

АКТУАЛЬНЫЕ ПРОБЛЕМЫ ВОСТОКОВЕДЕНИЯ И АФРИКАНИСТИКИ: ДИСКУССИЯ

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Some Reflections on African Studies, “the Truths of Science” in Humanities, or Why We Should Study Africa

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The paper considers the issue of formulating “objective truths” in the study of Humanities, as well as the role African studies play in understanding the current challenges in Russia and the rest of the contemporary world. The reasons for the complexity of formulating truths in Humanities are explained, alongside a consideration of certain specific features of the evolution African studies experienced in Russia. The position of African studies during the period when scholarship was dominated by scientometric indicators is discussed. An attempt is made to formulate a rationale for African studies in contemporary Russia, as well as to apply an analysis of African materials in order to understand certain pressing issues in Russia and elsewhere. Among the ideas and concepts proposed by African studies, the notion of “multistage heterogeneity”, multidimensionality of analysis of social phenomena, and the dichotomy between the cultural and the social realities are brought forward. Based on the above, the paper features a study of problems related to political organization in Africa, Russia and Europe, and delivers an examination of contemporary humanitarian “constructs”. All these phenomena are looked upon within the context of major globalization processes, primarily, the fundamental revolutionary changes in the speed of information flows. Certain concepts relevant to the present day political discourse are reviewed to demonstrate their mutual incongruity and intrinsic inconsistency.

Keywords: truth, Human sciences, African studies, contemporary world.

Introduction

Having been involved into African studies for about 35 years (as a student, professor and researcher) the author recently has faced several new challenges appearing in the field of his professional interest. These issues comprise such questions as what is the place of

African studies in the modern world, why we should study Africa in Russia, the country which is so greatly removed from it, what can be considered as the “objective truths” offered by humanities, and to what extent have African studies contributed thereto, and, finally, why some terms and concepts have been misunderstood. Sometimes, these challenges are formulated as direct questions (asked by students, colleagues, academic authorities etc) which the author is expected to answer. This paper contains some of the author’s reflections on the topics delineated above.

African studies in the epoch of ranking indicators

African studies in the USSR/ Russia have been always beset with a number of grave problems: the ideological pressure of the Soviet era, lack of funding and the ensuing disastrous loss of specialists in the post-Soviet period (over 30 graduates of the SPbSU Department of African studies who remained in the profession are employed outside of St. Petersburg), against the overall marginal position of Africa within the area of research and state interests. New challenges of the present day include the dominant role of scientometric (**ranking**) indicators in evaluating research and educational activities, which urge us to rethink African studies and their place in the contemporary world, scientific and educational processes.

Being engaged in African linguistics, whereof the number of experts in Russia and even globally is much smaller than the actual number of African languages (about 2,000), I and my Russian colleagues have long understood the need to integrate African studies into the realm of international research by making our publications available to foreign colleagues. In most stressful times of the early 1990s, “St. Petersburg Journal of African Studies” (translated into English) was published owing to the initiative of V.F. Vydrin, aided and abetted by his colleagues. The best works of Russian Africanists were published in six issues of this journal. It should also be noted that the St. Petersburg tradition of African studies became incorporated successfully into the international scholarly network soon after the “iron curtain” was lifted. This was facilitated by the contacts of our teachers (D. A. Olderooge, A. A. Zhukov) established while still in the Soviet Union, as well as by the enthusiasm displayed by new generations of Africanists. Moreover, Africanists traditionally had good levels of language proficiency, including European languages, as required by their professional activities.

Considering the above, I should have become an ardent supporter of the race for international rankings and scientometric databases, specifically in the context of their extreme popularity among education managers — for the principal administrative activities in education and scholarship and, accordingly, their funding are catered to provide an entry into the list of the top hundred of the world’s universities. However, I can not join this race wholeheartedly, though I would rather choose it as a lesser evil compared to the concept of an “iron curtain” in science that is gradually acquiring popularity again with some “patriotically” oriented colleagues who oppose the role of “international rankings” in academic life. Obviously, competition within the system of generalized objectivist evaluation of scientific effectiveness is a hard problem for African studies, as well as for Oriental studies (and Humanities on the whole, to a certain extent). To begin with, the evaluation of our research activities and, therefore, our scientific competition at national level and with foreign colleagues is limited to inclusion in the scientometric database,

which scarcely reflects the full content of research activities. Further, we actually compete not only between ourselves, i.e., within the subject domain, but also with other areas of knowledge, which in all countries are much more adapted to these rankings, developed and intended for STEM and natural sciences. However, it is exactly these parameters that determine grants allocation, publication allowances, and, in certain cases, appointments to a researcher's or a lecturer's position. Such "contest" reminds of a weightlifting sports event, where swimmers and runners are compelled to compete with professional weightlifters.

However, there exist more fundamental arguments against evaluating science and education based on "rankings" and "databases".

Firstly, I am convinced that rankings, even if drawn as objectively as possible, can derive from successfully organized research and education, but may and should not represent their goal. We must deal with matters that are content-related within a specific knowledge domain and are only comprehensible to a handful of respective specialists. If this content-related activity is reflected in rankings — it is OK, if not — most likely, something has gone wrong with the rankings. Moreover, the "content" can be evaluated properly only by fellow researchers in this or that knowledge domain, both on the national and global levels. In his presentation, Ben Sowter, Head of Division, QS Intelligence Unit, quotes Alison Richard, former Vice-Chancellor, University of Cambridge, which came out first in the top 200 QS World University Rankings 2011: "Rankings have many faults and do not adequately describe universities and cannot show whether one institution is better than another... ..but I am very happy when Cambridge is rated as the top university in the world" [1].

Among the top 20 universities rated QS, only one is located in a non-English speaking country, ETH Zurich — Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (occupying the 13th position), where the language of instruction in many Master's degree programs is English. The prevalence of English-speaking universities is typical for the subsequent ranking years, as well. Evidently, we can not compete for a number of important ranking parameters (for example, publications in the rated peer-reviewed journals, which are almost all in English; attracting foreign students), by default.

When we compare four university cities rated by students' evaluation (Paris, London, New York, and Moscow), our capital loses significantly on the criterion of "affordability". Obviously, this parameter depends on the state, rather than on universities; therefore, before the universities are tasked with ranking improvements, the state should ensure systemic improvements of its component, since it is mostly the state which considerably undermines the ranking position. This also refers to the ratio of workspace to the number of students/tutors considered in ranking assessments.

Certain considerations should also be given to the historical conditions of development of science and education in Russia. Here the question should be asked as to why we are so sure that we ought to head the rankings? Russia enjoyed emergence of universities and science quite late in its history. In Europe (Italy, Spain, England, France), universities appeared before the Mongol invasion of our land; while in Germany, Portugal, Sweden, and Poland — before the time traditionally considered to be the end of that invasion. The first Russian University (in St. Petersburg) was founded as late as in 1724, and began to function even later. Certainly, the modern development proceeded more rapidly — "young" American universities are now firmly established as the ones which hold leading

positions in various rankings, and Russian history, for instance, featured a very successful 19th century. But the 20th century was not so unambiguously positive for our science which suffered destruction (e.g. N. S. Gumilev), emigration of its preeminent representatives (the notorious “philosophers’ steamboat”) after the October Revolution (albeit against the backdrop of equalizing the average level of education in the country), wars, political repression, campaigns against cosmopolitanism, genetics, cybernetics, comparative historical linguistics, and ideological pressure in the realm of humanities. In the post-Soviet period ideological pressure relented, but a disastrous loss of specialists — scientists and lecturers — followed: strenuous financial conditions drove some leading experts into emigration and those remaining into having to seek various side-line activities to ensure their survival, which occasioned irreparable time loss to their careers. In such unwelcoming environment one should rather ask the question as to how our science, scholarship and education managed to survive at all, than why we have failed to secure leading positions in the rankings.

The problem of “objective truths” in humanities

The dynamics of social processes was apparently triggered by the Third Information Revolution¹ that complicated formulation of sustainable scientific concepts, thus creating an atmosphere of postmodern relationality. A seemingly obvious idea expressed by A. A. Zaliznyak, “the Truth exists, and the purpose of science consists in its search” [2] in conditions of the modern world turns into a statement no longer universally acknowledged. Such relativity is caused, *inter alia*, by a vast corpus of accumulated and accessible information and objective complexity of multiple problems faced by science and society. At the same time, for all those operating within the scientific paradigm (however difficult it may be to define it), another one of Zaliznyak’s postulates (voiced in the same presentation) is undeniably obvious: “Whatever the issue under discussion, an opinion of a professional (if he is a true professional and not merely a title holder) is, by and large, to be preferred to that of an amateur” [2]. All such statements cause one to reflect as to what exactly the professional science offers the society as truths a disputation of which reveals the disputant to be an ignoramus, and what exactly remains open to discussion. The natural and exact sciences have a sufficiently wide array of such truths: two times two is four, the sum of the areas of the two squares on the legs equals the area of the square on the hypotenuse, gravity force is equal to the object’s mass multiplied by gravitational acceleration, etc. Experts in the natural and exact sciences (the present writer not being one) can complement this list with more complex and conceptual “truths”, or with a list of major problems, of which the discussion is still underway. However, it is important to recall that there exists a long list of scientific achievements, the denial of which not only brings the discussion beyond the limits of science, but is not questioned principally, under any ordinary discourse. Formulating the “truth” in humanities is far more complicated. The reasons for that are quite obvious: everything that relates to humans is much more difficult to discretize, often depends on a subjective assessment, views and interests of a researcher,

¹ The Internet and other modern communication media have practically destroyed spatial restrictions in the information transfer, the same way as the emergence of writing had previously overcome time constraints, and even earlier, the appearance of language made a qualitative leap in the speed and volume of transferred information, compared to the biological forms of such transfer.

directly involves the social interests and cultural identification of both the scholar and his audience, and, therefore, is easily translatable from the realm of scholarship into those of propaganda or public rhetoric, at best. The interface between scientific and politico-ideological views of a researcher in humanities is a flimsy one. Transformation of human sciences into propaganda was particularly noticeable in the Soviet era and we still perceive its aftermath: the attitude to everything related to humanities as being propaganda or publicism leads to the loss of benchmarks not only in controversial issues, but to the sense of acceptability of any views whatsoever, as well as to non-distinction between scientific views and amateurism, often ideologically stained. At the same time, the gap between the science and media discourse, indicative of the extremely poor “background” knowledge in people, presents a serious problem. The media environment is filled with representatives of various institutions stating “geopolitical”, “strategic” and “national” in their presentation titles, which creates the illusion of science, being very far from it. The lack of scientific benchmarks affects not only the media space, but also the professional environment of historians and experts in “modernity” in particular, which is extremely risky; propaganda related subjective replacements of scientific facts and discussions penetrate gradually into the area of law (not only in Russia).

“Objective truths” and African Studies, or why to study Africa in Russia

In the Soviet times, African studies enjoyed certain advantages, as compared with other areas in humanities: the classics of Marxism-Leninism wrote next to nothing about Africa. With the exception of being engaged in “labour movement” or “building socialism” in Africa (such topics were mostly avoided by the Leningrad Africanists), there was great freedom of scientific thought, especially considering the specific features of African material. It is likely that this allowed the Leningrad Africanists to formulate a number of science-based statements that not only made them prepared for the ideological upheavals of the Perestroika, but also brought them nearer to the formulation of ideas claiming to be a “truth of humanities”. The author knew all Africanists of the older generation, or was instructed by them, but is more familiar with and mostly relies on the works and ideas of N. M. Girenko, who was one of the most “conceptual” among that generation of scholars and whose ideas formed the author’s world view. Many of Girenko’s ideas emerged from the creative polemic community of African studies in Leningrad. This community gave rise to the ideas about the multidimensionality of scientific analysis and thinking [3], the concept of multistage heterogeneity [4], the dichotomy between the cultural and the social, the concept of “ethnicity as a tragic myth of the 20th century” [5] (unfortunately of the 21st century also — A. Zh). Bibliography of selected publications on these problems by N. M. Girenko is presented in [6].

Today, we again are going through the period of obvious socio-political and ideological turbulence and once again we ask: why is it essentially necessary to study the distant African continent in contemporary Russia? How can African studies help in discussing the most pressing issues of the modern world? The immediate answer (albeit hardly satisfying for the “external” experts) by scientists and mere first-year students alike would be that the presence of the study object (over 50 states, 2,000 languages, etc.) itself implies the presence of certain interest. The pragmatic thesis about the vast natural resources in Africa, which could be developed with participation of Russia (the frequent official response),

is very popular, but, in my opinion, tends to devastatingly impoverish and simplify the content of African studies. Actually, this content lies primarily between the abstract “interest” and pragmatic use of resources. At least three important aspects can be gleaned from within the specified area, namely: 1) any modern society must present a certain critical mass of people with multidimensional (“multicultural”) thinking, for whom the study of Africa makes an extremely important incentive; 2) problems in understanding many current processes in Russia and elsewhere in the world that could be mitigated by referring to the “multistage-heterogeneous” African materials; 3) the importance and relevance of solving multiple urgent African problems for the sake of Africa and the whole globalized world.

Many of the ideas of the Leningrad tradition in African studies prove effective exactly in this field and support a development of a scientific view on current problems. I will here adduce an example of the practical damage caused by neglecting the multidimensionality of complex phenomena in the political system relying on a comparative analysis of party systems in Africa and the post-Soviet states. In both cases, building political systems was attempted in line with the Western model, since the alternative Soviet model had been compromised. For some reason, the output of such attempts materialized as single-party models, with ethnization/regionalization of the political system and dependence on external forces. In Africa, a single-party model is represented by Tanzania with “soft” authoritarianism under Julius Nyerere or Uganda under “strict” authoritarianism of Idi Amin. Within the post-Soviet space, we see the permanent rule of Lukashenko in Belarus or Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan (under formal compliance with electoral procedures). In Africa, this is the political system of Kenya, with a strong hold of ethnic component (Kikuyu/Luo), or the one based on regional and religious division — in Nigeria (North/South), with similar models in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (struggle between regional clans). In Angola, a long-term power struggle was initiated between the MPLA (supported by the USSR) and UNITA (supported by the USA), former allies in the fight against colonialism. Similar processes take place in modern Ukraine — the confrontation of forces focused either on Russia or on Europe, or in Moldova (the Trans-Dniester phenomenon). So, what is the problem with unsuccessful replication, what exactly failed? The answer to these questions proves to be also relevant for understanding the political system in Russia, where a Western model had been quite purposefully replicated. Going beyond one dimension in the analysis of the modern political system provides us with understanding the reasons, why none of the projects was able to create two mainstream, central parties (slightly “to the right” — “Our home — Russia”, “United Russia”, slightly “to the left” — Rybkin’s party, “Fair Russia”) to comply with the normal functioning of a multi-party civil society. Given a superficial similarity with such models as “Conservative”/“Labour”, “the Republicans”/ “the Democrats”, “the Christian Democrats”/ “the Social Democrats” (in the UK, the USA and Germany, respectively)², there is a fundamental difference from the Russian party system. The majority of political parties (as well as the majority of the population) in Western democracies recognize the primacy of personality over state; the state power becoming desacralized since the Enlightenment and the bourgeois revolutions. For all parliamentary parties in Russia, the state (in other versions — the country, the people, or

² With a simplified substantive difference: more economic freedom, more dynamic economy — with the former; greater social guarantees, less social tension — with the latter (with regular alternations as a guarantee of the balance of interests).

even the truly romantic Motherland) is primary to personality. The “game” between the “left” and the “right” that operates in Europe, the USA, and Japan, fails in Russia, since it does not involve the most fundamental system of coordinates: “the primacy of the individual” / “the primacy of the state”. Whatever epithet we are likely to use (Motherland, the country, or the state), the reality is that the postulated “interests of Motherland” (national/state interests) are nothing but the interests of the present-day power mongers. Under such approach, the government officials of different ranks do not act as hired managers to ensure the peaceful settlement of rights and interests of individuals and groups (these can not be the same as the “state” interests), but instead pretend to formulate “national interests”, which indeed would coincide with those of their own and their world view. For those who export oil, the depreciation of the rouble is profitable, while for those who buy imported medicine and products, it is not. The power elite turns out to identify itself on par with the “country” and naturally perceives the normal political rivalry as anti-state, and therefore, the alternation of power, fundamental to the balance of interests, is out of the question. The competition and alternation needed to maintain the balance of interests are replaced by the calls for unity, i.e. unquestioning support for the power elite. In this context, the struggle between the “left” and the “right” becomes pointless and any party in power is immediately transformed into a kind of CPSU (the Communist Party of the Soviet Union). The African material, often being clearer and less subjective for the researcher, allows for viewing Russian phenomena in a more organized way, as if “from outside”. The Leningrad-St. Petersburg tradition of African studies has always considered Africa as a specific model of traditional society, where numerous mechanisms can be perceived and understood. These are less noticeable in Russia but still function in synchronous systemic sections of Russian society. The elements of the social or cultural multistage heterogeneity that function as dominating in Africa can be reduced to rudimentary components in Russia yet they still affect their synchronous functioning. The study of a “more illuminating” African material often allows us to see and understand those rudimentary components. The notion of multistage heterogeneity proposed by N. M. Girenko might have appeared through studying the specifics of colonial society in East Africa [7]. The term “multi-stage heterogeneity” was introduced, elaborated (see, e.g., [4]), and became a key concept in the theory of social development which plays an important role in the system of N. M. Girenko’s scientific views. Despite its scientism, much feared by the students, it has a fairly simple and logical underlying principle: each specific synchronous moment of the societal development represents a system of elements and subsystems, some of which are rudimentary (dominant at the previous stages of development), some are dominant in this given period, and the rest are the emerging elements for the subsequent stages; the essential feature is their joint involvement in synchronous systemic links. This approach makes it possible to remain within the concept of “evolution” (“development”) along with avoiding the discrete change of stages criticized by the opponents of the evolutionary development schemes.

African studies, “objective truths” and problems of contemporary world

Where there is a human society, there are problems, as well, albeit of varying nature in terms of stages. “The **End** of History” promised by Francis Fukuyama has not come to the “Western” world either: the emerging balanced system of society functions went

under severe pressure from new factors. The objective globalization and a single information space brought about a situation when maintaining social balance and commitment to values of humanity required “sharing” not only with “in-house” “poor” and “unprotected” (which, by the second half of the 20-th century, the Western societies got accustomed to, not without a contribution from the social cataclysms in Russia), but also with the influx of migrants — representatives of other cultural traditions and descendants from other states. This creates totally new “challenges”, resulting in Trump’s success, nominal success of Marie Le Pen, Brexit, reflecting the emergence of a new socio-political dimension progressing towards the forefront — the opposition, which perceives itself as part of the common world space and is more closely tied to the national borders and cultural traditions (at the same time, the older opposition does not disappear — a multistage heterogeneity, according to N. M. Girenko). The global-scale reaction to all this comes as aggressive radicalism, isolationism, nationalism, extreme left and right populism, “a convincing explanation, as to why we should be living worse lives than the neighbours, and take pride in it altogether”. In this sense, Russia finds itself in an intricate situation: while the problem of the previous stage — desacralization of the state power — remains yet unresolved, we find ourselves involved in the problematic opposition of the next stage — part of the common world, or “sovereignty”. The problems of many African countries appear even more heterogeneous: the above-mentioned problems are complemented with the lack of resources and institutions for reproduction and development, the artificiality of borders against the uneven development of regions and cultural diversity, the unfinished economic modernization³, etc. I reiterate: in the contemporary world, the problems of Africa, like other regions, become common problems. And here, the increasingly mass-scale migration flows are not the only reason; ignoring the problems of the “world neighbours” causes a devastating impact on less problematic and more stable societies, as well. At the same time, rendering aid is a very complicated issue in itself: neither funding via the state institutions (often corrupt or ineffective), nor supplies of food would resolve these problems systemically. One of the objectives of African studies is to formulate the effective ways for equalizing the socio-economic situation in problematic regions.

No less pronounced practical importance is carried by a presumably theoretical discrimination between the social and the cultural in social phenomena. There are a number of questions, actively discussed within the country and worldwide, the answers to which can be quite unambiguous (the “truth”) in scientific terms. Is it permissible (or mandatory) to indicate nationality in the passport (this question has been recently raised on one of the TV channels)? Is it permissible to wear a hijab at school? Is it permissible for Sikhs (wearing turban is obligatory for them) residing in Italy to ride motorbikes without helmets, when the Italians are fined for doing so?⁴ We will try to answer these questions briefly, but unambiguously.

A passport is obviously a document of socio-political (state) identity and indicating one’s ethnic origin (nationality) refers to cultural identity. Here, we will even disregard the *ad hoc* nature of such identification, though the primordialist view of ethnic identity is being replaced by a constructivist concept (unfortunately, in scientific rather than everyday

³ According to the World Food Programme, out of 16 countries with the greatest expenditure on providing daily ration in relation to income, 11 are African.

⁴ This issue was raised quite hotly by my Italian friend who lives in a city with a large Sikh community.

discourse).⁵ What are the consequences of specifying cultural identity in a document of the state (socio-political) identification? There can be three answers: no consequences (then why?), protectionism and discrimination (obviously, the negative effects). Therefore, raising this question means contradicting the “truth”. And this should be as clear to the society as “two times two is four”.

Let us turn to the question of wearing a hijab at school. Personally, I do not favour declaring religious affiliation (any affiliations whatsoever) in public but while staying within the scientific framework, I will have to ask, whether it is permissible to restrict access to social institutions (school) on the basis of cultural (religious) identification. In my opinion, the negative answer to this question is obvious. However, in the case of clothes that cover the face completely (niqab), the answer would be the opposite — cultural identification should not invade the area of social norms (identification of a person in the public (social) space), which should not depend on cultural identities and traditions. The answer to the third question lies in the same plane — with all my sympathy for the Italian Sikhs and their cultural identity, social norms (traffic rules) can not differ for representatives of different cultural traditions. Either everybody is permitted cycling without helmets, or it is prohibited to everybody, or special helmets should be invented for Sikhs, otherwise I would have to justify the complaints of my Italian acquaintance.

Terminological problems and false concepts: a challenge for the modern world

Another aspect that needs to be highlighted is the serious backlog between the terminological and analytical tools of the humanities and the modern reality, and even a certain regression observed in this area in recent years. At least, in Russian political and social discourse, such terms as “tolerance”, “liberalism”, “human values”, “globalization” acquired an undertone of denial and mockery (“tolerast”, “liberast”, etc — words employing suffixes which convey derision). These notions were replaced by the increasingly popular “national interests”, “national ideas”, “geopolitics”, “sovereign democracy”, “bonds”, etc., accompanied by popular quotations from totally different historical realities of the past centuries and perceived as axioms and guidelines for action: “if you want peace — prepare for war”, “Russia has only two allies — the Army and the Navy”, “if you do not feed your army, you will feed someone else’s”. Such trend is in contrast with the objective trends in the society’s development (the third information revolution has already shaped a largely globalized social, economic and information space) and leads to an extremely risky conflict between the advanced military and technical facilities existing today and a long-outdated paradigm of conceptualization of society in the field of humanities.

⁵ The African material provides a very demonstrative example of the “floating” pattern in cultural identity, which obviously includes the term “ethnic group”. The representative of the ethnic group Nyong (Adamawa province, Eastern Nigeria) would perceive himself in his native village as a representative of a certain clan, rather than “Nyong”; in Yola, the capital of the province, — he would be self-identified as “Nyong”; in London he would position himself as a Nigerian, and his children (if they were born and raised there — as the British); in Russia, where Africans are far less numerous, the only possible cultural identity would be an “African”. The question as to which of these cultural identities should be called an ethnic group can be answered only upon linking the ethnicity with the native language; however, language is known as an important but not an exhaustive measure of ethnicity (see, e.g.: [8]).

This process is determined by a wrong interpretation of some terms and essential “non-definability” of some others. Tolerance does not mean wanton indulgence in anything; it denotes loyalty to cultural diversity, which by no means implies tolerance for violation of social norms or moral imperatives. Liberalism means recognition of the primacy of rights of an individual over the state, and not the absolute freedom of the market (there are the “right” and the “left” wings in liberalism; actually, their competition shaped modern political systems in the “liberal” states). Globalization does not mean imposing the interests of powerful states on others, but an objective process of expanding the socio-political space within the common space of information. Actually, creation of the so-called “national states” represented a certain degree of “globalization”, but on a smaller scale and in another historical period. At present, this comes as a trending habit when a resident of Germany perceives either a Frenchman, or a Spaniard (in the future — an Indian, an African, etc.) as a “guy next door” rather than a “stranger”, and in the course of formation of the national state, a Bavarian turns to perceive as “one of us” not only his nearest neighbour, but also a Saxon, a Thuringian, etc. Formulating universal values is indeed a very difficult task, since the world is still very heterogeneous, both socially and culturally, but the universal pattern of the “rules of the game” just means the very lack of “double standards” that cause a truthful aversion. Now, when all this is replaced by constructs containing the word “national”, a question of its terminological content would arise inevitably: whether it is a “nation” from the Stalin’s triad “tribe-nationality-nation”, a Western definition of a “nation”, as a set of residents of one state, an “ethnic group” (either in the constructivist or in the primordialist sense). With any interpretation adopted, “interests” and “ideas” can not be localized in the same way. Phrases like “if you do not feed your army, you will feed someone else’s” are axiomatic only at first glance: for instance, increased military expenditure in Pakistan (“feed your army”) would be followed immediately by an increase in defence expenditure in India (“feed someone else’s”); the same is true for Russia and the USA. Thus, the actual choice would be: “to feed both one’s own and someone else’s” and “prepare for war” or nonetheless look for allies in all countries and find them not only in one’s own “Army and Navy”, by realizing that the “interests” can be different — personal, group, social, universal or just “other” — and not only “national”. Everything should be considered, and an equilibrium should be mutually agreed on. That said, we can feed the children, the elderly (retired), people suffering from hunger in other countries and the poor of our own. What is called geopolitical interests often turns out to be a consideration of an insufficient number of dimensions. A conference discussion about the efficiency of the Soviet foreign policy in Africa and Eastern Europe was initiated recently. At first glance, the policies in Eastern Europe, with almost total control over the countries in the region, were far more efficient compared with an “altruistic” aid to African countries, without much economic benefit. Many people, sadly, gravitate towards this conclusion. But time has passed, and we can compare the attitude towards us in Eastern Europe and in Africa. In Africa, we do not have a trail of colonialism, exploitation, or occupation. In Africa, we meet a large number of former graduates of our universities who are friendly to our country, while Eastern Europe strives to keep its distance from us, both politically and economically. “Altruism” and “good attitude” prove more pragmatic in the long run than a total military and political control. After the collapse of the colonial system, it became even more clear that power control over the foreign territory is counterproductive and brings more harm than good, whereas an “ineffective” assistance

to other states (such as the Soviet aid to Africa or the Marshall plan in post-war Europe) has long-term “benefits”. Serious problems with concepts entertained by humanities exist in both the Russian and the global contexts, which only adds to the problem. The world’s political discourse operates, at first sight, with absolutely positive concepts: the right of a nation to self-determination, the immutability of existing borders, the state sovereignty and non-interference in the affairs of other states, guarantees of human rights under international law. However, it is obvious that the right to self-determination is fundamentally unenforceable while maintaining state borders, and sovereignty and non-interference are incompatible with the international human rights guarantees. At the same time, these principles are highly controversial on a standalone basis, as well: the borders were changed throughout the history and many borders of the present day were established through a less than legitimate process; what we mean by the “nation” entitled to self-determination, who can act as the subject of this process — the existing territorial entities or ethnic groups; whether the “non-interference” policy kept during the Rwanda genocide of 1994 (900,000 victims in 3 months) was well-meaning; who and under what conditions is entitled to protect the rights in other states; what should be classified as “aggression”, who and how should respond to it. It seems that the harmonization of the existing contrariety and “non-definability” of international norms becomes an extremely urgent task for humanities, and it is highly desirable that this should be resolved by the researchers: unfortunately, many politicians are excessively biased by their ideas of “national interests”, and this is unlikely to facilitate the compromise formulations. These issues largely refer to the scope of ethnography, cultural and social anthropology, which were actively developed within the field of African studies.

Conclusion

To conclude, I will quote the Memorandum of K. N. Lishin, Resident-Minister of the Russian Empire in Abyssinia, dated June 12, 1902, on a possibility of patronage of the Russian government over a commercial venture organized there by a Russian adventurer N. S. Leontiev, a retired Lieutenant of Guard, whose activities were allegedly untrustworthy: “Our exploitation of the wealth of the Equatorial provinces without legal right to do so could yield a certain degree of material success, but would have delivered a tremendous blow to our moral effects on Abyssinia. In addition, the Imperial Government, guided by the principles of legitimacy and justice, can not allow a Society of which it is the patron to violate these principles” [9, p.229]. I would ardently campaign to include this quote in students’ handbooks on both African studies and diplomacy in general.

The case may be that the “truths” formulated above and “provoked”, in particular, by African material, fail to qualify as such and it is absolutely certain that their argumentation would require a more detailed volume of text than what is acceptable for the present paper, but it is neither more “scientific”, nor practical to disregard the given facts and their analysis, or to replace them with a widespread discourse on “bonds”, “geopolitics”, and “national interests”. It is highly desirable that the “truths of humanities” are formulated and introduced into the “background” knowledge of the population with the active participation of researchers in African studies — the critical time for this is once again upon us.

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Некоторые размышления об африканских исследованиях и «истинах» в гуманитарных науках, или Почему мы должны изучать Африку

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В данной статье рассматриваются проблемы формулирования «объективных истин» в гуманитарных науках, а также роль исследований Африки в понимании современных проблем России и современного мира. Объясняются причины сложности формулирования гипотез в гуманитарных науках, автор рассматривает особенности развития

исследований Африканского региона в России. Обсуждается положение африканских исследований в период доминирования наукометрических показателей. Предпринимается попытка сформулировать обоснование изучения Африки в современной России, а также применить анализ африканского материала для понимания некоторых вопросов, актуальных как для России, так и для современного глобального пространства. Среди терминов, идей и концепций, которые предлагают африканисты, выделяются такие, как «стадиальная гетерогенность», многомерность анализа социальных явлений, дихотомия культурных и социальных явлений. Опираясь на вышесказанное, автор анализирует проблемы политической организации в Африке, России и Европе, рассматривает современные гуманитарные «конструкты» и термины. Все эти явления анализируются в контексте основных социальных процессов в современном мире, прежде всего фундаментальных революционных изменений в скорости информационных потоков. Рассматриваются некоторые концепции, относящиеся к современному политическому дискурсу, автор демонстрирует их проблемность и в ряде случаев несостоятельность как по отношению друг к другу, так и в рамках одной концепции. Автор приходит к выводу о том, что активное участие специалистов-африканистов и привлечение африканского материала при формулировании «истин» гуманитарного знания — одно из важных условий адекватности предлагаемых концепций в условиях современного мира.

Ключевые слова: истина, гуманитарные науки, африканистика, современный мир.

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