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The Dark Continent then and now From the land of savages to the land of wars

Abstract: This paper deals with the representation of Africa in selected British opinion-forming periodicals. The study is dedicated to a comparison of the images of the continent and its inhabitants prevailing in the 19th century, exemplified by *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, with contemporary images represented by the British media, such as the BBC's *Focus on Africa Magazine*. The emphasis lies on an analysis of the stereotypes occurring in the discussed periodicals and a subsequent defining of the similarities as well as differences in the stereotyping of Africa in both pre-colonial and post-colonial periods. Further, their effect on public opinion is emphasised.

Key words: Africa, stereotypes, racism, postcolonial studies

Słowa kluczowe: Afryka, stereotypy, rasizm, studia postkolonialne

Firstly, the study discusses the recurring stereotypes of Africa presented in *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, a scholarly journal of the 19th century. Secondly, the modern ways of stereotyping are further discussed in *Focus on Africa Magazine*. Considering the different character of the information presented in the research sample as well as the differing number of articles, two distinct research methods are used. In the *Journal*, more comprehensive articles provide the opportunity for qualitative content analysis. In contrast, short reports in the *Magazine* have proved to be fully compatible with quantitative analysis. By

using both methods, sufficient material is acquired for the purpose of theoretical basis verification. In turn, the evaluation and interpretation of research findings allows to reach a number of conclusions. Let us first focus on the 19th century.

Culture shock, scientific postulates, and economic interests

Two centuries ago, the presence of Europeans in Africa in larger numbers than ever before resulted in a massive interest in the continent and its inhabitants. More and more people with experiences in Africa, including returnees, explorers, researchers, and administrators, all brought new information about the “dark continent” back to Europe.

The representation of the Other and Otherness created an individual chapter in the history of the humanities, as an effort to conceptualise the world in terms of “us” and “them” seems to come naturally to humankind. According to Václav Soukup, we could find it across all societies.¹ For a long time, the term “other” referred to non-European cultures, Africans among them. They entered into the consciousness of Europeans as savages, whether they were bloodthirsty or noble. From the antiquity until the Middle Ages, foreigners were known as barbarians. The term barbarian was replaced during the age of geographical discoveries by the term savage, “who has been in the name of Christian morality and progress for civilization reeducated and exploited.”² So that this re-education, and especially exploitation, could take place without public remonstrance, African “savages” have been misrepresented in 19th-century literature. Its authors found justification for these misinterpretations both in the ideals of Christian morality,³ as well as in the scientific sphere.

Ethnocentrism, eurocentrism, racism, and physical anthropology

One of the essential doctrines that gave rise to the possibility of creating, and for a time perpetuating, the concept of a savage who was not at the same

¹ For more see V. SOUKUP: *Přehled antropologických teorií kultury*. Praha 2008.

² *Ibidem*, p. 9.

³ The Africans did not share the European idea of the one God or the faith in Jesus whose way of life they should imitate; they had no version of the Ten Commandments, and their entire perception of evil had been different.

level of civilizing progress as the Europeans were, was the conception of scientific racism.⁴ The vision of the inequality of races in both physical and psychological characteristics was associated with Africans ever since the era of the slave trade. The popularity of such a perception increased in the 19th and early 20th centuries, when it was represented by scholars and supported by their experimental conclusions. Scientific racism was based on physical anthropology, a discipline which focuses on the human morphology, races and anthropogenesis. A thirst for the knowledge of man, his anatomy, and his place in the world and the animal kingdom – these were all noble-minded aims of the new discipline building on the ideas of the Enlightenment, rationalism, and empirical knowledge.⁵

However, to a large extent, physical anthropology contributed to the assumptions about the “different varieties of *Homo sapiens* species.”⁶ It was the Swedish scientist Carl von Linné who contributed to the division of the white, black, red, and yellow races. To all of these races he assigned external as well as internal characteristics, beginning with data on skin colour and ending with the details about temperament, attitudes, and behavioural patterns. A member of the African variety was described as “niger, phlegmaticus, laxus.”⁷ In Linné’s opinion, it was not only the dark skin colour, wide nose, and curly hair that distinguished Africans, but also their laziness, neglect, and a tendency to follow their whims. In contrast, fair-haired Europeans putatively possessed typical fineness, intelligence, and resourcefulness.⁸

A certain turning point came with the publication of the work of Charles Darwin, who deprived the human sciences of an illusion of anthropocentrism.⁹

⁴ One of the most influential authors, H.S. Chamberlain, came with the idea that human races are just as different as the breeds of dogs are. For Chamberlain, Aryans (Teutonic people) are the superior race. Other races only *degenerate* to various stages: Africans to the most primitive one. The issue of degeneration was also discussed by J.A. Gobineau, who also refers to the *degree of stupidity*, which, according to him, differs from race to race. See H.S. CHAMBERLAIN: *The Foundations of the 19th Century*. London 1912; and J.A. GOBINEAU: *Inequality of Human Races*. London 1915.

⁵ Advocates of scientific racism used to refer to research done in the areas of biology, anatomy, or physical anthropology. P. Camper and J. Blumenbach are the most prominent representatives of this discipline. Camper’s influence lies in facial angles research, Blumenbach’s in skin tone examination. Both have contributed to the idea that Caucasians form the most beautiful race of men. See P. CAMPER: *The Works of the Late Professor Camper*. London 1821; and J.F. BLUMENBACH: *On Natural Variety of Humankind*. London 1865.

⁶ R.L. ANEMONE: *Race and Human Diversity: A Biocultural Approach*. London 2011, p. 57.

⁷ T.H. HUXLEY: *Selected Works of Thomas H. Huxley, Volume 7*. New York and London 1874, p. 221.

⁸ See R.L. ANEMONE: *Race and Human Diversity...*; V. SOUKUP: *Dějiny antropologie...*

⁹ On the one hand, Darwin supported the theory of monogenesis by predicting the existence of an ancient member, common ancestor, whose cradle, as a cradle of all humankind, was located in Africa. On the other hand, his research contributed to the *survival of the fittest* theory, shared by other scholars. See Ch.R. DARWIN: *On the Origin of Species*. London 1859; Ch.R. DARWIN: *The Descent of Man*. New York 1872.

Nonetheless, the ethnocentrism and Eurocentrism remained unbroken. In fact, racism may not be necessarily related to different skin colours. Categorisation could be formed also on the basis of ethnocentrism, on the tendency to view the world through the values, norms, and ideas of distinct social groups, ethnic groups, and the race to which we belong. The colour of the skin, the type of hair, and other external characteristics are in actuality neutral phenomena: only after having some value attributed to them, only after gaining some importance do they become categories of evaluation and begin to function as symbols. The cultural context is crucial in determining what certain phenomena represent. Therefore, the black skin colour, for example, came to represent laziness, passion, etc.¹⁰

Moreover, Africa itself, as well as its inhabitants, has suffered due to the fact that it has often been perceived through the lens of its exoticism. The thirst for knowledge about far-away, exotic places and peoples who were thought in advance to be different constituted yet another trend in the representation of non-European cultures. A hierarchy of the civility of societies was created, with the Europeans at its peak. The lowest grades were occupied by “the most primitive ones” – for example Pygmies, Bushmen, or Hottentots.¹¹ Such treatment and such accounts of the non-European peoples were further justified by the use of Darwin’s theory of natural selection. European superiority was explained as a consequence of the suitable climate and environment that enabled the formation of the most developed societies. In contrast, the lack of natural resources and an unfavourable climate resulted in the fact that local societies had no chance to develop, remaining instead at the primitive end of evolution.

The depictions of the continent also prove to be interesting. The dark continent, *terra incognita* – such were the imaginative names given to Africa by the Europeans. The conquest of *terra incognita*, unknown and unexplored territory, can be considered as an expression of cultural arrogance and an idea of invention.¹² Europeans gained the feeling that only they were worthy and capable of inventing Africa. Africans were regarded as too passive and dormant for this mission. For such “supreme beings” as the Europeans saw themselves, it still proved to be no simple task. The difficult terrain as well as the environment proved to be problematic. Explorers coming from a different climate were vulnerable to various local diseases, including the infamous diseases from the tsetse fly, mosquitos, miscellaneous worms, germs, microbes, bacteria, and viruses.

¹⁰ For more see V. SOUKUP: *Dějiny antropologie...*; J.F. STASZAK: *Other/Otherness*. London 2009.

¹¹ In terms of social evolutionism, Africans as indigenous people got into focus of Europeans. Labeled as primitive, they served to a process of European’s self-validation, when they could elevated themselves above the Africans. See R.J. REID: *Dějiny moderní Afriky od roku 1800 po současnost*. Praha 2011.

¹² For more see R.J. REID: *Dějiny moderní Afriky od roku 1800 po současnost...*, p. 125.

Besides the many victims of field obstacles, expeditions were also decimated by marsh fever, sleeping sickness, and other illnesses. Africa therefore became known as the continent of diseases, both real and imaginary – the legacy of the less-developed societies.

Culture shock and economic interests

Besides stereotyping based on scientific postulates, many of the misinterpretations of Africa and Africans come from culture shock. This stereotyping, a result of the confrontation between the researcher's and the studied community's behavioural paradigms, living and hygiene habits, manners of education or non-verbal communication,¹³ became the basis for many of the poor accounts of the Africans. Notes on their nudity, strange sexual and healing practices, different religious beliefs and rituals, methods, and ways of worshiping, and many other features became targets for criticism. Almost everything that did not fulfil the preconceptions of European ethics and morality could be described as manifestations of their savagery. Notes about their "otherness" successfully filled the headlines of newspapers and journals.

Economic interests constituted yet another source of misinterpretations of the African condition. In the 19th century, stereotypes about Africa and the Africans were usually used for the perpetuation of the colonial project, but also for other income possibilities. In the case of colonialism, the general differences between the races were most prominently emphasised. The Africans were included among the dangerous "black races"¹⁴ that were not able to ensure legitimate trade. Their bellicosity, aggression, liability, tendency towards tyranny, and other negative characteristics were the basis for the inevitability of the Pax Britannica and imperialism itself. In the case of other economic interests, concrete and specific characteristics were described and exaggerated. As an example, it is worth at least mentioning physical abnormalities such as the steatopygia indicated among the Hottentots or the unusually small stature of the San people. These features became the grounds for casting Hottentots or Sans as freaks and various stage attractions; the Hottentot Venus and Bushmen Children – Martinus and Flora constituted very famous carnival and circus acts.¹⁵

In relation to the economic profit, the issues of slavery and Orientalisation come to the surface. During the three hundred years of the transatlantic slave

¹³ For more see M. SOUKUP: *Terénní výskum v sociální a kulturní antropologii*. Praha 2014, pp. 85–89.

¹⁴ R.J. REID: *Dějiny moderní Afriky od roku 1800 po současnost...*, p. 133.

¹⁵ B. LINDFORS: *Hottentot, Bushman, Kaffir: The Making of Racist Stereotypes in 19th-Century Britain*. In: *Encounter Images in the Meetings between Africa and Europe*. Ed. M. PALMBERG. Uppsala 2001, pp. 56–66.

trade, the Africans used to be treated as commodities. Even after the abolition, this handling has affected the perception of Africans in the eyes of Europe for another decades. Hazel Waters, who deals with the relation between slavery and racism, declares that status of a slave plays a major role in the perception that the Africans had among the white society.¹⁶ Waters also claims that the Europeans, in their endeavour to profit from slavery by making the slaves commodities, justified their actions with religious motives. Waters argues that it is possible to trace how Europeans could rely on Christianity in the matter of master and slave relation. Firstly, he speaks about character of slaves as goods, saying, “in Christ all men are free...but slaves were commodities, bought and sold.”¹⁷ Secondly, Waters points out that for Europeans, people who do did accept the “true God” were considered heathens, and in the Spanish point of view even “sub-homines, whom it was the moral duty of their conquerors to enslave and set to work.”¹⁸ Thirdly, according to Waters, the Africans suffered due to the belief that they were Ham’s descendants. As such, they were “doomed to be servants of servants.”¹⁹ Moreover, even though all people were slaves of the sin, it was better for the Africans to remain under European guidance, rather than to let them linger in their benighted state, with their hot blood, dramatic character and concupiscence.

The idea of Orientalism and Orientalisation has been for decades associated with Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978); however, apart from Orientalism understood in the context of Asia and Northern Africa, we can see the parallels with *African Orientalism* (Czajka, 2005), which follows the theoretical and methodological framework of the “original Orientalism.” The two concepts share some similarities as well as differences. According to Czajka, the Africans occupy in the hierarchy of the Orient an even lower grade than the Asian Orientals.²⁰ While the Orientals used to be inferior only to the West, the Africans were inferior also to the Orientals. In fact, Asia was still considered to be a continent with cultures, albeit exotic ones. The Africans, in comparison, were people without culture, uncivilized barbarians.

¹⁶ H. WATERS: *Racism on the Victorian Stage: Representation of Slavery and the Black Character*. Cambridge 2007, p. 10.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ A. CZAJKA: *The African Orient: Edward Said’s Orientalism and “Western” Constructions of Africa*. 2005. Online.

The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London²¹

As one of the most popular 19th-century British journals, the scholarly *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* regularly brought information regarding far-away places to the British society. This opinion-forming journal constituted a hallmark of scientism and was considered an objective source of knowledge. The Journal was published from 1831 to 1880 and during this time, even the most famous of the explorers of the era, such as David Livingstone, contributed to the periodical. Let us pay attention now to some of the eloquent stereotypical interpretations of Africa and the Africans occurring in selected issues.

J.W.D. Moodie talks about the “uncivilized” Kaffirs in South Africa:

And it is to be observed that the acquisition of such a frontier should be as much an object of desire to the Kafirs as the colonists—for with a little more or less suffering inflicted on both parties, the uncivilized must give way to the civilized, and better soon than late.²²

A. Steedman talks about Kaffirs and hygiene:

Before they sit down to eat meat in company, the Caffers are very careful to immerse their hands in fresh cow-dung, wiping them on the grass, which is considered the perfection of cleanliness. Except an occasional plunge in a river, they never wash themselves, and consequently their bodies are covered with vermin.²³

And about Kaffir character:

The general disposition of the Caffer is cheerful, with an apparent indifference to the future. Hunting, dancing, mock-fights, and singing, are their principal amusements.²⁴

J.A. Lloyd's notes on Madagascar as the European's grave:

These sand-banks, or bars, by opposing the outflow of the rivers, have caused vast marshes to accumulate along the seacoast; and the decomposition of vegetable matter thus kept in stagnancy engenders pestilential miasmata, which, encircling as they do a large proportion of the island during one-half of the year, produce the dreaded Madagascar fever, the fatal effects of which have given this country, like many others, the melancholy designation of the European's grave.²⁵

²¹ Hereinafter referred to as JOTRGSOL.

²² J.W.D. MOODIE: *Ten years in South Africa*. In: *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London Volume the Fifth*. London 1835, p. 317.

²³ A. STEEDMAN: *Wanderings and Adventures in the Interior of Southern Africa*. In: *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London Volume the Fifth*. London 1835, p. 330.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 329.

²⁵ J.A. LLOYD: *Memoir on Madagascar*. In: *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London Volume the Twentieth*. London 1849, pp. 53–54.

M.P.D. Du Chaillu and the idea of invention:

My objects in going back to Africa were manifold. First, I wished to study still further the so-called primitive and unsophisticated men of nature, in observing their habits, religion, mode of thinking, and language, as far as I could ; and I hope I have been able to add something to our knowledge.²⁶

S.W. Baker and his Central Africa as the heart of darkness:

So vast is Central Africa, and so insurmountable are the difficulties of that savage country, that it is impossible for a single party to complete so great an exploration as the sources of the Nile.²⁷

H. Barth about barbarian Dahomians and Ashanti people:

The king of Dahome is perhaps the most despotic king in the world, and the Dahomians real barbarians. The Ashanti, who belong to a larger group of people constituting the O'chi race, seem to unite the greatest contrasts—the utmost barbarity with a certain degree of intelligence and human superiority.²⁸

We must point out that not all interpretations of Africa and the Africans were entirely negative. Some authors approached the study of societies more respectfully and objectively.²⁹ But among the seemingly more moderate representations, we have to take into consideration those that were similar to the negative interpretations based on mistaken European conceptions. As such, we may consider the supremacy of the white race that materialised through the idea of black Englishmen or the Hamitic hypothesis. The belief that assimilated Africans were more human than those who were not, and the belief that there was a natural hierarchy between the “African races” – these misinterpretations resulted in the exalting of some over others. The Other was still despised, regardless.

²⁶ M.P.D. DU CHAILLU: *Second Journey into Equatorial Western Africa*. In: *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London Volume the Thirty-Sixth*. London 1866, p. 64.

²⁷ S.W. BAKER: *Account of the Discovery of the second Great Lake of the Nile, Albert Nyanza*. In: *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London Volume the Thirty-Six*. London 1865, p. 15.

²⁸ H. BARTH: *General Historical Description of the State of Human Society in Northern Central Africa*. In: *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London Volume the Thirtieth*. Ed. N. SHAW. London 1860, p. 122.

²⁹ We may at least mention David Livingstone, who used to represent Africans as people who need no more than legitimate commerce and Christianity to help them grow into better men. According to Livingstone: “Commerce is a most important aid to civilisation, for it soon breaks up the sullen isolation of heathenism, and makes men feel their mutual dependence. Hopes of this make one feel gratified at the success which has attended my little beginning. But it is our blessed Christianity alone which can touch the centre of the wants of Africa.” See: D. LIVINGSTONE: *Explorations into the Interior of Africa*. In: *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London Volume the Twenty-Seventh*. Ed. N. SHAW. London 1856, p. 357.

Governor Ingram says about liberated Africans:

Some of these had prospered, and, to judge by the comfortable and cleanly appearance of their houses, many were evidently in easy circumstances; their wives and children were decently dressed in English costume, and seemed contented and happy... This day I had a vast number of visitors from among the black and coloured population, who came to wish me a happy new-year. A few short years ago, many of the persons who this day called to pay me complimentary visits were as utterly uncivilized as it is possible for human beings to be; now they are able to address me in my own language, which is also theirs, for the different tribes of liberated Africans communicate with each other in English only, and their children know no other. This almost incredible change from savage life to one of comparative refinement, has been effected in ten years.³⁰

Hamitic hypothesis according to H. Barth:

I will point out the principal seats of the most conspicuous among these tribes of Central Negroland, and will attempt, from an historical point of view, to give a few characteristic features of them. But I first beg to call attention to a very remarkable fact which ethnologists, who make any attempt at deciding the most intricate question with regard to the origin of the human race, must not leave out of their view. For although we see already plainly from the Egyptian sculptures that even as early as thirty centuries before our era the black race of negroes was distinctly developed, yet it is a very remarkable fact that nearly all the tribes which I have to mention include two distinct classes, one of a lighter, and the other of a darker shade... The Berbers are capable of great development, of the finest bodily frame, very tall and muscular, full of intelligence, application, industry, and warlike disposition. In former times they were organizing and founded mighty kingdoms, not only in the northern region, called by us Barbary, but also in the south, on the very border of Negroland... The Jolof, although distinguished from the greater part of the Fiiilbe by their dark black colour, as settled in the delta of the Senegal and Gambia, are only a different section of the same stock. The languages of those two tribes show affinity, and the same castes of degraded classes are observable. The Jolof are of beautiful physical development, but are fixed to the soil, show no enterprise, and have never become of any great historical importance, although at the beginning of the sixteenth century they were not quite powerless.³¹

Herein, we should discuss the purpose of JOTRGSOL's articles and details of their origin. The articles are all travel narratives addressed to the British 19th-century audience. As European explorers, the authors attempted to utilize the strategy of "visualizing novelties"³² to represent previously unknown phenomena. The main subject matter of the articles, as the titles suggest, consists of general descriptions of the travel, as well as notes on the land and people. The articles are often written in the form of diaries, including specific information

³⁰ T.L. INGRAM: *Abridged Account of an Expedition of About 200 miles up the Gambia, by Governor Ingram*. In: *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London Volume the Seventeenth*. London 1847, pp. 152–153.

³¹ H. BARTH: *General Historical Description of the State of Human Society in Northern Central Africa...*, pp. 116–119.

³² L. KOIVUNEN: *Visualising Africa in Nineteenth-Century British Travel Accounts*. New York 2009, p. 262.

regarding dates and places, as well as exact data regarding the number of the villages' inhabitants, the height and length of the native houses, or geographical location and distance.

But when it comes to the topic of describing the people, most of the remarks are either negligible, or, if well described, biased in most cases. None of the article's titles include a mention of the local people, even if they are mentioned in the text itself. The accounts, however, are strictly limited to a singular perspective, as their authors describe their own experiences in Africa, lacking consideration for any other viewpoints. Thus, all the articles are representations of a singular individual's perception of the experienced phenomena – what happens in the text highly depends on personal experience and impression.

As we may see, some of the ideas expressed in those articles correspond with the general view of the Africans in the 19th century. In the case of land, the situation is quite different. All the articles emphasize locality, so that the land itself is not so anonymous. However, similarly to the accounts of the local inhabitants, the notes regarding the continent itself also suffer from prejudice and stereotyping. And so as the Africans are uncivilized or barbarian, Africa itself is dangerous, waiting to be invented.

Images of Africa in the 21st century media

Even today, Africa remains misinterpreted and stereotyped in many Western media. Some interpretations draw on the past, while some are more contemporary. It is, thus, worth to mention some of the most pernicious stereotypes, criticized by scholars as well as experts.

Famine, violence, poverty and diseases

Africa continues to be misrepresented as a continent of victims of poverty, violence and ridden with HIV/AIDS... Most likely the view of the continent is that it is not a continent at all, but one large country, where everyone speaks the same language, eats the same food, wears the same type of clothing, and creates the same type of art...Yes, in their eyes, "Africa" is a homogeneous place of simple people with simple activities. Even today, it is still depicted as "The Dark Continent", with dark tales of gore and war. And it's not just the media. So-called "experts", practitioners, and scholars perpetuate these stereotypes to no end, continually feeding the misrepresentation engine.³³

³³ S. ARAYA: *The misinterpretation of Africa*. "Pambazuka News" 14.02.2007, p. 1.

In Western media, Africa forms a substantial part of what is considered to be the Third World.³⁴ As such, it is a personification of the ideas regarding poverty, famines, and various diseases. Further, the problems stemming from the inherited post-colonial state borders have resulted in tensions and violent conflicts, thus establishing Africa as a synonym for political instability and so-called tribal wars. Although the news concerning African arts, culture, and sport fill the pages of the newspapers, the headlines typically include the “problems of Africa.”³⁵ They help the media sell well and ensure their profit.

There are many ways in which Africa remains misinterpreted. According to Michira, the African continent is represented as a “homogenous entity; dark continent; wild/jungle;” the continent of “hunger, famine and starvation;” the continent of “endemic violence, conflict and civil wars;” the continent of “political instability and the Coup Cycle;” and the continent of “HIV/AIDS.”³⁶ In brief, besides the inherited idea of the dark continent, Africa is still represented as one big homogenous state, with no different cultures, languages, religions, customs, and policies, where people are starving due to endless wars and instability. Those are, in turn, exacerbated by the news of illnesses and the continent’s wild nature. Apart from that, we can also point out stereotypes about African poverty typically displayed through pictures of skinny children or dry landscapes. One opinion is that starving and thirsty Africans are the result of poor governance and distribution of resources, as well as the activities of warlords. Another conception operates around the idea that Africans are “lazy.” The “lazy African stereotype”³⁷ can be considered a successor to the ideas about the passive and dormant Africans mentioned above. The representations of Africans who are not able to feed on themselves; of Africans who are dependent on humanitarian aid, investments, and loans from the outside – this is another popular image of Africa.

The question remains, why are these representations still popular? As opposed to the 19th century, when the number of sources was limited – nothing compared to the information presented here – nowadays the level of knowledge is much higher and sources are abundant. However, as in the 19th century, stereotypes continue to have their basis in scientific postulates, perpetuated and justified by the continued imagery. Partially to blame is the assumption that it is natural for humankind to see the world as an “us and them” dichotomy. Thus, we can agree that stereotypes may occur anywhere in the world, and they are

³⁴ Countries that during the Cold War remained non-aligned with either the Western block (the First World), or the Communist Block (the Second World).

³⁵ According to Michira, they have “top story status.” See: J. MICHIRA: *Images of Africa in the Western Media*. 2002, p. 4.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 2–6.

³⁷ A.E. HARTH: *Representations of Africa in the Western News Media: Reinforcing Myths and Stereotypes*. 2012, pp. 7–8.

likely to be mutually occurring as well. But in the context of Western media images of Africa, we can find more clarifying causalities.

In addition to profit from “western audience media,”³⁸ there are three other explanations for stereotyping. First of all, there exists a “monopoly of ideas and opinion,”³⁹ caused by the domination and ownership of the media by Western corporate giants. This monopoly is the reason why different media are commonly presenting the same opinions. Secondly, there are issues of “foreign policy and Western interests in Africa.”⁴⁰ In this problem lies the rationale for portraying Africa as a dependent territory in need of an intervention. Lastly, there are the “textbooks and the School Curriculum.”⁴¹ The information about the history or geography of Africa given to students is inaccurate, using the popular construct of the wild Africa with animals at the centre or portraying non-representative groups like the San, the Massai, or the Bushmen.⁴²

Focus on Africa Magazine⁴³

BBCFOAM was a quarterly magazine published from 1990 to 2012 by the BBC in the UK. It was distributed worldwide, mediating information on the African arts, sports, politics, economics, culture, and many other aspects. Now, let us turn our focus to the representation of the discussed stereotypes included in fifty-three online archived articles, which readers first see at the publication’s website.⁴⁴

The large volume of material allows us, instead of focusing on excerpts from all texts, to bring forward summary statistics. Of all articles,⁴⁵ fifteen articles discuss the problems of corruption, instability, and bad governance. Information about conflicts and wars can be found across fifteen articles as well. Nine articles touch on issues of starvation, water shortage, and poverty. At least four articles are focused on diseases.⁴⁶ Thus, the “top story statuses” here appear to perpetuate the myths about Africa being a continent of political instability, dependency, and unceasing fires.

³⁸ Ibidem, pp. 6–7.

³⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹ Ibidem.

⁴² Ibidem.

⁴³ Hereinafter referred to as BBCFOAM.

⁴⁴ For online archived articles see http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/focus_magazine/archive/08/index.shtml [accessed: 11.10.2015] and http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/focus_magazine/archive/ [accessed: 12.10.2015].

⁴⁵ Out of fifty-three total articles, sixteen articles concerning sport, culture, environment, and arts also included stereotyping.

⁴⁶ Some articles contain more than one stereotype. Therefore, they are included in several different stereotyping categories.

Table 1

Stereotype	Article
Corruption, instability	Algeria: Holding the Reign Head to Head: African Democracy Nigeria: Time to move out Nigeria: Under Siege Nigeria: Back to Basics DR Congo: Radio Reaches out to rebels S. Africa: The Zuma bandwagon Nigeria: Presidential aspirations Dr Congo: Kabila's kingdom Uganda: Museveni backtracks on succession Chad: Vulnerable president Kenya: Kibakis Clique Guinea: Nervous nation Congo: Logging concern Nigeria: Burning with rage
Conflict, violence	Algeria: Holding the Reign Somalia: In The Eye Of The Storm Nigeria: Time to move out Nigeria: Under Siege DR Congo: Radio Reaches out to rebels Nigeria: Burning with rage Dr Congo: Kabila's kingdom Chad: Vulnerable president Guinea: Nervous nation Sierra Leone: Healing the scars Nigeria: A family voting South Africa: Soldier's trauma Ivory Coast: Weavers pray for peace Eritrea: A ride in the clouds Zimbabwe: Desperate measures
Starving, poverty	Ethiopia: Home wreckers Nigeria: Party town Zimbabwe: Desperate measures Uganda: Mobile bypass price-fixers Sierra Leone: Healing the scars Nigeria: A family voting Uganda: Malaria wedding net dress decline Ivory Coast: Weavers pray for peace Eritrea: A ride in the clouds
Disease	Botswana: Africa's shining jewel? Nigeria: Back to Basics Zimbabwe: Desperate measures Uganda: Malaria wedding net dress decline

As in the case of JOTRGSOL's articles reflecting the prevailing postulates of the 19th century, the articles archived at the BBCFOAM's page correspond to Michira's ideas of how Africa is misinterpreted today. The archive provides fifty-three articles divided into three columns: Politics and Economics, Human Interest, and Arts, Culture and Sport. It remains impossible to say who made the decision regarding which articles should be archived, or what the conditions for archiving were. We may only presume that the depicted topics are those which were deemed important enough to archive and display online.

In comparison to JOTRGSOL, the articles are not memoirs of a long-lasting travel; instead, they were written for some specific event or occasion. The main theme and location are outlined already in the heading, except for a few nonspecific titles, such as: *What's the big deal? or: Commander-in-Chief*.⁴⁷ The question of authorship seems more complicated. Several articles are written without any attribution, and no reference to the source of the information.⁴⁸ Others are written without the author's name, though they contain statements and quotations from identified sources, or are written in the form of a transcript of a conversation.⁴⁹ On the other hand, many articles identify the authors, who come from many different places. Some of the authors are European,⁵⁰ some African,⁵¹ but what they have in common is their profession.

One could argue that it is impossible to talk about an Eurocentric approach in the case of African journalists. However, the main audience remains unchanged. BBCFOAM, while sold worldwide, was created in Europe, for the intended audience of Westerners. However, there exists a fundamental difference between an eyewitness account and an article. The articles, in all probability, discuss the events from a second-hand perspective, repeating the same topics over and over again. In the 19th-century accounts, a singular perspective dominated, whereas the BBCFOAM articles are rather editorials that include quotes from other sources or specialist statements. However, it appears that the issues with stereotypical portrayals of Africa stem predominantly from the crucial importance of profit above everything else.

⁴⁷ See http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/focus_magazine/archive/ [accessed: 11.10.2015]; http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/focus_magazine/archive/08/index.shtml [accessed: 12.10.2015].

⁴⁸ See http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/focus_magazine/archive/story/2005/08/050825_sculptor_soldier.shtml [accessed: 12.10.2015].

⁴⁹ See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7646295.stm> [accessed: 12.10.2015]; http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/focus_magazine/news/story/2008/01/080102_epas_debate.shtml [accessed: 12.10.2015].

⁵⁰ For example Mark Dummet, British journalist, see http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/focusafrica/news/story/2007/02/070201_md_africindians.shtml [accessed: 12.10.2015].

⁵¹ Like Sola Odunfa, Nigerian journalist, see http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/focus_magazine/news/story/2007/03/070315_nigeria_obj_end2.shtml [accessed: 12.10.2015].

Conclusion

Both sources used for research constitute an example of how autostereotypes and heterostereotypes come to use in practice. In the past, the belief in the wealth of natural resources to be found in Africa led to colonization. In order to justify the colonial project, it was necessary to emphasize the backwardness and lack of civilization among Africa's inhabitants. Thus, the proclaimed reasons for colonization were to uplift the Africans through the civilizing mission, to fight heathenism, or to invent the continent, so unexplored by the passive natives. Today, an ongoing process of self-validation, together with the foreign policies and "Western interests" appear to be the chief motives for misinterpretation in the media, even if the authors are not of European origin exclusively.

As the research shows, the tendency to point out the wilderness of Africa itself and the savagery of its inhabitants has evolved into representations of the ineptitude of the local politicians, bad governance and poverty. In contrast to the 19th century, when descriptions were concerned with a particular place or ethnic group, contemporary media tend to write about entire countries, or even the continent in its entirety, as though they are universally applicable. While stereotyping in the past used to be hidden in the articles titled with dignified names, today misinterpretations create the headlines, only to attract readers and make them "click" and read. Whereas many of the 19th-century statements were based on scientific knowledge, although mistaken, they came from personal field observations. Contemporary reports are recycled and shared often without deeper scrutiny. And since repeated truth becomes the truth, this practice allows to satiate the Western audience's desire for stories about the Other.

The general perceptions of Africa and the Africans in the eyes of the First World media have come a long way from the sparsely-populated land of primitive and savage Negroes to the overpopulated continent full of hungry, infected, and violent men. Even reports on sport or cultural events often include mentions of the previous wars, crises, and problems. Arguably, this reality will remain in place as long as it is useful for the Westerners to maintain Africa's negative image. In the 19th century, Africans were reeducated and exploited in the name of Christian morality and the civilising process – and this mission still seems to be unfinished. After all, "Africans are lazy, and not able to help themselves."

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