used in the text is FRG – Federal Republic of Germany. In the period of time before the year 1990 it referred strictly to common English denotation of so-called West Germany, while after the re-unification it identified both parts.

<sup>51</sup> The term, referring to the group of Namibian children transported since 1979 to German Democratic Republic, is used in media as well as in academy (NIEKRENTZ et al. 2014:95).

was reconstruction of the “*media discourse surrounding the group which were published between 1979 and 2013 in Namibia (also South West Africa) and Germany (also GDR, pre- and post-unification FRG)*” (NIEKRENTZ et al. 2014:97). The outcomes of their action coincide with mine on several grounds. However, one crucial fact has to be considered – the children’s departure from German territory was in August 1990. It means that in order to confront the results of Niekrenz et al. I have to take into consideration only the sample before (and around the date of) their departure, moreover, published in Germany exclusively. Above this, between the years 1979 and 1989 there was a moratorium on press information distribution related to the issue of Namibian child war refugees’ stay. Mutual agreement of SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands – Socialist Unity Party of Germany) and SWAPO thus led to lack of print material in this period of time (two articles are mentioned being analysed). The restrictions were lifted in May 1989 and this action had consequences that will be mentioned later in these paragraphs.

As for the first period of time in German press releases, the similarities occur while the exoticising representation of children (citation 35a, b), emphasizing their political loyalty (citation 36a, b) and initial referring to them as a collective (citation 37a, b). Lifted restrictions in May 1989 caused not only more media coverage, but also political instrumentalisation of the children’s stay in GDR. The raise of critical voices not only led to unconfirmable speculations, but also to an issue of children belonging “back” to Namibia also from the reasons of former regime’s foreign policy as it was in my case. Citation 35a: *Mother Anna managed to comb the pigtails to all the little pretties however she had no time left for her own hair.*<sup>52</sup>

Citation 35b: “*elaborate hairstyle*” consisting of little “*antennae*.”<sup>53</sup>

Citation 36a: *When Sam Nujoma was elected to be the president of Namibia, all the children were celebrating – all of them knew his picture when the principal hung these on the walls of classrooms.*<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> Práca 21.9. 1991.

<sup>53</sup> Niekrenz et al. identify the source of these statements as a magazine Für Dich – Vol. 22, 1982 (NIEKRENTZ et al. 2014:99).

<sup>54</sup> Smena 21.3. 1990.

Citation 36b: *"children cherish the mission of President Sam Nujoma."*<sup>55</sup>

Citation 37a: *We had some troubles to distinguish between them. They seemed all the same.*<sup>56</sup>

Citation 37b: *"It seemed to us as if they all looked the same. We asked ourselves: how on earth are we going to get to grips with this bubbly crowd of children."*<sup>57</sup> When discussing the issue of belonging of the Namibian child war refugees, the findings of the German team were not thoroughly affirmed in my media analysis. I assume that the discrepancy occurred due to the "foster parents" theme – in gathered material from Slovakia, as part of federative republic of Czechoslovakia, this aspect is very obvious. Since the printed announcement of possibility to foster the Namibian children (in daily-published newspaper *Práca* from May 19<sup>th</sup>, 1990), the notion of children's belonging was getting more and more vacillating. The most emotionally intensive moments highlighted in media are those of the groups' departure because of foster parents' attempts to adopt. However, there are no notions of ideas of adoption in the German media analysis whatsoever. Though, possibly due to different time period and life conditions of GDR children it seems understandable. Nevertheless, in case of Slovakia this means that the group was no longer perceived as a collective whose true home was back in Namibia (as was one of the several findings of Niekrenz et al.), but as consisting of individuals whose home it was not supposed to be any longer.

## Conclusion

This paper presented an analysis of media portrayal of Namibian child war refugees' stay in Slovakia and its elaborated interpretation. The abundance of media outputs about the Namibian exile children from Slovakia and Germany makes sharp contrast to the vacuum of media public information concerning the Namibian children in Czechia. The lack of the print media sources about the 'Czech group' can be though considered as correlating with notion of temporal maintaining the secrecy as a matter of political decision.

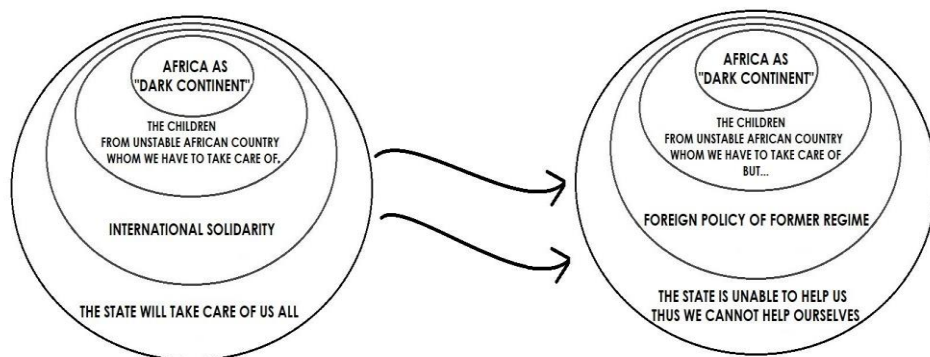
---

<sup>55</sup> Niekrenz et al. identity the source of this statement as a magazine *Schweriner Volkszeitung*, 23.12.1983 (NIEKRENTZ et al. 2014:99).

<sup>56</sup> *Sloboda* 19.5. 1990.

<sup>57</sup> Niekrenz et al. identity the source of this statement as a magazine *Für Dich* – Vol. 22, 1982 (NIEKRENTZ et al. 2014:99).

This, in German Democratic Republic, was taken by SWAPO and SED as stated by Niekrenz et al. (NIEKRENTZ et al. 2014:98). It is therefore possible to assume that similar decision was taken also in Czechoslovakia. The confirmation of this assumption however requires further research. In this context, I am convinced that the cooperation among German, Czech and Slovak team of scientists focused on this topic might bring more complex understanding of Namibian children in European exile – not only at the level of their media's representation. The fluid model of medial depiction of the Jakeš's children summarizes the identified manifest and (more or less) latent meanings in each category in a given time range. The visualisation (see Figure 2) presents the initial and final media portrayal.



**Figure 2:** *Initial and final construction of media portrayal.* Source: author 2018

Due to the fact that the shift in content was rather gradual than sudden, I find it more convenient and convincing to highlight the two versions rather than lose attention in more elaborative structure. The nature of social construction proved to be rather unstable, though, as manifested, some layers presumably take much longer period of time to transform (such as the Imagining Africa category). The media portrayal of the group of Namibian children in Slovakia was constructed within a larger matrix of institutions, practices, norms and beliefs. Based on the data analysis, it is possible to come to conclusion that all these did categorize the children most of all as objects. The frame of the analysis can be therefore accompanied with double summarization, firstly as *children = the saved orphans* (i.e. something that was rescued and being taken care of), and secondly as *children = the victims of political affairs* (i.e. something only minor in a larger picture). The shift can be gradually identified, reminds

a slow-motion echo of the Velvet Revolution. This one caused an uninterrupted chain of events with results visible in the whole society.

### **Bibliography**

BERGER, Peter. L. – LUCKMANN, Thomas (1991): *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Penguin Books.

BIOCCA, Frank A. (1988): Opposing Conceptions of the Audience: The Active and Passive Hemispheres of Mass Communication Theory. In *Communication Yearbook* 11 (1), pp. 51-80.

CAREY, James W. (2009): *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*. New York: Routledge.

DONOHUE, George. A. – TICHENOR, Phillip J. – OLIEN, Clarice. N. (1973): Mass Media Functions, Knowledge and Social Control. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 50 (4), pp. 652-659.

DONSBACH, Wolfgang (2008): Journalists' Role Perception. In Wolfgang. Donsbach (ed.): *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 2605-2610.

ECO, Umberto (1979): *The Role of the Reader. Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

FOUCAULT, Michel (1972): *The Archeology of Knowledge*. London: Tavistock publications.

GLEIJESES, Piero (2013): *Visions of Freedom. Havana, Washington, Pretoria, and the Struggle for Southern Africa, 1976-1991*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

GULYÁS, Ágnes (2001): Communist Media Economics and the Consumers. The Case of the Print Media of East Central Europe. In *The International Journal on Media Management* 3 (2), pp. 74-81.

HALL, Stuart (1980): Encoding/Decoding. In Stuart Hall, Doothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, Paul Willis (eds.): *Culture, Media, Language. Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79*. London: Routledge, pp. 117-127.

IŽÁK, Štefan. (2016): *Obráz subsaharskej Afriky v slovenských médiách. Diplomová práca*. Trnava: Univerzita sv. Cyrila a Metoda.

JANOWITZ, Morris (1975): Professional Models in Journalism: the Gatekeeper and the Advocate. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 52 (4), pp. 618-626.

JAROSZ, Lucy (1992): Constructing the Dark Continent: Metaphor as Geographic Representation of Africa. In *Geografiska Annaler* 74 (2), pp. 105-115.

JIRÁK, Jan – KÖPPLOVÁ, Barbara (2007): *Média a společnost. Stručný úvod do studia médií a mediální komunikace*. Praha: Portál.

KUNKEL, Dale – SMITH, Stacy L. (1999): The News Media's Picture of Children in the United States. In Cecilia von Feilitzen, Ulla Carlsson (eds.): *Children and Media. Image, Education, Participation*. Göteborg: Göteborg University, pp. 79-86.

LIEBES, Tamar – KATZ, Elihu (1995): *The export of meaning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

LUNE, Howard – BERG, Bruce L. (2017): *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.

McCOMBS, Maxwell – GHANEM, Salma I. (2001): The Convergence of Agenda Setting and Framing. In Stephen D. Reese, Oscar H. Gandy, August E. Grant (eds.): *Framing Public Life. Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 67-82.

McQUAIL, Denis (2010): *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*. London: SAGE.

MILDNEROVÁ, Kateřina (2016): "Obscene and Diabolic and Bloody Fetishism": European Conceptualisation of Youdun through the History of Christian Missions. In Hana Horáková, Katerina Werkman (eds.): *Knowledge production in and on Africa*. Wien: LIT Verlag, pp. 177-206.

MILLER, David – PHILO, Greg (2001): *Market Killing. What the free market does and what social scientists can do about it*. London: Longman.

MORLEY, David (1992): *Television, audiences and cultural studies*. London: Routledge.

NIEKRENZ, Yvonne – ARMBRÜSTER, Christian – WITTE, Matthias D. (2014): A problematic sense of belonging. A media analysis of the 'GDR children of Namibia'. In *Journal of Namibian Studies* 15, pp. 95-123.

NEUMAN, William Lawrence (2014): *Social Research Methods. Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.

O'NEIL, Patrick H. (2013): Media Reform and Democratization in Eastern Europe. In Patrick O'Neil (ed.): *Post-Communism and the Media in Eastern Europe*. New York: Routledge, pp. 1-6.

OPRŠAL, Zdeněk – HARMÁČEK, Jaromír – SYROVÁTKA, Miroslav (2016): The Allocation of Czech Foreign Aid in Sub-Saharan Africa: the Influence of Historical Relationships. In *International Journal of Economic Policy in Emerging Economies* 9 (4), pp. 325-343.

PARKER, McCrae A. – MILLER, Patti – DONEGAN, Kevin – GILLIAM, Franklin D. (2001): *The Local Television New Media's Picture of Children*. Oakland: Children NOW.

PAWLIKOVÁ-VILHANOVÁ, Viera (1988): The Knowledge of Africa in Slovakia. From the earliest times till 1990. In *Asian and African Studies* 23, pp. 221-232.

PAWLIKOVÁ-VILHANOVÁ, Viera (1991): Obraz Afriky v slovenskej spoločnosti v devätnástom a začiatkom dvadsiateho storočia. In *Sondy z dejín v strednej a východnej Európe*, pp. 145-170.

ROSEN, Jay (1999): The Action of the Idea. Public Journalism in Built Form. In Theodore L. Glasser (ed.): *The Idea of Public Journalism*. New York: The Guilford Press, pp. 21-48.

SCHMITT, Caroline – WITTE, Matthias. D. – POLAT, Serpil (2014): International Solidarity in the GDR and Transnationality: an Analysis of Primary School Materials for Namibian Child Refugees. In *Transnational Social Review* 4 (2-3), pp. 242-258.

SCHREIER, Margrit (2012): *Qualitative Content Analysis in Practice*. London: SAGE.

SZTOMPKA, Piotr (1993): Civilizational Incompetence. The Trap of Post-Communist Societies. In *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 22 (2), pp. 85-95.

TUŠER, Andrej (1999): *Ako sa robia noviny*. Bratislava: SOFA.

VAN DALEN Arjen – DE VREESE Claes H. – ALBÆK Erik (2012): Different Roles, Different Content? A Four-Country Comparison of the Role Conceptions and Reporting Style of Political Journalists. In *Journalism* 13 (7), pp. 903-922.

ZEBROWITZ, Leslie A. – WANG, Ruoyue – BRONSTAD P. Matthew – EISENBERG, Dan – UNDURRAGA, Eduardo – REYES-GARCÍA, Victoria – GODOY, Ricardo (2012): First Impressions From Faces Among U.S. and Culturally Isolated Tsimane' People in the Bolivian Rainforest. In *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 43 (1), pp. 119-134.

WYKA, Angelika W. (2008): Journalistic standards and democratisation of the mass media in Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. In Richard Keeble (ed.) *Communication Ethics Now*. Leicester: Troubadour Publishing Ltd., pp. 93-108.

ZHU, Jonathan J. H. – WEAVER, David – LO, Ven-Hwei – CHEN, Chongshan – WU, Wei. (1997): Individual, Organizational, and Societal Influences on Media Role Perceptions. A Comparative Study of Journalists in China, Taiwan, and the United States. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 74 (1), pp. 84-96.

ZÍDEK, Petr – SIEBER, Karel (2007): *Československo a subsaharská Afrika v letech 1948-1989*. Praha: Ústav mezinárodních vztahů.

### **Online resources**

Act No. 166/1990 Sb. act cancellation No. 180/1980 Sb. about establishment of Federal Office for press and information. Retrieved 25.11.2018, available on: <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/1990-166>

MICHIRA, James (2002): *The Images of Africa in the Western Media* (23.12. 2002). Retrieved 27.11. 2018, available on:

[http://web.mnstate.edu/robertsb/313/images\\_of\\_africa\\_michira.pdf](http://web.mnstate.edu/robertsb/313/images_of_africa_michira.pdf).

SENESE, Vincenzo Paolo – DE FALCO, Simona – BORNSTEIN, Marc H. – CARIA, Andrea – BUFFOLINO, Simona – VENUTI, Paola (2013): *Human Infant Faces Provoke Implicit Positive Affective Responses in Parents and Non-Parents Alike* (25.11. 2013). Retrieved 26.11. 2018, available on:

<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0080379#pone.0080379-Greenwald2>.