

AFRICA IN RUSSIAN IMPERIAL CULTURE

RACE, EMPIRE, AND
REPRESENTATION (1850-1917)



ANITA FRISON

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Anita Frison, *Africa in Russian Imperial Culture: Race, Empire, and Representation (1850-1917)*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0504>

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Information about any revised edition of this work will be provided at <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0504>

ISBN Paperback: 978-1-80511-766-7

ISBN Hardback: 978-1-80511-767-4

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-80511-768-1

ISBN HTML: 978-1-80511-770-4

ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 978-1-80511-769-8

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0504

Cover image: Aleksandr Benua, Illustration for the letters “fita” and “izhitsa”, in A. Benua, *Azbuka v kartinakh* (Saint Petersburg, 1904). Cover design: Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal

This work is funded by the European Union – Next Generation EU and by the Department of Linguistic and Literary Studies of the University of Padua under the 2021 STARS Grants@Unipd programme (project *AfTeR – The African Text: Representing Africa in Imperial Russia (1850-1917)*). CUP: C95F21009990001).

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Acknowledgements

To misquote John Donne, ‘no book is an island’, and this one is no exception. While researching and writing it, I had the privilege of collaborating with many incredible colleagues whose knowledge, support, and friendship have played a decisive role in its development. I am particularly grateful to Maria Emeliyanova, who was instrumental in retrieving the majority of the primary sources and with whom I shared much of this journey. I am also indebted to her and Martina Morabito for their help in organising an international conference that brought together scholars interested in the Russian discourse on Africa and colonialism. I thank them all heartily for the inspiring discussions, and particularly Maxim Matusevich for sharing his extensive knowledge on this topic with us.

I wrote several chapters of this book during a research period at the Slavonic Library of the National Library of Finland, Helsinki. I am extremely grateful to the exceptional staff, and especially Irina Lukka, not only for their expertise, but also for creating a warm and productive environment within the library. Without my time in Helsinki this book would simply not exist—for a variety of reasons; I am therefore indebted to this incredible city and to everyone I met there.

My deepest thanks also go to Jana Kantoříková for her support throughout, and for inviting me to discuss earlier drafts of the book in Berlin and Paris, thus giving me the chance to meet experts in related fields and receive valuable feedback.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my Italian colleagues Claudia Criveller, Emilio Mari, Martina Morabito, and Marco Biasio for their advice at various stages of this endeavour and for their invaluable friendship; to Alessandra Tosi and the incredible team at Open Book Publishers; and to the two peer reviewers for their helpful insights and suggestions.

This book is for my family, who has put up with my prolonged absences without ever making me feel guilty about them. I do not take this for granted.

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A Note on Terminology

This book reproduces language from historical sources, including terms used to describe peoples and groups that are now recognised as racialised or derogatory. Such terminology appears only in quoted material and is retained to preserve the accuracy of the original sources. The alternating use of 'Abyssinia' and 'Ethiopia' throughout the book is consistent with the popularity of both designations in late imperial Russia, and is to be understood as historically situated.

Introduction

To a general audience, the association between Russia and Africa might evoke recent episodes in international relations and political alliances, the Soviet anti-colonial and anti-imperialist rhetoric, or vague notions about the ancestry of Russia's most famous poet, Aleksandr Pushkin. A specialised readership may also recall the names of some Russian travellers and explorers, the history of Russian diplomacy and infiltration into African affairs, and the literary image of Africa mainly as depicted by the Acmeist poet Nikolai Gumilev. For the most part, scholarship dealing with the topic of Russia and Africa has focused on reconstructing the history of the relationship between these two entities, in relation to both the tsarist period and the Soviet era.¹ A significant and valuable part of this tradition in historical studies is represented by the publication of archival material showcasing Russia's various political, economic, and cultural interests in the African continent throughout the

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- 1 Cf. for instance S. Yakobson, 'Russia and Africa', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 1939 (51), 17, pp. 623-637; P. J. Rollins, 'Imperial Russia's African Colony', *Russian Review*, 1968 (27), 4, pp. 432-451; E. T. Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa before World War II*, New York 1974; E. Chistiakova, *Kontakty i svyazi Rossii s narodami Afriki (do XIX v.)*, Moscow 1987; A. Khrenkov, *Rossii i Efiopiia: razvitie dvukhstoronnykh svyazei*, Moscow 1992; A. Davidson and I. Filatova, *The Russians and the Anglo-Boer War*, Cape Town 1998; A. Letnev (ed. by), *Afrika glazami emigrantov: Rossiiane na kontinente v pervoi polovine XX veka*, Moscow 2002; M. Matusevich, *No Easy Row for a Russian Hoe: Ideology and Pragmatism in Nigerian-Soviet Relations. 1960-1991*, Trenton 2003; E. Iakovleva, *Kolonial'nyi razdel Afriki i pozitsiia Rossii (vtoraia polovina XIX-1914 g.)*, PhD dissertation, Irkutsk 2004; N. Malygina, *Rossiisko-efiopskie diplomaticheskie i kul'turnye svyazi v kontse XIX-nachale XX vekov*, PhD dissertation, Vladimir 2004; M. Matusevich, *Africa in Russia, Russia in Africa: Three Centuries of Encounters*, Trenton 2007; A. Vasil'ev and A. Tkachenko (ed. by), *Rossii i strany Magriba: Alzhir, Marokko, Tunis*, Moscow 2011; I. Filatova and A. Davidson, *The Hidden Thread: Russia and South Africa in the Soviet Era*, Johannesburg-Cape Town 2013; A. Davidson (ed. by), *Afrika v sud'be Rossii. Rossiia v sud'be Afriki*, Moscow 2019; T. Gavristova (ed. by), *Rossii-Afrika: ot ustnoi istorii k postkolonial'nomu narrativu. Sbornik materialov*, Yaroslavl 2022.

years.² Since Allison Blakely's seminal work *Russia and the Negro* (1986), research has also appeared on the subject of Russia's perception and reception of Africa and the African diaspora, thus shifting the focus on the cultural sphere and widening the discussion to include African Americans.³

However, there is still much to be done, particularly with regard to the representation of the African continent in Russian culture. Indeed, the Russian production of knowledge about Africa has been largely neglected, with studies centred only on known authors or case studies, thus jeopardising the drawing of a wider picture and, consequently, the understanding of the entire phenomenon. Overall, the recent academic

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- 2 Cf. for instance R. Viatkina, A. Davidson, and G. Tsyppkin (ed. by), *Rossiiia i Afrika. Dokumenty i materialy*, I, Moscow 1999; A. Davidson and S. Mazov (ed. by), *Rossiiia i Afrika. Dokumenty i materialy*, II, Moscow 1999; N. Podgornova, *Rossiiia-Marokko: istoriia sviazei dvoukh stran v dokumentakh i materialakh (1777-1916)*, Moscow 1999; G. Shubin, *Rossiiskie dobrovol'tsy v anglo-burskoi voine 1899-1902 (po materialam Rossiiskogo gosudarstvennogo voenno-istoricheskogo arkhiva)*, Moscow 2000; N. Voropaeva, R. Viatkina, and G. Shubin (ed. by), *Anglo-burskaia voina 1899-1902 gg. Po arkhivnym materialam i vospominaniiam ochevidtsev*, Moscow 2001.
 - 3 Cf. for instance A. Blakely, *Russia and the Negro. Blacks in Russian History and Thought*, Washington 1986; C. Quist-Adade, *In the Shadows of the Kremlin and the White House: Africa's Media Image from Communism to post-Communism*, Lanham 2001; G. Walker, *Silver-Age Writers on the 'Black' Continent: Russia, Africa and the Celebration of Distance*, PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison 2003; C. Nepomnyashchy, N. Svobodny, and L. Trigov (ed. by), *Under the Sky of My Africa. Alexander Pushkin and Blackness*, Evanston 2006, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv47w387>; M. Matusevich, 'Journeys of Hope: African Diaspora and the Soviet Society', *Journal of African Diaspora*, 2008 (1), 1-2, pp. 53-85; M. Matusevich, 'An Exotic Subversive: Africa, Africans, and the Soviet Everyday', *Race and Class*, 2008 (49), 4, pp. 57-81; S. Agureev, *Efiopiia v otrazhenii rossiiskogo obshchestvennogo mneniia v kontse XIX-nachale XX v.*, Moscow 2011; S. Guillory, 'Culture Clash in the Socialist Paradise: Soviet Patronage and African Students' Urbanity in the Soviet Union. 1960-1965', *Diplomatic History*, 2014 (38), 2, pp. 271-281; K. Clark, 'The Representation of the African American as Colonial Oppressed in Texts of the Soviet Interwar Years', *The Russian Review*, 2016 (75), 3, pp. 368-385, <https://doi.org/10.1111/russ.12081>; C. Kiaer, 'African Americans in Soviet Socialist Realism: The Case of Aleksandr Deineka', *The Russian Review*, 2016 (75), 3, pp. 402-433, <https://doi.org/10.1111/russ.12083>; M. Matusevich, *Soviet Anti-Racism and Its Discontents: The Cold War Years*, in J. Mark et al. (ed. by), *Alternative Globalizations: Eastern Europe and the Postcolonial World*, Bloomington 2020, pp. 229-250; D. Featherstone and C. Hogsbjerg (ed. by), *The Red and the Black: The Russian Revolution and the Black Atlantic*, Manchester 2021; M. Taroutina, 'Exotic Aesthetics: Representations of Blackness in Nineteenth Century Russian Painting', *Slavic Review*, 2021 (80), 2, pp. 267-279, <https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2021.81>; H. Lynd and T. Loyd, 'Histories of Color: Blackness and Africanness in the Soviet Union', *Slavic Review*, 2022 (81), 2, pp. 394-417, <https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2022.154>

engagement with discussions on race in Russian culture has also refrained from analysing the perception and construction of blackness, putting in the foreground other ethnic groups residing within the borders of the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and even the post-Soviet space.⁴

This book is one of the outcomes of a larger project entitled *The African Text: Representing Africa in Imperial Russia (1850-1917)*, which I have coordinated at the University of Padua, Italy. Its aim was to investigate the ways in which 'Africa' was created, represented, and shaped in late imperial Russia with regard to travel writing, pseudo-scientific studies, and the arts. Encompassing the Russian production of knowledge on the entirety of the continent, the project has led to the creation of an online database cataloguing primary sources,⁵ and to the organisation of an international conference⁶ discussing related themes—such as a comparison of the usage of colonial imagery and rhetoric in Russian discourse over the Caucasus and Africa. Such research has primarily been motivated by the overall lack of analysis on imperial Russia's discourse on Africa which, intertwining with relevant *fin-de-siècle* phenomena—the emergence of ethnography and anthropology, the expanding publishing market, the new interest in educating the masses, the need to establish Russia's identity in relation to (colonial) Europe, the spreading concept of 'race'—can be instrumental to various disciplines, including cultural studies, identity studies, the history of

4 N. Zakharov, *Race and Racism in Russia*, Basingstoke 2015; N. Zakharov and I. Law, *Post-Soviet Racisms*, London 2017; D. Rainbow (ed. by), *Ideologies of Race. Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union in Global Context*, Montreal 2019; E. M. Avrutin, *Racism in Modern Russia. From the Romanovs to Putin*, London 2022, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350097308>; M. Mogilner, *A Race for the Future. Scientific Visions of Modern Russian Jewishness*, Cambridge-London 2022, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2x00wbw>; M. Mogilner, *Jews, Race, and the Politics of Difference. The Case of Vladimir Jabotinsky against the Russian Empire*, Bloomington 2023. A welcome exception is the most recent critical forum 'Blackness in Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Societies', which was released online by *Slavic Review* just a few weeks before the publication of this book. Cf. 'Critical Forum: Blackness in Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Societies', ed. by N. Osei-Opare and S. Rucker-Chang, *Slavic Review*, 2025 (84), 3, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/slavic-review/issue/E6336AF1D62016F715A10F1D18596AC3>

5 The database is available on the website <https://after.disll.unipd.it/>

6 Cf. the international conference *Comparing Colonial Discourses: Africa and the Caucasus in Russian Thought* organised at the University of Padua (18-19 October 2023). The program is available here: <https://after.disll.unipd.it/archives/754>

anthropology, museum studies, literary studies, and colonial studies. In this respect, examining the Russian discourse over Africa has proven to be truly intersectional.

Unlike the project, this book focuses specifically on 'black Africa', i.e. Sub-Saharan Africa, a geographical delimitation that over the course of centuries has been transformed into a cultural construction. Indeed, it has acquired the status of an imaginary space useful for promoting imperialist and colonial binarism that 'establish a relation of dominance' (for instance, coloniser *vs* colonised, white *vs* black, civilised *vs* primitive).⁷ This binarism is not, of course, limited to black Africa. However, one could argue that this region has been—and still is for many—perceived as particularly well suited to establishing and confirming this rigid binary logic—especially with regard to the oppositions of culture *vs* nature and civilised *vs* primitive. According to the nineteenth-century world population theories that hierarchized people based on race, nationality, and ethnic origin, 'Negroes'—a constructed category with different meanings depending on the author—were placed at the lowest level precisely because of a supposed lack of culture and civilisation, only sometimes coming second to 'Aborigines'. Consequently, the inevitable outcomes of a colonial situation—rupture and hybridity—were strongly perceived in the context of black Africa which, between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, began to double for the anxieties and fears caused by the rapidly changing European society as it sped towards modernity.⁸ In this sense, Northern Africa, despite being subjected to exoticisation, orientalisation, and othering, remained the cradle of ancient civilisations, in both Western thought and Russian culture. As such, its discursive dynamics were quite different from the ones reserved for Sub-Saharan Africa—even when the latter coincided with the 'civilised' and Christian Ethiopia (or Abyssinia, as it was known).⁹

7 Cf. B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, and H. Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies. The Key Concepts*, London 2007, pp. 18–21.

8 Cf. for instance P. Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism. 1830–1914*, Ithaca-London 1988; C. Bongie, *Exotic Memories: Literature, Colonialism, and the Fin de Siècle*, Stanford 1991; R. McLaughlan, *Re-Imagining the 'Dark Continent' in Fin-de-Siècle Literature*, Edinburgh 2012.

9 Throughout the book, I will be consistent with the interchangeable usage of 'Abyssinia' and 'Ethiopia' common in late imperial Russia.

The timeframe of the investigation allows for a reconstruction of the Russian discourse on black Africa prior to the establishment of the monolithic Soviet rhetoric suggesting a brotherhood based on the common rejection of colonialism, imperialism, and racism. This makes one consider the lines of continuity and discontinuity between imperial and Soviet times. Moreover, it provides a foundation for a deeper understanding of the resurgence of Russian imperial figures and enterprises associated with Africa in the wake of contemporary alliances and diplomacy, as evidenced by journal articles,¹⁰ exhibitions,¹¹ podcast episodes,¹² and newly organised expeditions that retrace historical ones.¹³

The analysed materials cover approximately seventy years, from around 1850 (i.e., the second half of the nineteenth century, when relations between Russia and Africa increased thanks to the opening of the Suez Canal and the Berlin Conference, and discussions about topical issues—such as the slave trade—were fuelled by reforms, which included the abolition of serfdom) to 1917, an abstract frontier separating imperial Russia from the Soviet era—although the advent of World War I had already contributed to a shift in the discourse on

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- 10 Cf. for instance 'Krest' budet vas oberegat', *Pravoslavnyi polomnik*, 23.10.2012, <https://www.pravmir.ru/krest-budet-vas-oberegat/>; 'Gapa, bana, gapa, angaliia!', *Vokrug sveta*, 01.07.2013, <https://www.vokrugsveta.ru/vs/article/8188/>; V. Veretennikov, 'Livingston moskovskogo razliva: kak puteshestvennik Vasiliĭ Iunker otkryl neizvedannye ugolki Afriki', *Vokrug sveta*, 06.02.2024, <https://www.vokrugsveta.ru/articles/livingston-moskovskogo-razliva-kak-puteshestvennik-vasilii-yunker-otkryl-neizvedannye-ugolki-afriki-id4288239/>
 - 11 For example, two exhibitions have recently been organised. The first one, devoted to the expedition of Aleksandr Chikin and Pavel Shcherbov to Equatorial Africa (1888), took place in Svetlogorsk in 2023-2024 (*Tam, za morem: Afrika*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250427232114/https://www.world-ocean.ru/exhibitions/tam-za-morem-afrika>); the second one was organised at the Russian Museum in Saint Petersburg (2023) and displayed canvases by Russian artists depicting Africa (Virtual'nyi Russkii muzei, *Afrika v proizvedeniakh russkikh khudozhnikov*, <https://tinyurl.com/2s3c72wd>). Cf. also the exhibition held in Addis Ababa in 2018, which was devoted to the history of Russo-Ethiopian relations (Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, *Exhibition on 120 years of Russia-Ethiopia Relations Opens at Addis Ababa University*, <https://tinyurl.com/79z9kd2t>).
 - 12 Cf. Zvuk. Rossiia i mir, Radio Zvezda, *Vas'kin mys. Ozero Rudol'f, Efiopiia*, <https://zvuk.com/episode/85037663>
 - 13 Cf. the Kunstkamera (MAE RAN) project *The African Diary. A Century-Long Expedition*, within the scope of which MAE RAN scholars repeated the route of Nikolai Gumilev's 1913 expedition to Ethiopia (2009). For more information visit the website <https://gumilev.kunstkamera.ru/>

Africa by significantly reducing ties, cooperation, and travels. The analysis is based on a wide variety of sources, including essays, travel literature, journal articles, highbrow and popular literature, as well as museum collections, photographs, and maps. The aim is to provide a broad picture of late imperial Russia's representation of black Africa, encompassing several cultural sectors and involving different personalities. This broad approach, which provides a comprehensive picture of a phenomenon comprising several cultural actors and spheres rather than focusing on a specific case study, was chosen primarily due to the lack of previous research fulfilling this role. In the absence of an investigation of this scope, it would be impossible to draw valuable and significant conclusions from a single case study (or even a small number of them), as it would be difficult to establish their significance within the context of imperial Russia's production of knowledge. I hope this book will serve as a foundation for further research.

Chapter 1, entitled *Strangers*, introduces some of the authors behind the Russian discourse on Africa: explorers, travellers, soldiers, scholars, doctors, writers, and artists, they were effectively strangers in faraway, exotic, and still relatively unknown lands, which they visited for various reasons. Their activities were often reminiscent of those of Western colonial agents, and their writings were heavily influenced by Western colonial literature. In the popular press, they were often presented as Russian equivalents of key European colonial figures. But strangers were also—and even more so—the numerous authors popularising black Africa for the masses, without ever having been there: geographers, teachers, minor writers or pedagogues who devoted themselves to spreading knowledge—including about Africa—to the people, usually relying on Western sources and rhetoric.

Chapter 2, *Lands*, focuses on the representation of the lands of black Africa on the basis of cartographic materials, travel literature, accounts, and photographs. It demonstrates that mechanisms for appropriating the land were in place even in the absence of colonial relationships between Russia and black Africa: the process of (re)naming African places with Russian toponyms, the selective descriptions of the landscape that conveniently omit mentions of black people, the marking of one's itinerary at the expense of a more comprehensive representation of the territory, are all factors that contribute to a mental—if not physical—

conquest of other people's land.

Chapter 3, *Bodies*, centres around the portrayal of black Africans in anthropological studies focused on measuring the 'other', the black body—encyclopaedia entries and ethnographic essays that popularised Africa for the general public, as well as travel literature. It highlights the opposing tendencies of creating detailed, 'scientific' descriptions of the black body, meticulously reconstructed by the authors, and omitting recollections of actual encounters between Russian subjects and black people—which is particularly noticeable in travel writing. As a consequence, individuals are reduced to the essentialised characteristics commonly ascribed to their ethnicity, resulting in a loss of distinctiveness and a feeling of abstraction and detachment.

Chapter 4, *Collectors*, provides an overview of Russia's involvement in collecting black Africa's material culture to be displayed in museums opened to the general public for the first time at the end of the nineteenth century. Focusing particularly on the *Kunstkamera's* collections, the chapter explores the various methods of acquiring African objects—from close collaborations and exchanges with European institutions, to donations from notable figures such as Menelik II, to the activities of Russian subjects who, whilst being on African soil for different reasons, were all equally invested in collecting the 'other'. Additionally, photographic collections are also taken into account.

Finally, Chapter 5, *Disguises*, draws attention to the fictionalisation of black Africa in Russian literature and, to some extent, Russian art. Focusing on both renowned and forgotten authors, on highbrow and lowbrow literature, it explores how black Africa was (re)shaped in the context of modernism, and how it served as a platform for addressing topical issues such as hybridity, miscegenation, and gender dynamics. While disguises were often integral to the plot or used as metaphors, one could argue that, overall, black Africa was a disguise in itself for dealing with uncomfortable subjects, safely transferred to a decidedly 'other' space.

This analysis is informed by the concepts of 'colonialism without colonies' or 'colonialism at the margins'—and at the same time seeks to contribute to this perspective by offering the example of Russia and a space (Africa) that remained outside of its colonial control. On the basis of Iceland, Sweden, and Switzerland, Barbara Lüthi, Francesca

Falk, and Patricia Purtschert have pointed out that ‘these societies had an explicit self-understanding as being outside the realm of colonialism, but nevertheless engaged in the colonial project in a variety of ways and benefitted from these interactions’, and showed that, when moving beyond ‘reductive national-historic and Eurocentric perspectives’, one could reveal the ‘trans-local, transnational and transcultural linkages’ that have made the production of colonial discourse and rhetoric not necessarily limited to colonial empires.¹⁴ In this sense, Russia was no exception: as the various chapters of this book demonstrate, the tsarist empire contributed to the production of colonial knowledge on Africa through different outlets and media, without being directly involved in the continent’s partition. Perhaps even more significantly, this study reveals the extent of the connections between Russian cultural actors and their Western counterparts, not only in terms of overall influence, but also with regard to study exchanges, collaborations, practices, and direct contacts both in Europe (through cultural institutions such as universities and museums) and Africa. The two discourses on Africa are so intertwined that I would argue in favour of considering the Russian discourse as a variant of the Western one, despite its frequent exceptionalist stance—according to which the tsarist empire was often (though not always) presented as a better example of white power than European countries. In fact, the very same cultural dynamics, practices of appropriation, and racial language were used by Russians when dealing with black Africa. As ideas, vocabulary, practices, and rhetoric flowed between Europe and Russia and created a shared construct of the ‘dark continent’,¹⁵ this book argues in favour of the ‘new imperial

14 B. Lüthi, F. Falk, and P. Purtschert, ‘Colonialism without Colonies: Examining Blank Spaces in Colonial Studies’, *National Identities*, 2016 (18), 1, pp. 1-9 (pp. 1-2), <https://doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2016.1107178>

15 The term ‘dark continent’—which came to signify an unknown and uncivilised part of the world, i.e. Africa—became popular at the end of the 1870s thanks to Henry Stanley’s writings. The association between Africa and darkness, however, can be traced back at least to Georg Hegel. In imperial Russia, a rough translation began to appear from the 1870s (*chernyi materik*, or *chernyi kontinent*, literally ‘black continent’), and was used as a synonym for ‘Africa’ in both the popular press and scientific publications, including encyclopaedias. For instance, it occurs in the *Novyi entsiklopedicheskii slovar’ Brokgauza i Efrona* (New Encyclopaedic Dictionary by Brokhaus and Efron, 1911-1916), or the *Detskaia entsiklopediia* (Children’s Encyclopaedia, 1913-1914). On the construction of the ‘dark continent’, see for instance P. Brantlinger, ‘Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent’, *Critical*

history research paradigm' developed by scholars around the *Ab Imperio* journal and project, a paradigm that is 'postnational, postimperial, and hybridizing', thus 'distancing itself from any grand narratives'. Among its other functions, 'new imperial history underscores the danger of reducing world history to a mechanical sum of internally homogenous objects—empires or nation-states. [...] Any seemingly autonomous or even isolated entity can adequately be described only as part of various global contexts'. While 'nation-centered history is incompatible [...] [with] understanding society as an open system', 'abandoning national history does not mean ignoring "nation" as a crucial analytical category'.¹⁶ In this respect, while this book focuses specifically on Russian knowledge production, it also strives to place it in a wider European context, cutting across the porous borders of the already hybrid and non-homogeneous tsarist empire.

Inquiry, 1985 (12), 1, pp. 166-203; L. Jarosz, 'Constructing the Dark Continent: Metaphor as Geographic Representation of Africa', *Geografiska Annaler, Series B, Human Geography*, 1992 (74), 2, pp. 105-115, <https://doi.org/10.1080/04353684.1992.11879634>

16 Open Ab Imperio, *Platform* '24, <https://sites.google.com/view/openabimperio/platform24eng>

I. Strangers. Russians Discover Black Africa

Today marks the eighteenth day since we received any letters or news from Europe. The further we move away from Europe, the smaller it appears, as if we were looking at it from a hot air balloon or through inverted binoculars. All the trivial concerns of city life in St. Petersburg have faded away [...]. The people there seem small and the events insignificant. Life goes on here, touching Europe so little that you finally forget the customs of the West. You look at everything from a completely new perspective, and your political horizons become broader.

Petr Krasnov¹

From the second half of the nineteenth century, the renewed interest in Africa prompted an increase in the sheer number of publications devoted to this continent: travel notes and diaries, essays and articles, fiction and poetry set in Africa became decidedly more popular and widespread in Russia than before.² At the same time, the development of disciplines such as anthropology and ethnography led to a new attention to African material culture, which soon entered the growing museum collections dedicated to displaying samples of the world's population. In addition, photography was implemented both as a 'scientific' tool that could document human diversity, and as a medium that could testify to the native population's way of life and to encounters between Russians and African peoples, resulting in the

1 P. Krasnov, *Kazaki v Abissinii*, Saint Petersburg 1900, p. 283.

2 The bibliographies compiled by Rudolph Loewenthal and Sof'ia Miliavskaia provide a clear picture of the new popularity of Africa in the Russian editorial market from the 1850s onwards. Cf. R. Loewenthal, 'Russian Materials on Africa: A Selected Bibliography', *Der Islam. Journal of the History and Culture of the Middle East*, 1961 (36), 1-2, pp. 128-151; S. Miliavskaia (ed. by), *Bibliografiia Afriki. Dorevoliutsionnaia i sovet'skaia literatura na russkom iazyke. Original'naia i perevodnaia*, I, Moscow 1964.

establishment of valuable photographic collections.

Africa's new prominence was the result of a series of historical events and socio-cultural changes. Among the first were the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, which facilitated travel to the continent; the establishment of diplomatic relations and cultural exchanges with Northern African countries and Ethiopia (then called Abyssinia); and the enormous popularity in the Russian press and culture of events such as the Mahdist War (1881-1899), the Italo-Ethiopian conflict (1895-1896), and the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). Concurrently, Africa also became one of the destinations of new typologies of travellers forming during the nineteenth century, a composite group that included explorers and scientists (who contributed, albeit to a lesser extent than their Western counterparts, to geographical discoveries in several regions)³ as well as mere tourists and even soldiers and nurses sent (or volunteering) to assist in various conflicts. No longer necessarily the prerogative of the upper social class, travel also became possible for the newly-born Russian tourists with a bourgeois background (and sometimes even of low income) who, while being primarily attracted by 'spas and seacoasts in the non-Slavic territories in the East and South'⁴ of the Empire, nevertheless began to divert to other routes, among which were the Middle East and Northern Africa.⁵ A glance at the pages of the periodicals of the time reveals that even purely touristic or recreational trips to black Africa were not as rare as they might seem, and were usually motivated by hunting wild animals.⁶ Within this tourist category were often also

3 Cf., for example, a (partial) reconstruction in M. Gornung and I. Oleinikov, *Geograficheskoe izuchenie Afriki v Rossii*, in A. Davidson and G. Nersesov (ed. by), *Izuchenie Afriki v Rossii (dorevoliutsionnyi period)*, Moscow 1977, pp. 30-71. This, like other studies by Soviet Africanists on the establishment of Russo-African relations, suffers quite evidently of Soviet rhetoric in many passages. Nevertheless, publications like these can still be useful, as they provide insights on people and institutions involved with African countries before the 1917 revolution.

4 L. McReynolds, 'The Prerevolutionary Russian Tourist: Commercialization in the Nineteenth Century', in A. Gorsuch and D. Koenker (ed. by), *Turizm: The Russian and East European Tourist under Capitalism and Socialism*, Ithaca 2006, pp. 17-42 (p. 18).

5 Cf. V. Fastovskii, "'Like sneaky thieves, they broke into royal tombs': Mobility, Egyptian Antiquities, and the Limits of Anti-Colonial Critique', *Ab Imperio*, 2023, 2, pp. 81-116, <https://doi.org/10.1353/IMP.2023.A906841>

6 Cf. for instance the news of a hunting expedition to Zanzibar in 1890 organised by two Russian princes, 'Russkie okhotniki v Zanzibare', *Vokrug sveta*, 1890, 13, p. 209. Cf. also the advertisement for an organised trip from Odessa to the 'West coast of Africa' (namely Liberia, Ashanti, Dahomey, and Cameroon), defined as a 'leisure

professional artists—writers, poets, painters—who later weaved their African-inspired works with their own poetics informed by *fin-de-siècle* movements and modernism. Indeed, ‘travel, art and literature formed an interconnected whole that moved both those sallying forth and those who stayed behind’,⁷ i.e. the educated classes and the new readership that was emerging thanks to rising literacy rates. Alongside the canonical writers and painters, whose work was aimed primarily at the elite, a considerable number of minor and even obscure artists were involved in the production of knowledge about Africa, published in cheap editions or in the popular press. Soldiers, doctors, and nurses left traces of their African sojourns, too, contributing their memoirs and reports to an impressive amount of knowledge that was being constructed around this continent. In addition to their written endeavours, many of these Russian travellers brought back to Russia the ethnographic collections that later ended up in specialised museums, as well as photographs.

In this regard, I maintain that the fact that Russia did not possess actual colonies should not prevent researchers from studying and understanding the complex interactions between the moving subjects of the tsarist empire, busy negotiating their own (European? Non-European?) identity as well as their relationships to the Africans they encountered along the way, which could not be divorced from the broader context of Western colonialism. Within the framework of ‘knowledge coproduction’ and in the wake of studies with similar approaches,⁸ I stress the need to analyse these materials as sources enabling the unveiling of Russian imperial structures and private actors’ involvement in the colonial discourse and respective production of knowledge. Far from being an isolated reality from Western colonial practices, the Russian Empire clearly shared (and generally borrowed) colonial vocabulary, rhetoric, and practices at both institutional and private levels. As will become clear throughout this book, there was indeed a close relationship with Europe in terms of the production of knowledge about the African continent, not only as a form of borrowing

trip’ for hunting, in *Iuzhnyi krai*, 23.07.1899, p. 4.

7 M. Hussinger, H. Raupach, and J. Happel, ‘Introduction’, in J. Happel, M. Hussinger, and H. Raupach (ed. by), *Expeditions in the Long Nineteenth Century. Discovering, Surveying, and Ordering*, New York 2024, pp. 1-15 (p. 4), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003386643-1>

8 Cf. for example Fastovskii, “‘Like sneaky thieves’”.

Western imagery and rhetoric, but also as a reappropriation and re-elaboration of them in creative ways. This was often intertwined with a reflection on Russia's positioning amongst European nations, and was certainly not a prerogative of those who actually travelled to Africa: indeed, the Russian editorial market was rich in essays, textbooks, and even fiction written by authors who had never set foot on the continent and who based their works on second-hand sources. They could be academics (from geographers to ethnographers, from historians to anthropologists), schoolteachers, or even middlebrow or lowbrow writers who popularised adventure novels by famous Western travellers and writers such as Paul du Chaillu, Thomas Mayne Reid, Pierre Loti, David Livingstone, Samuel Baker, and so forth, adapting them for children or poorly educated adults.

Thus, when looking at the overall material on Africa (or, more specifically, on black Africa, the main focus of this study), one can sort it according to several parameters: direct/indirect experiences of the continent; social background of the authors; gender; involvement in appropriation practices (collecting objects, art, or even manuscripts); predicament towards the colonial West; genres; intended readership; geographical areas treated; and adherence to artistic movements. The various patterns that can be discerned in the constant overlapping of parameters reveal the complexity and intricacy of the Russian cultural construction of black Africa, which, far from being a linear and clear-cut process, is the result of a complex dynamic involving not only two subjects (Russia and Africa), but also a third—and no less important—one: the colonial West.

Before delving further into the analysis of the primary sources, this chapter intends to provide a typology of the plethora of authors who contributed to the construction of a 'Russian black Africa' between 1850 and 1917. In the following paragraphs, I will attempt to clarify who they were, what their professional and social background was, what their relationship with black Africa and stance towards European colonialism was, and how they were received in Russian society, systematising them according to the main purpose which led them to write about this particular space. This is not an exhaustive catalogue as not all of them are accounted for, and other actors will emerge in the following chapters. It is, however, a typology of strangers in—or in the case of

those who never travelled to Africa, strangers to—foreign lands, who created an articulated narrative about blackness, colonialism, and Europe, constructing and spreading knowledge throughout all the social classes of imperial Russia.

A (Russian?) Twist on a Western Trope: Vasiliï Junker and Aleksandr Eliseev Explore Black Africa

At a time when European exploration of Africa was well advanced, a number of Russian explorers partook in the process of mapping the continent, studying its peoples and collecting its material culture. For the most part, their names are now known only to specialists in the field. Although their expeditions and itineraries have been meticulously reconstructed by Soviet scholarship, the implications of their activities in terms of colonial and imperial practices have largely gone unnoticed.

While the endeavours of other subjects of the Russian Empire—as will become clear in the course of the chapter—also led to geographical exploration and mapping, Vasiliï Junker (1840-1892) and Aleksandr Eliseev (1858-1895)—perhaps better than others—can be ascribed to the Western trope of the ‘explorer’ of the likes of David Livingstone or Samuel Baker, given the main purposes of their travels and the visibility and notoriety they received in Russia. Although they came from different social backgrounds (Junker was born into a wealthy family of German origins, his father being the founder of the bank Junker & Co., while Eliseev was the son of a Russian officer stationed in Finland), they both studied medicine in Saint Petersburg and worked as doctors before devoting themselves to travels and explorations.

Junker’s popularity, which extended beyond Russia’s borders, was the result of two different factors. Firstly, he had long-standing connections with the European scientific community dating back to his university days, when he had attended courses in Göttingen, Berlin, and Prague. Since then, he had become well known in Western academia, taking part in events such as the International Geographic Congress organised in Paris in 1875, attended by almost 1,500 delegates from various countries.⁹

9 Cf. Gornung and Oleinikov, ‘*Geograficheskoe izuchenie*’, p. 48; M. Linke and I. Hönsch, ‘*Geographical Archives of the Institute for Regional Geography*’

It was on this occasion that Junker met Gustav Nachtigal, Gerhard Rohlfs, and Georg August Schweinfurth, who inspired his subsequent travels to Sudan and Central Africa. He also took part in European endeavours, accompanying the German epigrapher and historian of antiquity Gustav Wilmanns to archaeological diggings in Tunisia, aimed at providing Theodor Mommsen with ancient finds, and studied under the famous German cartographer Heinrich Kiepert to develop his own cartographic skills, which could be useful for mapping unknown—or scarcely known—African territories. Secondly, Junker's entanglement with the events surrounding the Mahdist rebellion (1885-1887) put him in the international spotlight. It was not his first time in Africa—though it was bound to be his last: in fact, he was already a regular presence in the continent where, starting from the early 1870s, he spent approximately twelve years relying exclusively on his own means.¹⁰ During this time he met (and became close to) the German naturalist Emin Pasha, who had become governor of Equatoria, a province of Sudan, and the Italian explorer Gaetano Casati, whose work and expeditions were carried out in the service of the British Army officer Charles George Gordon, appointed Governor-General of Sudan. After the latter's death during the Mahdi uprising in 1885, Junker, Emin Pasha, and Casati were all cut off from their European contacts for a considerable time, prompting Junker's relatives to organise an (unsuccessful) expedition to rescue him or at least learn of his fate. It was not until 1887 that he was able to return to Saint Petersburg via the Suez Canal. The news he managed to spread about Emin Pasha and Casati was met with a collective concern for their fate and prompted the British authorities to send a rescue mission, led by Henry Stanley, that was widely publicised in the press.

Thus, Vasiliï Junker's name was quite known not only among his fellow geographers and explorers, who especially praised his discoveries on the Nile-Congo divide, the hydrographic system of the Uele and Mbomou rivers, and his ethnographic observations (especially on the Aka people), but also among the general public both in Russia

(Länderkunde) at Leipzig, Germany', *GeoJournal*, 1992 (26), 2, pp. 223-228 (p. 227), <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00241226>. On the genesis of the International Geographical Congresses and their annual programs see C. Close, 'Address at the Anniversary General Meeting of the Society Held on 18 June 1928', *The Geographical Journal*, 1928 (72), 2, pp. 97-116.

10 Gornung and Oleinikov, 'Geograficheskoe izuchenie', p. 48.

and abroad. As a matter of fact, he was featured in the memoirs of Gaetano Casati (*Ten Years in Equatoria*, 1891), as well as in a number of publications dealing with the Stanley expedition to rescue Emin Pasha or in writings by Emin Pasha himself, all of which were translated into various languages and circulated widely in Europe.¹¹ Most importantly, Junker decided to write the account of his travels in German, publishing *Travels in Africa* in three volumes between 1889 and 1891. Although they were swiftly translated into English, a Russian edition was never made; instead, a shortened and modified version appeared after his death under the pen of Eduard Petri, at that time vice-president of the Russian Anthropological Society.¹² Junker did, however, deliver lectures at the Imperial Russian Geographical Society (IRGO), which honoured him with the title of honorary fellow in 1887 and published some of them in its proceedings.¹³

Despite the fact that he was clearly more inclined towards Europe—and especially the German-speaking countries—the Russian press constructed Junker as the local representative of the ‘Western colonial explorer’ stereotype, seen as useful in raising the tsarist empire to the same level as the European powers. In 1878, the illustrated journal *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia* began an article on Junker by noting that ‘the geographical congress held in Paris in 1875 showed to Europe how high Russia stands in terms of geographical knowledge’, underlying the success of Nikolai Severtsov, Nikolai Przhevalskii, Nikolai Miklukho-Maklai (‘All this shows how highly our travellers are regarded in the learned circles of Europe’), before noting that the once obscure name of Vasilii Junker had now gained great popularity in the European press. Particular praise was given to the fact that Junker had travelled to a country that ‘not only hadn’t been visited by a single European, but not even by ivory traders’. The article was accompanied by an interesting portrait of Junker with ‘two negroes, one of whom, from the Mundu

11 Cf. G. Casati, *Dieci anni in Equatoria e ritorno con Emin Pasha*, Milan 1891; A.-J. Wauters, *Stanley au secours d’Emin-Pacha*, Paris 1890; G. Schweinfurth *et al.* (ed. by), *Emin-Pascha: eine Sammlung von Reisebriefen und Berichten Dr. Emin-Pascha’s aus den ehemals ägyptischen Aequatorialprovinzen und deren Grenzländern*, Leipzig 1888.

12 E. Petri, *Puteshestviia V.V. Iunkera po Afrike*, Saint Petersburg 1905. The first edition was published in 1893.

13 Cf. for instance *Puteshestvie v tsentral’noi Afrike v 1875-1878 goda V.V. Iunkera*, Saint Petersburg 1879; V. Iunker, ‘Doklad o semiletнем puteshestvii po Ekvatorial’noi Afrike’, *Izvestiia IRGO*, 1887, 23, pp. 413-436.

tribe, [...] has accompanied our illustrious traveller on all his voyages and has now come with him to Saint Petersburg, where he is successfully studying Russian'.¹⁴ The drawing showed Junker surrounded by a series of trophies, items he had picked up and collected on his travels, and which functioned as signs of his deeds: African spears and shields, a tusk, a dead animal, as well as the tools of a good explorer such as a rifle, books, and several trunks. Amidst the objects were the two living trophies, i.e., the domesticated 'negroes', whose docility reinforced the self-confidence that transpired from Junker's pose.

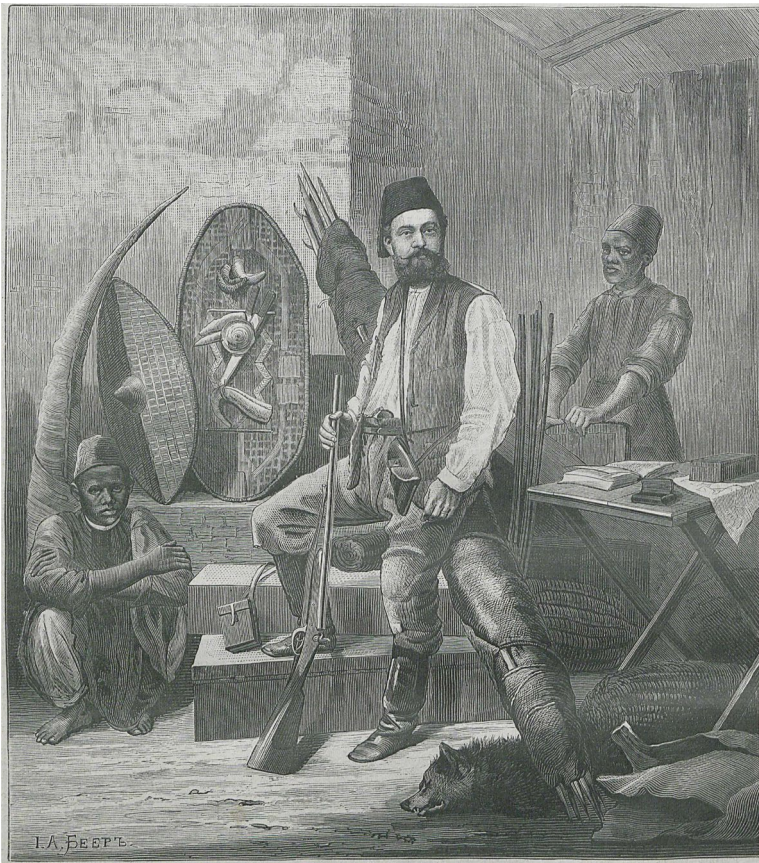


Fig. 1.1 I. A. Beer, 'Doctor V. V. Junker, a Traveller through Africa, and Two Natives', lithography by B. Brown, *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia*, 1878, p. 520.

14 K-skii, 'Russkii puteshestvennik po Tsentral'noi Afrike, doktor Vasilii Vasil'evich Junker', *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia*, 1878, 520, pp. 511, 514.

In the same vein, Petri's rendition of Junker's travelogues featured a portrait of the explorer surrounded by his African servants: this time his trophies were, on the one hand, the tangible bodies of the subjugated natives and, on the other, the almost immaterial and rough map behind their backs, bearing the names of some of the peoples he later described in his writings ('Niam-Niam', Aka) or regions he visited (Darfur).¹⁵ In Petri's volume, Junker is portrayed as a better version of the common European explorer, who, 'contrary to many other explorers who appeared on the African continent as *Kulturträger* with fire and sword in hand', has 'wandered peacefully for several years in regions unknown to anyone before him, living among wild tribes and in the most difficult conditions [...] without resorting to brute force, or the use of weapons against human beings', thus giving proof of 'a humane trait'.¹⁶ A 'traveller-scientist', he is presented as the exact opposite of the 'adventurer' or the 'tourist', being interested in exploration only for the sake of science; at the same time, he is clearly 'ours' (Russian), where Russia is at the same time part of Europe and yet also its better representative.

More sensational portrayals of Junker were also published. An 1887 cover of the illustrated journal *Vokrug sveta* fashioned Junker as the hero of an adventure novel: he is depicted in a hut with torn clothes and no shoes, absorbed in dressing his wounds with the help of a local, who stands there naked except for a piece of cloth wrapped around his waist and holding up a case containing Junker's medical kit.¹⁷ The drawing was created by the French illustrator Horace Castelli, and was originally published a few months before in the *Journal des Voyages et des aventures de terre et de mer* along with an article on the Russian explorer.¹⁸ Here, scientific merits are entirely secondary, while the iconography of Junker falls within the frame of the 'great explorer', the 'great adventurer' who has to overcome the dangers and perils awaiting him in Africa. The trope of his humanity and kindness to the natives recurs not only—as one might easily imagine—in *Vokrug sveta*, but also in *Journal des*

15 Petri, *Puteshestviia*, p. 277.

16 Ibid., p. X.

17 N. B-v., 'Doktor Iunker v Afrike', *Vokrug sveta*, 1887, 45, pp. 722-723.

18 V.-F. Demais, 'Docteur Junker en Afrique', *Journal des Voyages et des aventures de terre et de mer*, 1887, 526, pp. 82-83.

Voyages, evidence that this was not purely Russian rhetoric—though it certainly anticipated Soviet evaluations of him and other Russian pre-revolutionary explorers, who were praised for their supposed anti-racism and anti-colonialism.¹⁹

A similar fate was to befall the public perception of Aleksandr Eliseev, whose fame nevertheless remained much more confined within Russia's borders as he was well-known to European scholars, but not to the general public. Throughout his short life, Eliseev travelled extensively both as a military doctor stationed to different parts of the empire (Turkestan, Finland, the Baltic region), and privately, visiting Africa, the northern regions of Russia, the Urals, the Middle and Far East. However, at one point he drew enough attention on his explorations that the Imperial Russian Geographical Society decided to commission him a proper expedition to Sudan. In fact, he was not unknown to the Society, having published consistently in the official journal of the IRGO and other prominent periodicals of the time.²⁰ After his first two trips to Africa (1881-1882), during which he did not go further south than Egypt, he visited the northern part of the Sahara in 1884 and then tried to reach Sudan in 1893, but his plans were partially frustrated due to an attack by local marauders.²¹ Following his speech on this experience at the IRGO

19 This is particularly apparent in the case of Egor Kovalevskii, but it affects many others as well, with the notable exception of Nikolai Gumilev, who has always been severely criticised for his 'imperialist attitudes'. This rhetoric continues to this day. A recent article published in *Vokrug sveta* brushes up on Junker's adventurous life, referring to him in the title as the Russian equivalent of the more famous Livingstone, but with far more compassion for the locals. For instance, 'It should be said that Vasilii Vasil'evich, contrary to the attitude of the majority of the Europeans at the time, treated the blacks without any prejudice or arrogance', cf. V. Veretennikov, 'Livingston moskovskogo razliva: kak puteshestvennik Vasilii Iunker otkryl neizvedannye ugolki Afriki', *Vokrug sveta*, 06.02.2024, <https://www.vokrugsveta.ru/articles/livingston-moskovskogo-razliva-kak-puteshestvennik-vasilii-yunker-otkryl-neizvedannye-ugolki-afriki-id4288239/>

20 Cf. for instance A. Eliseev, *Poezdka v Egipet, Kamenistuiu Araviu i Palestinu*, Saint Petersburg 1885; A. Eliseev, *Antropologicheskaia ekskursiia v Sakharu cherez Tripoli, Tunis i Alzhir*, Saint Petersburg 1885; A. Eliseev, 'V strane tuaregov', *Russkii vestnik*, 1885, 7-8; A. Eliseev, 'Makhdzim i sovremennoe polozhenie del v Sudane', *Izvestiia IRGO*, 1894 (30), 5.

21 With regard to Eliseev's involvement with Egypt and Sudan, Edward Wilson has pointed out how him being a doctor granted him a 'better entrée among local inhabitants than did the arms used by other Europeans in their African travels', and that 'the expedition [to Sudan] does appear to have been conducted in the spirit of an anti-British intelligence operation and to have yielded information of value to the Russian government in assessing the strength of the British position in Egypt and

general assembly in 1895, the Society entrusted him with a recognised expedition to Sudan, with the explicit aims to '1. Enter the Mahdist region, which Europeans have not been able to access for some years already; 2. A concomitant, possibly exhaustive, study of Abyssinia'.²² Eliseev was accompanied by military officers Nikolai Leont'ev and Konstantin Zviagin, as well as by Archimandrite Efrem (known, before his career in the Church, as doctor Mikhail Tsvetaev). All four wrote reports and travelogues about the expedition, providing useful insights not only into the Ethiopian situation and the establishment of diplomatic and cultural contacts between Russia and Ethiopia, but also into the organisation and conduct of the expedition. While the IRGO offered official support and even the Paris Geographical Society sent the travellers a cover letter granting safe passage,²³ the journey was largely financed by Leont'ev, who came from a wealthy family of the old Russian nobility; the other members were expected to pay only minor expenses.²⁴ Evidently, this was not a purely scientific endeavour, especially since it was sponsored not only by the IRGO and the Russian Academy of Sciences, but also by the Ministry of War and private individuals interested in exploring the possibility of establishing trade between Russia and Africa.²⁵ Apparently, the lack of transparency with the Ethiopian leaders on the true intent of the expedition caused Eliseev and Leont'ev to fall out, resulting in the former's premature return to Saint Petersburg. Despite the political and economic agendas behind it, the expedition also had a positive scientific impact: it succeeded in establishing certain geographical coordinates and collecting a large number of natural specimens (insects, stuffed animals), as well as anthropological data on the Somali and Afar peoples, accompanied by eighty-eight photographs.²⁶

along the Nile', E. T. Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa before World War II*, New York 1974, p. 48.

22 Cf. B. Val'skaia, 'Vklad Russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva v izuchenie Afriki', *Strany i narody Vostoka*, 1969, 9, pp. 5-18 (p. 11).

23 Cf. M. Rait, 'Russkie ekspeditsii v Efiopii v seredine XIX-nachale XX vv. i ikh etnograficheskie materialy', *Afrikanskii etnograficheskii sbornik*, 1956, 1, pp. 220-281 (p. 240).

24 Arkhimandrit Efrem, *Poezdka v Abissiniu*, Moscow 1901, pp. 2-3.

25 Cf. Arkhiv Russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva, f. I-1894, op. 1, d. 13, l. 98, quoted in K. Vinogradova, 'Poezdki rossiiskikh puteshestvennikov v strany Blizhnego Vostoka i Afriki v kontse XIX-nachale XX vv.', *Nauchnyi al'manakh*, 2015 (10), 8, pp. 1355-1358 (p. 1357).

26 Cf. Leont'ev's letter to the IRGO Council of 11 February 1895, quoted in B. Val'skaia,

In 1895, upon returning to Russia, Eliseev delivered a lecture at the IRGO on the results of the expedition. However, he passed away mere days later. Shortly afterwards, *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia* published an obituary which, like that of Junker, portrayed Eliseev as the epitome of an explorer driven by an innate desire to travel the world. Interestingly, while the obituary does not shy away from mentioning Eliseev's other destinations, the image chosen to commemorate him associates him exclusively with Africa, thus implicitly underpinning the doctor's rightful place among Europe's most famous explorers. Like Junker, he is depicted in the 'uniform' of the explorer, with a leopard skin at his feet and a Somali boy in traditional dress standing slightly behind him. A human souvenir of sorts, the boy seems to have been part of a group that was brought back to Russia, along with other exotic 'things'. Once again, the young Somali functions as a testament to the possibility of domesticating the African other, forcibly becoming the trope of the native who worships his master and even stops eating because he is saddened by his death. Like Junker, Eliseev is praised for his humanity—this time not only towards foreign peoples, but also towards the Russian indigents, whom he used to treat for free—and presented as a 'rare soul' whose geographical lectures always aroused the interest of scholars.²⁷

The following month, Eliseev was honoured again, this time by the journal *Mir Bozhii*, which published its own obituary. The piece, signed by the writer Dmitrii Mamin-Sibiriak, consisted of Sibiriak's memories and impressions of Eliseev, whom he had met near Saint Petersburg in the summer of 1891. Having already read Eliseev's travel writing, Mamin-Sibiriak found it difficult to reconcile the image he had formed of the doctor with the real person he met, whom he described as 'not particularly remarkable', 'of medium height, fair-haired, with grey eyes and a Russian face',²⁸ something he was only able to do after visiting the doctor's study, 'an entire museum' containing botanical preparations, entomological collections, zoological rarities, and ethnographic material. According to the writer, while every child—and even every adult man—dreams of travelling around the world after reading

Vklad, p. 12.

27 'A.V. Eliseev', *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia*, 1895, 1376, pp. 460-462.

28 D. Mamin-Sibiriak, 'A.V. Eliseev. Stranichka iz vospominanii', *Mir Bozhii*, 1895, 7, pp. 37-48 (p. 38).

Thomas Meyne Reid, Gustave Aimard, or James Fenimore Cooper, very few Russians can achieve this, not only because of fear, but also because of a lack of geographical and linguistic knowledge. In this sense, he characterises Eliseev as an exception, a kind of outsider, emphasising his unusual habit of only stopping for tea for a moment without indulging in long conversations, as well as a general ‘un-Russianness’ (*chto-to ne russkoe*) in his way of working (which obviously clashed with his ‘Russian’ appearance): ‘There was even something un-Russian about this systematic and meticulous work—un-Russian because the Russian man had always worked in a kind of explosive way [*vzryvami*], or rather, not even worked, but ploughed through’.²⁹ A ‘tireless worker and courageous researcher’, a ‘sensitive soul’, a ‘subtle observer’ and a ‘deep lover of nature’, Mamin-Sibiriak’s Eliseev is also a man of prescience, and one who is very much aware of current events; indeed, his interest in Africa is explained, in his own words, by the fact that ‘the black continent is in the midst of a very turbulent period, the Europeans are tearing it apart piece by piece. And, in my opinion, it will play a huge role in the near future, which we can only guess at now’.³⁰

Towards the Far East: Ivan Goncharov and Aleksei Vysheslavitsev at the Cape

In some cases, Africa was not necessarily the main destination. In fact, from the eighteenth century up until the opening of the Suez Canal, Russia used to reach the coasts of East Asia by sea. Long maritime expeditions would sail from Kronstadt, proceeding through the Atlantic Ocean and rounding Africa—usually stopping at Simon’s Bay or Cape Town—before continuing into the Indian Ocean. It was a fairly common route, well documented thanks to the memoirs and travelogues of a minority of Russians who not only wrote about it, but were also fortunate enough to see their work published. Ivan Goncharov (1812-1891) and Aleksei Vysheslavitsev (1831-1888) were not alone in recollecting these arduous journeys, although they were certainly the

²⁹ Ibid., p. 40.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 42.

best known to the Russian public.³¹ The circumstances of Goncharov's departure are well documented—indeed, he is one of the few Russian figures commonly associated with South Africa, having stopped there *en route* to Japan as secretary to the vice admiral of the frigate *Pallada*, a journey that lasted from 1852 to 1855. Although officially motivated by the need to survey the Russian territories in America, the expedition was also intended to establish proper trade and diplomatic agreements with Japan, as well as to inspect Sakhalin Island, which was not yet under Russian control. As it has been noted, 'The naval voyages themselves, like the travelogues that described them, imported to Russia western models of modernizing colonial administration. They helped generate colonial knowledge useful for governing peripheral lands and peoples in increasingly uniform ways. [...] Many Russian naval officers trained directly with Britain's Royal Navy and travel literature was part of their education', something to which Goncharov himself was accustomed to and which he 'channel[led] [...] to some extent' in his book.³² Goncharov's literary effort on this experience, *The Frigate Pallada*, was published for the first time in 1858 and became a nineteenth-century bestseller, selling significantly more copies than the writer's later novel *Oblomov* (1859), for which he remains famous to this day. The travelogue was even reissued ten times before the end of the century. Indeed, 'prized for its exoticism, humor, and narrative flair, the book reached a socially and institutionally diverse audience that included not only those noblemen who traditionally consumed literature, but also government officials, students of military academies, women, and young readers—even schoolchildren'.³³ In itself, it is also proof of how the genre of travel literature was rapidly becoming more popular, affecting the entire editorial market. The book was considered a masterpiece of the genre, and was particularly praised for the author's style and ability to engage the reader with vivid descriptions of distant places and peoples, while largely avoiding the overly informative and pedantic details that more traditional travel books were rich in. But another important aspect

31 For an anthology of writings by other travellers, including Iurii Lisianskii, Vasili Golovnin, Gustav Blok, Baron Aleksandr Wrangel, cf. B. Gorelik (ed. by), *An Entirely Different World'. Russian Visitors to the Cape, 1797-1870*, Cape Town 2015.

32 E. M. Bojanowska, *A World of Empires. The Russian Voyage of the Frigate Pallada*, Cambridge-London 2018, p. 10, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv25250ck>

33 *Ibid.*, pp. 262-263.

that reviewers were keen to dwell on was Goncharov's 'combination of Europeanness and Russianness' that transpired from his way of describing foreign realities and understanding world—and imperial—dynamics, while remaining appealing to his audience by avoiding the Western trope of the 'heroic explorer' by 'never pursu[ing] strong impressions, never crav[ing] novelty'.³⁴ Indeed, the book served also as a self-reflection on Russia's place in the world. Yet, despite its extreme popularity at home—and despite Goncharov's notoriety as an author in the West as well—*The Frigate Pallada* did not circulate widely in Europe; unlike Junker's travelogue, Goncharov's work would only be (partially) translated into English in the 1960s.

Rather surprisingly, given the lesser popularity of its author, Vysheslavitsev's account of a very similar itinerary did circulate in Europe—albeit partially and locally, as one chapter was translated into Danish.³⁵ Born in the Tambov Governorate, Vysheslavitsev studied medicine in Moscow and served as a doctor during the Crimean War, publishing several articles in periodicals such as *Sovremennik* and *Russkii vestnik*. Between 1857 and 1860, as a ship's doctor on board the clipper *Plastun*, he took part in a naval expedition directed to the mouth of the Amur which had the aim of strengthening Russia's position in the context of the signing of a treaty with China. The itinerary was virtually the same as Goncharov's, and, in his own account of the events, Vysheslavitsev described many places and even people that the more famous writer had already seen. The two of them would eventually meet after the publication of Vysheslavitsev's travelogue, with the doctor visiting the writer's flat and even listening to him reading parts of his new novel *The Precipice*.³⁶ Vysheslavitsev's book, entitled *Essays in Pen and Pencil from a Journey around the World*, was released in 1862 as a separate edition by the Maritime Ministry—which financed and printed books about Russian naval expeditions—after being published in instalments in *Russkii vestnik*. It was very well received and widely read, prompting

34 Ibid., pp. 273-274.

35 Cf. S. Ivleva, 'Ocherki perom i karandashom iz krugosvetnogo plavaniia v 1857-1860-kh godakh Alekseia Vysheslavitseva v Rossii i v Danii (k istorii illiustrirovannogo izdaniia 1860-kh gg.)', in V. Baryshnikova and S. Trokhacheva (ed. by), *Sankt-Peterburg i strany Severnoi Evropy. Materialy piatoi ezhegodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii*, Saint Petersburg 2004, pp. 326-333.

36 B. Gorelik (ed. by), 'An Entirely Different World', p. 112.

a new edition in 1866, this time for one of the most prolific publishers of that era, Mavrikii Vol'f. Though its author ultimately remained famous for his later works on the history of art—for which he is still remembered today—there is no doubt that he gained quite an audience, especially for the informative quality of his descriptions. A review in *Otechestvennye zapiski* stressed the accessibility of the material, while curiously characterising Vysheslavitsev as a simple 'tourist'—albeit an educated one:

Vysheslavitsev's *Essays* are not a scientific description of a journey written by a specialist, nor are they a poet's recollections of his travels, told in full and complete pictures. Our author has no such bold claims: he is simply a humble tourist, an educated and curious observer, an intelligent and pleasant narrator of what he has seen before his eyes. [...] Not content with his own observations, he often supplements them with information from the writings of others. In this way, the book gains in importance and richness of facts, while retaining its ease of presentation. [...] In our literature there are several descriptions of voyages around the world, but most of them are of special scientific interest, while Goncharov's beautiful book is exclusively a collection of impressions of an artist, and a Russian one at that. That is why scientific voyages are not read, and Goncharov is blamed for the lack of accurate information. [...] Vysheslavitsev, as we have said, fortunately avoids the extremes of dry specialism and the exclusivity of personal impressions, and so his account is likely to find many readers.³⁷

This perception was long-lasting, as evidenced by a similar appraisal that a friend (and biographer) of the author gave more than two decades after the first edition: '*Essays in Pen and Pencil* cannot be compared to *The Frigate Pallada* in terms of literary merit. The classical beauty of the language, the completeness of the imagery and the elegance of the whole elevate Goncharov to the forefront of contemporary writers as a stylist. [...] [Vysheslavitsev] gave his book not only a literary, but also a utilitarian character. The wealth of diverse knowledge from history, geography and the natural sciences that he incorporated into the book suggests that he rightly expected it to become popular among young students, a popularity that it still enjoys today'.³⁸ The book's reputation

37 'Ocherki perom i karandashom iz krugosvetnogo plavaniia v 1857, 1858, 1859 i 1860 godakh', *Otechestvennye zapiski*, 1863, 4, pp. 97-98.

38 M. Solov'ev, *Aleksei Vladimirovich Vysheslavitsev*, Saint Petersburg 1890, pp. 44-45.

was further enhanced by the inclusion of nearly thirty illustrations, including lithographs by future renowned artists (such as Vasilii Vereshagin and Ivan Shishkin), based on the author's own drawings. In this way, readers were offered a visual testimony, coming from Vysheslavitsev himself, of both foreign places and exotic peoples.³⁹

Russian Expertise at the Service of Africa: Egor Kovalevskii and Nikolai Kurmakov

Another occasion that led to contacts with the African continent, and consequently to the publication of reports and the creation of ethnographic collections, was the enlistment of Russian experts by the authorities of various governments. These collaborations—not limited to the medical field (which will be discussed below)—were certainly not frequent, but when they did occur, they were undoubtedly significant. At least two of them, over a period of more than fifty years, were aimed at helping the local people or their rulers to find raw materials that could be the object of fruitful trade. Unlike exploratory expeditions, which were largely privately funded, these missions were usually financed and supported by a number of Russian government institutions.

When Egor Kovalevskii (1809/11-1868) left for Sudan, he had already gained a reputation both as a traveller and as a mining engineer. A descendant of Polish ancestors, Kovalevskii was born near Kharkiv into a gentry family of modest means. His uncle was the founder of the Kharkiv University, where he later studied philology and took several courses in geography and scientific subjects. After moving to Saint Petersburg, he began working for the Mining and Salt Department in 1829, attending special courses in geology and later moving to the Altai and the Urals to lead expeditions to find gold and other metals. With the rank of captain, acquired when the Department became a branch of the Russian army, Kovalevskii was then sent to Montenegro to help local engineers locate a gold vein. Briefly deprived of his Russian citizenship for his involvement in international affairs between Montenegro and

39 The originals (drawings and watercolours) are kept at the Russian State Library and the RGALI archive, Moscow. A few of them have been published for the first time in Gorelik (ed. by), *'An Entirely Different World'*.

Austria, he continued his work as a geologist and mining engineer in Bukhara, Xin-jiang, Afghanistan, and Kashmir. A writer known for his numerous and much-praised travelogues, he was also a member of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, even becoming secretary to its president. This position, together with his role as Director of the Asian Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, helped him to organise a number of expeditions to Central Asia. The opportunity to travel to Africa—a journey he had been considering for a long time—arose when the viceroy of Egypt, Mohammed Ali Pasha, approached Russia (which, unlike Western powers such as Great Britain and France, was not involved in imperialist politics on the African continent) to obtain expertise in the mining sector. At first, Mohammed Ali sent to Russia two Egyptian engineers, Ali Muhammed Ibrahim and Issa ad-Dashuri, who had been trained in Germany (1845). Under the supervision of Kovalevskii, they were sent to the Urals, in particular to Ekaterinburg, to study the latest mining techniques that could later be applied in Sudan.⁴⁰ This collaboration proved so fruitful, that in 1847 Mohammed Ali again asked for help—this time in the region itself—and Kovalevskii became the man designated for the purpose. He carefully planned the expedition, assisted by the future professor of botany and microbiologist, fellow IRGO member Lev Tsenkovskii (1822-1887), who was specially appointed by the Society and personally commissioned by Karl Ernst von Bauer to collect botanical and ethnographic data. It was also suggested that the articles resulting from this voyage should be translated and published in Europe, as previous publications on the same part of Africa, such as those by Carl Ritter, were now outdated. Thus, Tsenkovskii could contribute to the IRGO's relationship with the international scientific community.⁴¹ His task was also to draw well

40 Both Kovalevskii and the Egyptian engineers wrote accounts and letters about this enterprise. They are published in B. Val'skaia, 'E.P. Kovalevskii i egipetskie inzhenery na Urale i v Vostochnom Sudane (Neopublikovannye materialy)', *Strany i narody Vostoka*, 1973, 15, pp. 126-143. While very little is known about the Egyptians' stay in Saint Petersburg, Val'skaia recalls that they met at least two members of the Petrashevsky circle—Aleksandr Pal'm and Sergei Durov—who were close friends of Kovalevskii. Cf. also A. Antoshin, *Zoloto Sennara. Egipet i Sudan glazami ural'skogo мастера zolotodobychi XIX veka*, Moscow 2013. For a detailed biography of Kovalevskii cf. B. Val'skaia, *Puteshestviia E.P. Kovalevskogo*, Moscow 1956.

41 B. Val'skaia, 'Akademik K.M. Ber o puteshestviiakh E.P. Kovalevskogo v Egipet i v Kitai v 40-kh godakh XIX v.', *Strany i narody Vostoka*, 1959, 1, pp. 263-285 (pp. 270, 271).

rendered pictures of the peoples of 'inner Africa', and, if that was not possible, to write 'at least good descriptions' of them.⁴² Tsenkovskii came from a very poor Polish family, and while he had been able to afford university thanks to a scholarship, he had no sufficient means to fund this long journey. Thus, to help with his travel expenses, the IRGO gave him 500 roubles, a sum that was considered insignificant in the context of the Russian travellers' important discoveries to science and their dissemination to the public.⁴³ Tsenkovskii's participation in the expedition was also supported by the Russian Academy of Sciences, whose president, Sergei Uvarov, had other institutions co-finance the trip (for instance, the Botanical Museum and the Mineralogical Museum).⁴⁴ Apparently, the total cost for the IRGO was 7,960 silver roubles.⁴⁵ When Kovalevskii returned home, Tsenkovskii decided to stay in Africa and, after receiving further funding from the Academy of Sciences, spent two years on the continent studying the Nile system and the peoples living in the region.⁴⁶ A significant achievement of the expedition was the drawing of a new original map of 'Eastern Sudan and Abyssinia', which was published as an appendix to Kovalevskii's book, making Russia the first country to ever have mapped some specific territories and putting it on a par with European colonial cartographic enterprises.

Overall, the expedition was successful, both in terms of Mohammed Ali's need to find new gold mines and the Russians' desire to explore uncharted territory in search of the source of the Nile. However, the publication of Kovalevskii's travel notes, *A Journey to Inner Africa* (1849), brought him back into disgrace with the court, as he dared to compare African slavery with Russian serfdom. Nevertheless, the book was well received by the progressive Russian intelligentsia, with whom Kovalevskii was well acquainted,⁴⁷ as well as by fellow scientists and

42 Ibid., p. 271.

43 P. Semenov, *Istoriia poluvekovoi deiatel'nosti imperatorskogo russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva. 1845-1895*, Saint Petersburg 1896, p. 30; B. Val'skaia, *Akademik*, p. 264.

44 Val'skaia, *Akademik*, p. 265.

45 Antoshin, *Zoloto*, p. 51.

46 Val'skaia, *Akademik*, p. 266.

47 In addition to his services to the IRGO, Kovalevskii was also involved in establishing the Literary Fund (*Literaturnyi fond*, officially *Obshchestvo dlia posobiia nuzhdaiushimsia literatoram*), together with Aleksandr Druzhinin, Ivan Turgenev, Nikolai Chernyshevskii, Pavel Annenkov and others (1859). On his relations with prominent Russian writers and intellectuals cf. Val'skaia, *Puteshestviia*, pp. 162-183;

scholars, who praised not only its content but also its engaging and entertaining style. Interestingly, the nature of the book influenced how Kovalevskii was perceived as a traveller. In a review written soon after the publication of the travelogue, Bauer placed it somewhere in between 'tourist literature' (*turisticheskaia literatura*) and 'country descriptions in the form of journeys' (*opisanie stran v forme puteshestvii*), for which the *Voyage pittoresque autour du monde* by the French explorer and naval officer Jules Dumont d'Urville was chosen as an example. According to Bauer, 'tourist literature' is characterised by the fact that everything revolves around the traveller: the reader gets to know his impressions of the people he has met and the nature he has seen. The 'country descriptions in the form of journeys', on the other hand, provide the reader with specific data on its nature, inhabitants and history in a methodical but entertaining way (*v sistematicheskoi, no zanimatel'noi forme*). Kovalevskii was thus not merely a tourist, but also not merely a geographer, giving the impression of being more concerned in entertaining the readers than in educating them. Nevertheless, because he was an educated man, his book was perceived as more scientifically relevant than similar efforts by fellow European travellers such as Mungo Park, John Biscoe, or Ludwig Leichhardt.⁴⁸ Bauer's description of Kovalevskii as a tourist—albeit an educated one—points to a partial clearance of this word, which at the time mostly carried the negative connotation of a far less educated type of traveller, who often exploited local cultures and landscapes for the benefit of his writings.⁴⁹ It is also a curious way of defining a person who certainly did not travel to Africa for leisure, but was part of a state-sponsored expedition, and who chose to use the word 'traveller' (*puteshestvennik*) to define himself. Yet, Kovalevskii's fall from grace with the authorities and the simultaneous need to promote the book to a wider readership may have played a part in downplaying the author's

B. Val'skaia, 'Puteshestvennik E.P. Kovalevskii i peterburgskie literaturny (1861-1868)', *Strany i narody Vostoka*, 1994, 28, pp. 224-258.

48 Bauer's review, co-signed with the geologist Gregor von Helmersen (Grigorii Gel'mersen) and originally written in German, is published in Russian in Val'skaia, *Akademik*, pp. 271-280. This review was written on the occasion of the 1849 Demikovskii Competition, an annual prize established in 1831 by the Academy of Sciences. Kovalevskii's book, poorly received by the censors and authorities, did not fare well in the competition. Bauer and Helmersen point out both the positive and negative aspects of Kovalevskii's literary effort.

49 Cf. S. Layton, 'Russian Military Tourism. The Crisis of the Crimean War Period', in Gorsuch and Koenker (ed. by), *Turizm*, pp. 43-63.

role, giving him the simpler status of tourist-geographer.

Some fifty years later, in 1903, Menelik II asked the Russian government for expertise on the mining of a possible gold vein in the Welega Province. A geological expedition was organised and sent to Ethiopia in 1904 with the approval of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Agriculture and State Property, and the IRGO. A total of more than 43,000 roubles was allocated to cover the cost of equipment, transport and the salaries of the participants.⁵⁰ The expedition was led by Nikolai Kurmakov (1853-after 1917), an experienced engineer who, after graduating from the Mining Institute in 1876, had worked extensively in the Urals, in the Caucasus, Iran, Turkey, Siberia, and Poland. Kurmakov set the duration of the expedition at nine months. The preliminary results, presented to Menelik in November 1904, were indeed promising, so much so that Kurmakov proposed the establishment of a mine directly controlled by the state. However, when Menelik again asked the Russians for help in building the mine, the Ministry of Finance declined due to the complex financial situation following the Russo-Japanese war. This Russo-Abyssinian geological enterprise thus came to a halt, and was in fact the last major expedition to Ethiopia financed by the authorities before the revolution. This was the result of the changing political landscape within Russia itself, the growing opposition of the European powers to Russian influence in Ethiopia, and the completion of the Trans-Siberian Railway, which should have made the Suez Canal—and influence over the Red Sea ports—less necessary for the Russians.⁵¹ In addition to the discovery of the vein, the expedition was also successful in that Kurmakov's geographical observations led to the drawing of four new maps of the region, which together with his report and the extensive photographic collection showing the progress of the mining operations, represent a significant contribution to the knowledge of Ethiopia in Russia.⁵²

50 RGIA, f. 37, op. 44, d. 841, l. 64-65, quoted in V. Afanas'ev and I. Voloshinova, 'Diplomaticheskie missii gornykh inzhenerov vo vneshnei politike Rossii XIX-nachala XX vv.', *Bylye gody*, 2022 (17), 4, pp. 1770-1779 (p. 1774).

51 Cf. S. Agureev, 'Ekspeditsii IRGO v Efiopiiu na rubezhe XIX-XX vv.', *Voprosy istorii*, 2015, 7, pp. 91-108. A reconstruction of the whole affair, along with the publication of related historical documents, can be found in Z. Akisheva, 'Pervaia russkaia geologicheskaiia ekspeditsiia v Efiopiiu (1904 g.)', *Strany i narody vostoka*, 1969, 15, pp. 223-236. Cf. also N. Kurmakov, *Ot Indiiskogo okeana k granitsam Verkhnego Sudana*, Saint Petersburg 1905.

52 This photographic collection, which will be discussed in Chapter 4, is held by the *Kunstkamera* (N° 3819).

African Nature Put to Use: Russian Scientists and Hunters in the Depths of the Continent

Nature was also a major catalyst for travels to Africa, both for scientific studies and leisure. This type of travel became particularly fashionable from the 1900s onwards, when the continent was almost completely mapped, and the routes were better travelled and known. Notably, East Africa grew to be quite a popular destination visited by several biologists and naturalists in the early 1910s, who benefited from ties with the international scientific community, including the German and British colleagues already stationed there. Despite their relatively young age, these Russian naturalists were already accustomed to conducting research abroad and had prior experience of scientific travel and working in foreign laboratories. The oldest and most experienced was Sergei Averintsev (1875-1957), who had already been to Africa as a volunteer during the Anglo-Boer War. After studying natural sciences at Saint Petersburg University, he continued his education at many European institutions: he worked with the renowned German zoologist Otto Bütschli in Heidelberg, and then at the Zoological Station in Naples, an international research centre founded in 1872 by Anton Dohrn and conceived as a laboratory for scientists from all over the world. Well integrated into the European academic and scientific community, Averintsev visited other prestigious zoological stations and museums, including those in Trondheim, Hamburg, and Bergen. In 1911, the Russian Academy of Sciences awarded him a scholarship for an expedition to Java to study the tropical ecosystem. Averintsev set off from Hamburg, but during the voyage, when the ship he was on was already sailing along the East African coast, he was injured and had to spend a month in hospital in Dar es Salaam. Having disrupted his previous schedule, he decided to study the African tropical ecosystem rather than the East Asian one, and travelled to the Usambara Mountains, where the Amani Research Institute had been founded by the Germans in 1902. Eventually, he travelled to Zanzibar, Mozambique, and other parts of Africa, before returning to Europe via South Africa and the

Canary Islands.⁵³ His accounts, one for a specialist audience, the other for a wider readership, offer not only interesting information on zoology and the tropical ecosystem, but also his observations on German colonial policy and racism, of which he was a fierce critic.⁵⁴

Over the same period, East Africa also became the destination of three young graduates of the Moscow Faculty of Natural Sciences: Vasilii Nikitin (1886-1972), Ivan Puzanov (1885-1971), and Vladimir Troitskii (1885-1952), all of whom were destined to grow into quite important scholars in their own right. Although they were due to embark on a self-organised—and self-financed, with very limited means—trip to study the Red Sea ecosystem in 1910, Nikitin's problems with obtaining a passport for political reasons prevented their departure. Puzanov and Troitskii decided to leave regardless. While they came from different backgrounds (Puzanov was born in Kursk into the highly educated family of a middle-class merchant, Troitskii in Tambov into the family of a bank clerk), their move to Moscow to study science at university had given them equal opportunities to travel to different countries. Before their African adventure, Puzanov had spent a semester in Germany, a few months in Switzerland to deepen his studies and at the biological station in Sevastopol, and had travelled extensively in Crimea; Troitskii had taken part in research projects in Italy, the Urals, the Caucasus, the Red Sea and Egypt. Settling in Port Said, they spent a few months studying the coral reef ecosystem and travelling inland to Khartoum. On their return, Puzanov presented his naturalistic observations in two lectures in Moscow and Saint Petersburg (October 1910, March 1911). As a student of Dmitrii Anuchin, he also published a series of essays under the title *Essays on North-Eastern Sudan* in the journal *Zemlevedenie*, founded by the professor; the publication won him the silver medal of the Society of Devotees of Natural Science, Anthropology, and Ethnography, presided over by Anuchin himself, who continued to support Puzanov

53 For a reconstruction of Averintsev's journey see E. Gnevusheva, 'Puteshestvie po Afrike A.V. Averintseva', *Strany i narody vostoka*, 1965, 14, pp. 193-213.

54 S. Averintsev, *Predvoritel'nyi otchet o poezdke na stipendiiu, uchrezhdennoi pri Beitenzorgskom botanicheskom sadu. Čast' I*, Saint Petersburg 1913; S. Averintsev, 'Po poberezh'iu Chernogo kontinenta. Iz zapisnoi knizhki naturalista', *Priroda*, 1912, 2 (clmn. 211-240), 12 (clmn. 1441-1468).

on further travels (this time to the Far East).⁵⁵

Troitskii, on the other hand, felt that the short time he had spent on the East Coast of Africa was insufficient for his studies. He therefore organised a second expedition to explore the area between Lake Victoria and Lake Tanganika with the support of the Zoological Museum of the Academy of Sciences, the Moscow University, and the IRGO. The famous Swedish professor Gustav Retzius, who had been a collaborator of the Saint Petersburg Academy of Sciences since 1895, also supported the expedition. Troitskii left in February 1912 and returned two years later, in April 1914, after visiting Kenya, Tanzania, Burundi, and Uganda. He soon published a scientific account of his findings, as well as educational articles in the popular press.⁵⁶ Most importantly, he donated a significant material culture collection to the Anthropological Museum of Moscow University and a zoological collection to the Zoological Museum of the Academy of Sciences.⁵⁷ The press praised his activities highly, characterising him as an idealist and an intrepid scientist: 'V. Troitskii, a former Moscow University student and now a young natural scientist, has recently returned to Moscow after travelling through Africa. This tanned, stocky young man is one of those captivating tales that life so rarely provides. Driven only by a thirst to see and learn, he made his way from Russia to the distant jungles of sunny Africa, [...] and has now returned with a huge collection of valuable specimens, notes, and impressions', while his sangfroid when dealing with 'savage' black people, whose tattoos made their faces resemble beasts (*zveropodobnye*), was also admired.⁵⁸

55 I. Puzanov, 'Ocherki Severo-Vostochnogo Sudana. Zametki i nabliudeniia naturalista', *Zemlevedenie*, 1912 (19), 1-2, pp. 163-210; 1912 (19), 3-4, pp. 113-171; 1913 (20), 4, pp. 95-125; 1914 (21), 3, pp. 37-110. For Puzanov's detailed biography cf. B. Mazurmovich, *Ivan Ivanovich Puzanov*, Moscow 1976.

56 V. Troitskii, 'Poezdka v Tsentral'noi Afriku s 21 fevralia 1912 goda do 27 marta 1914 goda', *Ezhegodnik Zoologicheskogo muzeia Imperatorskoi Akademii nauk*, 1915 (20), 2, pp. XXXI-XXXV; 'Dva goda v Tsentral'noi Afrike', *Russkoe slovo*, 29 marta (11 aprelia) 1914, p. 7; V. Troitskii, 'Dva goda v Afrike', *Vokrug sveta*, 1914, 19-20, pp. 294-296; pp. 308-310. In Soviet times he also published an educational (and recreational) book on this experience, conceived with his colleagues at the State Botanical Institute, cf. V. Troitskii, *Puteshestvie v stranu chernokozhikh*, Moscow-Leningrad 1928.

57 Cf. E. Balakhonova, 'V.V. Troitskii i ego kolleksiia v Muzee antropologii', *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta*, Seriya XXIII, 2009, 3, pp. 55-65; M. Zabrodskaia, *Russkie puteshestvoenniki po Afrike*, Moscow 1955, pp. 77-78. On Troitskii's life, cf. also M. Gremiatskii, 'Pamiati V.V. Troitskogo', *Voprosy antropologii*, 1963, 14, pp. 112-114.

58 V. Troitskii, 'Dva goda v Afrike', *Vokrug sveta*, 1914, 19, p. 294.

For his part, Nikitin finally managed to travel to German East Africa and British East Africa in 1912, in order to study the local ecosystem. A tangible result of his expedition is a biological collection that was later acquired by the State Darwin Museum in Moscow (1919-1920), while his travel accounts, aimed at a wide audience, were published in the journal *Priroda* and in the hunters' magazine *Okhotnichii vestnik*.⁵⁹

Before the disruption of World War I put an end to similar journeys, a zoological expedition led by Valentin Dogel' and Ivan Sokolov set foot in Kenya and Uganda in 1914. Like their predecessors, they had a very international background, having spent months in the most prestigious European institutions to perfect their studies. Valentin Dogel' (1882-1955), born in Kazan into the family of a prominent Baltic scientist, had completed research stays at marine biological stations in Italy, Great Britain, and Norway before graduating from Saint Petersburg University. A keen disseminator of contemporary science—he had translated from German the works of Ernst Haeckel and other scientists—he became professor of zoology at Saint Petersburg university in 1913. Sokolov graduated from the same faculty in 1909 and in the following years followed the same international path as Averintsev: after a period in Heidelberg under the supervision of Bütschli, he studied at the biological stations in Naples and Villefranche-sur-Mer.

The two scientists joined forces in order to study the land animals of East Africa, an expedition that was carried out with very modest means, but with considerable scientific preparation: both had done extensive research into the history, geography, and cultures of East Africa, and had even learnt Swahili. While it was common to sail from Odessa and pass through the Suez Canal, Dogel' and Sokolov travelled first through Europe, visiting zoological institutions in Berlin, Lyon, and Marseilles, from where they finally sailed to Mombasa where they arrived after stopping in Naples, Port Said, and Aden.⁶⁰ Although their expedition was abruptly cut short by the outbreak of the war,

59 V. Nikitin, 'Po savannam Vostochnoi Afriki', *Okhotnichii vestnik*, 1913, pp. 18-23; V. Nikitin, 'Na beregakh Viktorii Niiantsa', *Priroda*, 1914, 5. For news on Nikitin's life cf. S. Mileikovsky, 'In Memoriam of Professor Vasilij (Basil) Nikitich Nikitin', *Marine Biology*, 1973, 18, pp. 87-88.

60 The itinerary of their journey is carefully detailed in B. Val'skaia, 'Puteshestvie V.A. Dogelia i I.I. Sokolova v Keniiu i Ugandu v 1914 g.', *Strany i narody Vostoka*, 1980, 21, pp. 187-202.

they managed to collect interesting material, including a collection of photographs, naturalistic data and specimens, ethnographic items and drawings. On their return to Saint Petersburg, they planned to write three major scientific volumes, the first (and only one) of which was published in 1916 with some funding from the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics, in both Russian and English.⁶¹ In the same year Dogel' also published an educational book, *A Naturalist in East Africa*, which was intended for a wide range of readers interested in Kenya and Uganda.⁶²

With the notable exception of Averintsev, who expressed a negative view of hunting—holding the lack of regulations responsible for the endangerment of many wild species—hunting was a big part of these scientists' lives in Africa, and is often recalled in detail in their writings. As mentioned earlier, sometimes it could even be the very reason for travelling to such distant lands—if one could afford it. This was the case with the famous Russo-Polish-Ukrainian architect Vladislav Gorodetskii (Władysław Horodecki, 1863-1930),⁶³ who travelled to British East Africa between 1911 and 1912 with the express purpose of joining a safari. He cited Jules Verne and Thomas Mayne Reid, whom he had read in his childhood, as the main influence that motivated him to undertake numerous hunting expeditions to Siberia, Central Asia, Persia, and Afghanistan, none of which, unfortunately, had amazed him. Conversely, Africa was still a 'hunters' paradise' thanks to its immense natural reserves, which the Europeans had not yet managed to destroy.⁶⁴ His account is enriched by more than a hundred illustrations—drawings and valuable photographs taken during his journey.

61 V. Dogel' and I. Sokolov, *Nauchnye rezul'taty zoologicheskoi ekspeditsii prof. V.A. Dogel'ia i I.I. Sokolova v Britanskuiu Vostochnuiu Afriku i Ugandu v 1914 g.*, I, Petrograd 1916; V. Dogel' and I. Sokolov, *Scientific Results of the Zoological Expedition to British East Africa and Uganda*, I, Petrograd 1916.

62 V. Dogel', *Naturalist v Vostochnoi Afrike*, Petrograd 1916. These were their only publications on Africa before the Revolution. Sokolov's diary, kept for many years by his family, has only recently been published: I. Sokolov, *Dnevnik ekspeditsii v Keniiu i Ugandu v 1914 godu*, Saint Petersburg 1999.

63 On Gorodetskii (Horodecki) cf. D. Sosnowska, 'Beyond the Limits – eccentric H.', in A. Kobylińska and M. Falski (ed. by), *Architects and their Societies. Cultural Study on the Habsburg-Slavic Area (1861-1938)*, Warsaw 2021, pp. 211-236.

64 V. Gorodetskii, *V dzhungliakh Afriki. Dnevnik okhotnika*, Kyiv 1914, pp. 1-2.

Theatres of War

As noted above, the Italo-Abyssinian War and the Anglo-Boer War saw the participation of Russian military and medical personnel, either sent by Russian institutions or volunteering. Oftentimes, the lines between soldier/doctor/explorer/geographer were blurred, and these actors played various roles whilst on the African soil, in some cases even reinventing themselves.

Nikolai Leont'ev, who had accompanied Eliseev to Ethiopia and largely financed the expedition, continued to be entangled in Ethiopian affairs long after Eliseev's death. Indeed, he was directly involved in the establishment of diplomatic relations between Russia and Abyssinia, accompanying the delegates of the first Abyssinian mission to Russia (1895). With the secret goal of gaining military support against the Italians, the official purpose of the mission was to honour the late Alexander III with a gold crown, a ceremony that was widely publicised in the press and resulted in the Ethiopian delegates being awarded the Order of Saint Aleksandr Nevskii and the Imperial Order of Saint Anne.⁶⁵ In the years that followed, Leont'ev became quite close to Menelik II, who in 1899 commissioned him an expedition to Lake Rudolf (now Lake Turkana), from which the officer brought back a significant collection of material culture that was exhibited at the 1900 Paris Exposition and later acquired by the Kunstkamera. Leont'ev's activities soon turned quite murky: during the exploration of Lake Turkana, 'to help Leontiev raise money from European investors for the exploitation of the Lower Omo basin, Menilek sealed an edict on 10 June 1897 assigning part of these still unconquered lands to him as a fief. [...] Leontiev bribed the emperor's secretary [...] to sign a more expansive French document which purported to be the translation of Menilek's decree in Amharic. The forgery gave Leontiev a concession to prospect throughout the empire for gold'.⁶⁶ From archival sources, it appears that Leont'ev had contacted Nicholas II, offering to donate to the Russian government the lands Menelik had given him to administer. It was soon

65 Cf. R. Viatkina, A. Davidson, and G. Tsypkin (ed. by), *Rossii i Afrika. Dokumenty i materialy*, I, Moscow 1999, pp. 54-55. For an account of the celebrations see for instance the 1895 *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia* issue number 1380.

66 R. Caulk, *'Between the Jaws of Hyenas': A Diplomatic History of Ethiopia (1876-1896)*, Wiesbaden 2002, p. 648.

discovered that he didn't have the right to cede these lands to Russia; when Menelik found out about the forged letter, he wrote directly to Nicholas II explaining the deception. The officer was forced to leave the country for good in 1902 in the wake of a well-documented scandal that left the Russians bewildered.⁶⁷

Partly linked to Leont'ev was the fate of Evgenii Senigov (1872-?), who had followed him to Ethiopia in 1898. Senigov came from a noble family of Saint Petersburg and had found employment in the army, serving in Turkestan between 1894 and 1897. Joining Leont'ev in Ethiopia proved to be a truly life-changing experience for him. When his superior was forced to return to Russia, he decided to remain in Menelik's service, settle permanently in Ethiopia and 'go native': he began to dress in Ethiopian fashion, lived in a traditional hut and married a local girl. His dream of founding a commune inspired by the Tolstoyan movement and financed through the trade of Ethiopian coffee with Russia soon failed, and Senigov devoted his life to painting, producing a collection of landscapes and portraits that are now kept, along with his diary, at the Kunstkamera. Senigov eventually returned to Russia in the 1920s, where he pleaded (in vain) with the Soviet authorities to re-establish relations with Ethiopia and even gave a public lecture at the Polytechnic Museum in Moscow on 'modern Abyssinia', discussing the geography, ethnography, and political order of the country (1924).⁶⁸ His subsequent fate remains unknown.

Leonid Artamonov (1859-1932), on the other hand, embodied the soldier/geographer type. A military engineer and general born in the Kherson Governorate into an impoverished noble family, he began his

67 Historical documents on this episode, Menelik's letter to Nicholas II and Leont'ev's plea to the government included, can be read in Viatkina, Davidson, and Tsyppin (ed. by), *Rossiiia i Afrika*, pp. 224-231. See also E. Iakovleva, *Kolonial'nyi razdel Afriki i pozitsiia Rossii (vtoraia polovina XIX-1914 g.)*, PhD dissertation, Irkutsk 2004, p. 185. Written documents of Leont'ev, including his diary, served as the main source for the 1898 book *The Emperor Menelik and his War against Italy* by Russian colonel, writer, and military historian Iulii Elets. Cf. Iu. Elets, *Imperator Menelik i voina ego s Italiei*, Saint Petersburg 1898.

68 The plan of the lecture, along with two pleas, is published in A. Davidson and S. Mazov (ed. by), *Rossiiia i Afrika. Dokumenty i materialy*, II, Moscow 1999, pp. 13-16. On Senigov cf. also Z. Pugach and S. Chernetsov, 'Evgenii Vsevolodovich Senigov—russkii tolstovets v Efiopii i ego kartiny', *Kunstkamera: etnograficheskie tetradi*, 2003, 13, pp. 288-295. His paintings can be seen on the Kunstkamera website, <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/en/entity/ALBUM/1242182491>

military career by serving in the Caucasus and in Central Asia, and taking part in the 1880-1881 campaign to conquer a large area of present-day Turkmenistan, which culminated in the Battle of Geok Tepe. Passionate about geography since childhood, he undertook several journeys in the areas where he served (Turkey, Afghanistan, Iran, Central Asia) and documented his findings: indeed, his lecture on the Akhal-Teke oasis in Central Asia earned him the title of fellow of the IRGO (1882). He arrived in Ethiopia as a member of the first Russian diplomatic mission, but his activities went beyond mere diplomacy: he studied the Djibouti coastline and then, in 1898, travelled west to draw up a proper map of the Sobat drainage basin. This trip was part of an expedition organised by the Ethiopian court to extend the country's borders against British and French claims to areas where neither Europeans nor Ethiopians had been before.⁶⁹ In addition to detailed ethnographic observations, Artamonov collected specimens of insects and plants, as well as precise hypsometric and meteorological data. Even though the IRGO did not fund Artamonov's explorations in the Sobat basin, it published one of his lectures in its annual report.⁷⁰ For his contribution to the geographical knowledge of Ethiopia, as well as the Caucasus, Iran, and Central Asia, Artamonov was awarded the Litke gold medal by the IRGO in 1899, and also obtained recognition for the other members of the expedition (including a 'Galla' [Oromo] translator, a Swiss explorer, and a French explorer).⁷¹

Back in Russia, Artamonov was also involved in spreading knowledge about the Anglo-Boer War and the general situation in South Africa: he wrote articles, edited a twenty-one-volume collection of material

69 Cf. Zbrodskaja, *Russkie puteshestvenniki*, pp. 66-68; Rait, *Russkie ekspeditsii*, pp. 263-267.

70 L. Artamonov, 'Kratkii referat doklada o puteshestvii v Abissiniuu', in *Otchet geograficheskogo obshchestva za 1898*, Saint Petersburg 1899, pp. 24-27. During his lifetime only one other publication on Ethiopia appeared (cf. L. Artamonov, 'Russkie v Abissinii', *Vestnik obshchestva revnitatei voennykh znaniy*, 1899, 18). It was not until the 1970s that his complete writings on Ethiopia were published, cf. L. Artamonov, *Cherez Efiopiiu k beregam Belogo Nila: Otchet i stat'i ob ekspeditsii 1897-1899*, Moscow 1979.

71 B. Val'skaia, *Vklad*, p. 15. On the occasion of his award, an account of all his achievements was published in the IRGO annual report of 1899, cf. A. Bol'shev, 'O geograficheskikh issledovaniakh deistvitel'nogo chlena IRGO polkovnika general'nogo shtaba L.K. Artamonova', in *Prilozheniia k otchetu imperatorskogo russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva za 1899*, Saint Petersburg 1900, pp. 4-9.

from the international press on the war, and gave public lectures meant to explain the circumstances of the conflict, the geography of South Africa, and the battles that had taken place.⁷² First-hand accounts of the Anglo-Boer conflict, written by military and medical volunteers, were soon published, too. In quite a departure from the usually male-driven writing about black Africa, one of these accounts was authored by a woman, Sof'a Iz''edinova, who volunteered as a nurse in the Russian-Dutch Ambulance.⁷³ Apart from what is reported in the memoir, very little is known about her or her upbringing, though it appears that she went on to join other battlefields and was even awarded several silver medals for bravery during the Russo-Japanese War.⁷⁴ The objectivity of her memoirs has been questioned, particularly given her critical stance on the Russian volunteers and her extremely positive portrayal, on the other hand, of lieutenant colonel Evgenii Maksimov. This is further compounded by the fact that Iz''edinova dwelled on tactics, battles and politics, highly unusual for a nurse's memoirs, as well as the fact that she recounted events she was not present at. Apparently, she resorted not only to other written sources, but also to conversations she had with witnesses, including Maksimov himself.⁷⁵

The fact that she was a woman did not go unnoticed, nor was it downplayed by the press; instead, her gender was used to explain the apparent affinity of women to the Boer cause. A review of her book published in the military newspaper *Russkii invalid* pointed out that 'Not long ago [...] we discussed a book by the Boer leader Christiaan de Wet, translated from the original Dutch by a Russian woman, Mrs Polovtseva. Now we have the work of a Russian woman again, this time an original work dedicated to the same Boers. Perhaps the almost

72 Cf. *Sbornik materialov po Anglo-Burskoi voine v Iuzhnoi Afrike. 1899-1900*, ed. by L. Artamonov, I-XXI, Saint Petersburg 1900-1905; N. Voropaeva, R. Viatkina, and G. Shubin (ed. by), *Anglo-burskaia voina 1899-1902 gg. Po arkhivnym materialam i vospominaniiam ochevidtsev*, Moscow 2001, p. 177.

73 S. Iz''edinova, *Neskol'ko mesiatsev u burov. Vospominaniia sestry miloserdii*, Saint Petersburg 1903. English translation: S. Izedinova, *A Few Months with the Boers. The War Reminiscences of a Russian Nursing Sister*, Johannesburg 1977.

74 *Russkii invalid*, 18.12.1904, p. 4; *Russkii invalid*, 14.07.1905, p. 6. On her journey East cf. S. Iz''edinova, 'Iz zapisok sestry miloserdii', *Russkii invalid*, 06.04.1904, p. 5.

75 B. Gorelik, 'The Role of Russian Volunteers in the Collapse of the International Legion in the South African War', *Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies*, 2021 (49), 2, pp. 29-41, <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-militaria-v49-n2-a3>

simultaneous appearance of two works by women dedicated to the long-suffering Boers is no coincidence? After all, a woman's heart is more sensitive than a man's, more sympathetic to the suffering of others'.⁷⁶ The review failed to mention another memoir by a Red Cross nurse, Ol'ga Baumgarten, who had a similar life trajectory to Iz'edinova: indeed, she later nursed during the Russo-Japanese War and wrote a book about it.⁷⁷ Yet women, though a part of it, were hardly the main force behind Russia's sudden enthusiasm for South Africa, which had a remarkable impact on society as a whole.⁷⁸ Evidently, the vast majority of volunteers were men, as were the authors of subsequent memoirs, articles and essays. Among them, the figure of Evgenii Avgustus (1874-1914) certainly stands out, not least because his writings, despite their relative lack of commercial success, circulated not only in Russia, but also in Europe. Of modest Latvian origins—though he Russified his surname from 'Augustus' to 'Avgustus', converted from Lutheranism to

76 'Neskol'ko mesiatsev u burov. Retsenziia', *Russkii invalid*, 23.04.1903, pp. 2-3 (p. 2). A curious case is that of another book apparently written by a woman, Mariia Z., set during the Anglo-Boer War and recounting the adventures of a Russian woman who, disguised as a man, joins the volunteers in South Africa in the hope of being reunited with her husband. Cf. Mariia Z., *Kak ia byla dobrovol'tsem na Transvaale*, Kyiv 1901. Researchers are uncertain as to the genre of the book (a work of fiction? A fictionalised memoir?), and have tried in vain to discover the real identity of the author. According to Apollon Davidson and Irina Filatova, it could be a pseudonym for Ol'ga Popova, a writer, publisher, and translator, who had at least planned to join a Red Cross unit to help the Boers and had sent an official request to the authorities. However, this hypothesis still needs to be verified. Cf. A. Davidson and I. Filatova, *The Russians and the Anglo-Boer War*, Cape Town 1998, pp. 123-129; RGVIA, f. 12651, d. 1392, l. 78, quoted in Voropaeva, Viatkina, and Shubin (ed. by), *Anglo-burskaia voina*, p. 513.

77 O. Baumgarten, *Vospominaniia o Transvaale sestry miloserdiia obshchiny sv. Georgiia*, Saint Petersburg 1901; O. Baumgarten, *V osazhdennom Port-Arture*, Saint Petersburg 1906; O. Baumgarten, *Artur pal!... Dnevnik sestry miloserdiia*, Saint Petersburg 1907. The newspaper *Russkii invalid* published positive reviews of her memoirs of the siege of Port Arthur, the proceeds of which were intended for the Sisters of Mercy's shelters. Cf. *Russkii invalid*, 24.12.1905, p. 4; 15.01.1906, p. 4.

78 As summarised by Boris Gorelik, 'In Russia, streets were renamed after Boer generals. Services in honour of President Kruger were held in Russian churches. Orchestras played the national anthem of the Transvaal. In pubs and restaurants, patrons had heated arguments about the war. Circuses capitalised on the popularity of the Boers by launching special revues. Writings by burgher leaders were published in Russian, essays and brochures came out in various cities. A pro-Boer folk song, "Transvaal, Transvaal, my country", emerged in those years', B. Gorelik (ed. by), *A Russian on Commando. The Boer War Experience of Yevgeny Avgustus*, Johannesburg 2022, p. XV. Cf. also Davidson and Filatova, *The Russians*, especially Part II (pp. 165-257).

Orthodoxy, and described himself as a Russian nationalist, monarchist, and imperialist—he embarked on a military career and held the rank of second lieutenant at the time of the Anglo-Boer War. He decided to volunteer on the Boers' side mainly to escape the dull life of the garrison, and hoped (in vain) to rise through the army ranks. In fact, there are no official records of his activities in South Africa—volunteers did so in a private capacity, thus he was not in any way a representative of the Russian army. On the verge of poverty, he managed to earn some money as a correspondent for two newspapers, *Varshavskii dnevniki/Dziennik Warszawski* and *Novoe vremia*, later republishing several articles in a separate edition.⁷⁹ His writings were very well received in the military circles, and were partially translated into French (in *La Revue hebdomadaire*) and Polish—yet the memoirs remained unfinished, and it is still not clear whether the manuscript for a second part has been lost, or whether it never existed. Avgustus would eventually attend courses in Oriental languages (Arabic, Turkish, and Persian) run by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for military officers, hoping to be posted to Central Asia. Yet the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War and the crisis with China in 1908 saw him sent to the Far East instead, before World War I brought him back again to Poland, where he died fighting the Germans.

Not only did the Red Cross join the conflict in South Africa, it also played a significant role in Ethiopia, bringing to the country several doctors who remained there for an extended period of time, as well as soldiers and officers to serve as their escort. The decision to send a contingent to Ethiopia was taken in March 1896, soon after the battle of Adwa, by the Red Cross Directorate, which allocated 100,000 roubles to provide medical assistance to both Abyssinians and Italians. The expedition was comprised of sixty-one men, including doctors and students of medicine, nurses, a hieromonk, and two translators. Following some disagreements with the Italian authorities, who refused Russian assistance and prohibited the passage of the mission, the Russian contingent finally arrived in Djibouti, then Harar and Addis Ababa, establishing temporary medical stations *en route*. In Addis Ababa, a hospital was founded in a European building that was quickly

79 E. Avgustus, *Vospominaniia uchastnika anglo-burskoi voyny*, Warsaw 1902. For information on Avgustus' biography cf. Gorelik (ed. by), *A Russian on Commando*. Cf. also Davidson and Filatova, *The Russians*, pp. 24-30.

renovated for its new purpose. The mission was a success, and Menelik requested that some of the personnel remain for longer than anticipated.⁸⁰

Once back in Russia, many of the participants published their travel notes or gave lectures at the IRGO in Saint Petersburg.⁸¹ In the following years, they returned to Ethiopia as part of other expeditions, such as the Russian diplomatic mission headed by Petr Vlasov (1897-1899).⁸² It featured colourful and interesting characters, such as the Cossack Petr Krasnov (1869-1947), who led the military convoy responsible for ensuring the mission's safety. Krasnov, who would eventually join the Whites during the Russian Civil War and support Nazi Germany in exile, also enjoyed a successful literary career: with regard to Ethiopia, he published not only a travelogue, but also short stories and novellas.⁸³ But there were also the doctors Nikolai Brovtsyn (1865-1913), a hereditary nobleman who had studied medicine at the Imperial Military Medical Academy and, after spending approximately six years in Ethiopia, went

80 Cf. the document 'Sanitarnyi otriad Rossiiskogo obshchestva Krasnogo Kresta v Efiopii. 1896 g.', in Viatkina, Davidson, and Tsyarkin (ed. by), *Rossia i Afrika*, pp. 204-207. For other documents on the activities of the Red Cross in Ethiopia cf. *ibid.*, pp. 204-221. The 'hybridity' of the Russian Red Cross, which combined 'the features of a state structure and a non-governmental organisation' has also been noted, especially with regard to the fact that 'although [it] was an autonomous body, with its own budget, employees, and priorities, it nevertheless acted like an arm of the government and an affiliate of the War Ministry. [...] It was clear to all concerned that the Russian Red Cross would represent the Russian state in Ethiopia, rather than Russian civic initiative'. Cf. R. Chowdhury, 'Russian Medical Diplomacy in Ethiopia, 1896-1913', in A. Winterbottom and F. Tesfaye (ed. by), *Histories of Medicine and Healing in the Indian Ocean World*, II, Basingstoke 2015, pp. 115-145 (p. 117), https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137567581_5

81 Among them was Petr Shchusev ('Doklad g. Shchuseva', *Izvestiia IRGO*, 1897, 33, pp. 449-452), along with feldsher Nikolai Patsukevich ('Poezdka v Kharrar. Etnograficheskie nabludeniiia v Iuzhnoi Abissinii', *Izvestiia IRGO*, 1897, 33, p. 455). Patsukevich had received financial support from the IRGO for his research in Ethiopia, cf. *Otchet o deistviakh imperatorskogo russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva za 1896 g.*, Saint Petersburg 1897, p. 24. Accounts were also published by Fedor Krindach (*Russkii kavalerist v Abissinii*, Saint Petersburg 1897; *Ocherk promyshlennosti i torgovli Abissinii*, Saint Petersburg 1897), David Glinkii (*Kharrar i ego obitatelei*, Grodno 1897; *Zhizn' russkogo sanitarnogo otriada v Kharrare*, Grodno 1899), Petr Shchusev (*Vrachebnye sovery dlia abissintsev*, Saint Petersburg 1897), Leonid Perfil'ev ('Somaliitsy. Antropologicheskie i etnograficheskie nabludeniiia pri puteshestvii v Abissiniiu', *Russkii antropologicheskii zhurnal*, 1901, 3-4, pp. 177-183).

82 Cf. the documents published in Viatkina, Davidson, and Tsyarkin (ed. by), *Rossia i Afrika*, pp. 96-151.

83 Cf. for instance P. Krasnov, *Kazaki v Abissinii* (a previous version had appeared with the title *Kazaki v Afrike* in 1899); P. Krasnov, *Liubov' abissinki: povesti i rasskazy*, Saint Petersburg 1903.

on to publish the most comprehensive Russian study on the anthropology of 'Abyssinians' (1909); and Mikhail Lebedinskii (1862-?), who played a key role in establishing the first Ethiopian hospital and spent seven years in the country with his wife and young daughter, writing reports, taking photographs, and collecting ethnographic objects.⁸⁴

Many of them were also responsible for further travels and explorations into the country. On the way home, for example, the military doctor Petr Shchusev (1871-1934) took an unusual route to visit the ruins of the ancient city of Aksum (1898), a journey that can be considered an expedition to northern Ethiopia in its own right.⁸⁵ But perhaps the most renowned and peculiar example of this tendency is Aleksandr Bulatovich (1870-1919), whose life proves how fleeting the boundaries between being a military officer, an explorer, a writer, and ultimately an orthodox monk with missionary purposes could be. Born in Orel into a wealthy family, Bulatovich moved to Saint Petersburg where he studied at the Imperial Aleksandr Lyceum before joining the military as a cornet. After arriving for the first time in Ethiopia as part of the Russian Red Cross mission, he travelled there on three further occasions (1897-1898; 1899-1900; 1911) in various capacities (the last time he was already a hieromonk and was no longer associated with governmental bodies).⁸⁶ Famous for being the first European to reach Kaffa, he took part in one of Menelik's expeditions to the former kingdom, which had been annexed by Abyssinia. Back in Russia, he delivered a lecture at the General Assembly of the IRGO (January 1899), and published *With the Armies of Menelik II* (1900) along with other works.⁸⁷ A few years later, in 1903, he relinquished his military career,

84 N. Brovtsyn, *Materialy dlia antropologii Efiopii. Abissintsy provintsii Shoa*, Saint Petersburg 1909; M. Lebedinskii, 'Antropometricheskie izmereniia u gallasov', *Russkii vrach*, 1911, 46, pp. 1772-1773; M. Lebedinskii, 'Pervyi gospiial v Abissinii', *Istoricheskii vestnik*, 1912, 130, pp. 811-826. Lebedinskii's collections is held by the Kunstkamera. Cf. <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/OBJECT?person=3528989>. On Brovtsyn, cf. also S. Chernetsov, 'Efiopskii dnevniki russkogo vracha (1898-1899 gg.)', *Vestnik Vostochnogo instituta: Acta Institutionis Orientalis*, 1999 (5), 2, pp. 4-42.

85 An account of this exploratory trip was published in P. Shchusev, 'K istokam Golubogo Nila', *Izvestiia IRGO*, 1900, 36, pp. 198-217.

86 On Bulatovich, cf. for instance M. K. Mirzeler, 'Reading Ethiopia through Russian Eyes: Political and Racial Sentiments in the Travel Writings of Alexander Bulatovich, 1896-1897', *History in Africa*, 2005, 32, pp. 281-294; E. Chach, N.S. Gumilev i A.K. Bulatovich: *puteshestviia v Efiopiiu v kontekste serebriannogo veka*, in *Orientalizm/Oksidentalizm: iazyki kul'tur i iazyki ikh opisaniia*, Moscow 2012, pp. 226-240.

87 A. Bulatovich, *Ot Entoto do reki Baro. Otchet o puteshestvii v iugo-zapadnye oblasti*

took orders and changed his name to Antonii. His final trip to Ethiopia aimed to solidify the Russian Orthodox Spiritual Mission's influence in the country: he even proposed building a Russian monastery near Addis Ababa. Although the project failed, it clearly demonstrated that 'the Russian Orthodox Church had less of a foreign missionary history than did the Roman Catholic or Protestant churches, but it did have a long tradition of following the political power', which it also did with regard to Ethiopia, exaggerating the similarity between the two churches: 'That both churches are called "Orthodox" [...] along with certain similarities in the rites and appearances of their respective priests, helped those who sought to establish links obscure the significant doctrinal differences between the two'.⁸⁸

Playing Colonial

As well as intervening in conflicts in which other Western powers were fighting for control of parts of Africa, the Russians also tried to establish their own colonies on African territory. However, in these cases the institutions kept their support hidden and were ready to disengage from these ventures the moment they failed.

An interesting example is that of Stefan Szolc-Rogozński (1861-1896) who led an expedition to Cameroon between 1882 and 1884, a peculiar case for many reasons. Firstly, Szolc-Rogozński was a Pole, born in the Russian partition of Poland. Although he was technically a subject of the tsarist empire and served in the Imperial Russian Navy, his life and activities are generally studied in the context of Polish society.⁸⁹

efiopskoi imperii v 1896-1897 gg., Saint Petersburg 1897; A. Bulatovich, *S voiskami Menelika II. Dnevnik pokhoda iz Efiopii k ozeru Rudol'fa*, Saint Petersburg 1900.

88 T. Rupprecht, 'Orthodox Internationalism: State and Church in Modern Russia and Ethiopia', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 2018 (60), 1, pp. 212-235 (pp. 216, 215), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417517000469>

89 Cf. H. Baginski, 'The Sixtieth Anniversary of Rogozinski's Expedition to the Cameroons', *The Geographical Journal*, 1944 (103), 1-2, pp. 72-75; M. Rhode, 'Zivilisierungsmissionen und Wissenschaft. Polen colonial?', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 2013, 39, pp. 5-34, <https://doi.org/10.13109/gege.2013.39.1.5>; J. Daheur, '"They Handle Negroes Just Like Us": German Colonialism in Cameroon in the Eyes of Poles (1885-1914)', *European Review*, 2018 (26), 3, pp. 492-502, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798718000194>; I. Tofiño Quesada, 'Stefan Szolc-Rogozński: A Polish Traveler in the Gulf of Guinea', *Estudios de Asia y África*, 2021 (56), 1, pp. 125-150, <https://doi.org/10.24201/ea.v56i1.2633>. In these publications, he is referred to

Secondly, Cameroon is situated in an area that was not of interest to Russia: it is indeed the only expedition to be led there by a subject of the Russian Empire and sponsored, at least virtually, by the IRGO. Thirdly, it is clear that, apart from a number of letters held in the IRGO archives (to this day unpublished),⁹⁰ all of his written (and even oral) accounts of his African experience were aimed at a completely different audience, one that was either Polish,⁹¹ or 'European',⁹² but certainly not Russian. This could be explained by the fact that one of Szolc-Rogozieński's ideological aims in leading the expedition was to 'give Poles a place among the great nineteenth-century European discoverers',⁹³ at a time when Polish identity was constantly being negotiated. A lively debate had indeed arisen between his supporters—including Henryk Sienkiewicz, Bolesław Prus, and Filip Sulimierski, who helped him raise money for the journey and even 'made an appeal [...] to guarantee that the fruits of the first Polish geographical discoveries in Africa stayed in the hands of Poles and not of others'—and his opponents, like the writer Aleksander Świętochowski, who challenged the expedition's moral principles and argued that Poles should focus on exploring

as a 'Pole', his expedition as a 'Polish expedition', and the involvement of the IRGO is never mentioned, nor is the fact that the IRGO archives still hold some of the letters he sent from Africa (cf. Val'skaia, *Vklad*, pp. 8-9 for specific archival references). Conversely, in Russian scholarship there is no mention of Szolc-Rogozieński's involvement in the dispute between Britain and Germany over Cameroon, nor of his ties with the Royal Geographical Society or the Société de Géographie, or of his publications in their journals.

- 90 The fact that this material remains unpublished is seen as the main reason why Szolc-Rogozieński and his travels are not widely known in Russia (see Gornung and Oleinikov, *Geograficheskoe izuchenie*, pp. 59-60). As with Junker, the name of Szolc-Rogozieński has recently begun to reappear in Russian scholarship, which seems to construct his image as one of the brave and loyal servants of his great homeland (Russia); cf. B. Semiannikov, 'Stefan Liudvigovich Shol'ts-Rogozinskii i ego ekspeditsiia v Kamerun', *Mezhdunarodnyi zhurnal teorii i nauchnoi praktiki*, 2019 (2), 1, pp. 59-64.
- 91 He published his travel notes in Polish: cf. Rogozieński, *Pod równikiem*, Kraków 1886; Rogozieński, *Zegluga wzdłuż brzegów Zachodniej Afryki na lugrze "Lucji-Małgorzacie" w r. 1882/3*, Warsaw 1886.
- 92 See, for instance, S. Szolc-Rogozieński, *Voyage à la côte occidentale d'Afrique dans la région des Camerouns. Conférence faite à la Société de géographie commerciale du Havre, le 24 novembre 1885*, Le Havre 1885; S. Szolc-Rogozieński, 'El viajero polaco Rogozinski en Fernando Poo', *Boletín de la Sociedad Geográfica de Madrid*, 1890, 29, pp. 60-72.
- 93 L. A. Ureña Valerio, *Colonial Fantasies, Imperial Realities. Race Science and the Making of Polishness on the Fringes of the German Empire, 1840-1920*, Athens 2019, p. 119, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv224tzkd>

their own country's geography, which was still not well known, rather than spending a fortune overseas.⁹⁴ Indeed, while the expedition was officially approved and sanctioned by the IRGO, it was funded only through Szolc-Rogozński's own resources and a public collection.⁹⁵

However, an examination of the Russian popular press of the time reveals references to the expedition that labelled it as 'Russian' (*russkaia*), thus incorporating it into the national context. Notwithstanding these few timely responses, Szolc-Rogozński's endeavour was practically never mentioned again.⁹⁶ The subsequent lack of interest in the explorer's discoveries and the absence of publicity on the part of the IRGO could be the result of the predicament which Szolc-Rogozński found himself in once he arrived in Cameroon. As a matter of fact, he became embroiled in the disputes between Britain and Germany over the colony, and even acted as an agent of the British Crown. As such, he supported and facilitated Britain's claims to the territory, only to be subsequently disavowed by the British during peace negotiations with Germany, which had demanded the removal of Szolc-Rogozński from the colony.⁹⁷ Consequently, 'the Russian Empire took no political responsibility for Szolc-Rogozński's acts in Africa. [...] the affair was declared a "Polish" one, and all ties with Imperial Russia were severed'.⁹⁸ Moreover, the expedition may have had the unofficial motive of establishing an independent Polish colony, which certainly would not have suited the tsarist empire. In fact, Szolc-Rogozński's writings make no mention of this endeavour, and it was not until the interwar period that it came to light through the writings of Leopold Janikowski,

94 Ibid., p. 120.

95 Gornung and Oleinikov, *Geograficheskoe izuchenie*, p. 57.

96 Cf. 'Geografiia, etnografiia i puteshestviia', *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia*, 1882, 695, p. 380: 'An expedition to Central Africa is being arranged with the involvement of our Imperial Geographical Society. The expedition is being organised by a member of the Society, Mr Shol'ts-Rogozinskii, who is known for his previous travels. It will explore a little-known region of equatorial Africa [...]. The expedition is being funded by the participants' contributions of 10,000 roubles each, except for Mr. Shol'ts-Rogozinskii who has contributed 25,000 roubles'. Cf. also 'Russkaia ekspeditsiia v Tsentral'nuu Afriku. Liuger "Liuchiia-Margarita"', *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia*, 1882, 697, pp. 410-411, 420.

97 This quite complicated and convoluted sequence of events is carefully detailed in J. A. Betley, 'Stefan Szolc Rogozinski and the Anglo-German Rivalry in the Cameroons', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 1969 (5), 1, pp. 101-136.

98 Ureña Valerio, *Colonial Fantasies*, pp. 134-135.

a member of the expedition.⁹⁹ It is, therefore, subject to controversy: Janikowski's publisher, the Maritime and Colonial League, was known to promote nationalism and colonial interventions, and therefore it may have had a vested interest in overstating Szolc-Rogozieński's colonial ambitions. Nevertheless, the heated debate surrounding the expedition in the Polish press at the time has been suggested as hinting at the possibility of colonial expansion.¹⁰⁰

In terms of scientific practices, Szolc-Rogozieński's expedition resulted in the construction of a scientific station on Mondoleh Island, which the participants had acquired from the natives. They also recorded the languages spoken by the various peoples, and discovered a cataract on the Mungo River, as well as two lakes. They informed the IRGO of these results and asked for money to continue their research, but the money never came.¹⁰¹ Moreover, they collected many ethnographical and anthropological materials, which they subsequently sent to the Polish lands and which became instrumental in the foundation of the ethnographical museums in Warsaw and Kraków. Interestingly, and unlike similar collections brought to Russia by other travellers and explorers in the same period, the Polish one also comprised a number of skulls, which Szolc-Rogozieński donated to the physician and anthropologist Izydor Kopernicki for future studies. According to the *Kurjer Warszawski* in 1886, they also brought back 'four savage black women' to be displayed during their lectures, whose fates remain unknown.¹⁰²

Similar enterprises directed instead towards Ethiopia certainly attracted more attention and were familiar even to the general public. In 1886 the satirical journal *Budil'nik* dedicated one of its covers to the adventurer Nikolai Ashinov (1856-1902) who, upon returning from Ethiopia, was labelled sarcastically 'hero of the day'. Ashinov's portrayal—riding an ostrich and accompanied by two other adventurers and two emaciated 'Abyssinians'—satirised the press coverage of his return from Ethiopia with gifts for the tsar, including a live ostrich and

99 Cf. in particular his travel notes, L. Janikowski, *W dżunglach Afryki*, Warsaw 1936.

100 Ureña Valerio, *Colonial Fantasies*, p. 124.

101 Val'skaia, *Vklad*, pp. 8-9.

102 Ureña Valerio, *Colonial Fantasies*, pp. 128-129. Szolc-Rogozieński organised two more expeditions to Africa without even attempting to obtain the IRGO's support. The first was to Fernando Po Island (now Bioko), undertaken with his wife, the writer Helena Janina Boguska (1887-1890); the second was to Egypt (1892-1893).

two young natives, a boy and a girl, the latter of whom was, according to Ashinov, none other than the niece of Yohannes IV. The short piece accompanying the drawing concluded with the ironic remark 'How strange that nobody has yet made Ashinov the hero of a novel in the style of Cooper or Mayne-Reid!'.¹⁰³



Fig. 1.2 *Budil'nik*, 1886, 32, front cover.

103 *Budil'nik*, 1886, 32, front cover and p. 377. Ashinov claimed to have received the gifts from Yohannes IV himself. He stated, moreover, that the ostrich was just one of the many animals he was supposed to return with—including a lion—though they had all perished during the journey to Russia. This claim, like the one regarding the identity of the Ethiopian girl, has been deemed highly implausible. Cf. V. Panaev, 'Iz vospominanii', *Russkaia starina*, 1906, 11, pp. 412-442 (p. 429).

Indeed, Ashinov was already well known for his shady ventures, such as his failed attempt to establish a Cossack settlement on the Black Sea coast, for which he was soon charged with misappropriating government funds. After fleeing Russia for Constantinople, Ashinov started to consider the idea of creating a Cossack colony in Ethiopia. He visited the country from 1885 to 1886, returning with the above-mentioned gifts for Alexander III and a proposal to lead an expedition to establish a colony named 'New Moscow'. With the support of the Holy Synod and the approval of the tsar for preliminary reconnaissance, Ashinov set off for Ethiopia with approximately 150 Cossacks, including women and children, in 1888. Settling in the abandoned fort of Sagallo, they soon triggered a reaction from the French stationed nearby. After an international scandal and great publicity, the attempt ended in complete failure and Ashinov was disavowed by all his previous supporters (1889).¹⁰⁴ The expedition, however, is significant beyond the figure of Ashinov because it highlights the interests of the Russian Church—through the figure of Hieromonk Paisii, who was tasked with spreading Russian Orthodoxy in Ethiopia and other parts of Africa—and of the Russian merchants, who were looking for new markets and saw Ethiopia's position as particularly favourable. By 1913, the doctor Aleksandr Kokhanovskii, who at this point had been stationed there for several years, would even urge the establishment of successful trade:

It is currently difficult to determine the capacity of the Abyssinian market; it is growing rapidly in response to increasing European demand for raw materials [...]. In addition to cotton fabrics, Abyssinia requires kerosene, sugar, alcohol, timber, matches, flour, and iron—precisely the products that Russia is interested in trading. Russia will trade with Abyssinia sooner or later, but it is better to be at the front of the queue than at the back. [...] Russia [...] consumes large quantities of products from tropical climates. We have no colonies in the tropical belt. It is, of course, more profitable for Russia to trade with tropical countries itself than with foreign colonies [...]. Abyssinia is a country where the cream has not yet been skimmed off. And Russia has the same right to it as anyone else, especially since it is not seeking territorial or political advantages here [...].¹⁰⁵

104 Cf. for instance P. J. Rollins, 'Imperial Russia's African Colony', *Russian Review*, 1968 (27), 4, pp. 432–451; A. Lunochkin, "Ataman vol'nykh kazakov" Nikolai Ashinov i ego deiatel'nost', Volgograd 1999. Documents on the Western reception of this enterprise are published in Viatkina, Davidson, and Tsyppkin (ed. by), *Rossiiia i Afrika*, pp. 61–70.

105 *Vrach rossiiskoi diplomaticheskoi Missii v Addis-Abebe A.I. Kokhanovskii o kharaktere*

For these features, scholars have found that the typological characteristics of Ashinov's expedition actually coincide with the initial stages of colonial expansion by Western powers.¹⁰⁶

Unsurprisingly, another, more cautious attempt was organised soon after. This time, rather than by a hothead like Ashinov, it was led by Viktor Mashkov (1858-1932), a lieutenant who had been present during Ashinov's expedition acting as a correspondent for the newspaper *Novoe vremia*. Backed by the Ministry of War, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Holy Synod, he was tasked with observing Ethiopia's economy and its relations with neighbouring countries and Western powers, as well as with bringing the respective churches closer together. There were no plans for any further attempts at establishing Russian colonies in the region. Mashkov led two separate expeditions (in 1889 and 1891), the latter of which was also supported by the IRGO, of which he was elected a member. Both expeditions were overall successful, despite Mashkov's occasional missteps, which caused the appointed Hieromonk, Tikhon, to return to Russia earlier than expected, as well as the condemnation from the Ministry of War. Nevertheless, Mashkov's activities and writings were highly praised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who employed him after his resignation from the military. Alongside his essays, usually signed with the pseudonym 'V. Fedorov', he is also responsible for a conspicuous collection of 85 ethnographic objects stored, for the most part, in the Anthropological Museum of Moscow University.¹⁰⁷

rusko-efiopskikh otnoshenii i ob interesakh Rossii v Efiopii, in Viatkina, Davidson, and Tsyppin (ed. by), *Rossia i Afrika*, pp. 147-151 (pp. 149-151). The fact that the Russians were considering Ethiopia as a potential new market is corroborated by other sources. In her dissertation, Elena Iakovleva cites Nikolai Leont'ev ('Russia has all the necessary data to transform the north-eastern part of Africa into its own market'), Konstantin Zviagin ('Russia can hardly find a more suitable market for its commodities than Abyssinia'), and the newspaper *Moskovskie vedomosti* ('There is no country in Africa more suitable for colonisation than Abyssinia—it is the African Switzerland'), E. Iakovleva, *Kolonial'nyi razdel*, p. 179. Even fiction cemented this interest: for instance, the protagonist of Petr Krasnov's novella *Terunesh* leaves Russia for Ethiopia, hoping to become rich through new trade opportunities. On this, cf. Chapter 5.

106 Iakovleva, *Kolonial'nyi razdel*.

107 Rait, *Russkie ekspeditsii*, pp. 221, 238-239. For a thorough reconstruction of Mashkov's expeditions cf. A. Khrenkov, 'Mashkov v Efiopii (mezhdru podvigom i avantiuroi)', *Voprosy istorii*, 1999, 2, pp. 123-137.

The African Canvas

Though generally overlooked in favour of Northern Africa, especially Egypt, Sub-Saharan Africa was also a destination for Russian artists, both famous and lesser-known, who visited the continent for various reasons. Their African experiences later transpired in their pictorial or written works, intertwining with their unique poetics and themes. Thus, the *peredvizhnik* painter Konstantin Makovskii (1839-1915) visited Africa several times in the 1870s, having been recommended to spend time in Cairo to help his wife recover her health. On his third visit in 1878 he also reached Sudan and Ethiopia, which resulted in a number of paintings of Africa that were displayed at various exhibitions, as well as numerous sketches. Conversely, the work of the painters, illustrators and caricaturists Aleksandr Chikin (1865-1924) and Pavel Shcherbov (1866-1938) remained largely out of the public eye. In fact, if not for a recent exhibition, their expedition to Mount Kilimanjaro would still be largely unknown today. The two men, one born in Kharkiv and the other in the Russian capital, met during their studies at the Imperial Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg. Both fond of travel, they decided to visit Equatorial Africa, following a route from Mombasa to Mount Kilimanjaro in 1888. According to Chikin's diary, which is currently held in the Russian Geographical Society's archives alongside other materials relating to their journey, they did not have a specific purpose apart from a desire to see the 'virgin nature of the dark continent' and its 'savage inhabitants'.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, their drawings and sketches, along with the diary, reveal an ethnographic sensibility that aligns with the IRGO council's decision to award Shcherbov a silver medal 'for the everyday objects used by the Masai people, which he brought back from their

108 A. Chikin, *Nemnozhko Afriki*, in *Nemnozhko Afriki. Ekspeditsiia k podnozhiiu Kilimandzharo 1888 g. v putevykh risunkakh A.A. Chikina*, Kaliningrad 2023, p. 29. This (partial) catalogue of the Svetlogorsk exhibition is quite useful, despite not being scientific, since it publishes a selection of Chikin's drawings, a photo by Shcherbov and a map. The diary is stored in the Russian Geographical Society archive, r. 98, op. 1, 26. Information about their travels is slowly emerging: apart from the recent exhibition in Svetlogorsk, *Vokrug sveta* has published an article (*Gapa, bana, gapa, angaliia!*, <https://www.vokrugsveta.ru/vs/article/8188/>), and some archival research has been conducted (cf. A. Zhuravleva, *Puteshestviia P.E. Sherbova na Vostok v 1891-1893 gg. 'Po dokumentam tainika usad'by khudozhnika', Istoriia povsednevnosti*, 2022, 3, pp. 121-143, https://doi.org/10.35231/25422375_2022_3_124).

land as a gift to the Society' (1892).¹⁰⁹ Following this trip, Chikin and Shcherbov continued travelling together for a few years, even planning a journey to West Africa. Although it was cancelled for family reasons, Chikin's work continued to be related to Africa (and other 'exotic' destinations, too) in some capacity: he illustrated Eliseev's *Around the World* alongside Nikolai Karazin, and collaborated with many illustrated periodicals devoted to travel, geography, and explorations (for instance, *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia*, *Mirovedenie*, *Chelovek i priroda*).

A decade later, the painter Vladimir Poliakov accompanied a member of the Free Economic Society, Nikolai Dmitriev, to Ethiopia (1897). The trip had two purposes: Dmitriev, a naturalist who had become an IRGO associate that same year, intended to study the local flora and fauna, while Poliakov aimed to collect materials to help him paint the 'Abyssinian way of life'. Although they financed the journey themselves, the IRGO took the expedition under its wing, providing Dmitriev with a letter of introduction in Russian and French, and assisting with travel arrangements. Dmitriev and Poliakov were reportedly accompanied by two Abyssinians and two servants.¹¹⁰ While no publications resulted from this journey, Poliakov did indeed create a number of paintings; however, none depict the Ethiopian everyday life. Instead, they were either official portraits of Menelik II and his wife, or scenes depicting significant moments in Russo-Abyssinian relations, such as the passage of the Russian diplomatic mission *en route* to meet the *negus*, and the *dzhigitovka* of the Russian cavalry in the presence of Menelik. Not much is known about Poliakov himself, the person who commissioned the paintings or their intended destination. The only certain fact is that the painter also collaborated with the journal *Rodina* to illustrate Dostoevskii's novels.¹¹¹ This lack of information about Poliakov seems

109 *Otchet o deistviiakh imperatorskogo russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva za 1892*, Saint Petersburg 1893, p. 62.

110 This meagre (and only) news about their journey is available in *Izvestiia IRGO*, 1897, 33, pp. 85, 100, 116. Cf. also B. Val'skaia, *Vklad*, p. 14, which, however, does not provide references.

111 On this subject an exhibition has recently been organised (<https://novgorodmuseum.ru/visit/sobytiya/f.m.-dostoevskij-v-illyustratsiyah-v.v.-polyakova>) and some studies have appeared. Cf. for instance Zh. Drozdova, *Poliakov Vladimir Vasil'evich, illiustrator proizvedenii F.M. Dostoevskogo*, in *Novgorodskii muzei-zapovednik, 2021: materialy ezhegodnyi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii*, Veliky Novgorod 2022, pp. 89-92. Cf. also V. Semenova, 'Efioipskie fotoillustrativnye kollektsii MAE RAN: k

peculiar, since he was involved in official representations relating to internal affairs: as a matter of fact, he painted the inauguration of the First State Duma on 27 April 1906 in two versions, the second of which was commissioned by Nicholas II himself and is now stored in the Russian Museum of Political History.

By the early twentieth century, Nikolai Gumilev was certainly the name most commonly associated with travel to Africa. His four journeys there—the last three of which were to Ethiopia—are a well-researched topic, especially in the context of his written work. However, he was not a simple tourist in a faraway country; he also conducted ethnographic research, particularly in his final trip in 1913, which was commissioned by the Russian Academy of Sciences. Entrusted with collecting exhibits of material culture and researching the native way of life, Gumilev and his nephew Nikolai Sverchkov also assembled a significant photographic collection.¹¹² His close relationships with prominent scholars of the time, such as the Egyptologist Boris Turaev, the historian and archaeologist Sergei Zhebelev and the director of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, Vasilii Radlov, significantly impacted his approach to (and perception of) the African reality. In that sense, one could argue that his (auto)constructed image of the poet-adventurer—much criticised in Soviet times for its intrinsic imperialism—goes hand in hand with that of the poet-scholar, or even the traveller-scholar: a traveller who does not engage in frivolous tourism, but instead studies, catalogues, photographs and maps an exotic country according to the latest scientific trends and discoveries. Indeed, before his final departure for Ethiopia, Gumilev had prepared thoroughly with the ethnographers Lev Shternberg and Radlov. As it has been noted, ‘in the person of Gumilev, the directors of

atributsii sobraniia vrachei russkogo otdeleniia Krasnogo kresta’, in *Sbornik muzeia antropologii i etnografii*, 2019 (66), 2, pp. 194–207 (p. 202). Three paintings are part of the Hermitage online collection: <https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/digital-collection/173224?lng=ru>; <https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/digital-collection/339223?lng=ru>; <https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/digital-collection/339224?lng=ru>. Apart from them, *Dzhigitovka of the Russian Cavalry at the Presence of the Negus* is stored in the Tver Regional Art Gallery, while others, such as an equestrian portrait of Petr Krasnov in Ethiopia and *The Arrival of the Abyssinian Mission in Russia*, are probably part of a private collection.

112 See https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/OBJECT?fund=44&person=3515863_3670892. For the ethnographic collection, comprised of Ethiopian art and objects, cf. <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/OBJECT?fund=26&person=3515863>

MAE did not meet the casual “conquistador”, but a young scholar who had already been to East Africa twice, and not because he was following romantic dreams; on his own initiative, instead, he had transcribed folkloric texts, acquired paintings by local artists, and ethnographic samples [...]. His interest in Africa was anything but futile: his diaries show that the structure of the collections he acquired, the subjects he chose to photograph, and many other details of his 1913 journey were entirely professional.¹¹³ Not only did Sverchkov help to take pictures, he also built a vast entomological collection, which he donated to the Zoological Museum of the Academy of Sciences. Furthermore, he kept a diary during the journey which he later prepared for publication with Zinovii Grzhebin’s publishing house; however, it was never published and its fate remains unknown.¹¹⁴ Thus, it is clear that the impact of Gumilev’s relationship with Africa extends far beyond the mere use of its image in poetry, and instead points towards a much more structured construction of knowledge about this continent on his part. His final expedition to Ethiopia remains relevant in modern-day Russia, as evidenced by the Kunstkamera’s 2009 expedition, which followed Gumilev’s footsteps and aimed to supplement his fragmentary field notes while also establishing new collections.¹¹⁵

Though little is known about the actual journey, the poet Vladimir Narbut, probably influenced by Gumilev or Bulatovich, also headed to Ethiopia around the same time hoping to find solace there after the controversy surrounding his newly published collection of poems, *Hallelujah* (1912). He spent five months on an ethnographic expedition about which nothing is known, before returning to Russia in 1913 following the general amnesty proclaimed for the 300-years celebration of house Romanov. Although there is no information about his ethnographic work or any collection he may have assembled, he left behind a few poems and two short essays on Abyssinia.¹¹⁶

113 Iu. Chistov, ‘K istorii odnoi nauchnoi ekspeditsii Muzeia antropologii i etnografii: poezdka N. Gumileva v Abissiniyu v 1913 godu’, *Vestnik istorii, literatury, iskusstva. Alʼmanakh*, 2010, 7, pp. 470-500 (pp. 474-475).

114 Ibid., p. 487.

115 Cf. the website of the expedition, entitled *African Diary. A Hundred-Years-Long Expedition*, <https://gumilev.kunstkamera.ru/>

116 Cf. for instance V. Narbut, ‘Pustynia Somaliiskaia’, *Selʼskii vestnik*, 28.04.1913, p. 3; ‘Prokazhennye v Kharare’, *Novyi zhurnal dlia vsekh*, 1913, 5, p. 2; ‘Abissiniia’, *Giperborei*, 1913, 9/10, pp. 34-35; ‘Gorod rasa Makonena’, *Vesʼ mir*, 1913, 20, p. 7;

Another prominent poet of the period, the symbolist Konstantin Bal'mont, briefly touched upon black Africa. A seasoned traveller and a collector of exotic objects from faraway cultures, Bal'mont decided to undertake a journey around the world, which lasted from February to December 1912 and involved many continents and countries (Africa, Oceania, and Asia—not counting Europe, the point of departure and arrival). In preparation, he exchanged letters with Dmitrii Anuchin, who recommended useful scientific literature and explicitly asked him to bring back exhibits of material culture to be displayed in the Museum of Anthropology at Moscow University.¹¹⁷ Although he apparently did not collect African artefacts, he wrote about his impressions of South Africa in an essay published in *Russkoe slovo*.¹¹⁸ Like Gumilev, Bal'mont, the most travelled of the modernist writers, can also be ascribed to the type of the 'traveller-scholar'.

Less prominent writers were also involved in the process of representing an African reality with which they were familiar, sharing their views in the popular press if not amongst the intellectual elites. Their work is now far less well-known to the public and even to scholars, as they are enigmatic and obscure personalities in numerous cases. Iurii Kazi-Bek (1869?-1929) is a perfect example of this. A member of Ashinov's mission to Ethiopia, Kazi-Bek led a complex and troubled life, the details of which scholars are still trying to clarify. This is primarily due to the fact that Kazi-Bek used many different personas and faiths (Jewish, Christian Orthodox, Muslim) throughout his life, as well as numerous pseudonyms, thus muddling the waters around his dubious activities. In fact, his origins and real name—probably Gersh Ber Ettinger—remain uncertain, although he appears to have been born in Tbilisi, then moved to Odessa (where his family was baptised and he adopted the name Grigorii), and

'Rozhdestvenskaia noch' v Abissinii', *Varshavskii dnevnik*, 27.12.1913, p. 2. On Narbut in Ethiopia cf. O. Lekmanov, 'O chem mogli (by) pogovorit' Vladimir Narbut i Aleksandr Bulatovich', *Zvezda*, 2007, 1, <https://zvezdaspb.ru/index.php?page=8&nput=689>; E. Chach, *N.S. Gumilev i A.K. Bulatovich*.

117 Indeed, the museum still stores around a hundred objects from Bal'mont's collection. Cf. E. Balakhonova, 'Istoriia slozheniia i sostav etnograficheskogo fonda Muzeia antropologii Moskovskogo universiteta', *Izvestiia instituta antropologii MGU*, 2016, 1, pp. 19-50. See also: E. Govor and N. Novikova, 'Etnograficheskie kollektsii iz Avstralii i Okeanii v fondakh NII i Muzeia antropologii MGU', *Voprosy antropologii*, 1989, 83, pp. 104-114.

118 K. Bal'mont, 'Iz iuzhnykh dalei', *Russkoe slovo*, 29.07.1912, p. 4.

finally to Saint Petersburg. Alongside various clashes with the law, Kazi-Bek also enjoyed a prolific career as a writer: he collaborated with many popular journals (including *Niva*, *Vokrug sveta*, *Priroda i liudi*, *Zhivopisnoe obozrenie*), and published several books, mainly collections of short stories and novels set in the Caucasus or in Constantinople. He created an auto-orientalised persona, and even posed as a 'Russian Muslim journalist' when he founded the journals *Moussulmanine* in Paris (1908) and *V mire musul'manstva* (*In the Muslim World*) in Saint Petersburg (1911).¹¹⁹ After returning from the disastrous mission in Ethiopia, he published a semi-fictional account of this journey in *Vokrug sveta*, signing it 'Iurii Kazi-Bek' and emphasising its most adventurous events to captivate readers over several issues.¹²⁰

Some people, such as the naturalist, traveller, and children's author Aleksandr Usov (1871-1942), who wrote under the pseudonym Aleksandr Cheglok (after a species of falcon), recreated the Africa they saw for children. A representative of that 'informative literature' which in the modernist period saw 'many respected scientists prepared to popularise their findings for the benefit of a young readership',¹²¹ Usov wrote several books for children about the nature of Russia, Africa, India, Australia, and North America, which he had studied and observed during his travels. This educational activity was a major part of his life and must be examined in the context of populist ideals regarding the necessity of spreading literacy among the people. He was close, as a matter of fact, to Nikolai Rubakin, the famous bibliographer, educator, founder of bibliopsychology and advocate for self-education, who was forced to emigrate after the failure of the 1905 revolution. Usov himself played a significant role in this historic event and left Russia

119 Cf. O. Bessmertnaya, 'Un agent-provocatour musulman, ou un orientaliste de plus: "jouer à l'autre" dans les miroirs impérial-orientalistes', *Slavica Occitania*, 2012, 35, pp. 83-126; O. Bessmertnaia, *Kem zhe byl M.-B. Khadzhetlashe, ili nuzhda v obmane*, in *Orientalia et Classica. Trudy vostochnykh kul'tur i antichnosti*, Moscow 2016, LXI, pp. 135-190. Following thorough archival research, Bessmertnaia effectively proves that Kazi-Bek became known as Mohammed Beck Hedjetlaché in later years. He was sentenced to death, then life imprisonment, in Sweden for the murders of three suspected Bolshevik agents (1920).

120 Iu. Kazi-Bek, 'Na chernyi materik. Iz vospominanii', *Vokrug sveta*, 1898, pp. 13-28.

121 B. Hellman, *Fairy Tales and True Stories. The History of Russian Literature for Children and Young People (1574-2010)*, Leiden-Boston 2013, p. 253, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004256385>

in 1906; during the emigration years, he associated with the circles of Georgii Plekhanov, Maksim Gor'kii, Anatolii Lunacharskii, and Vladimir Lenin. However, upon returning to Soviet Russia, he became increasingly controversial due to his adherence to theosophy and his role in establishing an ashram in Sochi, which was attended by many notable figures, including the poet Maksimilian Voloshin. For this, he was arrested in 1936. During his two trips to Africa (in 1909 and 1910–1911), he visited not only the northern regions (specifically Egypt and the Sahara), but also the interior, including the Congo. This experience prompted him to publish several illustrated children's books focusing mainly on the representation of exotic ecosystems, for which he often collaborated with the renowned illustrator and artist Vasilii Vatagin, who accompanied him on his travels around the world.¹²²

Armchair Travellers

The image of black Africa circulated amongst the Russian audience also thanks to the works of geographers, historians, and writers who, despite never having been to Africa, wrote textbooks, essays and even fiction set in this exotic location, oftentimes inspired by European colonial literature. Indeed, not only did Western scholars and scientists—especially ethnographers, anthropologists, and geographers—inform Russian scholarship, but a significant array of colonial adventure novels also circulated in the Russian editorial market, influencing the general public and professional writers alike.

One of the most popular European writers was certainly Jules Verne, whose *Cinq semaines en ballon* was translated into Russian in 1864 as *Vozdushnoe puteshestvie cherez Afriku* (*An Air Travel Through Africa*). It became a success, receiving praise from Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin, who particularly appreciated Verne's truthfulness, authenticity, and adherence to reality. The success of this publication paved the way for the extensive translation of all Verne's works, which were published in 88

122 A. Cheglok, *Moi prikliucheniia v Sakhare i severnoi Afrike*, Moscow 1912; A. Cheglok, *Rasskazy iz zhizni zhivotnykh Afriki*, Moscow 1912; A. Cheglok, *Zveri tsentral'noi i iuzhnoi Afriki. 10 rasskazov*, Moscow 1914; A. Cheglok, *Ptitsy Afriki: desiat' rasskazov s illiustratsiiami khudozhnika V.A. Vatagina*, Moscow 1915; A. Cheglok, *Zhivotnyi mir Afriki*, Moscow 1915.

volumes between 1906 and 1917.¹²³ Another favourite was undoubtedly Thomas Mayne Reid, who was so popular that, as early as 1864, Mikhail Vol'f's publishing house began working on a multi-volume edition titled *Hunting Stories from Life in Africa and America*. In retrospect, famous writers recollected their love for Reid's works, like Bal'mont ('And Mayne Reid! When I was eleven or twelve years old, a friend of my mother, an officer, brought me one or two volumes by Mayne Reid [...]. I have never enjoyed a book more than I did then. [...] In childhood and early youth, a book is not just literature; it comes alive and enters your soul, its meaning, its language, its very appearance, paper and cover'),¹²⁴ and Andrei Belyi ('I devour the journal *Vokrug sveta*, and read off the works by Jacolliot, Louis-Henri Boussenard and Mayne Reid'; 'I read a lot of Jacolliot, Jules Verne, Mayne Reid'),¹²⁵ while Reid's popularity amongst children transpired also through the lavishly illustrated pages of Aleksandr Benua's *Abecedary*. Here, the letter 'N' was represented by the word *napadenie* (invasion), depicted through children playing 'Indians'. Within the picture frame, the artist included, among Native American artefacts, adventure novels by Mayne Reid and Fenimore Cooper.¹²⁶ Louis Jacolliot and Louis-Henri Boussenard were equally famous, in fact the latter 'was even more popular in Russia than in his homeland. While remaining completely unknown in America and Great Britain, for example, his forty-volume collected works were published here in 1911'.¹²⁷ Some of the Western novels set in Africa circulated, moreover, in instalments in the popular press: thus, for instance, *Vokrug sveta* published *The Diamond Thieves* by Boussenard (1886) and *Nada the Lily* by Rider Haggard (1892).¹²⁸

Given the popularity of adventure novels set in foreign lands and the newfound desire to educate the masses, it is not surprising that minor writers, pedagogues, and teachers who contributed to this educational effort also devoted their attention to fiction and informative essays

123 Verne's adventure novels were also valued by writers of the likes of Lev Tolstoi, Ivan Turgenev, and Anton Chekhov. Cf. Hellman, *Fairy Tales*, pp. 164-165.

124 K. Bal'mont, 'O knigakh dlia detei', in K. Bal'mont, *Morskoe svechenie*, Saint Petersburg-Moscow 1910, pp. 190-191.

125 The excerpts are from Belyi's 'Material k biografii', in A. Belyi, *Avtobiograficheskie svody*, ed. by A. Lavrov and J. Malmstadt, Moscow 2016, pp. 35, 37.

126 A. Benua, *Azbuka v kartinakh*, Saint Petersburg 1904.

127 Hellman, *Fairy Tales*, p. 249.

128 See Chapter 5 for more on this topic.

aimed at improving people's knowledge of (black) Africa. Perhaps the most well-known and relevant among them is Nikolai Rubakin (1862-1946), who played an essential part in educating the masses and discovering the 'popular readers', 'not limit[ing] himself to study [them], but rely[ing] on a wide range of human and social sciences [...] to investigate the evolution of reading in the entire Russian society of the second half of the 19th century'.¹²⁹ His collaboration with Russian (and later Soviet) publishing houses continued well after his emigration to Europe following the events of the 1905 revolution. One of his projects was an 'encyclopaedic library' for the people, which, among other things, comprised books dedicated to 'the history of human culture and comparative geography [...] with special attention devoted to the political, economic, religious, and other characteristics of the lives of different peoples at different stages of development, under the common title *Peoples and Countries*', published alternatively by Gershunin, Sytin, Trautskii and Tikhomirov.¹³⁰ It was for this series that Rubakin wrote *The Wreck of the Grosvenor. A Tale about the Country of Kaffirs, Hottentots and Bushmen* (on the wreck of the East Indiaman Grosvenor in South Africa in 1782), *Adventures amongst Black Savages* (a retelling of several Western explorers' hardships in Africa), *Adventures in the Land of Slavery* (on Samuel Baker), *Doctor Hassan* (based on Élisée Reclus and other sources), and *The Terrible Negus. A Tale on the Customs and Habits of Abyssinia* (based on the works of Henry Blanc, Guillaume Lejean, Achille Raffray, Alexandre Girard, Stanislas Russel, and others). Evidently, he worked on a number of different Western sources, combining them to create a new, captivating narrative, that appealed to the average reader with its simplicity. These books were reprinted several times, proving their popularity. His second wife, Liudmila Rubakina (née Bessel', 1870-1947), also contributed: in 1912, she published a fictional travel diary entitled *How I Travelled through Abyssinia*, about a Frenchman travelling

129 D. Rebecchini and R. Vassena, "'Reader, Where Are You?' An Introduction', in D. Rebecchini and R. Vassena (ed. by), *Reading in Russia. Practices of Reading and Literary Communication. 1760-1930*, Milan 2014, p. 12. For details on Rubakin's biography cf. for instance A. E. Senn, *Nicholas Rubakin. A Life for Books*, Newtonville 1977; A. Rubakin, *Rubakin (Lotsman knizhnogo moria)*, Moscow 1979. A new publication containing previously unpublished materials has recently appeared, cf. Iu. Stoliarov, *Vozvrashchennyi Rubakin*, Moscow 2019.

130 Cf. *Knigi, sostavlennye N.A. Rubakinym*, Moscow 1914.

through Ethiopia after being tasked with delivering a letter to the French consul in Massawa. Illustrated with drawings from *Voyage au Choa* by Henry Audon and *From North Pole to Equator* by Alfred Edmund Brehm, the book was praised for its ethnographic content, but criticised for its sentimental tone.¹³¹

Educational books and children's literature did indeed play a significant role in spreading knowledge about Africa. Mikhail Chistiakov (1809-1885), the editor of *Zhurnal dlia detei* (*The Children's Journal*) and a prominent—though criticised—children's author, published *Tales of Travels through Africa* (first edition 1873; second edition 1897), where he adopted his typical technique, i.e., 'tak[ing] a foreign (most often German) story, chang[ing] the names and the places and retell[ing] the plot in his own words'.¹³² Scarcely original and highly dependent on Western sources was also *In the African Forests* by Nikolai Karintsev (Dudel'), published as a series in the journal *Iunaia Rossiia* (*Young Russia*) in 1913.¹³³ Opening with an epigraph from Livingstone, this story is set in Zanzibar and retells an anecdote that a young Arab told Henry Stanley. Karintsev was used to translate from many languages and adapted folk tales, the deeds of historical figures, and the history of significant scientific discoveries. Similar activities were pursued by Dmitrii Koropchevskii (1842-1903), a writer, translator and ethnographer who edited *Znanie* and *Slovo* for many years. A disseminator of the works of Darwin, Burnett Tylor and Lubbock, Koropchevskii wrote a biography of Livingstone intended for a general audience, and translated Wilhelm Bleek's *Raynard the Fox in South Africa, or Hottentots Fables and Tales* and Henry Callaway's *Nursery Tales, Traditions, and Histories of the Zulus*

131 Cf. *Ukazatel' nauchno-populiarnykh knig po geografii*, Saint Petersburg 1914, p. 123. L. Bessel', *Kak ia puteshestvoval po Abissinii*, Moscow 1912. Though Rubakin's son from his first marriage asserts that Liudmila Rubakina practically became a housewife after marrying Rubakin, the catalogue of Rubakin's archival fonds reveals that she helped her husband extensively with his various projects and also wrote and translated several works herself, mainly from French. Cf. Rubakin Nikolai Aleksandrovich: arkhivnyi fond, 1880-1970, f. 358, 14143 ed. khr., Fond nauchno-issledovatel'skogo otdela rukopisei Rossiiskoi gosudarsvennoi biblioteki. For information on Bessel's life cf. Rubakin, *Rubakin: lotsman knizhnogo moria*, pp. 56-60.

132 Hellman, *Fairy Tales*, p. 118. Cf. M. Chistiakov, *Rasskazy iz puteshestvii po Afrike (vybrannye iz zhurnala dlia detei)*, Saint Petersburg 1873.

133 N. Karintsev, 'V lesakh Afriki', *Iunaia Rossiia*, 1913, pp. 8-12. This short novel was soon republished in a separate edition with the title *Two Friends: Life in the African Forest* (Petrograd 1915).

in *Their Own Words* under the common title *Fables and Tales of Savage Peoples*.¹³⁴ Even Georgii Chulkov, a modernist writer who is definitely part of the literary canon, attempted to popularise Africa for children: he published a descriptive ethnogeographical piece entitled *In Distant Lands: Africa* in the journal *Detskii otdykh* (*Children's Leisure*), offering young readers a vivid picture of Egypt, Sudan, Madagascar, Central Africa, and Guinea.¹³⁵

Switching between fiction and geography, Nikolai Berezin (1866-1938), a writer and geographer, was a keen disseminator of the lives and endeavours of many Western adventurers and explorers, such as Nils Nordenskiöld, James Cook, and Gustav Nachtigal. A passionate traveller himself (for instance, following a journey to Karelia he published a reportage complete with his own photographs),¹³⁶ Berezin wrote some short novels set in Africa, among which *The Zanzibar Fugitive* (focused on the issue of slavery) and *In the Caliph's Claws* (a retelling of the memoirs by German merchant Karl Neufeld, who was held prisoner in Sudan for twelve years during the Mahdi rebellion), as well as a retelling of Stanely's first trans-African expedition in 1874-1877.¹³⁷ At the same time, he also wrote several geography textbooks and manuals for schoolchildren, thereby shaping their perception of the African continent.¹³⁸ Of course, he was not alone in this effort. Many other geographers of that time also contributed, writing both textbooks and essays aimed at adults with little education. For instance, Arkadii Pavlovskii (1828-1889), who taught geography at the Smolnyi Institute and the Aleksandrovsii Institute in Saint Petersburg for more than thirty years, disseminated Carl Ritter's ideas and perspective on geography in his coursebook *Nature and People*, dedicating two

134 D. Koropchevskii, *Basni i skazki dikikh narodov*, Saint Petersburg 1873.

135 G. Chulkov, 'V dalekikh kraiax. Afrika', *Detskii otdykh*, 1899, 12, pp. 13-35; 1902, 2, pp. 5-23. The essay was later republished in a separate edition, cf. G. Chulkov, *V dalekikh kraiax. Afrika*, Moscow 1910.

136 N. Berezin, *Peshkom k Karel'skim vodopadam*, Saint Petersburg 1903.

137 N. Berezin, *V kogiakh khaliifa*, Saint Petersburg 1901; N. Berezin, *Zanzibarskii beglets*, Saint Petersburg 1903; N. Berezin, *Cherez stranu karlikov (Puteshestvie Stenli)*, Saint Petersburg 1905. Cf. Chapter 5.

138 N. Berezin, *Geograficheskie imena: ob'iasnenie ikh v sviazi s istoriei otkrytii. Posobie dlia uchitelei geografii. Vyp. 1: Avstraliia, Afrika, Amerika, Aziia*, Saint Petersburg 1894; N. Berezin, *Afrika. Posobie dlia prepodavaniia geografii*, Saint Petersburg 1912; N. Berezin, *Zadachi i raboty po geografii: Aziia, Afrika, Amerika, Avstraliia*, Petrograd 1915.

volumes to Africa.¹³⁹ Fellow geographers Iakov Rudnev (1865-1930?) and Iulii Shokal'skii (1856-1940) wrote educational essays, as did Feofil Putsykovich (1843-1899), a pedagogue and scientific writer of manuals for use in popular schools.¹⁴⁰ Geography books were also written by members of the military, whose army duties did not prevent them from pursuing a career in publishing alongside their primary one. For example, Eduard Maidel' (1842-1918), a naval officer and an avid scholar of the Far East, awarded by the IRGO for an expedition in the North Sea, wrote a book on the West African shoreline.¹⁴¹ Similarly, Iosif Zashchuk (1845-1918), a lieutenant general and journalist (*Russkii invalid, Novoe vremia, Razvedchik*), collaborator of the *Military Encyclopaedia* published by Sytin, devoted an essay to the German colonies and the impact of German colonialism on society.¹⁴²

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From what has been considered so far, it seems clear that the image of black Africa circulating in the late tsarist period was created by a variety of individuals who, while certainly sharing an interest in and a passion for this continent, ultimately came from extremely diverse backgrounds and professions, and held differing motives for engaging with Africa. However, one can begin to grasp a common trait, i.e., the palpable closeness of their narrations to Western colonial literature and studies, regardless of the authors' politics. Indeed, even those most critical of Europe continued to rely on Western sources when creating their own versions of (black) Africa. The variety of genres and publishing venues ensured that knowledge about Africa, which had been relatively scarce up to fifty years prior, now reached almost all strata of society. This process was, of course, facilitated by the growth of the publishing

139 A. Pavlovskii, *Priroda i liudi. Kurs geografii*, kn. 2, vyp. 1: Egipet, Alzhiriia, Zapadnaia Afrika, Saint Petersburg 1860; A. Pavlovskii, *Priroda i liudi. Kurs geografii*, kn. 2, vyp. 2: Zapadnaia Afrika, Iuzhnaia Afrika, Tsentral'naia Afrika, Saint Petersburg 1861.

140 Ia. Rudnev, *Afrikanskii ostrov Madagaskar. Ocherk strany i narodov*, Saint Petersburg 1900; Iu. Shokal'skii, *Afrikanskie vladeniia evropeiskikh derzhav*, Saint Petersburg 1898; F. Putsykovich, *Abissinty. Chtenie dlia naroda*, Saint Petersburg 1896; F. Putsykovich, *Negry. Chtenie dlia naroda*, Saint Petersburg 1897.

141 E. Maidel', *Lotsmanskii zametki Zapadnogo berega Afriki*, Saint Petersburg 1900.

142 I. Zashchuk, *Germanские колонии. Znachenie ikh v ekon., polit. i voen. otnosheniakh*, Saint Petersburg 1908.

sector, which was increasingly interested in acquiring new readers (i.e., ordinary people, who were attracted to the illustrated press and popular renditions of tales and accounts of foreign lands). In this respect, the attention granted to Africa was not necessarily inferior to that given to other distant lands with closer ties to the Russian Empire, or even some of its imperial peripheries. Indeed, the empire was not alien to examine how Africa was administered by the Europeans in order to improve its own governance, particularly with regard to Central Asia and its markets. In this regard, authors who travelled to black Africa shared with Europe not only a common discourse about the continent, but also practices (exploring, mapping, practicing medicine, intervening in armed conflicts, collecting, and photographing) that inevitably impacted their knowledge production about this space. As will become clear in the following chapters, this knowledge was articulated through various outlets and media—atlas and geography textbooks, ethnographic and anthropological essays, travelogues, museum collections, paintings and literature. In the new democratic market for culture, which was open to the masses like never before, cinema also played its part in disseminating colonial knowledge: documentary shorts such as *Promenade au Soudan* (1908) and *La ville de Saint Louis du Sénégal* (1914), or scripted films such as *La princesse noire* (1908) and *Le roi Koko* (1913) were shown in Russian cinema theatres and contributed to the creation of a complex imagery in which the ethnographic interest merged with a penchant for sensationalist plots that accentuated the idea of Africa as a place of savagery and bloodlust, yet also naïveté.

2. Lands. Towards a Virtual Appropriation of the Continent

I named this place the Land of Nicholas; a small river [...] ran across it, a river whose name had been lost, and so I named it the Nevka on my map, which name would point to a European traveler's having reached this place and indicate his nationality.

E. Kovalevskii¹

In a somewhat critical passage about the penchant for sensationalism of the existing Geographical Societies, Karl Ernst von Bauer wrote that 'if a country is still completely unknown, they [the Geographical Societies] do not ask whether the traveller has studied the language of the local people, or brought with them a list of the plants; instead, they ask whether it is possible to fill a blank space [*probel*] on the map'.² This assertion, which dates back to 1849, is a clear response to the frenzy for cartographic knowledge that occupied the minds of travellers, explorers, societies and governments in the late imperial era, resulting in a massive production of the most diverse kinds of maps: from military to 'scientific', from ethnographic to educational. Intended for equally diverse audiences—scholars, the military and the government, the general public, students—maps not only played an essential role in shaping the public perception (and knowledge) of faraway lands, but, most importantly, they also covertly concealed the political, economic, and cultural agendas of the countries in which they were produced. Indeed, in Brian Harley's provocative and pioneering words, which

1 E. Kovalevsky, *A Journey to Inner Africa*, Amherst 2020, pp. 152-153.

2 *Retsenziia K.M. Bera i G.P. Gel'mersena: 'Puteshestvie vo Vnutrenniuiu Afriku E. Kovalevskogo'*, in B. Val'skaia, 'Akademik K.M. Ber o puteshestviiakh E.P. Kovalevskogo v Egipet i v Kitai v 40-kh godakh XIX v.', *Strany i narody Vostoka*, 1959, 1, pp. 263-285 (p. 279).

have shaped the subsequent development of cartographic studies,

Maps are never value-free images; except in the narrowest Euclidean sense they are not in themselves either true or false. Both in the selectivity of their content and in their signs and styles of representation maps are a way of conceiving, articulating, and structuring the human world which is biased towards, promoted by, and exerts influence upon particular sets of social relations.³

In some ways, Bauer's not-so-veiled critique forestalls the recognition among cartographers and historians of cartography, that the world

has, in large part, been made as a *geo-coded* world [...]. Cartographic institutions and practices have coded, decoded and recoded planetary, national and social spaces. [...] Maps and mapping precede the territory they 'represent'. Just as scientific facts are produced through the overlay and repetition of circulating references [...], [...] territories are produced by the overlaying of inscriptions we call mappings.⁴

The fact that maps 'are now understood to possess fluid, ambiguous, highly partial, and persistently ideological meanings', combined with the realisation that 'the technological and scientific rigor on which they depend has been revealed as an ideal that relatively few maps actually attain',⁵ has certainly stimulated new interpretations of maps and the mapping industry, particularly (but not exclusively) in an imperial and colonial context. While this trend has mostly taken root in connection with Western empires, some studies have also begun to (re-) consider Russian cartography, emphasising both its peculiarities and its similarities with its European counterpart.⁶

3 J. B. Harley, 'Maps, Knowledge, and Power', in J. B. Harley, *The New Nature of Maps. Essays in the History of Cartography*, Baltimore-London 2001, pp. 52-81 (p. 53).

4 J. Pickles, *A History of Spaces. Cartographic Reason, Mapping and the Geo-Coded World*, London-New York 2004, p. 5.

5 M. H. Edney, 'The Irony of Imperial Mapping', in J. R. Akerman (ed. by), *The Imperial Map. Cartography and the Mastery of Empire*, Chicago-London 2009, pp. 11-45 (p. 12).

6 I will highlight the studies conducted by Valerie A. Kivelson, for instance: V. A. Kivelson, 'Cartography, Autocracy and State Powerlessness: The Uses of Maps in Early Modern Russia', *Imago mundi*, 1999, 51, pp. 83-105; V. A. Kivelson, *Cartographies of Tsardom. The Land and Its Meanings in Seventeenth-Century Russia*, Ithaca-London 2006; V. A. Kivelson, '"Exalted and Glorified to the Ends of the Earth". Imperial Maps and Christian Spaces in Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century Russian Siberia', in Akerman (ed. by), *The Imperial Map*, pp. 47-91. See also: D. J. B. Shaw, 'Mapmaking, Science and State Building in Russia Before Peter the Great', *Journal*

Strangely enough, Bauer's critique went hand in hand with his appraisal of Kovalevskii's map of 'East Sudan or Abyssinia', which complemented the explorer's book:

Mr Kovalevskii attached a map to his work [...]; it will be of great interest to anyone dealing with Africa, as it contains data from d'Arnaud's travels according to the map published by Werne. For the Oriental part of the Nile region, the map by Caillié has been used as a foundation for Kovalevskii's additional observations. Moreover, the most recent observations by Englishmen have been added between the Indian Ocean and Abyssinia. This map is the main merit of this book.⁷

This passage stresses not only the importance of the map drawn by Kovalevskii, but also the explorer's indebtedness to his Western predecessors, such as Joseph Pons d'Arnaud, Ferdinand Werne, and René Caillié, thus including Kovalevskii's contribution amongst the European party. Indeed, the explorer clearly states the 'collaborative' nature of the project in the map's cartouche, listing not only Western sources (William Harris, James Bruce, Antoine d'Abbadie, Charles Tilstone Beke, Carl Ritter, Eberhard Zimmermann), but also 'Arab travellers' such as Zayn-el-Abidin, as well as 'statements from the locals [*tuzemtsy*]'. His own original contribution is thus mainly limited, by admission of Kovalevskii himself, to the great plain of Sennar (or 'Sennar peninsula') and the adjacent region.

But that is not to say that his work is insignificant—quite the opposite, in fact. Being this part of Africa still relatively uncharted, the author feels free to name places, and he does so by recourse to the Russian language: on the eastern side of a small river called 'Nevka' (little Neva), one can clearly see the words 'Strana Nikolaevskaia' (Land of Nicholas). This practice, which was justified by the fact that the river's original name had apparently been lost, can be read as a typical

of *Historical Geography*, 2005 (31), 3, pp. 409-429, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2004.07.020>; S. Seegel, *Mapping Europe's Borderlands: Russian Cartography in the Age of the Empire*, Chicago-London 2012. For 'peripheral' contributions to Russian cartography in imperial times cf. C. Gibson, 'Mapmaking in the Home and Printing House: Women and Cartography in Late Imperial Russia', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 2020, 67, pp. 71-80, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2019.10.011>; C. Gibson, *Geographies of Nationhood: Cartography, Science, and Society in the Russian Imperial Baltic*, Oxford 2022.

7 Retsenziia K.M. Bera, pp. 277-278.

example of the Western imperial and colonial tendency to 'textualiz[e] the spatial reality of the other, nam[e] or, in almost all cases, renam[e] spaces in a symbolic and literal act of mastery and control'.⁸ However, as Nicholas I had no intention of colonising this territory, it seems that in this case the (re) naming process was rather related to the explorer's desire to be considered a 'European traveller' and simultaneously a proud Russian: this 'name would point to a European traveler's having reached this place and indicate his nationality', Kovalevskii stresses.⁹ Thus, mapping Africa becomes a useful tool for (re)negotiating Russian identity within the European nationality spectrum, while the symbolic nature of the renaming process suggests the desire to master one's own 'Europeanness', rather than a foreign space and culture.

Despite the merits of Kovalevskii's effort for the time, large areas of land remained unmapped, blank spaces that could be filled at the cartographer's discretion. Indeed, when geographical notions seem to fail, ethnographic ones step in: the uncharted areas are simply filled with the names of the tribes (*plemeni*) supposedly inhabiting them, or with more articulated explanations about the natives and their occupation ('idolatrous Negroes working in the golden mines', 'alleged anthropophagi'), or even with descriptions of the landscape functioning as substitutes for cartographic symbols ('plateau covered in bushes which elephants feed on').

The descriptive quality of Kovalevskii's map, its mixture of codified signs aspiring to 'scientificity' and the resort to narrative devices when science is lacking, make for a good starting point to examine how—and with what intent—black African lands were represented in Russian culture during the late tsarist period. Moreover, it advocates a close reading of discursive colonial strategies shared with the West when dealing with a colonial setting. While a counter-/ (post-) colonial reading of European maps and written accounts comes more naturally, the obvious lack of Russian colonies in Africa complicates matters. From an epistemological point of view, the recently introduced concept of 'colonialism without colonies' can offer a solution. Proposed by Barbara Lüthi, Francesca Falk, and Patricia Purtschert, this theoretical framework builds on previous

8 B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, and H. Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies. The Key Concepts*, London 2007, p. 28.

9 Kovalevsky, *A Journey to Inner Africa*, p. 153.

research into the involvement of non-colonial European countries in a globally colonial environment. It also contributes to the discussion on the applicability of the same analytical framework of colonial *vs* non-colonial Western political entities, or even to European *vs* non-European forms of empire.¹⁰ According to Lüthi, Falk and Purtschert, countries without colonies 'had an explicit self-understanding as being outside the realm of colonialism, but nevertheless engaged in the colonial project in a variety of ways and benefitted from these interactions'.¹¹ This perspective challenges the assumption that a country had to be directly involved in colonialism in order to participate in the creation of colonial knowledge. Taking as an example the cases of Switzerland, Sweden, and Iceland, the authors ask some topical questions, i.e. 'how were these places entangled in the colonial endeavour, how did they manage to profit from it and in what ways did their involvement in colonialism differ from those of the "official" colonial powers?'. While examining these issues, they stress the productivity of such a re-framing, which 'addresses the persistence of colonial structures and power relations in countries that have never been regarded as or understood themselves as official colonial powers. [...] To move beyond reductive national-historic and Eurocentric perspectives, such a focus concerns itself with trans-local, transnational and transcultural linkages that also characterized the history of supposedly non-colonial countries'.¹² Indeed, while Russia's colonial nature with regard to its own peripheries has become less controversial over the years, examining its relationship with 'external' colonised countries and the consequent creation of knowledge certainly

10 B. Lüthi, F. Falk, and P. Purtschert, 'Colonialism without Colonies: Examining Blank Spaces in Colonial Studies', *National Identities*, 2016 (18), 1, pp. 1-9, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2016.1107178> Cf. also S. Keskinen, S. Tuori, S. Irni, and D. Mulinari (ed. by), *Complying with Colonialism: Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Nordic Region*, Farnham 2009, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315573212>. The concept of 'non-colonial orientalism' has already been part of the equation for quite some time (cf. for instance N. Berman, 'K.u.K. Colonialism: Hofmannsthal in North Africa', *New German Critique*, 1998, 75, pp. 3-27; S. Lemmen, 'Noncolonial Orientalism? Czech Travel Writing on Africa and Asia around 1918', in J. Hodgkinson and J. Walker (ed. by), *Deploying Orientalism in Culture and History. From Germany to Central and Eastern Europe*, Rochester 2013, pp. 209-227). For a discussion on the possibility of studying Western and non-Western forms of the empire within the same analytical frame cf. A. L. Stoler, C. McGranahan, and P. C. Perdue (ed. by), *Imperial Formations*, Santa Fe 2007.

11 Lüthi, Falk, and Purtschert, *Colonialism without Colonies*, p. 1.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

makes a valuable contribution to the discussion.

Within this framework, the present chapter will focus on the depiction of 'black African' lands in late tsarist Russia in maps, accounts, and essays, revealing the interplay and dynamics with European knowledge, as well as the ideological and political implications of these depictions.

Mapping Black Spaces, Mapping Black People

Maps such as the one drawn by Kovalevskii should not necessarily be considered representative. Indeed, the explorer's effort and results are quite exceptional: the vast majority of maps depicting the African territory were either schematic reconstructions of the Russian (or European) travellers' itineraries, providing their readers with a useful tool with which to contextualise their adventures, or part of scholarly atlases intended for young pupils and reflecting educational trends. Yet, for the most part, they tell a complex story that combines racial and ethnic knowledge of the time, beliefs in 'scientificity' and accuracy in measuring and scaling a territory, as well as connections with European cartography—or map making—and Russia's own position in the age of empires and colonisation. Indeed, in a country still heavily affected by illiteracy, 'geography and cartography, no less than history and literature, were European ways to transform students into educated imperial subjects'.¹³

Maps illustrating the racial, ethnic, or confessional variety of Africa—the most vague and opaque depictions of the continent—were an integral part of atlases and textbooks. As a matter of fact, ethnocartography was a well-established discipline in the Russian Empire, and even though it focused primarily on the diverse peoples within its borders, it was also employed to schematise distant lands. Indeed, cartography that mapped human diversity was one of the tools used to establish 'Russia as a cultural state and a modern and rationally organized society'.¹⁴

As it has been rightly pointed out, 'Maps reduced complex intersectional forms of identification to flat plates of tightly tessellating colour and presented space as a key factor in this process of ordering the human world. [...] Ethnographic map-making brutally divided

13 Seegel, *Mapping Europe's Borderlands*, p. 126.

14 Mogilner, *Homo Imperii. A History of Physical Anthropology in Russia*, Lincoln-London 2013, p. 102.

communities, erased certain segments of the population, and promoted the aggrandising claims of other groups'.¹⁵ Of course, the arbitrariness with which lines were drawn between different races (*rasy*), tribes (*plemena*), or faiths is not necessarily (or exclusively) to be considered as an exercise in power, often being, instead, the reflection of the knowledge of the time. While the authors may even have considered themselves enlightened and progressive in their treatment of different populations, and therefore did not intentionally or maliciously 'divide' or 'erase' communities, it should be taken into account that 'every map is linked to the social order of a particular period and place. Every map is cultural because it manifests intellectual processes defined as artistic or scientific as they work to produce a distinctive type of knowledge. [...] Maps do not simply reproduce a topographical reality; they also interpret it'.¹⁶ Russian maps of Africa clearly reflect the scientific theories and knowledge of the time in which they were produced; however, their schematism forces them to omit significant debates of that era, such as the monogenesis *vs* polygenesis theory of human origins, without betraying any inclinations for one position or the other. Thus, while these maps aspired to provide the most up-to-date and exhaustive representation of the world's ethnic distribution, they still remained quite opaque.

Racial or ethnic categorisation was complicated by the language used to describe the variously coloured 'patches' of Africa, a 'terminological confusion' lasting for all the long nineteenth century, when the terms *plemia* (tribe), *poroda* (breed), *rasa* (race), and even *narod* (people) were largely interchangeable.¹⁷ In a map depicting the 'Distribution of Human Tribes' from a school atlas published by Brokgaus, the geographer and teacher Andrei Linberg (1837-1904) identified six tribes (*plemena*) ('Caucasian', 'Mongolian', 'Malaysian', 'Negroid', 'American', and 'Papuanian'), of which the 'Caucasian' was dominant in the northern regions of Africa, and the 'Negroid' in Sub-Saharan Africa. A notable exception is South Africa, apparently inhabited by

15 C. Gibson, *Nations on the Drawing Board. Ethnographic Map-Making in the Russian Empire's Baltic Provinces, 1840-1920*, PhD dissertation, Florence 2019, pp. 3-4.

16 J. B. Harley, 'Text and Context in the Interpretation of Early Maps', in Harley, *The New Nature of Maps*, pp. 34-49 (pp. 44-45).

17 Cf. V. Tolz, 'Race, Ethnicity, and Nationhood in Imperial Russia', in D. Rainbow (ed. by), *Ideologies of Race. Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union in Global Context*, Montreal 2019, pp. 29-58.

‘Caucasians’, while Madagascar was drawn as a mixture of ‘Negroid’ and ‘Malaysian’.¹⁸ This partition corresponds, more or less, to the equally schematic representation of faiths: Islam (yellow) is predominant in the north apart from the Christian enclave of Abyssinia, pagans (pink) cover Sub-Saharan Africa, while Christians (blue) live in South Africa. Madagascar is split between paganism and Islam (table 32 of the same publication). According to the preface written by Linberg, these maps were drawn using sources by the German scholars Adolf Stieler, Emil von Sydow, Gustav Adolf von Klöden, and August Petermann.

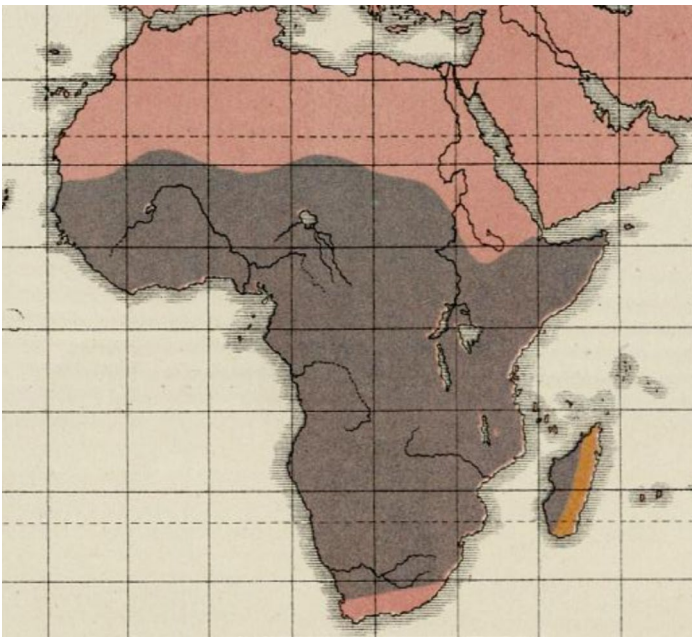


Fig. 2.1 A. Linberg, ‘Distribution of Human Tribes’ (detail), in *Uchebnyi atlas vseobshchei geografii*, Leipzig 1874 (table 31).

Twenty years later, Aleksei Il’in (1834-1889), a renowned cartographer and publisher, produced a school atlas that retained the six tribes. Il’in was effectively granted a monopoly on producing maps for the Academy of Sciences and the IRGO, an endeavour that thrived alongside his career as the editor of nature and travel journals such as *Vsemirnyi*

18 A. Linberg, *Uchebnyi atlas vseobshchei geografii*, table 31 ‘Oblasti rasprostraneniia chelovecheskikh plemen’, Leipzig 1874. The first edition was published in 1872.

puteshestvennik and *Priroda i liudi*. In his rendition, Africa was inhabited by the three tribes identified by Linberg, though he changed the lines of demarcation between them and added, for the northern African region, the label ‘Semites’ (*semity*).¹⁹ For all the arbitrariness that never escaped labels and lines of demarcation, South Africa was again represented as being inhabited solely by white Christian people—which in itself is perhaps the most outrageous fabrication amongst the general lack of specificity and the penchant for misleading generalisation.



Fig. 2.2 A. Il'in, 'World Tribes' (detail), in *Novyi uchebnyi geograficheskii atlas dlia polnogo gimnazicheskogo kursa*, Saint Petersburg 1893 (table 38).

A school atlas (1898) by the ethnographer, anthropologist, and geographer Eduard Petri, who served as the vice-president of the Russian Anthropological Society and was the first professor of the chair

¹⁹ A. Il'in, *Novyi uchebnyi geograficheskii atlas dlia polnogo gimnazicheskogo kursa*, table 38 'Plemena vseh chastei sveta', Saint Petersburg 1893.

in Geography and Ethnography at Saint Petersburg University (1887), portrays a more multifaceted—though by no means less discretionary—situation. Instead of tribes, this time the map's key pinpoints four different *narody* (peoples of the 'European' type, peoples of the 'Mongolian' type, peoples of the 'Negroid' type and 'Pygmy' peoples), the first three of which are subdivided into further categories. Thus, according to Petri, Africa is home to 'Europeans' (sub-species 'Semites' and 'Hamites' in the northern regions, 'Europeans' [*evropeitsy*] in South Africa), 'Negroes' (sub-species 'Sudanese', 'Bantu', 'Hottentots', and 'Bushmen'), 'Mongolians' ('Malaysian' sub-species in an area of Madagascar) and 'Pygmies', marked by small blue circles within the 'Negro' region.²⁰ The lines of demarcation appear quite arbitrary in this case too, never coinciding with equivalent maps from previous or subsequent periods.

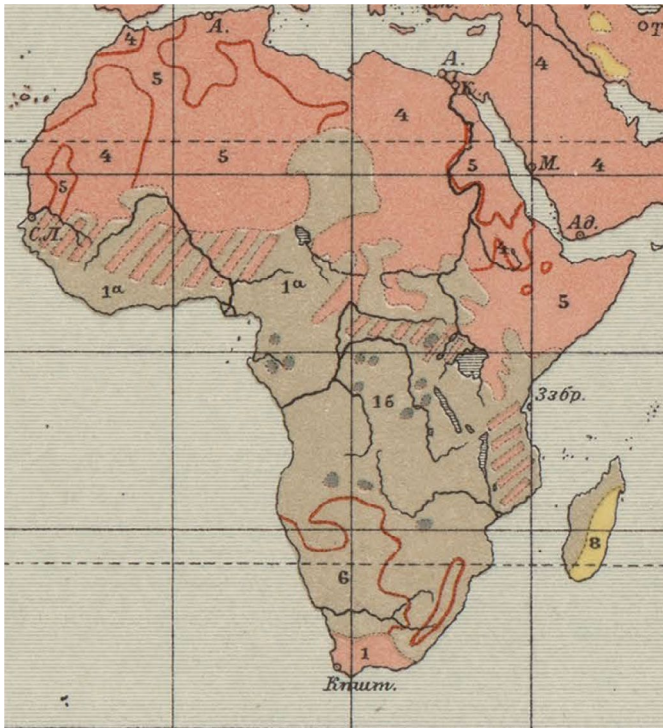


Fig. 2.3 E. Petri, 'Peoples of the World' (detail), in *Uchebnyi geograficheskii atlas*, Saint Petersburg 1898 (table XI).

20 E. Petri, *Uchebnyi geograficheskii atlas*, table XI 'Narody zemnogo shara', Saint Petersburg 1898. The same map was reproduced without any changes in the second edition (1912).

Geography textbooks and workbooks provided young readers with the same broad tripartition, switching, in the first years of the twentieth century, to the term *rasa* instead of *plemia* or *narod*, and visually confirming the existence of three races ('white', 'black', and 'yellow') living in Africa.²¹

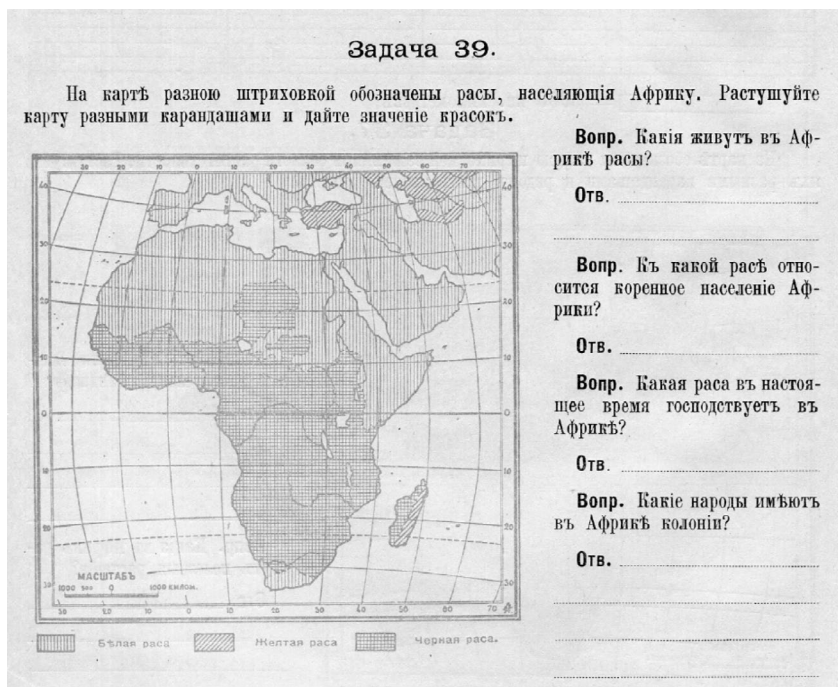


Fig. 2.4 An exercise asking pupils to assign the appropriate race to the different areas of Africa, and elaborate on the issue, in A. Nechaev, *Tetrad' dlia samostoiatel'nykh rabot po geografii*, Petrograd 1915, p. 32.

In addition to these basic maps showing the distribution of tribes or races at a rough guess, more articulate representations that did more than just name the three major groups also circulated amongst pupils and the general public. Already in 1852, an educational atlas compiled by the cartographer, pedagogue, and professor Stepan Baranovskii (1817/1818-1890) included a map displaying 'natives sorted on the

21 An exercise from A. Nechaev, *Tetrad' dlia samostoiatel'nykh rabot po geografii*, Petrograd 1915, p. 32. Cf. also, for example, the map showing the distributions of peoples (*narody*) in Africa in A. Kruber et al., *Kurs geografii vnevropeiskikh stran*, Moscow 1916, p. 78. Despite the word *narod* in the caption, the key distinguishes between white, black, and yellow races (*rasy*).

basis of their tribe' (*tuzemtsy razdeleny po plemenam*).²² Here, the young pupils could familiarise themselves with 'exotic' names of the likes of *Berbery* (Berbers), *Tibbu* (Toubou people), *Liviitsy* (Libyan Arabs), *Galla* (Oromo), *Fulakhi* (Fula people), *Banda*, *Damara*, *Gottentoty* ('Hottentots') and so forth. Devoid of fixed perimeters, these names overlapped with mildly coloured areas that identified the various European zones of influence and control, while Europeans featured as inhabitants on their own right in several areas, most notably in South Africa (a land they shared with the 'Hottentots').



Fig. 2.5 S. Baranovskii, 'Africa', in *Polnyi geograficheskii atlas sovremennogo mira*, Saint Petersburg 1852 (table 14).

From what has been examined so far, two major traits are becoming clear. Firstly, none of the cartographers involved in drawing these ethnic maps had visited Africa, nor did they have any direct knowledge of it. This was by no means unusual in the industry,

22 Cf. S. Baranovskii, *Polnyi geograficheskii atlas sovremennogo mira*, table 14 'Afrika', Saint Petersburg 1852.

which was not so much dominated by professional ethnographic mapmakers as by an array of individuals from different professions: from civil servants to military personnel, statisticians, teachers, professors, and even pastors, who never actually visited the places they were dealing with—including those inside the Russian borders.²³ Secondly, the vast majority of them belonged to the German, Baltic Russian, or even Polish lineage, as their surnames suggest, or were associated with German or Baltic Russians in some capacity. Thanks to their easier access to Western scholarship—many of them mastered several European languages and studied abroad—the border between Western- and Russian-produced geographical knowledge became quite porous, even with regard to Africa.²⁴ In this regard, Petri's case is emblematic. As Marina Mogilner has pointed out, Petri not only studied and trained in Germany and Switzerland, but he also brought back to Russia the 'colonial anthropology' developed by the Berlin Anthropological Society and based on the study of 'uncultured' people. This had significant repercussions for the Russian context: 'Petri's application of the opposition of "cultured" vs. "uncultured" to the Russian imperial context [...] confined anthropology exclusively to the study of the "underdeveloped" *inorodtsy* of the empire, thus framing it as a science of colonialism'.²⁵ This impacted the production of maps and atlases, a teaching tool for which Petri requested state funding.²⁶ While the implications mainly concerned knowledge about Russia's own 'uncultured', they were nonetheless reflected in the representation of Africa and its people, the epitome of 'underdeveloped' (and rightfully so, according to Petri, who thought it was the prerogative and duty of the 'cultured' to study and represent the 'uncultured', considered as naturally lacking agency). Thus, Western geographical scholarship entering imperial Russia

23 Gibson, *Nations on the Drawing Board*, p. 14.

24 On this matter, Steven Seegel has highlighted the very same with regard to the founding members of the IRGO: 'Founding members of the IRGO in 1845 had European credentials [...]. Many were ethnic Germans of aristocratic origin in the empire, or Russian Germans from Ukraine or the Baltic littoral who had knowledge of French or German, or both', Seegel, *Mapping Europe's Borderlands*, pp. 112-113.

25 Mogilner, *Homo Imperii*, pp. 81-82.

26 Ibid., p. 83.

was swiftly adapted to the new context, becoming in several cases the foundation for the development of new theories and approaches. For instance, Friedrich Ratzel's ideas regarding the development of anthropogeography as a field combining anthropology and geography were rapidly adopted by Dmitrii Koropchevskii, Petri's successor at Saint Petersburg University. Koropchevskii 'advanced a Ratzel-inspired anthropo-geographical model that focused on the genesis of ethnicities on specific geographical regions [...]. [...] The main object of his anthropogeography was neither ethnicity (*narodnost'*), nor race, but people-*narod* as a biological-historical category and the key trope to the populist discourse'.²⁷ Amongst many other endeavours, Koropchevskii devoted his time to compiling an extensive collection of educational essays aimed at accounting for the entire world's population (1886). The author promoted it as the first of its kind in Russia, where comprehensive manuals acknowledging the diversity of the human population were uncommon.²⁸ Significantly, in his foreword, the publisher Vladimir Marakuev, a firm believer in spreading education amongst the people, strongly differentiated Koropchevskii's latest effort from the works of Thomas Mayne Reid and Jules Verne, who 'will put the final confusion in the students' heads', already bewildered by unsystematic and partial portrayals of 'primitive peoples', unable to provide a clear picture of human population. In the following chapters, the physical and psychological characteristics of various African peoples are presented to the reader as strictly factual, a perception strengthened by the ethnographic map at the end of the book. The epitome of objectivity and science, the map drew additional validation from the fact that it had been compiled following Ratzel's studies: it was not the product of (still) unreliable and inexperienced Russian scholars, but rather the work of a distinguished European academic. In these kinds of publications, the indebtedness to Western academia was often made explicit in the maps' cartouche.

27 Ibid., pp. 88, 90.

28 D. Koropchevskii, *Liudi. Etnograficheskie ocherki. Chernye liudi*, Moscow 1886, p. 3. On Koropchevskii, cf. Chapter 3.

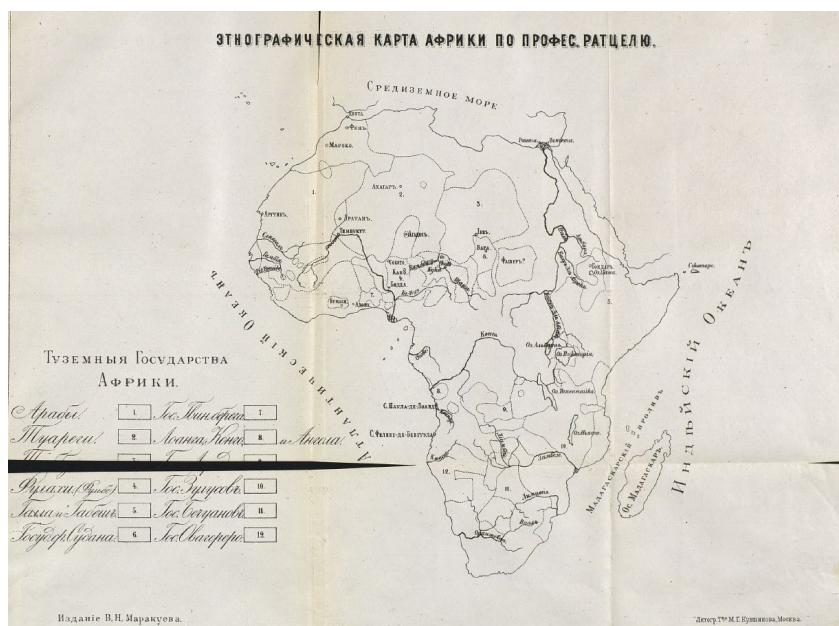


Fig. 2.6 'Ethnographic Map According to Professor Ratzel', in D. Koropchevskii, *Liudi. Etnograficheskie ocherki. Chernye liudi*, Moscow 1886.

The *Ethnographic World Map* (Figure 2.7) featured in the 1884 *Detailed World Atlas* by Il'in explicitly referenced the works of Gustav Adolf von Klöden, Oscar Peschel, as well as Aleksandr Rittikh and Mikhail Veniukov, who had both previously collaborated with Il'in to publish the 1875 *Ethnographic Map of European Russia*. According to the key, the colours attributed to different ethnic groups could be interpreted using the classification systems of both von Klöden (first column reporting the ethnic groups' names) and Peschel (second column), though with minor changes. The map displays one of the leitmotifs of colonial cartography, i.e. the erasure of natives from their lands;²⁹ indeed, South Africa is shown

29 This could be achieved in several ways, such as renaming places, constructing the indigenous space as empty and thus at the mercy of white people, or ascribing numerical superiority to the latter in conquered areas. For an overview of this topic, cf. for instance H. Winlow, 'Mapping, Race and Ethnicity', in A. Kobayashi (ed. by), *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, Amsterdam 2019, pp. 309-321. South Africa as a space inhabited by white people was indeed a feature of nineteenth-century Western atlases; cf. for instance Heinrich Berghaus' *Physikalischer Atlas*

to be inhabited by Europeans, who belong, more precisely, to the 'German tribe' (*germanskoe plemia*). This was not an isolated case, but rather a recurring feature. Thus, the 1900 pocket atlas by Anton Hickmann and Adolf Marks identified the Germans (*germantsy*) as the main inhabitants of the region,³⁰ while also introducing an element of ambiguity with regard to the 'Hottentots' and the 'Bushmen', classified as '*plemena of uncertain race (ne vpolne opredelennoi rasy)*'.³¹ The tendency to erase the natives from cartographic ethnic representations of southern Africa was often corroborated in Russian geography textbooks by the assertion that Europeans had successfully colonised these lands in search of a healthy climate and natural resources, thereby becoming the most conspicuous ethnic group. Linberg, matching his cartographic depiction, underlined that in South Africa 'the majority of the population is now comprised of Englishmen, Frenchmen and Dutch'; schoolteacher Nikolai Berezin wrote that 'the earliest and most successful European settlement was in South Africa. They [Europeans] live all over the Cape: blacks can only be found as servants, porters and carriage drivers'; and schoolteacher Germogen Ivanov pointed out that Europeans 'now form a solid mass of population in the very south, where the climate is healthy for them'.³² An exception to this trend was the textbook *Course on the Geography of Non-European Countries*, edited by four renowned geographers of that period, including Aleksandr Kruber and Sergei Grigor'ev. In this work, the authors did not shy away from offering a negative evaluation of European policies in Africa, especially criticising white people for wiping out entire communities and imposing their religion via missionaries. Recognising that South Africa was the region most suited to Europeans due to its climate, they nevertheless cautioned against treating the area as predominantly white, stating that 'in sheer numbers, the white population is not very numerous compared to the locals, most of whom belong to Negroes of the Bantu family'. Indeed, the ethnographic map published in this textbook does not

(1892 edition; first edition 1852) or the ethnographic map drawn by John Emslie for James Reynolds *Introduction to Natural Philosophy* (1851).

30 A. Gikman and A. Marks, *Vseobshchii geograficheskii i statisticheskii karmannyi atlas*, table 4 'Rasprostranenie narodov zemnogo shara', Saint Petersburg 1900.

31 Ibid., pp. 14-15.

32 A. Linberg, *Kratkii uchbnik vseobshchei geografii. Kurs 2-go klassa gimnazii. Avstraliia, Afrika, Amerika, Aziia*, Moscow 1886, p. 38; N. Berezin, *Afrika. Posobie dlia prepodavaniia geografii*, Saint Petersburg 1912, p. 157; G. Ivanov, *Nachal'nyi kurs geografii. Chast' 2-ia. Aziia, Afrika, Amerika, Avstraliia*, Saint Petersburg 1913, p. 62.

allocate any area of South Africa specifically to white people; instead, it emphasises the presence of 'Hottentots' and 'Kaffirs', while 'Englishmen' is simply added in overlay.³³

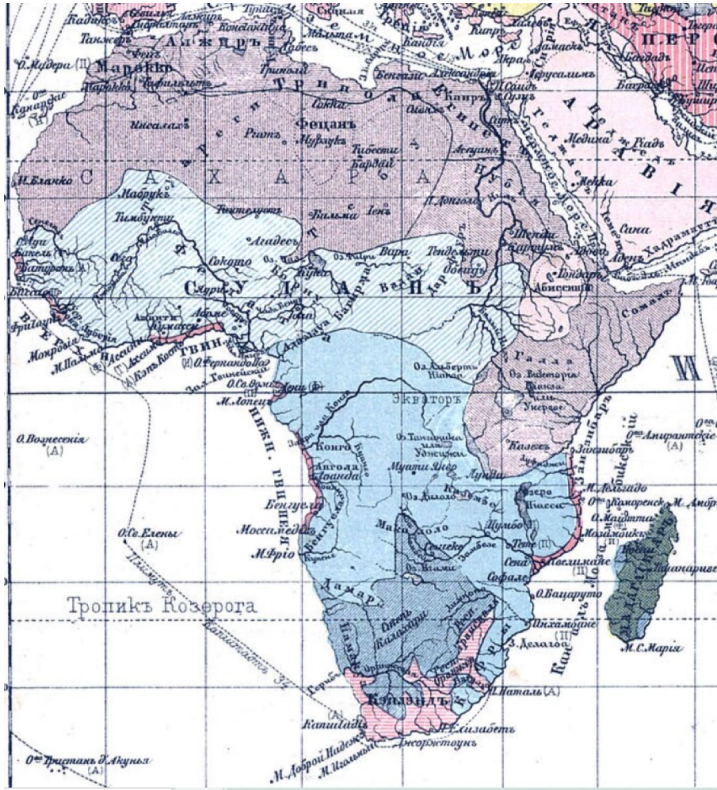


Fig. 2.7 A. Il'in, 'Ethnographic World Map' (detail), in *Podrobnii atlas vseobshchei chastei sveta*, Saint Petersburg 1884 (table 12).

Western scholarship also influenced geographical and political maps detailing natural features and the European partition of the continent. Many maps intended for pupils or the general public replicated the long-standing tendency to embellish the drawings of the lands with 'a wide range of decorative emblems', like 'decorative title pages, lettering, cartouches, vignettes' and so forth, all contributing, in the

³³ A. Kruber *et al.*, *Kurs geografii vneevropeiskikh stran*, p. 111; for the map, see p. 78. Cf. also E. Lesgaft, *Kratkii kurs geografii vneevropeiskikh stran (kurs starshikh klassov sredneuchebnykh zavedenii)*, Petrograd 1915, p. 104.

colonial era, 'to symbolize the acquisition of overseas territories'.³⁴ In the era of the rise of a 'culture-consuming' public with little education, this trait, which had always been part of the cartographic tradition, was adopted by publishing houses, including the ever-expanding media sector, whose main source of income were the middle and lower classes. For instance, in British and French cartography appearing in the media at the turn of the twentieth century, '[...] maps were often interspersed with other pictorial representations of imperial landscapes and cultivated an image of overseas colonies as masculine, martial arenas, exotic spaces of danger and adventure', strongly influencing the public perception.³⁵ Russian atlases for pupils evolved accordingly. Iulian Simashko's *School Atlas of General Geography* (1859) is a telling example not only of the juxtaposition of maps and drawings, but also of a time of profound change in both the publishing sector and the educational trends. Simashko (1821-1893), a zoologist, pedagogue, and public figure born in Warsaw, where his family had moved from the Kyiv Governorate, gained popularity for his *Russian Fauna* (1856-1861) and as the founder and editor of the journal *Sem'ia i shkola* (*Family and School*), alongside the writer Elena Apreleva. An extremely active individual, he contributed to the establishment of the Entomological Society and was an honorary member of the Russian Mineralogical Society, as well as one of the minds behind the Pedagogical Museum founded by Nikolai Isakov.³⁶ The *Atlas*, published in 1859 after two years of work, was to be used in schools and gymnasiums. It quickly became popular and saw several editions, with adjustments and additions by the German and Russian (respectively) geographers Heinrich Kiepert and Arkadii Pavlovskii.³⁷ The physical and political maps of the continents were richly coloured and invariably framed by drawings of local flora and fauna, a decision that the author defended in the preface against possible criticism of their 'redundancy', which would have caused confusion among students. Simashko devoted two

34 Harley, *Maps, Knowledge, and Power*, pp. 73, 75.

35 M. Heffernan, 'The Cartography of the Fourth Estate. Mapping the New Imperialism in British and French Newspapers, 1875-1925', in J. R. Akerman (ed. by), *The Imperial Map*, Chicago-London 2009, pp. 261-299 (p. 298).

36 P. Bykov, 'Iu. I. Simashko', *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia*, 1888, 1036, pp. 415, 418.

37 Cf. for instance the fifth edition, published in 1872: Iu. Simashko, *Uchebnyi atlas vseobshchei geografii*, Saint Petersburg 1872.

maps, one physical and one political, to every continent except Africa and Australia, which only have one each. Looking at how Africa was rendered in this atlas, one can observe a perceptible abstract quality: physical features are barely visible (only major rivers and lakes are shown, and reliefs are barely outlined), the central region—still relatively unknown—is depicted as an empty space, allowing readers to use their imagination and project their own fantasies about the ‘dark continent’ (*chernyi materik*), where ‘negation acts as a kind of provisional erasure, clearing a space for the expansion of the colonial imagination and for the pursuit of desire’.³⁸ The main tools used to help the pupils read the map are the names of the settlements and the coloured lines that mark the borders of the European colonies. For the most part, signification occurs outside the African contours: the visual representation of the continent is accompanied by three tables, which explain some of the symbols used by the author, provide a list of the most significant African reliefs, and outline the profile of the Sahara Desert. The map is then framed by fifty-two drawings of animal and plant species, randomly arranged and accompanied by minimalist captions. It seems natural to project all of these species, following one’s own imagination, into the empty African space, without actually taking into account their real habitats. More detailed explanations of the various animals and plants are provided separately, quite far from the map itself, as they are added at the beginning of the atlas in a general explanatory section. This separation of images and text certainly helps readers to conjure up exotic and far-fetched adventures in a land whose representation relies more on its partition among Western powers (as carefully detailed in the first table on the bottom left), than on its actual physical features. As signifying elements, European colonial possessions (*vladeniia*) thus prevail on African physical features, contributing to the creation of a space negotiated between white men and exotic nature, and where the overall absence of black people points to their perceived irrelevance.

38 D. Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire. Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*, Durham-London 1993, pp. 92-93. Although this may not have been the intention of the cartographer, it certainly seems to be one of the consequences of the way this map was structured.



Fig. 2.8 Iu. Simashko, 'Africa', in *Uchebnyi atlas vseobshchei geografii*, Saint Petersburg 1872.

Despite its numerous editions and its growing popularity, the atlas also received negative reviews in the press. Soon after its first release, *Russkoe slovo* published a rather unflattering piece by the accomplished explorer of Central Asia and naturalist Nikolai Severtsov (1827-1885), in which, apart from reporting a number of factual errors, the scholar criticised the structure of the atlas as a whole. One of his main concerns was the lack of thorough explanations and of a list of sources in an atlas destined to pupils, which, in his views, rendered the publication extremely average (the benchmark, as one might expect, was German cartography). This initial perception was reinforced by the fact that the explanatory section was not in-depth enough, as well as by the author's attempt to combine separate disciplines (geography, zoology, and botany) under the same roof. The multidisciplinary approach was perceived as the result of the popularisation of science, which had determined a qualitative drop. Commenting on the drawings of flora and fauna, Severtsov stated:

If the aim is to provide students with a more vivid image of a country [...], showing them its nature, then this aim is not achieved at all. [...] However, despite the fact that the poor execution makes this purpose difficult to guess, we cannot consider any other possibilities—otherwise we would have to suspect that the publisher had in mind the impression that his atlas would make on uneducated parents who want to educate their children in a modern way.³⁹

While previous atlases contained only physical features and city names, this one offered a smattering of botany, climatology, natural history and so forth for a very modest price ('And all this for three roubles! How could you not buy it!'). Although subsequent editions underwent minor revisions, the general outline of the atlas remained unchanged.

From this moment onwards, this new typology of atlases, perceived as a break from tradition and one of the outcomes of a necessary teaching reform, continued to flourish, effectively mixing physical geography with ethnography, natural science, history, orography, and mineralogy. In the preface to his atlas, Linberg anticipated possible criticism and defended the work's 'peculiarities', stating that textbooks and manuals should adapt to the ever-changing pedagogical needs. Among the main innovations, Linberg listed the use of pictures (*kartiny*) instead of single drawings of plants and animals, explaining that pictures 'can familiarise [the pupil] with the nature and the works of nature of the different countries more effectively', as they leave a lasting impression on students.⁴⁰ Consequently, the maps of the various continents are surrounded by scenes depicting the landscapes or specific moments in the lives of the inhabitants. The images, as Linberg stated at the beginning, were taken almost entirely from the German atlas by Leeder and Schade. Devoid of any pretence of 'scientificity' or adherence to the pictorial canon of natural science, these pictures provided a subjectivity which may be found surprising, and which brings the atlas closer to the products of the coeval illustrated popular press. The almost minimalist physical and political maps of Africa are encapsulated by five pictures, three of which reproduce orientalist, romanticised tropes of the desert and ruins of ancient civilisations,

39 N. Severtsov, 'Uchebnyi atlas Iu. Simashko', *Russkoe slovo*, 1860, 1, pp. 100-106 (pp. 102-103).

40 A. Linberg, *Uchebnyi atlas vseobshchei geografii* (cf. *Predislovie*).

while the remaining two play with imagined notions of Africa's supposed exotic, dangerous, and savage character. With the help of these scenes, it was almost natural for the young pupils to project their own imagination into the empty space of the African continent, thus embarking on a journey of the mind that had very little connection with reality. The following page is entirely occupied by eight 'scenes from African countries' (*vidy iz afrikanskikh stran*), ranging from examples of human settlements and civilisation (a view of Timbuktu, the Sphynx and the pyramids), to cruel practices (a slave caravan), to ethnographic portraits of northern Africans and samples of local fauna put into their respective environment and often caught in brutal acts, thus emphasising the continent's dangerousness. While these scenes undoubtedly captured the students' imagination, they did very little to enhance their scientific knowledge.



Fig. 2.9 A. Linberg, 'Physical Map of Africa', in *Uchebnyi atlas vseobshchei geografii*, Leipzig 1874 (table 6).

Evidently, cartographic illustrations and atlases were progressively extending the conventional boundaries of 'pure' or 'traditional' geography. Indeed, the front cover of the Linberg atlas did not refer to either physical or political geography, but rather depicted a series of facial portraits, representing a cross-section of the world's ethnic groups.

The portraits were methodically organised into a hierarchical structure, with the top of the page featuring the 'Slavs' (the Great Russians at the summit), followed by the 'Arabs' and 'Hispanics'. The central section was dedicated to the depiction of 'native Americans' and 'Asians', while the bottom section was allocated to 'Negroes', 'Papuans', and 'Malaysians'. The power of the map maker was not generally exercised over individuals but over the knowledge of the world made available to people in general. Yet this is not consciously done and it transcends the simple categories of "intended" and "unintended" altogether', Harley has observed.⁴¹ Indeed, if Linberg's objective was to modernise Russian atlases and render them more appealing to young students, the unintended consequence was the dissemination of a structured system of representation and knowledge originating from the Western—in this case predominantly German—tradition that was merely adapted to the Russian context.

Even political maps of Africa, *de facto* reconstructing the changing borders of the European colonies, sometimes offered an additional layer of meaning, particularly when accompanied by a key. For example, maps supplemented by squares or rectangles of various sizes to represent the difference in surface area between the small European mother nations and the vast African colonies reinforced the general perception (and common criticism) that the Western powers had expanded too much.⁴² In other cases, Russia was interestingly included in the array of nations possessing colonies (*kolonii*): the *Marks's Big Desk World Atlas*, edited by Petri and by Iulii Shokal'skii, can be cited as a good example. The atlas continued the path of modernising the discipline by including a wide variety of thematic maps and charts alongside the 'traditional' (physical and political) ones. Of particular interest amongst them is a map showing the international trade and communication routes (the telegraph network), alongside the colonies of 'European countries'.⁴³

41 J. B. Harley, 'Deconstructing the Map', in Harley, *The New Nature of Maps*, pp. 149–168 (p. 166).

42 See for example the treatment of France in Ia. Rudnev, *Afrikanskii ostrov Madagaskar*, Saint Petersburg 1906 and Kruber *et al.*, *Kurs geografii vneevropeiskikh stran*, p. 103.

43 E. Petri and Iu. Shokal'skii, *Bol'shoi vseмирnyi nastol'nyi atlas Marksa*, table X 'Mezhdunarodnye puti soobshcheniia i kolonial'nye vladeniia', Saint Petersburg 1905.

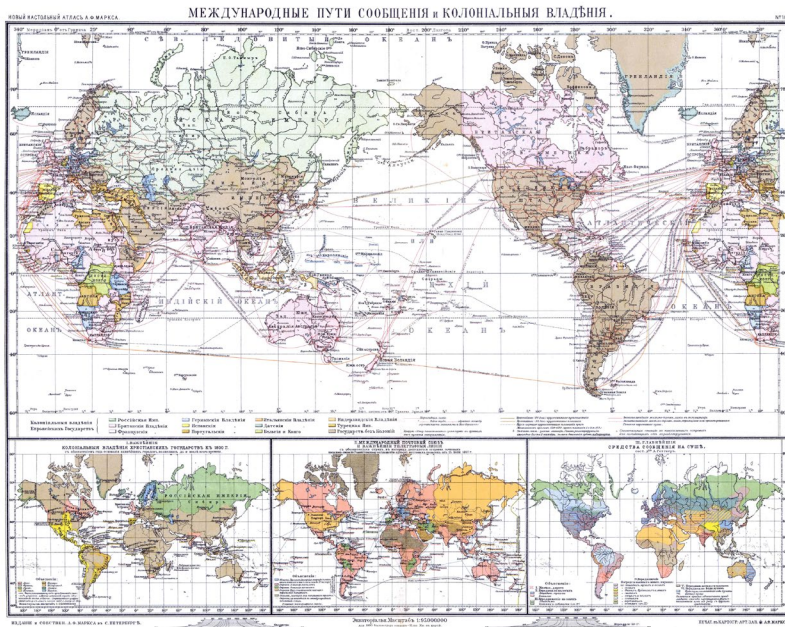


Fig. 2.10 E. Petri and Iu. Shokal'skii, 'International Trade Routes and Colonial Possessions', in *Bol'shoi vsemirnyi nastol'nyi atlas Marksa*, Saint Petersburg 1905 (table 10).

Thematically, maps of this kind were part of a new twentieth-century fashion for what has been called the 'cartography of imperial commerce and trade', which was a response to 'the sense that the new century would usher in a new global order dominated by huge continental-scale states and panregional confederations'.⁴⁴ Thus, imperial spaces were represented 'as arenas of economic opportunity and commercial potential', 'awaiting new development and integration that would benefit colonizers and colonized alike'.⁴⁵ Russia was no exception in this respect. This atlas, published after the deaths of both Marks and Petri, was the result of several years of work, during which the scholars had examined many Western atlases and selected the most accurate and appropriate maps of the 'other' continents for the public. The main reference, in this case, was the German cartographic publishing house

44 Heffernan, *The Cartography of the Fourth Estate*, p. 284.

45 Ibid., p. 271.

Wagner and Debes. In the aforementioned table, comprised of four maps, the keys appear to be particularly significant. In the first map of the table, different colours are assigned to different countries and their respective colonies: peculiarly, the key, which accounts for the 'colonial possessions of European countries', lists the Russian Empire in first place, thus implicitly putting Russia amongst the European countries and, at the same time, in a position of parity and competition with them. The light green colouring assigned to Russia, of course, covers only the territory occupied by the tsarist empire, effectively rendering it a single giant colony. To the discerning eye, such a representation may even seem grotesque: unlike other empires, there was no clear geographical demarcation between the centre and the periphery of the Russian Empire. This peculiarity, coupled with the usage of only one colour—light green—transformed European Russia into a colony of itself. However, demonstrating the vastness of its domains, which were clearly larger than those of any other Western power, was undoubtedly one of the map's main purposes. Showing the unmatched superiority of Russia's territorial magnitude was also the main purpose of the map at the bottom left of the same page, titled 'The Most Important Colonial Domains of Christian Countries around 1800'. The final effect was bittersweet here, too: while at the beginning of the nineteenth century the Russian Empire had no direct rivals in terms of land extension, the comparison with the present-day situation—after merely a hundred years—was certainly merciless.

From Maps to Descriptions: Russian Travellers Recreate the African Lands

The printing costs of professional maps were such that they were effectively the prerogative of cartographic publishing houses, which released both those intended for an academic audience and those for the general public (such as atlases). But other categories of maps also circulated in late imperial Russia, especially in publications designed for new generations of readers, such as military and travel maps. The trends in the frequency of such a type of cartographic representation are consistent with what occurred in the West during the same period. Military maps, which were formerly exclusively available to military

personnel, began to be published in the popular press during major international conflicts, though they remained less prominent than illustrations, which were considerably cheaper.⁴⁶ In relation to the African continent, the conflicts that attracted the most attention in Russia were undoubtedly the Italo-Abyssinian war and the Anglo-Boer war, both of which saw, as was outlined in Chapter 1, the direct participation of Russian soldiers and sanitary convoys. Yet, while memoirs and/or accounts of Russians who participated in such wartime events were published extensively, both as individual volumes and in a wide variety of journals (from family journals like *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia* and *Vokrug sveta* to more sectorial ones, such as *Voennyi sbornik*), the maps that in some cases accompanied them showed no trace of Russian involvement. With the Russians conveniently wiped out of the scene in these cartographic representations, Africa remained a space disputed among—and touched by—‘purely Western’ powers, thus providing yet another telling example of Russia’s constant wavering between considering itself part of Europe or something different, depending on its shifting interests. If existence is defined by a presence on a map, and if cartographic silences do count, then Russia’s absence from the cartographic representations of these two major historic events suggests a desire to remain officially ‘unregistered’ and ‘undetected’. A personal memoir is one thing; a map is another: as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, maps precede reality, they define it through signification, they make it official, to the point that often only what is registered on the map exists. Therefore, while memoirs and accounts were tolerated and even promoted because they provided examples of individual acts of Russian courage, registering the Russian presence on a map would have been tantamount to declaring the government’s direct interests in the African continent.

Indeed, thanks to their apparent scientific nature, maps could have been perceived as even more objective than photographs, which were starting to be used to document military conflicts. With regard to visual representation in written sources, traces of Russian involvement

46 Cf. Heffernan, *The Cartography of the Fourth Estate*. On the coverage of wars in the popular illustrated press of *fin-de-siècle* Europe cf. M. Martin, *Images at War: Illustrated Periodicals and Constructed Nations*, Toronto 2005, <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442675995>

in African conflicts can be found in pictures (albeit rarely),⁴⁷ or in the 'plans' used in memoirs to clarify settings or arrangements for the reader. In *With the Armies of Menelik II*, for example, Aleksandr Bulatovich, including a plan of the headquarters, represented also his own tent, which, moreover, in the key is listed just after Menelik's and well before those of the other Ethiopian leaders.⁴⁸ Yet, this tangible evidence of the Russian presence in Africa should not come as a great surprise. While recounting war conflicts between Abyssinians and other African peoples in which he and his companions took part, Bulatovich's memoirs stray from a strictly military narrative to become, for the most part, the account of a professional explorer. As such, his presence in Africa should not have gone unnoticed; quite the contrary, it was important to draw attention to it. The volume was accompanied by three maps, two of which graphically showed his scientific observations of the regions he travelled through in 1897-1898. The third map was a detailed physical representation of the same lands, with a clear black line which followed Bulatovich's itinerary. Indeed, despite the title of the book giving the impression of a predominantly military narrative, Bulatovich's main preoccupation throughout his narration is making geographical and scientific discoveries in lands untouched by Europeans. According to his account, Menelik offered him the opportunity to join one of the three expeditions he was organising; he chose the one set to 'completely unexplored regions. In this respect, the expedition of Ras Walda Giyorgis was most interesting and promising. No European had yet succeeded in penetrating southwards beyond the northern borders of Kaffa [...]'.⁴⁹ His ambition to make significant discoveries soon turned into an obsession: as the account progresses, his excessive

47 See for instance Iu. Elets, *Imperator Menelik i voina ego s Italiei*, Saint Petersburg 1898, which includes many photographs taken by Nikolai Leont'ev. While the majority of them make Leont'ev a simple observer of places, peoples and events in which others—but not him or his Russian companions—are involved (which is interesting in itself), the latter part of the book also provides evidence of the tangible Russian presence in Abyssinia (see, for example, the pictures entitled *The Camp of the Red Cross Contingent* (p. 271) and *The Arrival in Djibouti of N. Leont'ev's Contingent* (p. 279)). This, however, was not common. For instance, the *Album of the Glorious War of the Boers* (*Al'bom slavnoï voiny burov*, Saint Petersburg 1902), comprising drawings depicting episodes of the war, contains no traces of Russians.

48 A. Bulatovich, *S voiskami Menelika II. Dnevnik pokhoda iz Efiopii k ozeru Rudol'fa*, Saint Petersburg 1900, p. 137.

49 Ibid., p. 7.

efforts—scrutinised by the perplexed and oftentimes alarmed gaze of the surrounding troops and local population—resulted in cruelty and a lack of common sense. Recalling one of his excursions, for instance, Bulatovich described how he forced a prisoner to accompany him to the top of a mountain in extreme conditions:

Halfway down the road, the prisoners refused to go any further and lay down, huddled together. Threats didn't help. [...] I needed the prisoner badly, as he was the only one who could identify the surrounding mountains for me, so I decided to force him to continue. I fired my revolver over his ear and, taking advantage of his fright, pulled the prisoner up by his hair. [...] He followed me, moving like a machine. [...] At 11:15 a.m., completely exhausted, we reached the top of the mountain.⁵⁰

A clear example of the (Western?) fixation on discovering new places at any cost, this passage (as many others in the book) shows—albeit tangentially—the perspective of the locals, who did not understand the motives behind exploring and mapping. Indeed, Bulatovich frequently creates a juxtaposition between himself (in this regard, a representative of European civilisation), preoccupied with knowing the names of (and naming) places, and the locals, who not only seem unaware of these names, but also appear uninterested in learning them. No curiosity, no inclination to expand their geographical knowledge is attributed to them; even the Ras is forced to ask Bulatovich for help to correctly read a map and calculate distances.⁵¹ However, the perception of this substantial difference does not seem to have caused Bulatovich to question his actions, even slightly, in the book. In fact, all the suffering resulting from his reckless explorations is ultimately rewarded: at the end of his journey, Bulatovich, like Kovalevskii before him, is able to name three places *à la russe*, which are permanently recorded on the map itself. These are a mountain range which he names 'Mountain range of the emperor Nicholas II' (*Khrebet imperatora Nikolaia II*); a mountain reminiscent of the high ground 'Tsarskii valik' in Krasnoe Selo which he names exactly as such, and finally 'Cape Vas'ka' (*Vas'kin mys*) on Lake Rudolf (now Lake Turkana). In addition to the evident allusion to the Russian state power in the first two toponyms, a clear

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 230-231.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 79.

marker of Russianness on the African soil (and a sanctioned one at that, as Menelik II apparently approved Bulatovich's terminology), the one perhaps most relevant, though largely gone unnoticed,⁵² is 'Cape Vas'ka'. A local three-year-old boy whom Bulatovich treated after having found him severely mutilated, Vas'ka owed his name to the explorer himself—his real one remains obscure. Thus, in this case the process of naming involves at first an African subject, a living person to whom the Russian explorer assigns a new identity. On the same day, Bulatovich named the Cape facing Lake Rudolf in honour of this newly acquired subject/son/servant figure, providing a second reminder of his power over the African landscape. Conveniently, Vas'ka proved himself to be a great find: he 'turned out to be a good, healthy, potbellied little boy',⁵³ full of spirit, 'remarkably intelligent' and even capable of learning Russian very quickly.⁵⁴ The young boy's many virtues opportunely became, in Bulatovich's writing, evidence of the author's competence in choosing and investing time in the very best of the 'savages'.⁵⁵ Thus, naming the Cape after the boy is a testament to Bulatovich's ability to transform himself into a successful representative of colonial culture, rather than to the greatness of the Russian Empire.

With the black line of the itinerary, the topography carefully detailed according to the explorer's surveys, and the tents of the bivouacs clearly displayed in the main settlements, Bulatovich's map summarises the book's main themes: travel, exploration, and war. Indeed, both the map

52 The dedication of the mountain range to the tsar, along with a minute description of its geography and a celebration of its explorer, was widely publicised in the newspaper *Russkii invalid* (07.09.1899, p. 2). The featured article was then included as a footnote in Bulatovich's book.

53 Bulatovich, *S voiskami Menelika II*, p. 224.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 236.

55 Vas'ka belonged to one of the many tribes subdued by Ras Walda Giyorgis on this expedition. Therefore, he was not ethnically 'Abyssinian' and did not share the prerogatives attributed to this people by Bulatovich, for whom they were not only cultured (especially thanks to their Christianity), but also a civilising force within Africa itself. The African tribes he encountered were generally depicted as either incapable savages with unpleasant features, or, in the case of Muslims, associated with common orientalist tropes. Bulatovich later became quite fond of Vas'ka and brought him back to Russia to educate him. After a few years, however, he sent him back to Abyssinia, as the boy was being mocked by his schoolmates. Cf. M. K. Mirzeler, 'Reading "Ethiopia through Russian Eyes": Political and Racial Sentiments in the Travel Writings of Alexander Bulatovich, 1896-1898', *History in Africa*, 2005, 32, pp. 281-294, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2005.0017>

and the author's narration depict Ethiopia as either a war theatre or a site for potentially impressive discoveries: in both cases, it is treated as an object of conquest, whether military or scientific. Evocative descriptions of the landscape are never devoid of sombre hints to the destruction caused to the land by armed conflicts, as in the following quote:

The eye rested on the green of the surrounding dense foliage. [...] The place's enchanted beauty took you somewhere far away, into a magical world. You could almost hear and see a marvellous fairy tale unfolding. The enchanted forest from *Sleeping Beauty* was before you; the only things missing were the princess, her palace, and her subjects. But instead of the beautiful, poetic setting of the fairy tale, there were terrible traces of death and destruction. White human bones were scattered among the green grass. There were no settlements to be seen [...]. The evil fairy of war had destroyed everything by scattering bones across the fields. As we approached the capital of Kaffa, traces of recent battles became increasingly visible. Near the city itself, the meadows were strewn with human bones...⁵⁶

The traces of war and violence are so pronounced and frequent that, when looking at an intact and peaceful landscape, Bulatovich cannot help but imagine how it will change after the upcoming battle. In his perception, the landscape, violence, and destruction become inexorably linked:

As far as the eye could see, the valley and hills were densely populated. Smoke rose from the houses. [...] The fields were cultivated. The quiet, hard-working life of the peaceful people was visible in everything, and it was sad to think that tomorrow all this would be destroyed... The scene would change: the inhabitants would flee, taking their cattle with them and carrying their belongings and children away. Probably, they would be killed, wounded and captured, their houses would be set on fire, leaving only ashes behind.⁵⁷

Yet, sad as this situation is, the violence that Bulatovich witnessed and participated in during the expedition is neither questioned nor condemned. Instead, it is presented as an unescapable necessity on the Abyssinian part, since the country is seen as the rightful civiliser of the savage African tribes that have not yet been domesticated. While European interference in Africa is vehemently criticised, especially in

⁵⁶ Bulatovich, *S voiskami Menelika II*, pp. 41-42.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 116-117.

the introduction, Abyssinia is presented as the perfect candidate to bring Africa into the realm of civilised lands. However, this does not stem from some undisclosed Abyssinian virtues, but rather from the fact that, culturally speaking, Abyssinia is closer to 'wild Africa' than Europe. Consequently, it can act as a cultural intermediary between the West and the 'black savages':

By seeking to expand the boundaries of his empire, Menelik is merely carrying out Ethiopia's traditional role as a cultural propagator and unifier of the tribes inhabiting the Ethiopian highlands and surrounding areas, and is only taking a new step towards establishing and developing the power of a black empire. [...] It is well known what consequences the conquests of savage tribes by Europeans lead to. A significant disparity in cultural development between conquerors and conquered has often resulted in the enslavement, mistreatment, or degradation of the weaker race. [...] For the Abyssinians, the Egyptian, Arabian and finally European civilisation, which they little by little adopted, have not been detrimental: borrowing their fruits, and in turn conquering and annexing neighbouring tribes and transmitting their culture to them, Abyssinia did not wipe out or destroy the identity of any of them, but rather enabled them to preserve their individual characteristics. Thus, Christian Abyssinia plays an important role in global progress by acting as a conduit for European civilisation to reach the wild peoples of Central Africa.⁵⁸

If conquering the surrounding black African space is seen as the Abyssinians' prerogative, as symbolised by the Abyssinian flag being raised over the newly annexed land, the Russian explorer is left with nothing more than a 'virtual' conquest, of a scientific kind. While he may not physically or politically master the land, he can still do so by measuring and photographing it and becoming the most knowledgeable person in the convoy. Not only does he profess deep geographical and astronomical knowledge, he is also appointed the expedition's doctor, responsible for treating wounded soldiers and prisoners. His relentless pursuit of scientific discovery undoubtedly stems from his desire to assert his own share of authority over a land conquered by the Abyssinians and contested by Western colonial empires.

Here Bulatovich's inner ambivalence comes to the surface. On the one hand, he embodies the European man who relentlessly seeks new

58 Ibid., pp. 4-5.

horizons and is obsessed with discovering and measuring the world in order to feel in control. His positive attitude towards the Abyssinians, moreover, is not the result of an epiphany leading to the realisation that hierarchical values between peoples need to be overcome; rather, it is simply linked to their Christianity, which renders Western colonial claims against them unjustifiable (whereas colonial claims against 'savage Africa' are understandable, albeit often disruptive). On the other hand, throughout the book, he emphasises, as a Russian, his differences from the Europeans. For example, he challenges the Abyssinian belief that all 'European' soldiers are weak, which they formed by observing the Italians in battle, explaining that the Russians use different tactics in battle that demonstrate strength and courage.⁵⁹ In this way, Russian military superiority is reaffirmed without the need to resort to bloodthirsty actions that could cast the empire in an unfavourable light.

This seems consistent with the tendency to remove the Russian presence from military maps of the African continent, which also impacted the way the land was mapped and described by military representatives. In this regard, Petr Krasnov's account of the diplomatic mission to Ethiopia that he led with the support of some of his Cossacks is particularly insightful.⁶⁰ Although this was not a military expedition per se, Krasnov was a military man, and that was his role during his time in Ethiopia. Yet the diary he published shortly after his trip reads more like a tourist's travelogue than military literature. As a consequence, including the convoy's itinerary on the map in the diary's second edition could not have had a negative impact on how the Russian military presence in Africa was perceived.

Indeed, Krasnov's Abyssinia falls back on the fully orientalist rhetoric of a dreamlike, highly exotic space, constructed as a spectacle that exists simply for the gaze of the West. Lyrical descriptions of majestic nature and striking landscapes abound throughout the diary,

59 'In their eyes, European armies appeared as highly disciplined but extremely stationary masses, whose actions in battle were exclusively limited to shooting. I felt it necessary to challenge this perception with regard to Russians. This surprised him greatly. "We attack with bayonets and a cry of *Hurrah!*, while the cavalry attack with *shashki* [sabres]", I told the Ras. "I thought", he replied, "that *ferenji* [foreigners] only fire their guns, but if you attack with cold weapons it means you are truly good soldiers"', *ibid.*, p. 74.

60 P. Krasnov, *Kazaki v Abissinii*, Saint Petersburg 1900.

serving both as a reminder of the geographic—and cultural—distance between Russia and Africa ('You look into the distance [...] and feel that it is something new, unexplored, not European, not Russian. Russia is far away. An unfamiliar landscape is all around you. [...] The colours are sharp, the contrasts are heavy'),⁶¹ and as an inescapable force which lures the European man into the unknown with its mysterious charm. It is a place where one can lose one's sense of direction ('The African night came at once. The yellow glow of the sunset had faded, and unfamiliar bright stars appeared in the dark vault of the sky. There was no Polaris yet—the compass of the northern cavalryman—and I felt eerily out in the wilderness'),⁶² being so far away from civilisation ('These couriers, the last link with the civilised world, from time to time convey our news to Europe')⁶³ that one can think of living in a dream:

High up in the dark blue sky, almost starless, the bright disc of the full moon shone. It was not the moon of the north, meek and quiet, resembling a modest beauty, [...] no, this was a proud beauty, confident in its powers, outshining all the stars with its bright lustre, shining high in the sky. [...] And beyond the city stretched other mysterious blue mountains, alluring [...] like the magic fairy tale of the Orient, like everything shrouded in the haze of the unknown.⁶⁴

Indeed, anticipating questions from acquaintances upon returning home, the author explicitly presents this space as a product of fiction and imagination:

'So, how is Abyssinia?', 'How is Menelik?'. Abyssinia is a fairy tale. Just as you listened, in your childhood, to stories about a king in a certain kingdom who had three sons and waged marvellous wars with unseen warriors, so in Abyssinia, under the heat of the midday sun or in the cool of the night, under the wonderful glow of the stars, you feel that you are in a magical fairy tale.⁶⁵

Full of a healthy (albeit somewhat 'savage') life, in contrast to the current situation in the West ('Life is bustling in this fertile land—it bustles with life, not with nerves, it bustles with reality, not with the

61 *Ibid.*, pp. 102-103.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 161.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 182.

64 *Ibid.*, pp. 221-223.

65 *Ibid.*, p. 466.

fiction of neurasthenic decadence'),⁶⁶ the Abyssinian space is carefully cleansed of any references to the destruction and disarray caused by present-day conflicts. It is not the torn country of Bulatovich, bearing the signs of war, but an inviting region that can easily be visited by ordinary tourists: even wild animals are not that dangerous, since they are easily killed during hunting trips. Apart from the obvious reminders to the other soldiers in Krasnov's convoy, hints at the military world are either set in the past—for example, when Krasnov briefly recounts the events of a battle between Abyssinians and Harari people which unfolded in 1886—or treated through an essayistic lens, as in the meticulous explanation of the Abyssinian army's structure.⁶⁷ This seemingly untouched and uncorrupted poetic space, highly exoticised and orientalist, is presented as completely alien. While the most common rhetoric at the time stressed the proximity of Ethiopia, its culture and religion to Russia, Krasnov emphasises its distance and unfamiliarity with the Western world, of which Russia is also a part. In this sense, the Cossacks' itinerary marked on the map serves as a tangible record of their journey into a land of dreams.

Indeed, the vast majority of memoirs and travelogues were equipped with a map illustrating the author's route. In some cases, such as the aforementioned Bulatovich, the itinerary was reconstructed within a broader physical rendering of the region in which the journey took place, thus offering readers an insight not only into the author's movements, but also into the local environment. For instance, Kovalevskii's map, whose primary aim was to chart specific areas of Africa for the first time, also recorded the explorer's itinerary. This, on the one hand, strengthened the claim to name places *à la russe*, and, on the other, served as a sort of certificate attesting to his presence in still unknown areas. Neither the map nor the memoirs depict Kovalevskii's Africa as a military arena, a land profoundly affected and changed by war. However, he shared with Bulatovich a sense of pride in being the first 'European' to reach certain regions, as well as a clear desire to 'master' the African space and its inherent wildness. Contrary to what the map suggests, namely that Central Africa is empty and unoccupied, Kovalevskii's memoirs depict the continent as extremely rich and full of life, with abundant vegetation and people:

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 209.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 264, and the entire chapter 24.

The reader has now seen whom and what we found in those parts; and given all that, Inner Africa is still believed to be deserted; Inner Africa, where man can live off the fruits of the earth, with no need for ploughing or sowing. I have not told you, reader, about the half of the fruits, roots, and leaves that the negroes eat.⁶⁸

Even the proverbial danger associated with Africa is toned down here, as overcoming it means mastering this foreign space:

What a lovely country! One cannot approach the banks for fear of lions and hyenas; nor can one remain in the water for fear of crocodiles. We were not, however, to remain cautious for very long! Instead, we would come ashore alone and bathe with a carelessness worthy of true Arabs—even at night.⁶⁹

The richness of the land and the apparent ease with which its most dangerous features can be overcome facilitate the idea that it is a space completely at the disposal of those who arrive: explorers, scientists, gold miners, 'we, [...] tortured by the daemon of curiosity and by our desire to learn as soon as we could the solution to the problem that we had come to solve from such distant lands',⁷⁰ and collectors, who are ready to take natural and ethnographic specimens back to their own countries ('What a variety of plants, what an extraordinary abundance of birds, what collections we will bring back for cabinets of curiosities!').⁷¹ In this land penetrated by a Russian explorer ('[...] at the highest point of the Peninsula of Sennar, whence my gaze penetrates far, far into the country I have already explored, step by step, and where no European has ever trodden [...]'),⁷² the numerous and heterogeneous indigenous tribes are challenged by the inexorable advance of the Europeans, themselves presented as barbarians driven only by commercial interests even when posing as spiritual missionaries. In this regard, Kovalevskii, as Bulatovich after him, distances himself, as a representative of Russia, from the 'bad colonists', even making an effort to debunk some false claims against the locals and the supposed inferiority of their race.⁷³

⁶⁸ Kovalevsky, *A Journey to Inner Africa*, p. 176.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 187.

⁷³ For example, he challenges the common belief that African tribes are cannibals. His

Overall, his recollection conveys the feeling that Africa is a vibrant space, full of life long before the arrival of the Europeans (though it is at their disposal). In this regard, the empty space on the map is not really a sign of an African 'emptiness' that needs to be filled—both virtually and tangibly—by the West, but rather a reflection of the Europeans' shortcomings, given that they have not managed to travel through and map the area.

In the case of highly accomplished explorers, maps could even trace their itinerary alongside those of their European colleagues, thus placing them within the same canon. Junker's path, for example, was traced alongside those of Georg Schweinfurth, Henry Stanley, and Emin Pasha in the 1879 account of his travels through Africa between 1875 and 1878.⁷⁴ Less well known in his homeland than he was abroad, since he had published his extensive three-volume account of his travels in German, Junker was met with renewed interest after his death, thanks to Eduard Petri. Indeed, in 1893 Petri published a shortened and edited Russian version of Junker's *magnum opus*, explicitly intended to establish him as one of the most renowned European explorers. Petri's adaptation aimed to popularise Junker's travels and studies, reaching a large readership—a goal he achieved as the book appeared in multiple editions over the years. As such, the level of detail and 'scientific' information needed to be toned down for the book to be enjoyable to a wider audience. Thus, while in the preface Petri underlines the progress in cartography made possible by Junker himself,⁷⁵ the vast majority of the book does not delve into the actual process of exploring and mapping the equatorial lands. Contrary to Bulatovich's case, there is no sense of a thirst to measure the land or show off Western techniques and tools useful for this purpose. Instead, Petri selects the aspects of the original version that interest him the most as an anthropologist: the ethnographic descriptions of the various tribes encountered by Junker, including their physical traits, habits, ways of life, and faiths. These descriptions are often accompanied by carefully chosen pictures showing the Russian reader examples of 'negroes', their customs, and material culture. Petri's Junker is presented as a traveller-

ideas about race and African peoples will be explored further in Chapter 3.

74 Cf. *Puteshestvie v tsentral'noi Afrike v 1875-1878 goda V.V. Iunkera*, Saint Petersburg 1879.

75 Cf. E. Petri, *Puteshestviia V.V. Iunkera po Afrike*, Saint Petersburg 1905.

ethnographer, rather than a geographer-cartographer: he is explicitly characterised as a 'traveller-scholar' (*puteshestvennik-issledovatel'*), whose 'scientific' attitude distances him from the more prosaic type of the 'sensationalist explorer'—seeking danger and adventure—or the 'simple tourist'. Nevertheless, he appears to be more interested in the peoples he met, than in the (still) relatively unknown lands he travelled to. Only the map at the end of the book, taken from Junker's second volume—though with additions and changes, Cyrillic transliteration included—seems to restore the equilibrium. In fact, it was drawn by Bruno Hassenstein (1839-1902), a German 'armchair cartographer' specialising in maps of Africa who usually based his work on the observations of famous travellers, since he virtually never left his own country.⁷⁶ Thus, the map is merely a reconstruction by a second party (in this respect, Petri becomes the third), a tentative armchair journey in which the German cartographer replaces the explorer, chasing his movements. Partly physical, partly ethnographic, the map makes Junker's itineraries immediately visible by depicting them in bright red (a novelty, with respect to the original edition) and even displaying the exact dates on which the explorer reached specific places. However, Junker's presence is not the only 'Western' one recorded on the map: Inner Africa is a space that he shares with the likes of Emin Pasha, Georg Schweinfurth, Alexandrine Tinne, and others, whose itineraries are equally recorded (albeit in a more sombre black). Thus, Inner Africa appears to be a place negotiated between local tribes with exotic names—carefully reported for the benefit of the reader—and European visitors, whose fleeting presence has nevertheless left a permanent mark in the form of many new colonial toponyms scattered around like outposts for future enterprises. Curiously, the peaks of the present-day Rwenzori Mountains, as recorded on the map, show a variety of names that are not entirely consistent with those of today's Mount Stanley, Mount Speke, Mount Baker, Mount Emin, Mount Gessi, and Mount Luigi di Savoia. The most notable difference is the appearance of 'Jebel [mountain]

76 For news on Hassenstein's life and activities, particularly in relation to mapping other distant lands—like Japan—cf. A. Schmidtke, 'Mapping a Distant Empire: Bruno Hassenstein's Atlas of Japan (1885-1887)', in H. Meyer, S. Rau, and K. Waldner (ed. by), *SpaceTime of the Imperial*, Berlin 2016, pp. 367-393, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110418750-019>

Junker', a name not recorded elsewhere, not even in Junker's original volumes or other translations:⁷⁷ the attribution of a toponym to Junker paradoxically reinforces his (or rather, Petri's) claim to be part of the canon of Western explorers. Both Petri's retelling and Hassenstein's map dispel the idea of an empty land: on the contrary, it is densely populated by a wide range of peoples and disputed by many European nations through their explorers. This uncertain situation, in which a European/African hybrid emerges, is reflected in the map through the use of local and foreign toponyms. For instance, Hassenstein opts for the local name, Mbutan-Nzige, instead of Lake Albert (a toponym introduced by Baker in the 1860s). Thus, original and colonial toponyms merge in a space signifying constant negotiation between locals and Europeans.

While mapping the land still came first in the examples considered here, and inserting the travellers' itineraries was intended to establish their authority to depict a foreign and relatively unknown space, in other cases the itinerary itself was at the centre of attention: the map was constructed 'around' a given traveller's route. The African space and its political borders were thus only relevant insofar as they related to the journey undertaken. For example, at the end of his account of a hunting expedition in East Africa (1911-1912), Władysław Horodecki included two maps showing every stop on his safari, along with the borders between British and German East Africa, and only the main geographical features of the region.⁷⁸ It is perhaps the sole example of a travelogue—and related maps—of a journey through black Africa undertaken by a Russian subject purely for pleasure. In this regard, Horodecki functions as a tourist—albeit a very specific one—amidst an array of specialists (military personnel, scientists, explorers) in the depths of the continent. Although naturalistic and ethnographic observations feature prominently in his diary, his tourist status gives his narrative a more relaxed tone. From the outset, he acknowledges

77 Cf. W. Junker, *Reisen in Afrika, 1875-1886: nach seinen Tagebüchern unter der Mitwirkung*, Vienna 1889, p. 530. For the English translation cf. 'The three highest peaks I named Jebel Gessi, Jebel Gordon, and Jebel Baker. The most distinct was Jebel Gordon; the ground gradually ascends to the lower hills before it. Other ranges lie to the south of the two highest peaks of Jebel Gordon, beyond which is the group Jebel Baker. To the north of Jebel Gordon, the Jebel Gessi, a high conical rock on the mountain ridge, can be easily recognised', W. Junker, *Travels in Africa During the Years 1875-1878*, London-Philadelphia 1890, p. 466.

78 V. Gorodetskii, *V dzhungliakh Afriki. Dnevnik okhotnika*, Kyiv 1914.

his debt to Jules Verne and Thomas Mayne Reid, and emphasises the fairy-tale (*skazochnyi*) essence of Inner Africa—a hunter's true paradise, a hunter's 'El Dorado'. While this fictional perspective on the region is much more prominent in the introduction than in the rest of the book, where it is lost amongst (or perhaps concealed by) aloof descriptions of flora and fauna specimens, there is no doubt that Horodecki portrays East Africa as a place that exists in order to be exploited by hunters and explorers. Indeed, it is referred to as 'the favourite region for the majority of sportsmen who arrive in this colony to hunt'.⁷⁹ Although he believes that hunting does not pose a threat to the land, he perceives the activities of explorers and scientists as causing the imminent demystification of an untouched place shrouded in mystery and savagery:

Every year [...] the number of study expeditions to the tropics, aiming to explore this semi-savage region of the continent and its abundant fauna, grows. In half a century, the thirst for knowledge and labour, inspired by the English and especially the Germans, will enslave this region. The impenetrable jungle will be transformed into rubber and maize plantations by the merciless axe, and the infinitely rich fauna [...] will become the property of museums alone. For now, however, Africa remains the same rich world, untouched by culture, so vividly depicted in the imagination of every young man who reads the lively and brilliant descriptions of Potocki, Sztolcman, Nieroth, Foa [...].⁸⁰

The construction of the African land simultaneously occurs through essentialised, dreamlike tropes that point towards an imagined space in which one can project their own fantasies, and through quasi-scientific descriptions of its flora and fauna. This reverberates in the visual setup comprising photos and drawings by the author. Enhancing the book's documentary aspect, the photos primarily depict hunting trophies and dead animals in wild, open spaces, often alongside their hunter. However, they also possess an ethnographic quality when depicting the locals and their way of life, and a scientific focus when showcasing exotic plants and animals. In this case, they serve as a visual signification system of the conquest of the land: its wild openness, its animals, its plants, and its inhabitants. Conversely, the lavish illustrations adorning the chapter titles transport readers back to the realm of adventure

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

novels, feeding their imagination shaped by popular authors. For Horodecki, this is indeed a land profoundly connected with childhood, and this remains the case throughout the diary: reality cannot spoil the author's imagination. Thus, if initially he states that 'enchanted by this kaleidoscope, we were reminded of our childhood and the stories of Mayne Reid, and all of those things that had once excited our youthful imagination so strongly and seemed like fairy tales now really appeared before our eyes',⁸¹ by the end of the travelogue he links the beautiful memories he has made during the journey with the pleasant one from his childhood ('These days will never be repeated, but the memories will never be erased from our minds, just as the memories of blissful days from our childhoods have not been erased').⁸²

In this context, the maps merely offer a visual representation of Horodecki's itinerary during the safari: operating on a large scale and missing several physical features of the region that is now part of the Tsavo West National Park (most of the reliefs remain unacknowledged, thus hinting at an empty space), they are not at all useful to the general reader—who was not necessarily an expert on the geography of Africa—in deciphering the coordinates of the author's journey. Instead, the seemingly random zigzag lines of Horodecki's safari merely serve as an abstract signification of his presence in the midst of a still mysterious and unknown space, officially validating his penetration into those 'fairy-tale forests' that would soon be spoiled by the English and the Germans. Thus, he presents himself as one of the last witnesses to the Africa of the good old days, and someone who contributes to keeping its memory alive among younger generations.

In these kinds of maps, the African continent can be completely overlooked: its geography becomes increasingly irrelevant, as do the borders of European colonial domains and useful details about the region's inhabitants. The process of abstraction, which naturally occurs in every cartographic representation, is greatly enhanced by a tendency to considerably reduce physical and political signifiers. The traveller's route can therefore be depicted as a vivid line that stands out in an otherwise empty landscape. Vladimir Troitskii's map of his journey through Central Africa can serve as a good example: the scientist's route is clearly visible,

81 Ibid., p. 22.

82 Ibid., p. 178.

while the geography of Africa is barely hinted at. What lies beyond Troitskii's immediate surroundings appears to be completely irrelevant and unworthy of note. Only what has been seen, touched, and reached by the traveller matters; beyond his experience, nothing exists. Indeed, the traveller is the ultimate master of lands he does not actually possess, the one who determines what exists and what does not.

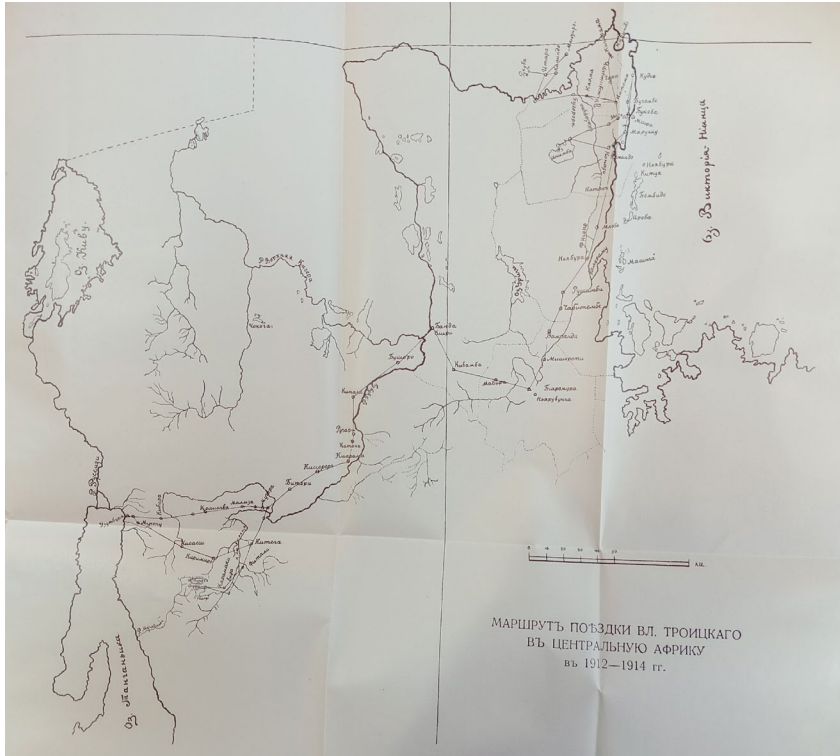


Fig. 2.11 'V. Troitskii's itinerary in Central Africa (1912-1914)', in V. Troitskii, 'Poezdka v Tsentral'nuu Afriku s 21 fevralia 1912 goda do 27 marta 1914 goda', *Ezhegodnik Zoologicheskogo muzeia Imperatorskoi Akademii nauk*, 1915 (20), 2.

Maps were not the only cultural product profoundly impacted by the tendency to cherry-pick what suited or interested a traveller most. Indeed, this trait is shared by memoirs, travelogues, and essays alike. While subjectivity is, of course, a permanent component of writing, in certain cases the writer's focus on their own personal experience was so narrow that any other aspect of the land was moved to the background or erased entirely. Complementing the erasure of locals in cartographic

depictions of South Africa, Evgenii Avgustus—a volunteer in the Anglo-Boer War—constructed this space as ‘the’ land of the Boers in his writings. Black people are so irrelevant to him that he seldom mentions them, and they certainly cannot make any claims to the land. As a matter of fact, they simply seem to be inconsequential relics, much like in the ethnographic maps. Avgustus was no fool—in fact, his account is rhetorically polished and narratively engaging, steeped in detailed (if troubling) observations of foreign lands. During his journey to the Transvaal, he recorded his impressions of other ‘exotic’ places, often resorting to orientalist tropes, as in the case of Port Said (‘For the first time I was admiring the sight of an Eastern city [...]. It was exactly as if a scene from *One Thousand and One Nights* had risen up before me, and I relieved the dreams of my distant childhood as I gazed in admiration at the slender minarets, already set ablaze by the golden rays of the sunrise. A fresh morning breeze rustled the fronds of a lonely palm; in the distance the desert, menacing in its silence, menacing in its infinity, stretched out around us’).⁸³ In Djibouti, a lively interaction with locals gives him the opportunity to act as a proper white master, something that he diligently records on page: ‘Out in the street, the bothersome boys besieged me again, and I was forced to buy an ebony stick decorated with copper wire in order to keep them away from me. Swinging the stick, I cleared myself a pathway to the nearest café [...]’.⁸⁴ When he meets Nikolai Leont’ev and is told about the military campaigns in Ethiopia, moreover, he appears not only to register the natives’ presence, but also to feel compassion towards their impotence: ‘I shuddered at the thought that such expeditions by white men were actually no more than a massacre of the hapless black population, armed with spears and arrows. They calmly allow the locals to get within 400 paces, they aim their deadly quick-firing guns, the latest thing in British technology, and then they immortalise the scene on a photographic plate’.⁸⁵ And yet, as soon as he sets foot in South Africa, natives are completely forgotten. The Boers’ ability in successfully

83 B. Gorelik (ed. by), *A Russian on Commando. The Boer War Experience of Yevgeny Avgustus*, Johannesburg 2022, p. 38. More information on Evgenii Avgustus is provided in Chapter 1.

84 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

85 *Ibid.*, p. 42.

mastering the land according to European standards has granted them utter control over it: 'The Boers were exceedingly familiar with *their* country, which *they* have transformed through long endeavours into fruitful fields and gardens, and are able, with the aid of signs *known only to them*, to establish the presence of underground water'.⁸⁶ Indeed, it has been noted that 'the colonizing imagination takes for granted that the land and its resources belong to those who are best able to exploit them according to the values of a Western commercial and industrial system'.⁸⁷ However, one could argue that it is not necessary to have a traditional colonial relationship with the land of others in order to view it through this distorted lens. The important thing is to share a common discourse with representatives of colonial cultures—in other words, to simply be part of the Western system of knowledge, a deeply ingrained way of thinking that cannot be escaped, even when it is (sometimes regretfully) acknowledged. Recalling his arrival in Harar, for example, the Russian doctor David Glinskii could not help but see it as 'useful' in some way: 'We changed our minds and began to think of Harar *not only as a place to find water and shade*, but also as a city of *undoubted interest to any intelligent European* who wasn't there to sell poor-quality brandy, cheap Harar coffee, gold, bones and musk'.⁸⁸ Although Avgustus is primarily interested in the conflict, which he devotes most of his pages to, his narrative is occasionally punctuated by descriptions of landscapes that can acquire the form of majestic nature or bear the unpleasant signs of war. The most lyrical passages, however, are usually those written from the perspective of a train, which—as the mark of Western industrial development—is in itself the sign of European mastery over the land. In this case, the African space functions as the confirmation of the legitimacy of Western authors, a space created by and for the West: 'The tropical landscape stretched out before us. Pardon me—not tropical, but the South African bush with which *we* had grown up *from the novels of Mayne Reid*. This, then, was *where the intrepid Boers lived and hunted, chased swift-footed antelope, hid at elephant watering holes and roamed through the mountains and plains*

86 Ibid., p. 21. Italics are mine (A.F.).

87 Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire*, p. 31.

88 D. Glinskii, *Kharrar i ego obitatelei*, Grodno 1897, p. 5. Italics are mine (A.F.).

in their heavy ox-wagons'.⁸⁹ From the vantage point of the train (and of the European), the natives' huts seem but a 'gigantic ant-hill', or are 'so small as to resemble toys'.⁹⁰ These two examples of the very few mentions of natives' settlements convey an extremely generic image, while offering an explicit association between the locals, insects, and children's toys. With very few exceptions, the natives are only ever acknowledged as nameless and faceless servants of the soldiers, tasked with packing goods and carrying weights.⁹¹

The 'Europeanisation' of South Africa and the progressive erasure of black people from its depictions were particularly pronounced in the memoirs on the Anglo-Boer War, compounded by the fact that the narrative focused on a conflict between Western sides. Writing about the Cape some fifty years earlier, Ivan Goncharov and Aleksei Vysheslavitsev had devoted several passages to the local population, providing in-depth portrayals of their physical traits and thus accentuating their 'strangeness' and exoticism. It seems that the Anglo-Boer War helped to cement the idea that South Africa was essentially a European country; even the *Album of the Glorious War of the Boers*, comprising drawings from various Western sources, showed scenes that could have happened in any European country, in a landscape marked by European architecture and almost entirely devoid of black people.⁹²

In some instances, the domestication of South Africa aligned with Russian pro-Boer rhetoric, helping its cause. A review of Sof'ia Iz'edinova's memoirs in the pages of *Russkii invalid* built a bond between Russia and Transvaal precisely on the basis of their similar—in essence—landscape, simultaneously reinforcing feelings of both familiarity and uniqueness:

89 Gorelik (ed. by), *A Russian on Commando*, p. 62. Italics are mine (A.F.).

90 Ibid., pp. 63-64, 72. Well-known is Mary Louise Pratt's reasoning around the 'monarch-of-all-I-survey scene', usually made possible by adopting a vantage point (a summit, a high floor) when describing the land. Despite the fact that trains certainly do not have a vertical development, Avgustus still perceives them as elevated positions from which to observe and survey the landscape. Cf. M. L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London-New York 2008 (especially chapter 9).

91 Cf. Chapter 3 for a discussion of three specific encounters recalled by Avgustus.

92 Cf. *Al'bom slavnnoi voiny burov*. Only two pictures are entirely devoted to black people; one is entitled *Two Chiefs of the South African Kaffirs*, the other *Zulu Feast and Dance in South Africa*. Black people feature very rarely in the other drawings, and always as servants.

The reason why the Russian Sister of Charity felt so attached to the remote South African country was because of the similarities she saw between it and her own homeland. And when the Boers asked her how she liked their country and what it reminded her of, she replied: Russia. 'And for all the differences in climate, vegetation and wildlife, that is exactly the case. In spite of the charm of many foreign landscapes, nowhere, except in the African plains, have I experienced the feeling of native vastness, of barely visible country roads, of the unbroken horizon of a flat, sparsely populated agricultural country'. And this feeling was particularly understood by the old Boers, the true sons of the pioneers of the colonisation of the African plains, who migrated across vast deserts, over mountains and forests, with their families, their unusual cattle and all their household goods. These old men were particularly fond of stories about the nature and life of Russia, its steppes and forests and the uninhabited areas of Siberia.⁹³

Through a primarily geographic argument, a direct connection is thus established between South Africa and Siberia, both constructed as incredibly vast spaces with unbroken horizons, virtually uninhabited, and therefore open to be colonised by the Boers and the Russians respectively. The perceived semi-emptiness of these two spaces serves as a legitimisation for their conquest by people reputed to be far more able and advanced than their original inhabitants. Moreover, the inclusion of Siberia in the discourse around South Africa helps to normalise the Boers' colonisation for the Russian public, at the same time reinforcing Russia's aspiration to be considered on a par with European powers.

This rhetoric often merged with the perception that Africa did not live up to the expectations—it was not wild enough or sufficiently 'different' or 'alien', which resulted in a sense of disappointing domesticity. As was often the case, travellers would not adjust their expectations in light of reality, but rather they would quickly jump to the conclusion that what they were seeing was not the 'real Africa'. Thus, Ivan Sokolov wrote about Nairobi that 'The character of the place, the vegetation on the meadows and the temperature (approximately the same as in our country in May or August) all rather reminded me of Europe (for example, the neighbourhood of Bern), but not Africa—let alone the part of it located under the equator!'⁹⁴ while his travel companion, Valentin

93 'Neskol'ko mesiatsev u burov. Retsenziia', *Russkii invalid*, 23.04.1903, p. 3.

94 I. Sokolov, *Dnevnik ekspeditsii v Keniiu i Ugandu v 1914 godu*, Saint Petersburg 1999, p. 47.

Dogel', similarly noted that 'the locals are Nairobi's main exotic feature. Otherwise, the nature of the surrounding area is so similar, on the whole, to Europe, that I was even disappointed going on excursions'.⁹⁵

For some, it was the realisation that Western modernity was penetrating 'wild Africa' that spoiled its exoticism. In the travelogue published in the journal *Priroda*, Vasilii Nikitin dwelled on the alienating traces of progress in the wilderness on more than one occasion: he noted that 'In the midst of untouched nature, almost in the centre of Africa, where the Waganda pirogues were sailing not so long ago and their war cries could be heard, an electrically lit steamer now stands, and the beats of a gong call us to dinner. I cannot believe that a European, an Englishman, Speke, first saw Victoria Nyanza in 1858', and marvelled at a 'wireless telegraph that connects a group of Europeans stranded in Africa with the cultural world'.⁹⁶ Yet, the pictures he included in the publication did not show any traces of modernisation, and instead conveyed exactly what the reader could have expected: majestic nature (the baobab, the jungle), naked or semi-naked natives (a rarity in Russian ethnographic photography), 'primitive' huts. This ambiguity can also be found in the reportage about the hunting trip he undertook whilst in East Africa, which was published in the hunters' journal *Okhotnichii vestnik* the previous year. While it is clearly a completely different text, one that recreates the highs and lows, the excitement and the fears of hunting wild beasts in an unknown and exotic place, thus exciting the readers' appetite for adventures—rarely possible, in the modern Western world—Nikitin also dwells on the changes Africa will soon witness. In contrast to Horodecki, he conveys a sense of urgency, indirectly inviting readers to visit Africa before it is too late:

In general, I would say that East Africa is still largely unspoilt, particularly in the area through which our caravan travelled. It is a place where sporting hunters can find plenty of big game and experience unexpected and exciting sensations, coupled with that pleasant sense of danger which enhances the charm of hunting so much. However, the time when herds of buffalo grazed on the vast savannah and giant elephants roamed near the forest has passed [...]. The animal kingdom, particularly the large mammals, is dying out rapidly under the onslaught of European

95 V. Dogel', *Naturalist v Vostochnoi Afrike*, Petrograd 1916, p. 26.

96 V. Nikitin, 'Na beregakh Viktorii Niantsa', *Priroda*, 1914, 5, clmn. 596-597, 600.

culture. The time is approaching when the deserted savannah will no longer reveal to the astonished eyes of the traveller the enchanting pictures that stood before me, and the beauty of untouched nature with its present-day life forms will become a thing of the past.⁹⁷

Thus, the vibrant 'kaleidoscope' and 'extraordinary picture, full of enchanting charm' that is East African nature could soon become nothing but a relic of the past.⁹⁸

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The ambivalence of colonial discourse over nature has been well summarised by David Spurr, who has underlined that 'on one hand, nature is opposed to culture and civilization: primitive peoples live in a state of nature. On the other, nature, or "natural law", is also that which grants dominion over the earth to more advanced peoples; the land shall belong by natural right to that power which understands its value and is willing to turn it to account'.⁹⁹ Even though Russia had no territorial claims in (black) Africa, the discourse adopted by scholars and travellers when (re)constructing its territory—whether in maps, essays, travelogues—certainly shared the same dichotomy as the West. Indeed, one could argue that the 'discourse' itself transcends the existence of actual colonial ties: even in the absence of political, military, social, or economic practices structured from above by the government and its designated offices, the way of reckoning with a colonial space remained essentially the same. Alterity, exoticism, perceived 'savageness', and a general subalternity informed by racial science were the actual foundations of such a discourse, which was transnational before than national. Geography, cartography, and the natural sciences were all part of this process just like racial science, developing within the mobile, transnational community of scholars and then taking root in journalism, travel literature, and so forth.¹⁰⁰

97 V. Nikitin, 'Po savannam Vostochnoi Afriki', *Okhotnichii vestnik*, 1913, 23, p. 386.

98 Nikitin, 'Na beregakh Viktorii Niiantsa', clmn. 592, 593.

99 Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire*, p. 156.

100 'Scientific transnationalism', especially in relation to racial science, has indeed proven to be a valid perspective from which to conduct studies on these matters. Cf. for instance R. McMahon (ed. by), *National Races. Transnational Power Struggles in the Sciences and Politics of Human Diversity, 1840-1945*, Lincoln 2019, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvj5f4cz>

When describing black Africa, Russians did rely on the opposition of nature *vs* culture/civilisation; they also did spread the idea, either consciously or unconsciously, that 'natural law' was a true force behind European expansionism and administrative politics in the colonies. Even the most critical authors did not fully realise the potential of their criticism, instead limiting themselves to lament the 'good old days' when some places on earth were still 'natural', i.e. untouched by men. In this sense, they also perpetuated the disconnection between 'man' and 'nature' that had grown stronger in Western thought over the centuries, according to which 'man no longer stands at the center of the natural world in microcosmic relation to the universe. Rather, human history is now distinct from natural history [...]. Human history [...] follows natural laws while it also progresses away from natural origins'.¹⁰¹ This is where the sense of inevitability that invariably accompanies criticisms of European colonial administration in 'black Africa' comes from: it is seen as a necessary and inevitable process responsible for bringing culture and civilisation to lands that were supposedly lacking both, yet at the same time as the primary cause of their loss of authenticity and ultimate demise. In this regard, black Africa functions as the last existing paradise on Earth, still offering little corners of land that are valuable exactly for being 'virgin', 'untouched by men', while simultaneously representing the possibility of reuniting men with nature and filling an alienating void: 'Despite all the impressions I had during the journey, the picture unfolding before my eyes is so enchanting that prompts the thought of how nice it would be to live here [...] all my life', Sergei Averintsev daydreamt in the midst of German East Africa.¹⁰²

Rather than being properly anti-colonial, these are laments for the imminent loss of the last paradise on Earth; or, perhaps even more accurately, the wails of modern men for the loss of nature by their own hands.

101 Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire*, pp. 158-159.

102 S. Averintsev, 'Po poberezh'iu Chernogo kontinenta. Iz zapisnoi knizhki naturalista', *Priroda*, 1912, 2, clmn. 212, 231.

3. Bodies. Black People under Russian Scrutiny

The character of the Negroes is dominated by cheerfulness, mobility, sociability, imprudence, volatility, vanity. They are great lovers of music and dancing; [...]. They are also inclined to singing, but their voices are often hoarse. [...] Negro children easily learn to read and write, play music, and do crafts, but their development usually soon stops, and later they are overtaken by their white peers. Among them, however, come pastors, rural and urban teachers, artisans, and in America even lawyers, doctors, civil servants, and artists; nevertheless, up to now, it seems, there has not been a single purebred Negro who has declared himself outstanding in literature, art, science, or technology. Negroes have a noticeable capacity for imitation, but their initiative is weak.

D. Anuchin¹

Though evidently rarer than encounters with ethnic minorities living within the borders of the Russian Empire, contact with black people, whether in Africa or Russia, resulted in multifaceted representations of blackness, spanning from scientific essays to travelogues, fictional prose, poetry, photography, and paintings. In many other cases, actual encounters were not even deemed necessary, as authors relied on pre-existing Western sources to describe black people.

Although substantial, the corpus has largely been overlooked by critics, who have focused instead on the portrayal of other (and certainly more numerous) ethnic groups living within Russia or on imagery depicting threatening foreign powers, such as China and Japan.² Recent

1 D. Anuchin, *Negry*, in *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar' Brokgauza i Efrona*, XXa, Saint Petersburg 1897, pp. 821-822.

2 Cf. for instance J. Burbank and D. L. Ransel (ed. by), *Imperial Russia. New Histories for the Empire*, Bloomington 1998; E. Thompson, *Imperial Knowledge. Russian Literature and Colonialism*, Westport-London 2000; J. Burbank, M. von Hagen, and

scholarly research into race and racial theories in the Russian context has also neglected to properly examine how blackness was constructed and presented to the public.³ In fact, it is a rather important piece of the puzzle that connects key issues for late nineteenth-century Russian society, such as the emancipation of serfs and debates about identity in the context of the growing importance of the concepts of nationhood, ethnicity, and race; it also encompasses different social and demographic groups: from academics to the general public—who were reached through popular literature—and from adults to children.

This chapter will focus specifically on the representation of black people in non-fiction genres, such as essays, encyclopaedia entries, and travelogues, which circulated among academics and the general public. These texts could appear in specialised journals, such as the publications of medical or anthropological societies, in popular periodicals, or could even be published as separate works by publishing houses specialising in popular literature.

A. Remnev (ed. by), *Russian Empire. Space, People, Power. 1700-1930*, Bloomington 2007; R. Bartlett, 'Japonisme and Japanophobia: The Russo-Japanese War in Russian Cultural Consciousness', *Russian Review*, 2008 (67), 1, pp. 8-33, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9434.2007.00471.x>; I. Gerasimov, J. Kusber, and A. Semyonov (ed. by), *Empire Speaks Out: Languages of Rationalization and Self-Description in the Russian Empire*, Leiden 2009, <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004175716.i-280>; D. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism. Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration*, New Haven-London 2010; R. Cvetkovski and A. Hofmeister (ed. by), *An Empire of Others. Creating Ethnographic Knowledge in Imperial Russia and the USSR*, Budapest-New York 2014; K. Parppei and B. Rakhimzianov (ed. by), *Images of Otherness in Russia, 1547-1917*, Boston 2023.

- 3 For instance, the collective monograph that offers—to this day—the most comprehensive discussion of race in Russia throughout the centuries does not consider Russian imagery of blackness; cf. D. Rainbow (ed. by), *Ideologies of Race. Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union in Global Context*, Montreal 2019. Other studies, more limited in scope, have tended to focus on Soviet rhetoric about Africa. See for example H. Lynd and T. Loyd, 'Histories of Color: Blackness and Africanness in the Soviet Union', *Slavic Review*, 2022 (81), 2, pp. 394-417, <https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2022.154>, whose authors moreover state that 'Regarding African-descended people racialized as black, the imperial Russian past offered only indirect historical references. Literature in translation from the French, British, and American empires provided Russian readers with foundational ideas about black people's supposed childlike innocence' (p. 396). However, as will become clear, the situation was far more complex and nuanced. Furthermore, Russia's perception of blackness cannot be entirely attributed to foreign literature in translation; this would be an oversimplification. Cf. also E. Avrutin, *Racism in Modern Russia. From the Romanovs to Putin*, London 2022, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350097308>, in which the author mainly focuses on the ethnic groups living within the borders of imperial and Soviet Russia.

Measuring the Black Body: Russian Physical Anthropology and the ‘Negroes’

In her seminal work on the development of Russian physical anthropology, Marina Mogilner has underscored, among many other salient issues, three characteristics that appear to be of particular pertinence to this study: the clear indebtedness to Western anthropology, resulting from the common practice of conducting study periods in Europe, predominantly in Germany and France; the claim to be a properly scientific discipline, as such under the auspices of the Departments of Physics and Mathematics (while ethnography remained in the domain of the humanities); and the relative lack of interest from the authorities in this new discipline, despite its development in various universities across the empire (not only in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, but also in the peripheries, where, being a scientific subject with a distinctly Western origin, ‘it allowed people sharing the modern universal European culture but residing in the periphery of autocratic monarchy with no prospects for bringing modernity into their immediate social environment [...] still to feel themselves as integral part of modernity’).⁴ Indeed, it was the concept of race that ‘served as one of the languages of imperial self-reflection and modernization’, and that was promoted and utilised by modernising forces as a new, up-to-date tool to deal with the multiethnic nature of the empire as opposed to traditional and government-driven ‘official idiom[s] of empire’ that used to rely ‘on categories such as mother tongue, social estate, or regional belonging’.⁵ As Edyta Bojanowska has effectively summarised,

Although the tsarist regime never adopted race as a category of official institutional practice and was ‘less tainted’ by moral culpability than its

4 M. Mogilner, *Homo Imperii. A History of Physical Anthropology in Russia*, Lincoln-London 2013, p. 54.

5 M. Mogilner, ‘When Race is a Language and Empire is a Context’, *Slavic Review*, 2021 (80), 2, pp. 207-215 (p. 208), <https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2021.73>. Mogilner shows that race did not merely—or solely—serve to measure, order, and dominate the ‘other’ (especially as it was not officially embraced by the central authorities), but that it could also become a tool of ‘anticolonial resistance through collective self-racializing’, with ‘self-racializing as a subaltern strategy for disentangling one’s national body from the imperial mix and resisting empire as an “unnatural” formation that hampered the “authentic” development of “natural” nations’. Consequently, it can be considered one of the forces that drove minorities towards the many faces of nationalism.

western peers, it promoted racial consciousness and racist attitudes. Yet while questioning Russia's purported exceptionalism, historians have also identified characteristic inflections of Russian racial thought, which tended toward the liberal end of the European spectrum. These include a predominant belief in monogenesis, in the environmental conditioning of races and their malleability, lesser purchase of racial hierarchies or crude social Darwinism, as well as a more permissive attitude toward miscegenation, which, however, waned post-1870.⁶

For the most part, this reasoning holds when applied to the specific context of the reception of black people in Russia between the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Although a preference for monogenism and the belief in environmental conditioning were indeed part of the Russian discourse on Sub-Saharan Africans, racial hierarchies were, in this case, followed quite scrupulously. As will become clear throughout this chapter, even liberal thinkers who openly criticised categorising human populations based on race and who opted for a system based on cultural level—reminiscent of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century beliefs in the possibility of progress for all human 'races'—still placed black people at the bottom of the hierarchy by using racialised language. In this way, the racial argument was conveniently concealed behind the smokescreen of liberal thinking and the condescending assertion that, with the right guidance (and only with it), black people could eventually evolve. Miscegenation, if not particularly feared simply due to the overall scarcity of contact between Russians and black people, became a key trope in *fin-de-siècle* fiction about Africa, which was consistent with popular themes and fears in European colonial literature.⁷ Perhaps even more significantly, racial hierarchies and racial language permeated virtually every text on 'black Africa' published during this period—be it a scientific essay, an encyclopaedia entry, a cheap booklet for the self-education of the masses, travel literature, or even fiction. Even if the tsarist regime was not necessarily interested in acquiring and using this language of categorisation, race did indeed enter the public sphere and became ubiquitous in publications for both the upper and the lower classes. With regard to black people, it could be argued that they were

6 E. M. Bojanowska, 'Race-ing the Russian Nineteenth Century', *Slavic Review*, 2021 (80), 2, pp. 258–266 (p. 260), <https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2021.86>

7 The theme of miscegenation in Russian *fin-de-siècle* literature will be explored in Chapter 5.

portrayed quite unequivocally as humanity's lower representatives—despite political and theoretical differences between authors, and despite the often-advocated idea that they could be 'improved' in terms of cultural level. This context, quite rich in ideological implications and repercussions, was further muddled by the pretty much interchangeable usage of different terms to identify the very same entity (*rasa*, *rod*, *plemia*, *poroda*, with *plemia* and *poroda* also meaning 'nationality'), which led to 'race, ethnicity and nationhood' being conceived 'as a single, integrated conceptual field'.⁸

Though they were exploited for various ideological goals and political agendas, anthropometric measurements were considered the pinnacle of physical anthropology due to their inherent 'scientific nature', and became a staple of studies on human diversity (whether racial/ethnic, gender-based, psychological or criminal) authored by scholars, doctors, and the military throughout the empire. Although blackness was not among the various forms of 'diversity' readily available in Russia, it was nevertheless a part of the discussion: measurements of black people's bodies were used to draw parallels or highlight differences with ethnic groups living within the borders of the empire.

Clearly, measuring blackness presupposed direct contact with African people, which could be achieved in two ways: through ethnic shows performed on Russian soil and through observations recorded in Africa by Russian scholars and doctors. Before the late 1890s, no original anthropometric study of black people had been conducted by Russian authors, although 'scientific' descriptions based entirely on Western sources had already entered the Russian publishing market. Aleksei Lovetskii (1787-1840), a Doctor of Medicine and Academician (among his other duties, he served as Dean of the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics at Moscow University), included descriptions of the 'black tribe' (*chernoe plemia*) in his 1838 book, *A Brief Guide to Understanding the Tribes of the Human Race* (where 'tribes' equals *plemia*, and 'race' equals *rod*).⁹ After

8 V. Tolz, 'Constructing Race, Ethnicity, and Nationhood in Imperial Russia: Issues and Misconceptions', in Rainbow (ed. by), *Ideologies of Race*, pp. 29-58 (p. 33).

9 As noted by Tolz, the term *rasa* was used for the first time in Russia in the 1830s: at the time of Lovetskii's writing, it was still an uncommon noun, hence his usage of *plemia* and the resort to insert within the text in brackets the French 'race' (Tolz, 'Constructing Race', pp. 33-34). Cf. A. Lovetskii, *Kratkoe rukovodstvo k poznaniiu plemen chelovecheskogo roda*, Moscow 1838.

stating in the introduction that 'the human race constitutes one great whole', and consists of only one species, 'Homo sapiens', but 'broken up, like a white sunbeam, into several coloured parts', Lovetskii proceeded to provide a Russian translation (or, better, popularisation) of excerpts from works by French doctors Constant Saucerotte and Pierre-Paul Broc, who nevertheless propagated the idea of a hierarchical ladder in which black people, at the last step, were overlooked by white Europeans. Saucerotte and Broc's conclusions were based on both physical measurements and observations of the alleged moral characteristics of different peoples around the world, which Lovetskii diligently helped to popularise among the Russian public.¹⁰ Thus, one could read about Broc's classification of black peoples into seven groups ('Negroes or Ethiopians'; 'Kaffirs'; 'Hottentots'; 'Papuan'; 'Australians'; 'Oceanians'; and 'Mulattos'), their generic physical features ('The skin colour of Negroes is black, excluding the palms and soles. Their hair is curly and black, the foreheads are flattened, the eyes are large and bulging; [...] the lips are thick and protrude significantly forward [...]''), and their customs, as well as their perceived proximity to the animal kingdom:

[The Hottentots] have a more distinct animal character than Negroes, who seem to form a middle link between humans and orangutans. However, the Hottentots also have characteristics of both apes and intelligent humans. The characteristics of humanity are expressed in speech, intelligence and the capacity for higher education; but on the other hand, their height does not exceed five feet, [...] their nasal bones are united into one plate-like bone, just as in some species of monkeys [...]. The humerus is excessively long and the socket that receives the olecranon of the ulna is continuous, a feature common to Hottentots, monkeys, dogs and many other species of carnivorous animals [...].¹¹

10 Cf. the originals: C. Saucerotte, *Tableau synoptique des races humaines, montrant leur origine, leur distribution géographique, leurs caractères distinctifs, les peuples dérivés, etc.*, Paris 1836; P. P. Broc, *Essai sur les races humaines considérées sous les rapports anatomique et philosophique*, Paris 1836. Lovetskii's work even attracted a review from literary critic Vissarion Belinskii, who emphasised the novelty of Saucerotte and Broc's theories and methods compared to the work of other scholars, and praised Lovetskii for his 'effective presentation of the subject', given the lack of suitable anthropological and zoological literature in Russia at the time. Cf. V. Belinskii, 'Retseziia na "Kratkoe rukovodstvo k poznaniu plemen chelovecheskogo roda, s prisovokupleniem glavnykh priznakov, otlichaiushchikh ego ot drugikh zhivotnykh"', *Moskovskii nabliudatel'*, 1838, 18, kn. 2, otd. IV, pp. 418-423.

11 Lovetskii, *Kratkoe rukovodstvo*. The essay was also illustrated with drawings mainly

Although European racial rhetoric had slowly been injected into the Russian cultural sphere for quite some time, direct 'scientific' observations of black people came much later and, as previously mentioned, originated in the context of ethnic shows coming to the Russian Empire. As opposed to the notoriety enjoyed by ethnic shows in *fin-de-siècle* Europe, there are only few accounts of their arrival in tsarist Russia, except for advertisements and reviews in local newspapers. So far, scholars have traced shows featuring people believed to be black ('Nubians', 'Zulu Kaffirs', 'Bushmen', 'Dahomeyans', 'Somalis') in the context of Saint Petersburg and Moscow's zoos and entertainment parks from 1880 through to the 1910s.¹² At the same time, they have also pointed out that actual African performers were not always involved; in some cases, their roles were played by white people in blackface, which undermined any pretence of scientific validity and instead added a theatrical dimension to these events. One of the most notorious exhibitions was that of Dahomeyan Amazons in Moscow in 1901, the study of which has certainly been elicited by a mention in Boris Pasternak's *Safe Conduct*. In fact, Dahomeyan shows had been circulating within the Russian Empire since before 1901, as evidenced by references in periodicals and by the publication of an anthropometric treatise by the now obscure gynaecologist Vladimir Favr (1852-1923). However, in this case, the setting was not Saint Petersburg or Moscow, but rather Kharkiv, where a number of shows by a troupe of Dahomeyans were held in the spring of 1895. These events were publicised in the newspaper *Iuzhnyi krai*, which announced the debut of fifty-one 'savage

showcasing cranial differences among various peoples. One table features a frontal and lateral portrait of a 'Bosemanka', whose physical characteristics resemble those depicted in portraits of 'Hottentot' women, accompanied by the caption 'against nature' (*protiv natury*).

- 12 Cf. I. Novikova, 'Imagining Africa and Blackness in the Russian Empire: From Extra-Textual Arapka and Distant Cannibals to Dahomey Amazon Shows', *Social Identities*, 2013 (19), 5, pp. 571-591, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2013.810122>; E. Savitskii, 'Somaliiskaia derevnia v peterburgskom Luna-parke v 1912 godu. Istoriia i ee sovremennye interpretatsii', *Istoriia*, 2018 (9), 8, <https://doi.org/10.18254/S0002442-5-1>; M. Leskinen, 'A Century of Elision? Ethnic Shows in Saint Petersburg and Moscow. 1879-1914', in D. Demski and D. Czarnecka (ed. by), *Staged Otherness. Ethnic Shows in Central and Eastern Europe. 1850-1939*, Budapest-New York 2021, pp. 295-327, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9789633864401-011>; E. Savitskii, 'Vystavka "dagomeiskikh amazonok" v Moskve v 1901 g.: mezhdru kolonial'nym vysokomeriem i provintsial'nym tshcheslaviem', *Istoriia*, 2022 (13), 9, <https://doi.org/10.18254/S207987840022915-5>

women' (*dikie zhenshiny*) performing at the circus owned by the German entrepreneur Wilhelm Suhr.¹³ Apparently, their arrival in town caused quite a stir:

Yesterday, a detachment of Dahomeyans arrived by the evening train on the Kharkiv-Nikolaev railway to take part in the performances of the circus 'Suhr'. A large crowd gathered at the station, causing a great commotion. People stood in lines along Ekaterinoslavskaiia Street, marvelling at the unusual passengers sitting four by four in the wagons. Among the incoming blacks, there were children and men, but most of them were women. The latter were all dressed in soldiers' overcoats from various armies, including the Russian army. These clothes had apparently been acquired by chance in the place where the warlike Amazons were staying. They wore white caps with a dragon painted on them and carried rifles. The Amazons of the King of Dahomey are said to be warlike, brave, and very strong.¹⁴

This passage clearly illustrates how the public immediately perceived these people, i.e., essentially as performers. Their preposterous, over-the-top and visibly inauthentic outfits did nothing but reinforce the farcical nature of their arrival in town, turning them into jesters ready to entertain the Russian public. In the absence of any tangible proof of their supposed bloodthirstiness and propensity for war, these traits were reinforced through props such as the uniforms and the rifles, as well as by the journalist's timely remarks on their bellicose nature and strength. The popularity of this particular troupe in southern Russia is evident not only from the organisation of further shows at the Nikitin brother's circus at the end of the same year, but also from their employment by the Rostov-on-Don Opera to perform in Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine*, in an attempt to attract reluctant audiences to the theatre. The result was so well received that it was suggested this experiment be replicated with other ethnic minorities in similar productions, such as with Chechens in Lermontov's *The Demon*.¹⁵

However, while playing their role as entertainers, the Dahomeyan women also became the subject of a 'scientific' study, featuring as the protagonists in Vladimir Favr's *Anthropological Notes on Dahomeyan*

13 Cf. for example *Iuzhnyi krai*, 02.05.1895, p. 4.

14 'Pribytie dagomeek', *Iuzhnyi krai*, 03.05.1895, p. 2.

15 'Teatr i muzyka', *Iuzhnyi krai*, 19.06.1895, p. 3.

Women (1896). Born in the Iziium district, Favr had studied in Kharkiv, graduating as a doctor (*lekar'*) in 1876. After serving in the Red Cross during the Russo-Turkish War, he had specialised in gynaecology and obstetrics, subsequently working at several regional medical institutions and becoming a member, and later secretary, of the Kharkiv Medical Society in 1877.¹⁶ His study, which focused specifically on the pelvis of the Dahomeyans, was praised by the Society as the first anthropometric study of its kind.¹⁷ The paper, discussed in 1885, was published the following year as a supplement to the journal *Akusherstvo i zhenskii bolesni* (*Obstetrics and Women's Diseases*), and received attention from beyond the specialist audience of doctors and scholars. Indeed, the entire endeavour was cited by the essayist and poet Vasilii Ivanov (1865-1912), who frequently contributed to *Iuzhnyi krai* under the pseudonym Shpil'ka. In his poetic feuilleton, *Silhouettes of Local Life*, he humorously reported on the arrival of the Dahomeyans in town, his fellow citizens' penchant for savagery, the sudden and strange interest local men had in African women, and even how science meddled in what was presented to the public as pure entertainment: 'Even in the doctors' society, the body of the Dahomeyan lady has become the subject of important discussions...'.¹⁸

Interestingly, in his study Vladimir Favr never hinted at the purported savagery and bloodthirstiness of Dahomeyan women—a trope that had been carefully constructed by the European and Russian press alike in an effort to sensationalise both the French-Dahomeyan War and the rampant ethnic shows. On the contrary, when describing their 'character', he portrayed them as 'cheerful, sociable, they are smart, meek, curious, polite, good-natured, passionate lovers of bright colours and various kinds of decorations'.¹⁹ It is, indeed, quite a departure from what the public was accustomed to reading about Dahomeyan women, and even more so as this is the only passage in Favr's study in which he provides

16 S. Igumnov (ed. by), *Khar'kovskoe meditsinskoe obshchestvo 1861-1911 gg. Ocherki ego piatidesiatiletnei deiatel'nosti*, Kharkiv 1913, pp. 519-520.

17 Ibid., p. 182.

18 Shpil'ka, 'Siluety mestnoi zhizni. Beskonechnaia poema', *Iuzhnyi krai*, 22.10.1895, p. 2. The feuilleton was first published in instalments in the newspaper and then released in a separate edition (Kharkiv 1896).

19 V. Favr, *Antropologicheskie zametki o dagomeikakh. Dagomeiskii zhenskii taz*, Saint Petersburg 1896, p. 2.

a commentary on their 'character'. Cannibalism is never mentioned, nor are human sacrifices. Instead, Favre apparently tried to make their image more relatable: he repeatedly stressed their cleanliness ('Dahomeyans are clean, in their homeland they bathe up to 3-4 times a day') and casually dismissed polygamy as 'a common form of marriage amongst the negro population of the African continent'.²⁰ The general physical description, which he provided on the basis of 'those representatives who visited us in Kharkiv', is remarkably devoid of excessive pathos or sensationalist rhetoric. This does not mean that othering was not part of the doctor's writing process, but merely that it did not follow more common routes. Though it is almost impossible to know whether these women were actually from Dahomey, as was the case for every troupe of this kind travelling through Europe at the time, Favre characterised them as 'the purest classic Guinean Negro type among the others (Kaffirs and Hottentots)', adding that the Fon people, 'now called Dahomeyans', are 'the most powerful nation [*natsiia*] of this group'. He then proceeded to provide a general physical description that followed the traditional markers of blackness (skin colour, odour, hair, lips, and nose):

[they are] characterised by a dark coffee-coloured skin, sometimes with a greyish tinge, which is velvety to the touch and slightly thicker than that of white people, almost devoid of fine hair, somehow elastic, and with a peculiar smell, reminiscent of that of rancid fat [...]. The hair on the head is thick, very curly [...]. The eyes are black, the sclera yellowish, the teeth are white, broad and somewhat tilted forward, protruding beyond the teeth of the lower jaw. The face is elongated and narrow, and prognathism is clearly visible [...]. The nose is broad, flattened at the base with large open nostrils, [...] the mouth is wide with thick lips in most cases. [...] Breasts in girls are medium-sized, hemispherical or pear-shaped, somewhat saggy, and when nursing they become larger, reaching the waist; nipples are well formed. A distinctive accumulation of fat (steatopygia) can be noticed on the buttocks of most Dahomeyan women, and it is particularly evident during their war dances.²¹

The description allows the reader to easily follow Favre's gaze as he scrutinised the bodies of the Dahomeyan women, noting their hairstyles, jewellery, tattoos, and clothing. As a gynaecologist and obstetrician, he

20 Ibid., pp. 3, 4.

21 Ibid., pp. 1-2.

then turned his attention to his specialist interests, providing information on topics such as menstrual cycles, pregnancies, childbirth, and breastfeeding habits, combining medical observations with ethnographic details: for instance, he explained that they would bury the afterbirth and plant a palm tree in the same spot, or that they would bathe newborns three times a day and anoint them with palm oil. The final section of the essay focuses on the anthropometric measurements of the pelvises and heights of twenty-two women aged between eighteen and twenty-five. According to Favre, he had collected the data using the method of the German-Baltic anatomist Ludwig Stieda (1837-1918), a professor at the University of Dorpat (Tartu), who, following a suggestion of the German zoologist Hermann von Ihering (1850-1930), advocated for the inclusion of oscillation exponents in order to make the raw numbers statistically sound.²² Favre then compared the means with those of Russian women, concluding that Dahomeyan women—and therefore the entire ‘negro race’ (*negrskaia rasa*), of whom they were ‘pure representatives’—had significantly smaller pelvises, yet these were perfectly capable of performing the tasks assigned to them by nature. Domestication thus becomes a significant component of Favre’s representation of blackness: despite the differences in skin colour, physical traits, and habits, the bodies of the exotic women he examined are ultimately normalised as simply a smaller variation of the European ones.

Fifteen years later, another troupe of Dahomeyans became the subject of a second anthropometric study. This time, the Dahomeyans were stationed at the Zoological Garden in Moscow in 1909, and the author of the publication was a well-known figure, Arkadii (Aron) El’kind (1869-1921). El’kind, who was born in Mogilev into a Jewish family, had studied medicine in Moscow, where he had become interested in anthropology as a pupil of Dmitrii Anuchin. A member of the Society of Devotees of Natural Science, Anthropology and Ethnography, he had deepened his studies in Europe (in Rome and Munich) and participated in anthropological expeditions in the Vistula region, prior to focusing his scientific interests on the anthropology of Jews, especially those living within the borders of the Russian Empire. The findings he presented at his 1912 doctoral defence suggested that Jews were ‘monotypical and racially distinct, sharing few

22 Cf. H. von Ihering, ‘Zur Einführung von Oscillationsexponenten in die Craniometrie’, *Archiv für Anthropologie*, 1878, 10, pp. 411-413.

traits with the surrounding population', and they made him a well-known figure in both the scientific community and society at large.²³

In 1909, taking advantage of the presence of the troupe of Dahomeyan people in town, El'kind took the measurements of twenty-two men and three women aged between sixteen and forty-two, publishing his study three years later with the addition of six photographs, taken by his fellow anthropologist and future theoretician of anthropometric photography Nikolai Sinel'nikov (1885-1941).²⁴ Characterising them as 'Sudanese Negroes', El'kind nevertheless pointed out that two of the subjects were not, in fact, 'pure' representatives of the Dahomeyan people, as their fathers were, respectively, from India and Jamaica. While he registered variations occurring in these two subjects (for instance with regard to hair—in one case described as 'dark blond and wavy'—and eye colour—brown and light brown as opposed to dark brown), he did not consider these differences significant enough to disrupt the homogeneity of this group of 'Negroes' belonging to the 'dark type' (*odnorodnaia gruppа temnogo tipа*). While Favr was mainly interested in the pelvis, El'kind took measurements of the whole body, paying attention to height, skull, face, trunk, limbs, proportions, and dutifully reporting the data in a table. No information about the subjects' culture and habits was provided; instead, the author devoted several paragraphs to a geographical and historical account of Dahomey. This was in line with El'kind preoccupation with the influence of a given environment on physical development; however, he did not establish a direct cause-and-effect relationship between the African nature and the physical characteristics of the people he measured. Interestingly, the only connection he established was between the decline—or at least the weakening—of the Dahomeyans' bodies and the pernicious influence of the Europeans:

While abolishing the slave trade and the brutal customs accompanied by numerous human hecatombs, the Europeans also brought with them a number of negative aspects of their civilisation, such as alcoholism, syphilis, tuberculosis and other diseases, the harmful effects of which

23 M. Mogilner, *A Race for the Future. Scientific Visions of Modern Russian Jewishness*, Cambridge-London 2022, p. 74, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2x00wbw>. On El'kind and his anthropology of Jews see the entire chapter three (pp. 73-103). Cf. also M. Mogilner, *Homo Imperii*, pp. 221-241.

24 A. El'kind, 'K antropologii negrov (dagomeitsy)', *Russkii antropologicheskii zhurnal*, 1912 (29), 1, pp. 20-35.

are already evident in the declining physical health of the population. According to dr. Külz, who has lived for many years in the German colony of Togo, neighbouring Dahomey, the sum of the negative influences of the Europeans is not offset by the positive measures they carry out for the benefit of the local population. Recently, Oetker has emerged as an ideologist of sorts, advocating for the education of the Negroes in order to introduce them to European civilisation, an ideologist who recognises the necessity of corporal punishment, but who completely ignores the measures to combat the harmful influence of said scourges of our civilisation on the Negroes. It is to be wished that before its application, Oetker's programme should be radically revised and that it should, in its new revised form, make the preservation of the physical health of the many millions of Negroes in Africa a condition of cultural ennoblement.²⁵

In addition to the threat posed by European habits slowly taking root in Africa, black people's health was also deemed to be at risk when they were in Europe. Thus, El'kind drew a direct link between the poor constitution of the subjects of his study and the lifestyle they had been leading while working in ethnic shows:

If not all, then the majority of the Dahomey people who were the subject of my study have been leading a nomadic life for a number of years, full of privations and intense activity, which has led them to their temporary stay in Moscow. Insufficient nutrition, immoderate alcohol consumption, to which they became addicted during their long journey through Europe, could not but have a negative effect on their physical development, particularly with regard to their height.²⁶

Europe was therefore constructed as the main cause of the physical decay and loss of natural strength of black people, regardless of where they lived. According to this rhetoric, malnutrition and overexertion had conveniently been occurring before the troupe's arrival in Russia, which *de facto* exonerated the empire from culpability for the decline of the black body.

Comparing his data to the available literature (Reclus, d'Albéca, Ratzel, Wolf, and others), El'kind came, in a nutshell, to two conclusions: that Dahomeyans, 'characterised by a short trunk, a narrow chest, and long limbs', have body proportions 'in many ways close to those of Europeans', with 'deviations' explainable 'by the limited number of observations';

25 Ibid., p. 35. El'kind is referring to the German colonial doctors Ludwig Külz, who was stationed in Togo and Cameroon, and Karl Oetker, who served in German East Africa.

26 Ibid., p. 26.

and that 'two types', 'perhaps two races' can be detected among them:

one is tall, dolichocephalic, hypsicephalic, chamaeprosopic and leptorrhine; the other is short, [...] with a narrower face and a wider nose. It is not possible to enter into a more detailed assessment of these two types both in view of the limited amount of our own material, and in the almost complete absence of comparative data. Nevertheless, the duality of the Dahomeyans' physical type may, to a certain extent, serve as an expression of their anthropological mixture, as indicated by some researchers who have observed the natives of the Slave Coast directly.²⁷

Even though El'kind admittedly had two mixed-race individuals at his disposal, whom he could use to formulate hypotheses about hybridity within the Dahomey population, he chose not to pursue this line of research, probably due to the limited number of subjects he could evaluate. Perhaps even more interestingly, among the pictures of Dahomeyans provided in his study, there are none of the half-Jamaican and half-Indian men, which could have given readers an idea of the physical variations noted by the scholar. Five of the six pictures depict men from Porto-Novo and Cana (aged twenty-five, twenty-three, thirty-seven, eighteen, and twenty-two respectively), while the sixth depicts a woman from Cotonou with an estimated age of twenty-seven. Their names are provided in the captions, along with their identification number within the study. The photographs offer a significant insight into Russian anthropological photography of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Fifteen years later, their author, Sinel'nikov, would concede that

Until now, we have not used any specific methods for anthropological photography, and it is hardly possible to point to a single Russian work on anthropology that uses methods other than taking portraits 'in profile' or 'face'; but how this has been done, what lens was used, what was the precise setting of the people getting photographed, etc.—remains unknown. And it may be assumed that each author worked according to their own method.²⁸

While it is certainly true that Russian photographers of 'anthropological' or 'ethnographic' types enjoyed a significant degree of independence, one thing the vast majority of them had in common—and which can be seen also in Sinel'nikov's photos of the people of Dahomey—was

²⁷ Ibid., p. 30.

²⁸ N. Sinel'nikov, 'O metodakh antropologicheskoi fotografii', *Russkii antropologicheskii zhurnal*, 1926 (14), 3-4, pp. 99-102 (p. 100).

a refusal to portray their subjects naked. Contrary to the well-known recommendations of Paul Broca, which were included in the 1872 *Instructions for Those Wishing to Make Photographic Images for the Benefit of Anthropology* published by the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, nudity appears to have been systematically excluded from the Russian anthropological and ethnographic canon.²⁹

Although there are certain constants, Sinel'nikov's portraits for El'kind's study are not homogeneous. Four of the men are depicted in profile and face while sitting on a chair, with a bare wall in the background; one of them is photographed down to the calves, showing his bare torso, white trousers, and a 'primitive' skirt made of rags, while the images of the others are cut at the torso. Unlike the others, the younger boy is depicted only in profile, with his arms clearly visible (though his hands remain largely unseen) and a light fabric covering the lower part of his body. No genitalia are shown whatsoever, which is even more conspicuous in the case of the only picture of a woman. Apparently named 'Fassi', she is portrayed sitting on a chair with her hands folded and looking directly at the camera, in a composed and almost reflexive posture. What strikes the most, however, is not so much the gracefulness of the image—which, although rare, can be found in other similar photographs of the time—but rather the complete absence of exotic or at least ethnographic elements, which were a staple of this kind of portraiture. Indeed, the quite elegant, well-kept dress that Fassi is wearing—Western in appearance rather than African—and the fine, inconspicuous jewellery, set a precedent in the iconography of Dahomeyan women, which usually emphasised quite different aspects: savagery, bloodthirstiness, or, at least, a profound exoticism. It is certainly an unusual choice to portray a woman from Dahomey in a scientific anthropometric study not only as fully dressed, but also as normalised and lacking the 'traditional elements' constantly sought after in colonial photography. Indeed, both El'kind and Favre took a fairly neutral stance towards the Dahomeyans, in that they did not pass judgement on their habits, general culture or place in civilisation. This strikes as something quite unusual, given the fact that the iconography of the Dahomeyans in the popular press was oriented towards a completely different direction, one in which the amazons' savagery was

29 Cf. L. Elias, 'Picturing "Russia's Orient": The Peoples of Russian Turkestan through the Lens of Samuil M. Dudin (1900-1902)', in S. Gorshenina *et al.* (ed. by), *Photographing Central Asia. From the Periphery of the Russian Empire to Global Presence*, Berlin 2022, pp. 63-90, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110754469-003>

so conspicuously stressed and nurtured that it became problematic when they adopted Western habits and lost their 'identity'.³⁰



Рис. 6. Fassi, 27 л. (?), род. в г. Кутону.

Fig. 3.1 Portrait of Fassi, twenty-seven years old, born in Cotonou, in A. El'kind, 'K antropologii negrov (dagomeitsy)', *Russkii antropologicheskii zhurnal*, 1912 (29), 1, p. 33.

Alongside those conducted in Russia on the occasion of the arrival of African troupes, anthropological studies could also be carried out in

30 For instance, see the cover of a 1905 issue of *Vokrug Sveta*, which reproduces a picture of a wedding in Dahomey from *L'Illustration* alongside a short note. The image shows a festive-looking black couple: the woman is wearing a white dress with a veil, and the man is wearing a tuxedo and a top hat. Some of the guests are also dressed 'as Europeans', while four children are in rags. The note explains that 'civilisation has penetrated Dahomey very quickly', hence the European clothes. As for the children, they are 'especially original in their primitive costume, devouring this outlandish procession with their eyes. But who knows? Perhaps, in a few years, they too will be dressed in European clothing under the shade of the bananas in their homeland and, like the wedding guests depicted in the picture, will be infused, at least in appearance, with the benefits of civilisation', 'Svad'ba v Dagomee v 1905 godu', *Vokrug Sveta*, 1905, 43, p. 686. The illustration was taken from *L'Illustration*, 09.09.1905, and is a reproduction of a photograph taken by the missionary Eugène Chautard (1851-1915). The written excerpt is a variation of the French version.

Africa. Ethiopia proved to be fertile ground for military doctors, who were a familiar sight in the country between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as part of the Red Cross contingent sent to support Menelik II. Quite active not merely as medical practitioners, but also as popularisers of Ethiopia in Russia by delivering lectures and organising exhibitions with materials they had collected, these doctors were not specifically trained in anthropology, yet they recorded data both from patients and ordinary people. In this context, the most significant and comprehensive study was undoubtedly Nikolai Brovtsyn's dissertation. A hereditary nobleman from the Novgorod Governorate, Brovtsyn (1865-1913) enrolled at the Imperial Military Medical Academy in 1885 and graduated in 1890. He soon began serving in various regiments and was dispatched three times to Ethiopia (in 1896, 1897, and 1903) as part of the Russian Red Cross and First Diplomatic Missions. As a result, he spent approximately six years there, during which time he worked as a doctor and also collected ethnographic objects and took photographs and measurements of local people.³¹ In 1899, he was officially appointed as lieutenant surgeon (*leib-kirurg*) to Menelik II. Once back in Russia, he furthered his studies to obtain the title of doctor of medicine, a task he accomplished in 1909 when he discussed his dissertation *Materials for an Anthropology of Ethiopia. The Abyssinians of the Shewa Province*.³²

Brovtsyn had not specifically studied anthropology, nor was he associated with Dmitrii Anuchin's Moscow 'school' of anthropology, but rather gravitated towards the scientific circles of Saint Petersburg. The lack of adequate training is revealed by the author himself in the introduction to the thesis, in which he confessed his difficulty in finding

31 Cf. Brovtsyn's curriculum vitae in N. Brovtsyn, *Materialy dlia antropologii Efiopii*, Saint Petersburg 1909, pp. 367-368. See also M. Rait, 'Russkie ekspeditsii v Efiopii v seredine XIX-nachale XX vv. i ikh etnograficheskie materialy', *Afrikanskii etnograficheskii sbornik*, 1956, 1, pp. 220-281. In 1999, a portion of what appears to be Brovtsyn's diary was published alongside a detailed commentary; while these pages recount his activities as a doctor, they make no mention of anthropological measurements. Cf. S. Chernetsov, 'Efiopskii dnevniki russkogo vracha (1898-1899 gg.)', *Vestnik Vostochnogo instituta: Acta Institutionis Orientalis*, 1999 (5), 2, pp. 4-42. A number of photos of Brovtsyn in Ethiopia also remain, usually taken by his colleagues. For example, see the picture of the doctor outside his home in Addis Ababa, which is available as part of the Kunstkamera online collection: <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/en/entity/OBJECT/93466>

32 The discussion, open to the public, was conducted on 03.12.1909. Cf. *Russkii invalid*, 03.12.1909, p. 2.

his way around critical anthropological literature: 'When familiarising oneself with anthropological literature, one often becomes stumped, not knowing how to understand the mass of figures, how to compare two apparently homogeneous measurements, or what scheme of research was carried out and what main points the researcher adhered to when making this or that measurement'.³³ Following an excursus in which he quoted Broca, Virchow, and Topinard, he explained that he relied on the method of Aleksandr Tarenetskii (1845-1905), thanking him for the advice he provided until his death. Tarenetskii, a professor of anatomy himself, had been one of the promoters of the Military-Medical Academy's first Anthropological Society, which was officially created in 1893. He had become chair of the Society prior to being appointed rector of the Academy itself. The Anthropological Society established within the Military Medical Academy responded to the army's rather practical need for 'modern population statistics and data on the physical 'fitness' of the imperial population' after the reforms of the 1860s and 1870s.³⁴ The promoters, among which there were academicians, military officials, and anthropologists working outside academia,

wanted to join the ranks of the anthropological movement in 'civilised countries' at the stage where anthropology was ceasing to be an abstract science and becoming a practical field to which physicians, linguists, archaeologists, lawmakers, and attorneys could refer for applied knowledge and advice. [...] the MMA initiative group [...] did not mean the continuation of the tradition of 'exotic studies', but the normalization of physical anthropology through its transformation into a mandatory subject of medical-military training and a basis for the scientific reorganization of the imperial army.³⁵

While most military doctors conducted studies and wrote dissertations on various populations living within the empire and thus subjected to conscription, Brovtsyn, confident in his experience in Africa, chose to focus on Ethiopians, now at the centre of disputes among European countries and rather popular in Russian society. He conducted his observations and measurements on 134 individuals, including eighty-four men aged seventeen to eighty, twenty-five women aged seventeen

33 Brovtsyn, *Materialy*, p. 4.

34 Mogilner, *Homo Imperii*, p. 269.

35 Ibid., pp. 271-272.

to fifty, and twenty-five children aged six to fourteen. However, he issued two major warnings. The first was about the approximation of the ages he recorded, which was a consequence of the Abyssinians' dismissal of their year of birth; the second was about the impossibility of tracing the subjects' family history, which he had originally planned to include in his study in order to provide a broader picture of their physical development.

To avoid muddling the results with particular pathologies, Brovtsyn mainly selected the subjects of his study from the military, a decision presumably encouraged by the overall interests of the MMA society. However, he also included a small number of individuals from other social strata, such as farmers, students, scholars, miners, and even the homeless. As for women, they were all servants, while children were either servants or military boys. Although they all came from different parts of the Shewa province, Brovtsyn noted that they all shared the Christian faith. Unlike the doctor's initial attempts at anthropological research, which were affected by the locals' distrust of 'Europeans', these measurements were acquired fairly easily during his second stay in the country between 1898 and 1899, with few complaints. He attributed this to the acclimatisation of these 'children of nature' (*deti prirody*) to Western doctors. However, from Brovtsyn's subsequent explanation, it transpires that the subjects did not actually make the decision to be studied and measured themselves: '[...] my extensive acquaintance with the court ranks, high dignitaries, and military commanders of Abyssinia was of no small benefit to me, for these persons, on learning of my desire to take measurements, supplied me with anthropological material from their subordinates [...]'.³⁶ Towards the end of the introduction, the author explained his methodology, which was largely based on Tarenetskii's work, and illustrated the sequence and order of the measurements taken. Further information on his method can be found in the final bibliography, which does not include works by Anuchin or other members of the Moscow school. Instead, it shows a propensity towards Tarenetskii, Eduard Petri and Iurii Chudnovskii, as well as long-standing frequenters of Ethiopia and Ethiopian culture, such as Boris Turaev, Aleksandr Bulatovich, Efrem Dolganev, Viktor Mashkov,

³⁶ Brovtsyn, *Materialy*, p. 4.

and Konstantin Zviagin.³⁷

In fact, the dissertation does not focus solely on physical anthropology; it also offers extensive information on the country's geography and history in two special essays, as well as detailed data on the diseases and injuries treated by the Red Cross contingent. The author also provided the percentage of patients treated according to parameters such as tribe (*plemena*) or age. Brovtsyn then discussed the various tables containing figures, offering considerations, hypotheses, and references to colleagues and other practitioners. It is an interesting tale in itself, as it intertwines paternalistic rhetoric and a sense of scientific superiority with the description of ambulatory practice and the Ethiopians' reactions to Western medicine.

The anthropological section as such only begins on page 142. If compared to Favre's and El'kind's treatises, Brovtsyn's is considerably less objective and more personal in tone, in that he frequently used qualifying adjectives such as 'beautiful', 'pleasant', or 'ugly', thus providing his own assessment of the appearance of the people he examined. He was also used to making generalisations about their 'character', which he defined as 'extremely hospitable, they are cheerful and carefree, but at the same time proud, self-loving, and very boastful. The men are very lazy and most of the hard work is done by the women'.³⁸ These are the 'Abyssinians of the Shewa province' that he examined, whom he sometimes refers to as 'Abyssinians' (*abissintsy*), and at other times as 'inhabitants of Shewa' (*shoantsy*). Brovtsyn's treatise adhered to his previously declared methodology: measurements (*izmereniia*) come only after a general —yet very thorough—inspection (*osmotr*) of the bodies, which is recounted discursively and offers personal evaluations and hypotheses. The doctor lingered on complexion, musculature, skin colour, hair, eyes, skull, face, teeth, neck and nape, ribcage, buttocks, sex organs, limbs, after which he provided the measurements, commenting on them and confronting them with those of other people (not only Africans, but also ethnic minorities living within Russia and even

37 Other sources include previous anthropological surveys of ethnic minorities in the Russian Empire (Ossetians, Belarusians, Kuban Cossacks, Kabardians), as well as Western studies by authors such as Paul Topinard, Friedrich Ratzel, Edward Tylor, Wilhelm Sievers, and Antoine d'Abbadie.

38 Brovtsyn, *Materialy*, p. 142.

Europeans). When discussing skin colour and noting variations within the same population, Brovtsyn put forward the hypothesis that there may have been a connection between a subject's overall health and their skin colour: 'According to my observations, subjects with darker skin colour (dark brown) have better health and they are all reported to have a good complexion, whereas among light-skinned subjects a "thin, mediocre and poor" complexion is more often noted'.³⁹ Although he admitted that he did not have enough data on the matter to confirm or deny this claim, it must have been a significant point for him, since he included it in the final summary where he drew the study's conclusions:

1. According to anthropological measurements, Abyssinians are a mixed tribe (*plemia*): Semites-Hamites;

2. Abyssinians are not a viable tribe and, thanks to debauchery, syphilis, and drunkenness, they will undoubtedly become extinct and merge with more viable neighbours (Galla people);

[...]

4. A darker skin colour in Abyssinians can be a sign of good health;

[...]

8. The military department must prioritise the large-scale establishment of sanatoriums for military officials suffering from tuberculosis of the lungs, bones, joints, glands and other organs. There are many such patients, and cases of tuberculosis in permanent military medical establishments are severe. It is not feasible to send patients home, as this often leaves them in a helpless situation and can spread the disease to the local population. Furthermore, having patients stay at home places a burden on their relatives.⁴⁰

The distance between Brovtsyn, a Russian, and the subjects of his study is all the more evident here: unlike dissertations dealing with imperial subjects, which frequently demonstrated a 'spirit of strategic relativism' by avoiding 'racial descriptions of the non-Russian population of the empire in terms of their unfitness and inherent physical and mental inferiority',⁴¹ Brovtsyn's study does not shy away from an overall

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 145-146.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 366.

⁴¹ Mogilner, *Homo Imperii*, p. 276.

negative evaluation of the 'Abyssinians of the Shewa province', so much so that, in his view, they were not even capable of keeping their own 'tribe' (*plemia*) alive, being instead destined for extinction. This is hardly a flattering description, made all the more striking by the generally positive perception of Ethiopians as brothers in faith and ideal friends in Russian society, and by the fact that Menelik II, for whom the doctor worked, was one of them. However, Brovtsyn's position becomes more comprehensible when considered in the context of Western medical diplomacy in Ethiopia. As a matter of fact, the Russian Red Cross mission was not the only foreign medical contingent active in Ethiopia at that time. As part of a modernisation effort, Menelik II had called for a foreign workforce in various fields: from military to medical training, from engineering to construction workers and scientists. European powers thus had begun competing to gain the favour of the Negus and strengthen their influence in the still independent African country. Citizens of Britain, France, Italy, and Russia were all involved in this strategic game, and they ended up constituting a relatively significant proportion of Ethiopia's population, particularly in Addis Ababa and Harar.⁴² Medicine quickly became central to this process of modernisation; as has been noted, 'the Ethiopian state's involvement in healthcare emerged within two particular contexts: the fight against epidemics and the rise of the imperialists. On the one hand, Menelik II sought to control diseases such as smallpox, plague, and cholera to prevent them from decimating his armies. On the other hand, the use of Western medicine also reflects Menelik's desire to appear on the international scale as a "modern" and, therefore, powerful country'.⁴³ While Menelik was promoting the idea of using foreign powers to Ethiopia's advantage in order to modernise the country, the foreign powers in question were

42 For an in-depth look at this issue, cf. R. Pankhurst, 'Menilek and the Utilisation of Foreign Skills in Ethiopia', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 1967 (5), 1, pp. 29-86.

43 V. Pedrotti, 'When a Quest for Modernization Meets French Imperialist Aspiration: The Circumstances Surrounding the Establishment of the St. Anthony Leprosarium and the Ras Makonnen Hospital in Harar (1901-1906)', *Annales d'Ethiopie*, 2022, 34, pp. 121-152 (p. 123). By providing modern healthcare free of charge, the Russians set the bar high. The other Western powers had to adapt, meaning that, unlike in Europe, Ethiopian patients could enjoy completely free treatment for several years. On the role of Western medicine in constructing and representing the 'African body', cf. A. Butchart, *The Anatomy of Power: European Constructions of the African Body*, Pretoria 1998.

also developing their own specific rhetoric. Russia combined the idea of Ethiopians as allies against common Western enemies with the notion that the military and sanitary assistance provided was a sign of its own belonging to the Western world. Inscribed in colonial practices, this served as confirmation that Russia was indeed a European state whose expertise was sought by an African country looking to modernise. It was Russia's very own civilising mission in the 'dark continent': every accomplishment had to be celebrated, while a certain distance from Ethiopians—who, despite being Christians and allies, were nevertheless at a lower level of development—had to be maintained in order to justify said mission. One of the most celebrated successes was undoubtedly the construction of the Addis Ababa hospital, the first in Ethiopia, which would be eulogised, in retrospective, by Mikhail Lebedinskii, a colleague and friend of Brovtsyn:

The entire European colony came to see the new house-hospital, and everyone was amazed and marvelled at what the Russian doctors had achieved. [...] Russia can be proud: its great sacrifice has not been in vain; it yielded rich fruits. Years will pass, there may be many medical institutions in Abyssinia, but the first hospital is entirely the work of Russia and Russian doctors. Russia brought light into the dark consciousness of the people, not through violence, but through reason and the high humane idea of helping the sick and wounded.⁴⁴

Considered in this context, Brovtsyn's dismissive attitude towards Ethiopians can be justified by the need to emphasise the importance of the Russians' efforts in the country: after all, they were the ones introducing people to modern medicine when they were only accustomed to traditional forms of healing. The condescending tone found in several passages of the dissertation can therefore be explained by the position of scientific—but also cultural—superiority that was inevitably assumed by the author.

⁴⁴ M. Lebedinskii, 'Pervyi gosptal v Abissinii', *Istoricheskii vestnik*, 1912, 11, pp. 811-826 (pp. 822, 824). Lebedinskii reported that the hospital closed in 1907 and that the French doctor Vitalien, who was born in Martinique, was put in charge of the establishment. On Vitalien, cf. Pedrotti, 'When a Quest'. For his part, Lebedinskii wrote a dissertation, which however was not published, on the anthropology of 'Galla' people (Oromo). This study was also inspired by Tarenetskii, and was conducted between 1898-1899 and 1902-1905. A synopsis was published, cf. M. Lebedinskii, 'Antropometricheskie izmereniia u gallasov', *Russkii vrach*, 1911, 46, pp. 1772-1773.

Brovtsyn's 'accusations' against Ethiopians could be arbitrary, such as accusations of 'indolence', or derived from his medical practice, as in the case of the custom of child marriage: indeed, he pointed out that it was not uncommon for girls aged seven to ten to be married off, especially in the Shewa province, and denounced the negative, sometimes permanent, consequences this had on their young bodies.⁴⁵ Of course, negatively perceived characteristics intersected with positive ones. For example, the Shewa Abyssinians are praised for their hospitality, military skills, courage, and beautiful appearance compared to 'other Abyssinians'. However, these feel more like concessions than genuine praise, especially when considering Brovtsyn's accounts of the most prevalent diseases in Ethiopia. Here, Abyssinians are portrayed as completely unaware of the causes and consequences of actions that have caused them serious health problems. It is left to Brovtsyn and other Western doctors to resolve the situation, which would otherwise degenerate. The attitude of the patients is described by Brovtsyn as completely trusting—and even a bit reckless:

Our black patients, who had complete confidence in us, were very willing to undergo all kinds of operations, with the exception of limb amputations, probably because, in Abyssinia, serious offences are punished by cutting off an arm or leg. Nevertheless, they still agreed to these operations. They are generally fond of bloody methods of treatment and often insist on operations where no surgical intervention is really necessary. [...] In this respect, Abyssinians are the exact opposite of our common people.⁴⁶

While adopting a superior stance towards them, it appears from the final remarks that Brovtsyn acts as if he is working for their benefit. Indeed, his very last point is a practical suggestion intended to improve the lives of soldiers and consequently the performance of the Ethiopian army. By posing as a representative of modern—and therefore Western—science, he embodies a colonial rhetoric of progress, paternalism, and white saviourism that ultimately help him, as a Russian, to position himself and his country within the realm of civilised and modern empires.

⁴⁵ Cf. Brovtsyn, *Materialy*, p. 73.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

Mixed Signals: Blackness in Encyclopaedias

While academics were preoccupied with measuring the black body and providing the most 'accurate' (in numerical terms) representation possible—albeit often with clear ideological undercurrents—the emerging editorial industry for the masses constructed an image of black people that existed between scientific representation and fictional reinterpretation. This process involved popularising scientific discoveries (mainly ethnographic) and/or travel experiences, which were made available to the public through encyclopaedias, separate volumes and periodicals such as *Vokrug sveta*, *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia*, *Vsemirnyi puteshestvennik*. Encyclopaedias, in particular, acted as the main mediators between science and the general public, a role that was made easier by their growing market at the turn of the century.⁴⁷ Furthermore, their authoritative and trustworthy status meant that the information they provided was generally accepted as factual, thereby solidifying whatever 'truth' they set out to explain.

Dmitrii Anuchin's entry for the word 'negroes' (*negry*), which was compiled for the *Brokgauz i Efron Encyclopaedia*—perhaps the most representative, though expensive and therefore upmarket, of its time—deviates significantly from the kinds of 'academic writing' discussed so far. Here, Anuchin, one of the founders of Russian anthropology, opted to pass on generalisations and stereotypes largely borrowed from Western literature. Anuchin never visited Africa, nor, as far as we know, did he ever meet the 'negroes' he was now describing for the benefit of the public. However, he was clearly familiar with anthropological and ethnographic studies written by European scholars. Just two years after this volume of the *Brokgauz i Efron Encyclopaedia* was published, he developed a specific interest in the African continent while researching the exact origins of Aleksandr Pushkin's ancestry.⁴⁸

In his 1897 characterisation, 'negroes' (*negry*) are 'the black [*chernokozhie*] inhabitants of tropical Africa', who have been considered

47 For representations of Africa in previous encyclopaedias cf. S. Miliavskaiia, 'Afrika v pervykh russkikh entsiklopediakh', *Strany i narody Vostoka*, 1980, 21, pp. 187-202.

48 Cf. D. Anuchin, *Pushkin (antropologicheskii eskiz)*, Moscow 1899 (the essay had been previously published serially in *Russkie vedomosti* the same year). On Anuchin's reconstruction of Pushkin's lineage and the ideological ramification, cf. M. Mogilner, *Homo Imperii*.

‘a kind of lower race [*rod*], destined for slavery’ for centuries, though new research ‘has reduced their “animality” to more moderate terms’.⁴⁹ This brief introduction is quickly followed by a physical description preoccupied with skin colour (‘the black colour of the skin of Negroes is due to a colouring granular substance, a pigment, deposited in the mucous Malpighian layer of the skin’, ‘a newborn Negro has a lighter, reddish or pinkish-brown colour, which soon begins to darken’, ‘the skin of an adult negro is never completely black, but rather brownish’), hair, height, general complexion, head, chest, face, and various other characteristics (the ratio of the width of the nose to its length, the shape of the chest, the narrowness of the pelvis, the eyes, the genitals, the brain, the faster sexual development and consequently faster ageing). In his description, Anuchin used two contrasting reference points: Europeans on the one hand, and apes on the other. Thus, ‘negroes’ are effectively placed within this range, at the intersection between humans and animals: ‘In height, Negroes do not differ from Europeans [...]. However, the somewhat greater length of their arms brings them closer to chimpanzees or orangutans. Nevertheless, this approximation is weakened by the fact that their legs are also longer, whereas in anthropomorphic apes, the body is longer and the legs are shorter’.⁵⁰ The physical description ends here, and the evaluation of their ‘character’ begins: the reader thus learns that they are cheerful, volatile, vain, love music and dancing (though they have ‘hoarse’ voices), and are capable of learning to read, write, and play, ‘but their development usually stops soon, and they are later overtaken by their white peers’; though sometimes travellers praise their intelligence and devotion, more often they accuse them of ‘lying, greed, laziness, perfidy, cruelty, animality etc.’.⁵¹ Anuchin’s interest then shifted to their culture(s), focusing especially on witchcraft, human sacrifice, and cannibalism. Interestingly—and in stark contrast to Favr and El’kind, who did not dwell on this aspect—Anuchin also recalled that ‘mass murders of prisoners are carried out’ in Dahomey.⁵² Nevertheless, the scholar conceded that ‘negroes’ were not ‘utter savages’ since ‘they are familiar with iron’ and that ‘many tribes are excellent at processing metals, forging various

49 Anuchin, *Negry*, pp. 820–821.

50 Ibid., p. 821.

51 Ibid., pp. 821–822.

52 Ibid., p. 822.

tools and weapons, making dishes, producing leather, bark fabrics, etc. Agriculture and cattle breeding are widespread everywhere'. Interestingly, despite the heated debates surrounding slavery in Russia due to its perceived proximity to serfdom, and despite Anuchin's liberal stance, the scholar remained quite neutral on the matter, refraining from making explicit judgements while acknowledging the negative impact of this practice on the civil and cultural development of the 'Negro population' worldwide. Anuchin seemed particularly interested in the situation in the United States, having foreseen an apocalyptic scenario for the country as a direct consequence of the slave trade: 'Taking into account that blacks reproduce more than whites, that immigration of whites is constantly decreasing and emigration is increasing, it can be assumed that in twenty years the black population in the southern states will be twice as large as the white population'.⁵³ The statement was consistent with *fin-de-siècle* anxieties about miscegenation and the numerical decline of the 'white race', and, given the author's standing in the academic community, helped to scientifically anchor and justify similar sentiments in the public press and literary works. Considering the general objectivity of both Favr and El'kind, who did not pass judgement on the subjects of their studies nor indulged in common clichés such as savagery, cannibalism, laziness, cognitive limitations, and general backwardness in terms of civilisation, Anuchin's views are quite surprising. A renowned scholar and the father of Russian anthropology, Anuchin was a liberal who was not accustomed to linking race and culture and making assumptions accordingly. Indeed, as his 1899 study of Pushkin's racial composition and heritage made clear, he reserved this method exclusively for the 'Negro race', which he continued to characterise as inferior. Given the circulation of the *Brokgauz i Efron Encyclopaedia* (and Pushkin's popularity in 1899, the centenary of his birth), it is reasonable to assume that more people read Anuchin's portrayal of black people than Favr's or El'kind's studies. Moreover, the authority emanating from the encyclopaedia itself, coupled with Anuchin's reputation, only served to reinforce the validity of this representation, which notably provided a pseudo-scientific basis for the sensationalist depictions of Africans that were prevalent in periodicals. Another point should be made: while the *Brokgauz i Efron Encyclopaedia*

53 Ibid., p. 824.

certainly reached more people than specialist anthropometric studies, it was still an elitist publication with a relatively high cost. Therefore, it was only accessible to people of a certain status who were already quite educated. Taking this into consideration, it is reasonable to conclude that Anuchin's portrayal of 'negroes' could not be perceived as an elementary adaptation of scientific facts intended for an uneducated audience. In fact, a comparison of different encyclopaedias published during the same period reveals that assertions like Anuchin's were very much the norm. In this regard, there is little difference in rhetoric between the *Brokgauz i Efron Encyclopaedia* and the *Nastol'nyi entsiklopedicheskii slovar'*, a cheap and widely available publication:

The negro is very irascible and hot-tempered, but at the same time good-natured and even sentimental; he is characterised by gaiety, he is inclined to dances and spectacles, he is careless and thinks little of the morrow. [...] The negro's cruelty to his enemies, slaves and subordinates knows no restraint, and his religious fanaticism can make him a real beast. Mentally, the negro differs greatly from Europeans. An unusually developed imagination is the predominant power of his soul, while abstract thinking is not much available to him. Negroes are gifted with a remarkable capacity for imitation and an enormous memory, thanks to which they quickly learn foreign languages. The negro child usually develops faster than the European child and is initially easy to educate, but as the years go by, further mental development becomes more and more difficult. It is, of course, difficult to determine what in the Negro's character lies in racial peculiarities (and whether there are any such unchangeable peculiarities) and what is the product of life and history.⁵⁴

Though expressed in slightly different words, the essence is the same suggested by the *Brokgauz i Efron Encyclopaedia*; however, here the possibility that 'negroes' can 'improve' and become civilised is much

54 *Negry*, in *Nastol'nyi entsiklopedicheskii slovar'*, VI, Moscow 1897, p. 3431. The author of the entry is not acknowledged. In addition to this 'character description', there are also some paragraphs reporting on physical details and way of life. The author based his observations on Oscar Peschel, Robert Hartmann, and other European sources. 'Negroes' are defined as 'the black inhabitants of Africa with the exception of the Hamites in the north, Hottentots and Bushmen in the south-west, and some tribes of equatorial Africa, like the Akka and others [...]', p. 3430. The new edition of this encyclopaedia (*Entsiklopedicheskii slovar' Granat*), featured, within the entry 'Africa', a section written by Anuchin on African peoples (cf. *Afrika*, in *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar' Granat*, IV, Moscow 1912, clmn. 310-328). This edition is lacking a specific entry for 'Negroes'.

more prominent, so much so that the author, talking about the successful example of African Americans, notes that while they have not changed their physical characteristics (yet), culturally they have come very far, becoming statesmen, generals, lawyers, artists. Their entry in the realm of civilisation is entirely ascribed to the 'direct and indirect influence of white people'.

As a matter of fact, it was a fairly standardised representation that varied most with regard to who actually belonged to this 'race'. Overall, 'negroes' shared the following traits: a seemingly good nature and cheerful character, coupled with cruelty towards their slaves and women; savagery; a penchant for music and dancing; cannibalism; despotism; mendacity; and the ability to learn from white people.⁵⁵ Later publications, such as the new edition of the *Brokgauz i Efron* (1911-1916), are consistent with this imagery: the entries 'Africa' (*Afrika*), written by the geographer Andrei Grigor'ev, the future director of the Institute of Geography of the USSR Academy of Sciences, as well as 'African peoples' (*Afrikanskie narody*), written by the renowned Russian-French anthropologist Joseph Deniker, continued to present readers with the same image of semi-savages and uncultured (*poludikie*) human beings, capable of adopting Western habits, accustomed to hard work on plantations and in mines, and showcasing a physical endurance far superior to that of Europeans.⁵⁶ However, the newest and more people-oriented encyclopaedias introduced another element to the description of black people: colour tables, in which various African 'types' were drawn for the benefit of the public, enabling them to navigate more easily exotic denominations like 'Hottentots', 'Bushmen', 'Pygmies', 'Negroes', 'Niam Niam', and so forth. Usually, these drawings displayed only the head and shoulders of a person, and also provided hints about traditional clothing, in addition to physiognomic details. In this regard, the *Russian Encyclopaedia* (1911)—a project carried out by accomplished professors in collaboration with foreign institutes such as the Bibliographisches Institut in Leipzig—opted to modernise the iconographic apparatus by including black-and-white photographs.⁵⁷ This improvement on the

55 Cf. for instance *Negry*, in *Bol'shaia entsiklopediia*, XIII, Saint Petersburg 1903, p. 742, as well as *Afrika*, in *Bol'shaia entsiklopediia*, II, Saint Petersburg 1900, pp. 284-305 (and especially pp. 296-298).

56 Cf. 'Afrika', in *Novyi entsiklopedicheskii slovar' Brokgauza i Efrona*, IV, Saint Petersburg 1912, clmn. 335-361, and *Afrikanskie narody*, *ibid.*, clmn. 362-370.

57 Cf. 'Afrika', in *Russkaia entsiklopediia*, II, Saint Petersburg 1912, pp. 119-124. It was a

usual drawings contributed to validating and corroborating the written description of Africa's various inhabitants by virtue of the photographs' realism, which added a new touch of objectivity.

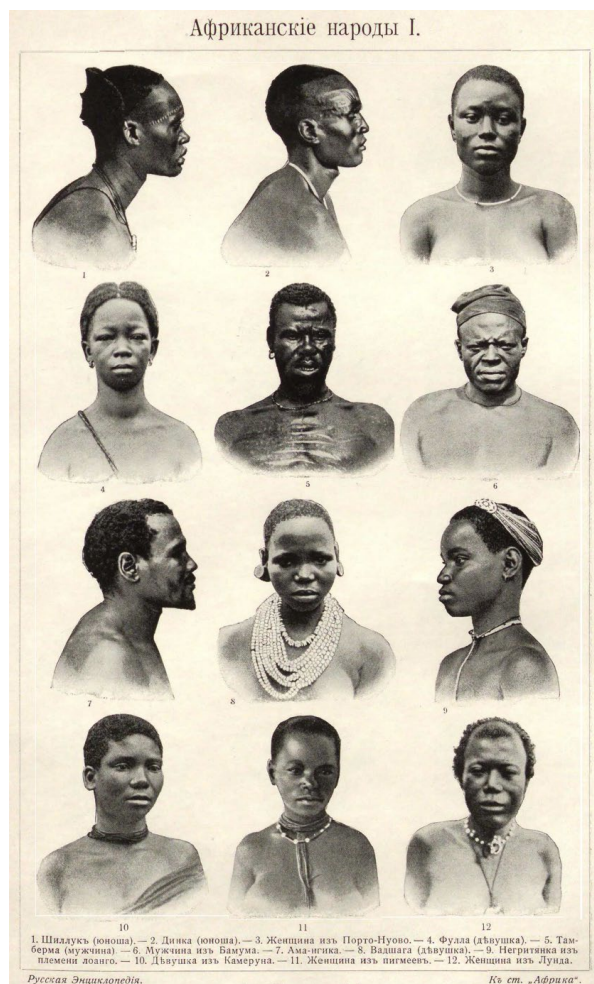


Fig. 3.2 'African People', in *Russkaia entsiklopediia*, II, Saint Petersburg 1912, pp. 119-124 (table 1).

particularly well-curated encyclopaedia, with a specific attention for high-quality images. It was not a cheap publication, but, with twenty volumes planned, it was still cheaper than the 48-volume *Brokgauz i Efron*. Due to World War I and the 1917 revolution, only eleven volumes were actually published.

Encyclopaedias aimed at lower social classes or children promoted similar imagery, albeit with a simpler, more conversational style, despite still being structured and written by academics. The *Popular Encyclopaedia of Scientific and Applied Knowledge* (1910-1912), created by the Kharkiv Society for the Spread of Literacy among the People under the patronage of the physiologist Vasiliï Danilevskii (1852-1939), director of the Kharkiv Women's Medical Institute, was precisely 'intended for the general public and, primarily, for adult readers who have completed only elementary school and are consciously striving for self-education', and served 'to promote the general rise of education among the masses'.⁵⁸ The 'Anthropological-Geographical' volume, the sixth in the series, contained—in addition to geographical descriptions, information on meteorology and news on geographical discoveries—some sections on anthropology and ethnography, in which the concept of 'race' (*rasa*) was presented in the simplest terms. The authors began by stating that all foreign people, at first glance, look the same to us, so much so that we are incapable of distinguishing a 'negro' (*negr*) from another 'negro', one Chinese person from another Chinese person, and they explained that this is due to the fact that every given people have some common characteristics, which, being the most evident, are the first to be noticed. They then clarified that

We call a group of people who share similar anthropological characteristics a 'race' [*rasa*], referring to the most complex subdivision of the human race. Each race is then divided into groups of tribes [*plemena*], and tribes are further divided into separate groups. Tribes are the smallest subdivision of the human race and can even differ only in their secondary characteristics. The division of the human race into races based on skin colour is a long-established concept; the ancient Egyptians and Indians were aware of it. In fact, the Hindi word 'caste' (*Varna*) literally means 'colour'. Of course, characteristics such as colour clearly distinguish between a white European, a black African, and a yellow Asian, so it is completely natural to divide humanity by this characteristic. However,

58 V. Danilevskii, 'Obshchee predislovie k Narodnoi entsiklopedii', in *Narodnaia entsiklopediia nauchnykh i prikladnykh znaniï*, I.I, Moscow 1912, p. XV. In his preface, Danilevskii emphasised that, unlike encyclopaedias created for a privileged audience, this particular encyclopaedia aimed to democratise knowledge for a wide range of people. With this in mind, he opted to write comprehensive articles instead of shorter entries for each letter of the alphabet, to broaden the readers' intellectual horizons.

the groups of whites, blacks, and yellows may in turn be divided into a whole series of smaller groups which, while remaining the same colour, differ in other features.

The very word 'race' is to be understood in the same way as the word 'breed' [*poroda*] in relation to animals and plants [...].

The lack of a definitive ancestor to which all races can be attributed, coupled with their great diversity, makes it very difficult to classify humanity into races and tribes. This is why different scientists do not classify humanity into the same number of races.⁵⁹

After acknowledging that the vast majority of the world's population is a mixture of different races and that 'pure' [*chistye*] races are extremely rare, the authors addressed two sensitive issues: the origin of races and the possibility of classifying some as superior and others as inferior. They expressed their disapproval of contemporary theories such as polygenism, arguing that they had merely served to justify cruelty against 'coloured races', considered inferior, particularly in the Americas during the slave trade. Conversely, they maintained that the differences between races are not essential: even such a remarkable signifier of diversity as skin colour is in fact based on 'grains of pigment' that all races have in their skin. They also advised caution when it came to making a clear distinction between superior and inferior races:

We judge inferior races mainly by their culture [...]; in classifying races, we cannot identify any features that would make it absolutely impossible for any race to develop. A particular state of culture is not connected to any racial characteristics, but can be transmitted or borrowed; in the history of mankind, it is possible to see that the most cultured nations have not necessarily belonged to the white race, and that the cultural development of the white race is relatively recent. Members of all races can achieve a high level of development, as evidenced by individuals from the black, yellow, and red races.⁶⁰

Yet, despite their apparent inclusivity, they still identified 'primitive' [*primitivnye*] people, who, for the authors, displayed features that likened them to apes and thus were deemed to have remained quite 'pure' throughout the years: they are 'Australians' [*avstraliitsy*],

59 'Delenie chelovecheskogo roda na rasy i plemena', in *Narodnaia entsiklopediia nauchnykh i prikladnykh znanii*, VI.II, Moscow 1911, pp. 720-735 (pp. 720-721).

60 *Delenie chelovecheskogo roda na rasy i plemena*, p. 724.

'Bushmen' and 'Hottentots', 'Dravidians' and 'Veddas'. It appears very clearly, thus, that a hierarchical ladder was still in the charts: rather than being based on alleged racial (and therefore intrinsic) peculiarities, it was based on culture. With a condescending attitude the authors stressed that every man was, in theory, capable of development, while highlighting the idea that 'development', in the present day, was that achieved by white people.

The description of the various races that follows is focused only on physical features (skin colour and hair being the most discussed in the case of black people, who incidentally, as if the previous assertions were forgotten, are defined as 'ranki[ing] lowest among the other races in terms of mental development'), while moral characteristics, general behaviour, and customs are not recounted at all.

Instead, such details are mentioned in the geographical section dedicated to Equatorial Africa, whose exoticism and strangeness are constructed through descriptions of its 'savage' [*dikie*] inhabitants as freakish pygmies or wrinkly Bushmen who wear only a piece of skin, live in caves and have no form of state organisation, or 'the real Negroes', who are 'much more developed, with black or chocolate brown skin, thick lips, flattened noses and curly hair. Many black people are beautifully built. [...] They like to paint their bodies with different colours (tattoos) and are engaged in farming and herding'.⁶¹ Here, too, they are described as cheerful and passionate about music and dancing, but also as crude fetish worshippers, as cannibals ('Niam Niam'), and as people prone to despotism and illiteracy. Sudan is the only country that has managed to establish a proper state structure and to devote itself to an organised religion (Islam), but this has been made possible by its proximity to Arab and white people.

Readers come to understand that the 'true Negroes' who feature in the encyclopaedia are Bantu people, to whom a specific chapter is devoted. Given the importance placed on culture as a measure of a people's advancement within a hierarchical structure, and the capacity of individuals to educate themselves and progress, it is not surprising that the Bantu are portrayed as semi-savages, a status that is contingent on external factors hindering their development. Though 'not lacking

61 *Ekvatorial'naia Afrika. Sudan*, in *Narodnaia entsiklopediia nauchnykh i prikladnykh znaniï*, pp. 623-624.

in intelligence', 'constant wars' prevented them from developing properly; those who were sold and transported to America 'showed a lot of mental strength and proved capable of cultural work' once they obtained their freedom.⁶² Now, many of them have a university degree, while the Bantu still living in Africa 'remain true savages', accustomed to despotic, senseless, and even farcical rulers: 'If the king sneezed, all the courtiers sneezed after him, even if they did not want to. [...] To distinguish himself from his subjects, he often wore European clothes without knowing how to use them, such as a tailcoat on his bare body, or an official's triangle while wearing only torn trousers and going barefoot. [...] Yet his power was unlimited'.⁶³ The relationship between the Bantu and white men (particularly Europeans) is presented as having two sides. On the one hand, it is clearly stated that the Bantu suffered at the hands of their owners in America or colonists in Africa, particularly the Germans and British, and that their living conditions were unfair and inhumane. On the other, Europeans are presented as having finally introduced civilisation and modernity to a place that would otherwise have remained barbaric. Thus while Anuchin was prone to link the physical attributes of the 'black race' with an assumed inferiority that would persist forever, the authors of the *Popular Encyclopaedia* sought to underline the universality of human intellectual capabilities. Nevertheless, in doing so, they continued to regard the white man's 'culture' as the pinnacle to which black people could only aspire. This attitude is also evident in the surprisingly brief coverage of Ethiopia, which is barely mentioned and completely overlooked despite Russia's interest in the region. It is portrayed as a still quite backward country, where pagan rites persist, the people are largely illiterate, and there are no real cities apart from Addis Ababa. The only 'cultural' elements are said to come from the white race, defined as 'close to the ancient Egyptians' and 'dominant', but whose 'more or less high level of education' is constantly threatened by proximity to and conflicts with 'more warlike tribes' of Muslim faith.⁶⁴

62 *Negry Bantu*, in *Narodnaia entsiklopediia nauchnykh i prikladnykh znaniy*, pp. 667-673 (p. 668).

63 *Narodnaia entsiklopediia nauchnykh i prikladnykh znaniy*, pp. 669, 670. The 'king' in question is not a particular historical monarch, but a generic figure representing a 'Negro ruler'.

64 *Severnaia Afrika. Egipet*, in *Narodnaia entsiklopediia nauchnykh i prikladnykh znaniy*, p. 612.

This liberal coating of a racialised perception of the world also affected publications intended for young readers, including the ten-volume *Children's Encyclopaedia* published by Sytin between 1913-1914—perhaps the most affordable and at the same time well-produced of its time. Supervised by renowned scholars such as the zoologists Iulii Vagner (1865-1945) and Sergei Metal'nikov (1870-1946), and the historians Sergei Kniaz'kov (1873-1919) and Ivan Kozlovskii (1869-1943), the encyclopaedia was presented as a Russian version of Arthur Mee's famous and widely translated *Children's Encyclopaedia* (1908-1910). Although the authors made it clear that it was not a faithful translation of the original text, its overall structure, themes, and the lens through which reality was presented were very similar to Mee's work. Quite simply, the emphasis on Britain and British-related contexts in the original version had been replaced by a focus on Russia and Russian culture, and significant Russian figures had been added to the 'notable people' section. However, this does not mean that Africa or colonial topics were absent from Sytin's publication. On the contrary, they can be found throughout the ten volumes, in articles dealing with a wide range of topics, from history to natural sciences. Not surprisingly, the rhetoric they offered Russian children was one of great ambivalence. On the one hand, Africa was presented as an underdeveloped place where Europeans were introducing modernity; on the other, Europeans were criticised for their greed in pursuit of economic interests. They were also blamed for the decline and gradual disappearance of the local population, as well as for environmental damage. However, these allegations were pursued alongside a discourse that positioned local populations as members of an inferior race. While advising children against despising them, this rhetoric asserted that they were valuable only insofar as studying them could help clarify how humankind had developed over millennia:

There are particular reasons to be concerned about what is happening in the Congo forest. No matter how carefree we are when riding our motorbikes and bicycles, we should be aware of the cost of their rubber. The foliage of this vast forest provides food and shelter for many species of animals that cannot be found anywhere else and are extremely interesting. There are also some human tribes that foolish people despise, but any sensible person would consider them very valuable because they provide us with important information about the human race.

Unfortunately, the so-called civilisation is slowly but inevitably destroying the simplest forms of human life all over the world [...]. If things continue as they are, it is highly probable that in a century there will be no 'inferior' races left on earth! But even if they are inferior to us—and in some respects they are—they are still extremely interesting. Once they have disappeared from the face of the earth, the possibility of studying them will also disappear.⁶⁵

This passage effectively encouraged Russian children to consider black people as mere objects of study at their disposal, rather than as independent human beings. The need to 'preserve' them from the adulterating influence of Europeans stems from the egoistic hunger to create and accumulate knowledge, which renders them passive figurines part of the Russian intellectual archive of Africa. While monogenism was asserted throughout, the diversity between 'races' was also constantly supported, with physical differences (such as different skull shapes and sizes) being linked to higher or lower intellectual capabilities. Europeans occupied the apex of this hierarchical ladder, being considered the 'highest type of human race',⁶⁶ who, precisely because they were superior, had a moral obligation to uplift the existence of lower races. European explorers who ventured into Africa were not only praised for their courage, but also for their civilising mission: for example, Livingstone's role as an evangelist and the success he achieved with the 'savages' (*dikari*) who 'loved him' were emphasised throughout.⁶⁷ While technical progress (for instance, the construction of railways in Africa) was commended, slave trade and exploitation were definitely disapproved of ('They [the Europeans] established a number of colonies there and began a dark business: they captured the negroes, peaceful, poorly armed and unable to fight against the more educated and skilful Europeans, and sold them into slavery [...]').⁶⁸ In this regard, the authors aligned their positions with those expressed in Mee's *Encyclopaedia*, including a belief in progress and a Christian understanding that all men are equal, coupled, however, with racial thinking, a touch of Darwinism, and Eurocentrism.⁶⁹

65 *Detskaia entsiklopediia*, VII, Moscow 1914, p. 176.

66 *Detskaia entsiklopediia*, IV, Moscow 1913, p. 183.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

68 *Detskaia entsiklopediia*, X, Moscow 1914, p. 108.

69 Cf. J. M. Coetzee, 'Growing up with *The Children's Encyclopedia*', *English in Africa*,

Bringing Black Africa to the People

While encyclopaedias experienced a significant surge in popularity and reached a broad, socially diverse readership, educational books and manuals on a variety of subjects were also published for less educated people. Africa was no exception to this trend, featuring as a primary theme in numerous volumes intended for the general public, which were usually of a geographical or ethnographical nature. In most cases, the authors were pedagogues, teachers, or public figures who believed strongly in the necessity of spreading education to the masses, acting as advocates of social causes. Often linked to populist ideas or revolutionary movements, they are usually remembered (if at all) for reasons other than their depiction of Africa. However, perhaps surprisingly, this continent was among their interests, featuring in the titles of books they published throughout their lives.

Perhaps the most well-known of them is Dmitrii Koropchevskii (1842-1903), an anthropologist and ethnographer who studied at the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics at Moscow University and devoted himself to popularising knowledge. Throughout his career, Koropchevskii 'connected the study of race with that of culture and environment', stepping aside from the 'cultured/uncultured contraposition' promoted by the Saint Petersburg anthropological school.⁷⁰ As his bibliography makes clear, his interest in 'primitive, savage men' led him to pay particular attention to the African continent. He wrote several publications on the subject for a less educated readership and children, and he also translated Western books such as Friedrich Hahn's *Afrika* (1901; Russian edition 1903). Through this work, he not only created and spread knowledge on the people living there and their exotic customs, but also addressed topical issues of the time, such as the presence of Europeans in Africa, the activities of Western explorers (especially Livingstone, whom he wrote about in a book for the popular series 'Lives of Remarkable People'), and discussions about race (including in relation to Russia and the influence of the 'yellow race').

However, it was only in his 1903 publication, *First Lessons in Ethnography*, that he revealed his specific point of view to a wider

2021 (48), 3, pp. 7-28, <https://doi.org/10.4314/eia.v48i3.1>

⁷⁰ Mogilner, *Homo Imperii*, p. 88.

audience, providing a lens through which to better understand his treatise on ethnicities and his descriptions of the world's peoples. The publication stemmed from a lecture he gave at the Pedagogical Congress of Zemstvo Teachers in Saratov in 1901, which was intended to aid school teachers in combining the study of geography with that of the human population. Since it lacked technicalities and was enriched by many photos, it was also a thoroughly enjoyable reading for a wider public, at the fairly affordable cost of 75 kopecks. A second edition was published a few years after Koropchevskii's death. In this book, the scholar made it clear that he did not consider race (*rasa*) to be the main factor behind humanity's hierarchy. Acknowledging the existence of three races—'black people' in Africa and Australia, 'yellow people' in Asia and America, and 'white people' in Europe—he pointed out that racial mixture had occurred throughout millennia. This, coupled with the fact that it is impossible to clearly identify some people as belonging to one race or another, led him to conclude that a human hierarchy based on culture would be more effective. Conveniently, this categorisation method was superimposable on the racial subdivisions that he had supposedly rejected: 'The black race has never independently attained high culture or education, i.e., significant scientific and artistic development; the yellow race has reached a high mental level but has stalled and is not progressing; the white race has created an even higher culture and is advancing more and more rapidly along this path'.⁷¹ However, he argued that the cultural superiority or inferiority of one people over another was not innate or necessarily related to race. Instead, it was the direct consequence of the environment in which they lived: 'we will relate the study of peoples to their habitat, i.e., their dependence on the natural conditions of geography, climate, soil, flora and fauna. This is important to us because it clarifies why a people's cultural level or significance is what it is, namely the degree of their material well-being and spiritual development'.⁷² The racial aspect was an additional component that was only noticeable at the highest levels of culture, which was to be understood primarily through a socio-economic lens. According to Koropchevskii, people should be ranked from 'wandering [*brodiachie*], hunting and fishing tribes' to 'nomadic

71 D. Koropchevskii, *Pervye uroki etnografii*, Moscow 1903, p. 2.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

or pastoral' to 'sedentary or agricultural peoples', the latter of which is also represented by 'industrial' people in the present day—the most developed in all of humanity. Consequently, the following chapters first present wandering groups to the reader (with 'Australians' at the lowest level, followed by 'Bushmen', 'African Pygmies', 'Negritos', and 'Veddass'), before moving on to Arctic peoples, North Siberian peoples, American fishers and hunters, sea peoples of the Pacific and Indian Oceans, African nomads ('Hottentots', 'Kaffirs', and 'Northern African' nomads), 'Asian' nomads, 'Negro' farmers, 'Asian' farmers, 'Eastern European' farmers, and industrial and farming peoples of Southern and Northern Europe. While skin colour does not dictate the structure of this pyramid, the latter nevertheless ends with a white man at the top:

Currently, the lives of all people are influenced by the most cultivated race: the white race. Almost everywhere, the black race has had to recognise its supremacy, which is limited only in tropical countries due to climates that are unsuitable for white people. [...] The negroes of Africa are not so easily subjugated by the white race, simply because they are so numerous and white people have difficulty settling in their countries.⁷³

As cultural levels are not innate or inherited, 'black' and 'yellow' people can aspire to achieve a higher status, though with two main conditions: the first is that they will only manage this if they are under the influence of 'white' people, while the second consists in the loss of their identity, which Koropchevskii seemed to dislike as it prevented him and his fellow scholars from conducting meaningful research: 'We can see that almost all peoples and tribes on Earth are no longer in the same condition as before they came into contact with European culture; they are constantly changing under its influence. Those who are able to absorb it may change for the better, but they will inevitably lose their identity, which is of particular interest to us as it is the direct consequence of race and external geographical conditions'.⁷⁴ Once again, 'races' other than the 'white' one were reduced to useful tools at the disposal of the European—and Russian—scholar, infatuated with discovering and classifying the 'other'. The possibility of cultural hybridity was not even contemplated, while cultural assimilation at the hands of white people

⁷³ Ibid., p. 15.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 15-16.

was presented as both a necessity for the betterment of humanity and a curse for scientific research.

Bearing this ideological background in mind makes it easier to understand Koropchevskii's portrayal of black people in two previous publications, both of which were devoted to Africa and intended for the education of the masses. The first, *Black People*, was published in 1886 by Vladimir Marakuev's new publishing house, 'Narodnaia Biblioteka', and was intended to be the first instalment in a series introducing readers to peoples from around the world—though, ultimately, Koropchevskii only completed similar works on the inhabitants of Oceania. The second one, entitled *Arapy: An Essay on the Way of Life and Customs of Black Tribes*, appeared for the first time in 1894 and was quickly reprinted in the popular series 'Knizhka za knizhkoi', founded by the author and publisher Mariia Sleptsova (1861-1951), wife of the populist, writer, and active state councillor Aleksandr Sleptsov. This series was extremely cheap and gained widespread notoriety, not only among its intended audience of children, but also among low-educated adults.

In both publications, Koropchevskii sought to downplay negative stereotypes about African populations that were prevalent in society, while simultaneously perpetuating other clichés. For example, he argued that nakedness was not related to savagery, but rather a natural consequence of the hot climate; he reported that cruel punishments only occurred in extremely rare cases and that cannibalism was mostly a rumour spread by Africans themselves to instil fear in their enemies; he also claimed that bloodthirstiness was not a characteristic shared by many. Conversely, Koropchevskii believed that Africans were childlike in some respects; not accustomed to abstract thought; excitable; chatty; vain; moody; prone to immoderate passions (though they could learn from white men to control themselves); gullible; and lazy (though laziness, as much as nakedness, was a direct result of the excessive heat). Whilst denying or confirming stereotypes, Koropchevskii insisted that their current low level of civilisation was entirely dependent on their environment, and that they were, in fact, 'capable of learning in schools' and 'capable of being enlightened'.⁷⁵ Toussaint Louverture, Lislet Geoffroy, and Phillis Wheatley were all held up as examples of

75 D. Koropchevskii, *Arapy*, Moscow 1912, p. 48.

successful black people who had reached a high level of civilisation—thanks, of course, to white men. However, notable figures such as the Fula leader Usman dan Fodio were also sometimes praised even though they had not been ‘civilised’ by Europeans.⁷⁶

A domestication strategy is here largely at play: the idea that we all share a common ancestor (*obshchii chelovecheskii tip*) is reiterated, children are encouraged not to fear black people, and the fact that Europeans were once savages themselves is constantly reminded to the reader. The idea is that humanity as a whole is capable of growth and cultural evolution, provided it follows in the footsteps of white men (including Russians), who are portrayed as constantly improving themselves. In an interesting passage, Koropchevskii reminded the reader that, in the past, black people with their ‘strange’ appearance were perceived as so fearsome by whites (in this case: Russians) that the same words were used to describe both black people and demons: *efiopy* and *muriny*.⁷⁷ In the author’s time, however, these additional meanings had largely been abandoned, and the words themselves were used differently: *efiopy* referred to people living in Abyssinia, while *negry* was used in association with black people. Their domestication, which mainly happened in Russia through the tsar’s court, had proved that they were human just like the Russians, hence the language evolution. At the same time as establishing black people’s humanity, however, Koropchevskii’s argument also highlighted the efficacy of the Russian acculturation system, effectively constructing the empire as the prototype of the successful educator, able to domesticate and tame black people without recourse to brutal force.

Despite his pronounced attention to culture and cultural evolutionism, Koropchevskii remained strongly attached to physical features, too. While stressing that a true ‘negro’ ‘bears very little resemblance to those painted as *arapy* on tobacco shop signs and cigar box covers’, who

76 On Louverture, Geoffroy, and Wheatley, cf. D. Koropchevskii, *Liudi. Etnograficheskie ocherki. Chernye liudi*, Moscow 1886, p. 83; on Usman dan Fodio, cf. *ibid.*, p. 126.

77 Cf. Koropchevskii, *Arapy*, p. 6. In Russian, *efiop* and *murin* were used until the late nineteenth century to mean ‘demon, evil force’, as well as ‘black man’ (with no reference to Ethiopians). The title of the book, *Arapy*, refers to the term used in Russia for blackamoors in the service of the tsar or noble houses. However, it is inaccurate: Koropchevskii suggests that it is the result of a confusion with Arabs, who are a completely different people. Consequently, the author encourages his young readers to abandon the term *arap* in favour of *negr*.

'are nothing more than walking, established caricatures of Negroes',⁷⁸ he went on to depict them relying on common tropes. For instance, he likened 'Bushmen' to apes,⁷⁹ stated that 'the physical type of the Hottentot bears the marks of degeneration',⁸⁰ differentiated Fula people on the basis of their skin tone (yellow or reddish-brown) from 'proper black negroes', speculated on the mixed-race origins of 'Kaffirs', and stressed similarities, largely based on skin colour, between Ethiopians and (southern) Europeans: 'Their facial features are therefore closer to the European type than the Negro type. The women are generally no darker than southern Italian women, but the men range in colour from chocolate to dark brown and even black'.⁸¹

Essentialised traits, physicality, and race indeed continued to play a significant role in Koropchevskii's treatise on black people. Still, his efforts to downplay negative stereotypes, popularise monogenism, and emphasise the capability of every human being to evolve culturally were quite rare in the mass-market publishing scene of the time. The committed writer Emilia Pimenova (1854-1935), for example, did not extend her social battles, intended for the emancipation of the masses and women in particular, to black people. In her 1900 book *African Nature and People*, the prolific writer and translator of popular literature painted a highly unflattering portrait of 'Negroes' and Africa as a whole, describing its inhabitants as 'at a very low level of development' and 'almost primitive savages'. Conceding that 'a higher level of civilisation can be found in places [...] where Europeans or Arabs have already visited', and that those living on the northern coastline, who have a long tradition of trading with Europeans, 'are much more civilised than the population that remains alienated from them',⁸² she nevertheless never suggested that African people had the mental capacity for proper 'development', instead implying that they had been passive subjects in their journey towards (European) civilisation. To Pimenova, 'true Negroes' were those living in Central Africa, north and south of the equator—such as the 'Bantu', 'Tswana',

78 Koropchevskii, *Liudi*, p. 52.

79 Ibid., p. 116.

80 Ibid., p. 107.

81 Ibid., p. 131.

82 E. Pimenova, *Priroda i liudi Afriki*, Saint Petersburg 1910, pp. 37-38.

and 'Kaffirs', whereas the 'Hottentots' and 'Bushmen' were 'a remnant of a primitive people that once inhabited Africa', and others, 'formerly classified as Negroes, are now called Negro-like (*negropodobnye*)'.⁸³ Though not explicitly stated, the primary characteristic in Pimenova's construction of 'Negroes or Negro-like people' was passivity: their inherent loyalty and propensity for obedience were blamed for their long history of slavery,⁸⁴ they were 'incorrigible sloths' who would not work unless compelled to,⁸⁵ they were 'content' with a piece of paper cloth for clothing⁸⁶ and, on the whole, they were not portrayed as being interested in changing their primitive status. Alongside nakedness, cruelty, savage habits like cannibalism, and overall animality, Pimenova considered a lack of science and scientific thought to be an important component of their primitiveness: thus, she linked superstitiousness with the inability to correctly identify the cause of illness ('they are so accustomed to the idea that sickness and death are caused by evil men that when misfortune strikes, they immediately turn to the oracle to find the culprit. Magicians and sorcerers are held in high esteem'), and she even stated their medical incompetence ('their knowledge of many healing herbs can sometimes help, but more often than not they do more harm than good and kill innocent people').⁸⁷ In other cases, such as those of the Abyssinians and the 'Bushmen', Pimenova created a more orientalist, dreamlike prototype of blackness. For instance, after describing how the 'Bushmen' were hunted like wild animals by the neighbouring 'Kaffirs' and 'Hottentots', she declared that, in fact, they 'cannot be denied intelligence, even cleverness. A life full of adventures develops great resourcefulness in them. [...] They can even be called artists [...] Travellers who had to deal with the Bushmen were amazed at the power of their imagination [...]'.⁸⁸ Throughout her treatise, Pimenova did not forget that the continent was inhabited, at least in part, also by an allochthonous race, i.e., the white one. Though she mentioned the slaughter of locals by European colonists, overall she depicted the colonists in a benevolent light—at

83 Ibid., p. 38.

84 Ibid., pp. 39-40.

85 Ibid., p. 46.

86 Ibid.

87 Ibid., p. 49.

88 Ibid., p. 152.

times even heroic—strengthened by a life of adventure and constant threats from the locals, who saw them as aliens. Writing about the Boers, Pimenova recalled:

It was a life of constant danger, fending off attacks either from savage tribes who saw them as unwelcome intruders or from the abundant ravenous beasts. However, this lifestyle instilled courage, bravery, fortitude, and endurance in the settlers. They became excellent marksmen and highly skilled hunters, feeling like free birds on these boundless African plains where they had to rely on themselves and no one else.⁸⁹

African Nature and People was primarily aimed at children—it was, as a matter of fact, part of the series ‘Biblioteka iunogo chitatelia’ (Library of the Young Reader)—though it was also recommended for adults seeking self-education. As it was popular literature, it was not accompanied by references or a list of sources that Pimenova relied on or was influenced by. However, two circumstances in her life can help us to gain insight into how her image of Africa was formed and then disseminated to the public (the book was indeed quite popular, since it was published in four editions between 1900 and 1915). The first is her personal acquaintance with Henry Stanley, which occurred when she was very young and worked as his translator during his trip to the Caspian region in 1869. Stanley made ‘the most pleasant and lasting impression’ on Pimenova, who later recalled the moment she received the explorer’s account of his journey in Central Africa as a gift a few years later.⁹⁰ She went on to translate and adapt his autobiography and, already in Soviet times, she published a second book about his life and travels.⁹¹ The second circumstance relevant to understanding Pimenova’s construction of Africa is her exposure to foreign (European) literature, which she translated and adapted for the masses. Popular adventure novelists such as Robert Louis Stevenson, Emilio Salgari, and Edouard Deburaux, as well as explorers like Stanley, Frederick Cook, and Arnold Landor, or even scholars such as the anthropologist Charles Letourneau, were sources not only of information, but also of inspiration for the heroic

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 134.

⁹⁰ Cf. E. Pimenova, *Dni minuvshie. Vospominaniia E.K. Pimenovoi*, Moscow-Leningrad 1929, p. 55.

⁹¹ Cf. E. Pimenova, *Zhizn’ Stenli*, Saint Petersburg 1912; E. Pimenova, *Sokrushitel’ skal. Zhizn’ i putestviiia G. Stenli po ego vospominaniia*, Moscow-Leningrad 1928.

and adventurous passages she wrote. Overall, Pimenova promoted a vision of Africa based on rhetoric and imagery reminiscent of Western colonial literature: the abuses perpetrated by the whites were presented as simple facts, without any strong moral condemnation, while the local population was portrayed as completely passive in both their everyday lives (they are incapable of modernising themselves autonomously), and their process of civilisation (which seems to occur almost by osmosis due to the presence of Westerners). Even the Ethiopians were portrayed unfavourably: Pimenova reported the opinions of unnamed travellers, some of whom denounced their untrustworthiness (“‘They are not to be trusted’”, cries one of the travellers, who speaks very badly of the Abyssinians. They are all treacherous, lazy, and ungrateful, but they know how to hide their faults, and the first impression they make with their quiet, dignified manner is more positive than negative’), while others played down their cruelty. However, all agreed that ‘the Abyssinians are very unclean and very frivolous’.⁹² Although they were Christians, they had not progressed alongside Western countries, but had lagged so far behind that Pimenova compared their state to feudal Europe in the Middle Ages.

This general backwardness was often presented as an undeniable fact of which Africans were supposedly fully aware, which served to reinforce and legitimise the superiority of Europeans—and Russians among them. In his pamphlet *Negroes. A Reading for the People* (1897), Feofil Putsykovich presented his readers with an (alleged) African tale about the superiority (*prevoskhodstvo*) of the white race:

In the beginning, God created three white people and three black people and, to prevent them from grumbling against him in the future, he commanded them to choose good and evil for themselves. A large box was placed on the floor, with a sealed bag next to it. God allowed the black people to choose first. They took the box, thinking it contained everything. But when they opened it, they saw pieces of gold, iron, and other metals inside. When the white people opened the paper left for them, it told them everything and they became wise. God left the black people in the forest, while he brought the white people to the sea and taught them to build ships, to travel the sea and bring various goods from other lands,

92 Pimenova, *Priroda i liudi*, pp. 114-115.

arriving at the conclusion that, 'according to Negroes, they could have been the first people [*pervyi narod*], if only they had chosen paper instead of a box'.⁹³ It is unclear where the author read about this legend, who transcribed it into a European language, and when this occurred—if at all. What should be noted, however, is that this legend portrays black people as directly responsible for their own misfortune. Despite having the advantage of being able to choose first, they ultimately made the wrong decision, receiving riches but not knowledge. This unfortunate choice is presented as the moment when the destinies of the two races, hitherto essentially equal, begin to diverge and drift apart. Yet the idea that a different choice would have given the black people the upper hand is shown as their own conviction, not a generally shared opinion.

Apparently, negative self-representations of black people are quite common in African folktales (including origin myths) transcribed by Western ethnographers until at least the 1920s, i.e. in a period when 'the methods of collecting and transcribing oral literature were not beyond suspicion: but, above all, a period when the ethnographer, often an administrator or a military man, hardly doubted his intellectual and moral superiority over the colonized peoples'.⁹⁴ The dissemination of this form of self-representation within folkloric collections, a practice that gained particular currency from the latter half of the nineteenth century, served to reinforce the value of what the vast majority of popular ethnography told the masses. In 1912, an intriguing book, which combined ethnographic essays with transcriptions of Africa folktales, was published in Moscow. Entitled

93 F. Putsykovich, *Negry. Chtenie dlia naroda*, Saint Petersburg 1897, p. 15. This publication was part of the series *Iz narodovedeniia* [Studies in Ethnography] comprising forty works written by Putsykovich and widely read by the masses. Feofil Putsykovich (1843-1899) was a writer, pedagogue, and teacher, devoted to the popularisation of knowledge. He authored manuals and popular literature on a wide range of subjects (including ethnography, history, geography, orthography, religion).

94 S. Lallemand, 'Compte rendu de V. Görög-Karady, «Noirs et Blancs. Leur image dans la littérature orale africaine. Étude. Anthologie»', *L'Homme: Revue Française d'Anthropologie*, 1978 (18), 3-4, pp. 224-225. Cf. also F. Topa, 'The Hands of the Blacks: Racism and Myths of Origin', *Africana studia*, 2021, 35, pp. 85-93, <https://doi.org/10.21747/0874-2375/afr35>

African Folktales, it was written by the historian and pedagogue Nikolai Kun (1877-1940), who would gain notoriety in Soviet times for his book *Greek Myths and Legends* and the editorial work on the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* and *Small Soviet Encyclopaedia*. This was the first 'original' Russian compilation of its kind, after the 1870s translations of Wilhelm Bleek's *Raynard the Fox in South Africa, or Hottentots Fables and Tales* and Henry Callaway's *Nursery Tales, Traditions, and Histories of the Zulus in their Own Words* by Koropchevskii. Although Kun's sources were not specified in the volume, his work at the University of Berlin and the Ethnological Museum in 1903 under Eduard Meyer's supervision likely brought him into contact with African (or Africa-related) materials. As a matter of fact, a close reading of the tales reveal Kun's indebtedness to a variety of British and German sources, among which C. F. Schlenker's *A Collection of Temne Traditions, Fables and Proverbs* (1861), G. McCall Theal's *Kaffir Folk-Lore* (1882), A. Seidel's *Geschichten und Lieder der Afrikaner* (1896).⁹⁵ The primary aim of the book was to introduce young readers to African folklore, which Kun described in the preface as tales of 'monsters, sorcerers, witches and cannibals, and all sorts of wonderful adventures'.⁹⁶ However, when compiling the anthology, Kun also set out to provide detailed ethnographic information on the peoples whose oral traditions he presented: each of the nine chapters focuses on a specific ethnic group and includes an introductory essay on their characteristics and customs, as well as ethnographic illustrations (often taken without acknowledgement from European publications such as F. Ratzel's *The History of Mankind*), and finally, their own tales. From his selection, it is clear that the Africa he had in mind was the 'darkest' (i.e., the most savage) possible: Northern Africa and Ethiopia were excluded from the publication, which instead presented the reader with 'Hottentots', 'Kaffirs', 'Damara people', 'Nyamwezi people', 'Baganda', 'Somalis', 'Swahili people', 'West-African Negroes', and 'Sudanese Negroes'.

95 Due to its long-standing tradition of linguistic studies and its expanding colonial empire, Germany had rapidly become a major centre for colonial folkloristics alongside Great Britain, producing a copious amount of African folklore collections. Cf. R. Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa*, Cambridge 2012 [1970], pp. 34-36, <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0025>

96 N. Kun, *Skazki afrikanskikh narodov*, Moscow 1912, p. 3.

'Somalis' were the only (partial) exception, since they 'cannot be considered a pure (*chisty*) Negro tribe (*plemen*)' by virtue of their physical traits, though they could still be ascribed to the savage component of the continent thanks to their extreme cruelty.⁹⁷ Indeed, from the outset, Kun characterises the populations whose tales he is about to recount as backward, savage, and naïve, lacking in scientific knowledge, but nevertheless capable of receiving a European-style education that will lead them to a better life:

Especially interesting are those tales in which the negro, not possessing scientific knowledge, tries to give an answer to those phenomena in his life and in nature, which attract his attention. [...] some of the tales bear a tinge of cruelty, but this is due to the fact that the negro is still at a low stage of development and it is impossible to make the same demands on him as we make on Europeans. But still, despite the naivety of the tales and the cruelty of some of them, we must recognise in the negro not only the ability to work as a slave, as the Europeans thought until very recently, but also the ability to develop and improve. Many negro tales clearly show how unjust the Europeans were in denying the negro all human feelings and talents for so long.⁹⁸

This paternalistic—and patronising—attitude towards black people is a staple in Kun's writing ('at least the questions and the attempts to answer them are an indication that Negroes are inquisitive and curious'),⁹⁹ and it informs all the ethnographic essays, in which any recognition of human qualities in black people is always made in the form of a surprised concession. While information on local customs and ways of life is also included in the various presentations, the greatest emphasis appears to be placed on the physical element, which is perhaps the aspect that would strike a child the most. On a textual level, this is achieved through vivid and detailed descriptions:

They ['Hottentots'] are not tall, they are gaunt and their physique is not beautiful. Their skin is yellow-brown, resembling the colour of withered leaves. Their facial features are sharp; prominent cheekbones,

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 167, 169.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 4–5.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

narrow forehead, flattened nose, thick upturned lips, coarse curly hair (p. 7);

[‘Kaffirs’] are all of such good physique that many travellers have spoken of them with delight, calling them ‘living bronze statues’ and ‘models for sculpture’. The features of the Kaffirs are not so harsh and coarse as those of most of the Negroes of South Africa, though their lips are turned on, their noses broad and flat, and their hair woolly and curled into short tufts (p. 39);

Baganda people are lighter in skin and build, more graceful and slender than the people of southern and central Africa. Their skin is bronze or reddish-brown, and the women’s is sometimes so light that, according to the traveller Stanley, it even resembles that of dark-skinned Europeans (pp. 145-146).

A preoccupation with skin colour and physique is clearly evident in all these quotes, with common tropes—such as the idea of a statuesque body oozing power yet simultaneously at the mercy of the Western gaze, which transforms it into a passive object—reiterated. However, descriptions are not the only tool Kun employed to direct the readers’ attention towards black bodies: images are just as important. Indeed, drawings and photographs exemplifying blackness punctuate the entire volume. Rather than illustrating the various tales, which should have been the author’s most obvious choice in a children’s book, the images serve as a visual reinforcement of the ethnographic essays. In this regard, rather than stimulating a child’s imagination with foreign myths, legends, and fables, they played down the fictional and imaginary elements in favour of a seemingly realistic approach. This not only legitimised Kun’s ethnographic writing, but also elevated his status as a storyteller above that of African peoples, whose stories remained unillustrated. In certain cases, images are not merely supplementary to the text; rather, they serve as a substitute for it, thus acquiring even more prominence and authority. For instance, the physical description of ‘Sudanese Negroes’ is entirely entrusted to images, which contribute to creating a striking visual of them while Kun’s narration dwells only on their way of life.



Fig. 3.3 'A Negro of the Hausa Tribe', in N. Kun, *Skazki afrikanskikh narodov*, Moscow 1912, p. 249.

Here, too, surfaces the theme of white predominance, in both the ethnographic essays and the tales, as something of which black people are well aware. In Kun's mind, it is not necessarily a positive thing: European influence is beneficial to the development of black people only if it is virtuous. Thus,

The Europeans have long been familiar with the coast of West Africa and have established colonies there, but it must be admitted that they have done little to improve the lives and customs of the West African Negroes. For a long time, it was not the best of Europe that came, but rather various adventurers and people looking for easy profit who corrupted the Africans, robbed them and took them into captivity. They got them

drunk on vodka and did not care to raise their cultural level.¹⁰⁰

At the same time, however, their inner superiority is uncontested and recognised as truth by Africans themselves, as evidenced by one of the tales narrated by Kun. Attributed to the 'West African Negroes', the *Legend of the Creation of the World and the First Humans* tells of how black and white people were the progeny of the first humans God created. Although no reason is given for the emergence of different skin colours, there are a few paragraphs on how God made them different in life: he moved white people to the shore and provided them with the necessary tools for navigation, as well as with artisans, tailors, and scribes. This enabled them to easily conquer the world. Conversely, he moved black people inland, gave them blacksmiths, and taught them to build houses from clay, plough the fields, craft amulets, foretell the future and practise witchcraft—activities in which white people do not indulge. In addition to this characterisation of black people as drawn to the irrational and as representatives of a primitive society (clay houses, only agriculture), their mental inferiority is also openly stated as a matter of fact: 'Even as a boy, the white man's mind surpasses that of the black man, and the black man cannot compete with him'.¹⁰¹

This statement, along with the tale in its entirety, was not conceived by Kun but was, in fact, already present in both Christian Friedrich Schlenker's and August Seidel's previous renditions, with which, based on his selection of tales, Kun must have been familiar. Despite Kun's decision to excise certain passages deemed unsuitable for a children's audience,¹⁰² the legend of the creation of the world remained almost identical to the 'original' English and German texts.¹⁰³ Schlenker had

100 Ibid., p. 208.

101 Ibid., p. 235.

102 For example, Kun's narration omits a passage on the supposedly stronger sexual desire of women, menstruation, and the sexual act between the first man and the first woman reported by Schlenker. Cf. C. F. Schlenker, *A Collection of Temne Traditions, Fables and Proverbs*, London 1861, pp. 19–20. This particular passage had already been expunged by Seidel, whose anthology of African folklore was aimed at a more general audience than the specialist reader of Schlenker. Cf. A. Seidel, *Geschichten und Lieder der Afrikaner*, Berlin 1896.

103 August Seidel (1863–1916) was a German linguist, secretary of the German Colonial Society, and editor of the journal *Zeitschrift für afrikanische, ozeanische und ostasiatische Sprachen*. In the introduction to his anthology of African folklore he did not specify his sources, nor his method, leaving open the question of whether he translated all

asserted that he had transcribed the text from an elder in Port Loko approximately a decade earlier, shortly before the man passed away. Furthermore, the linguist had stated that he had translated the texts in a 'somewhat free' manner, given the presence of a glossary that could be consulted for greater precision. The unreliability of the source (just one man), the length of time that had passed since the supposed encounter, and the freedom taken in the translation all contribute to making the trenchant verdict on their mental capacity highly questionable, especially when considered alongside the already mentioned tendency to negative self-representations in folktales. Verifying the truthfulness of the tale in question is beyond the scope of this study, but it is certainly interesting that Kun, despite omitting other sections from the 'original' text(s), left this allegation of mental inferiority intact, thus effectively teaching Russian children their own superiority—even as children—over black people. And what could have been more effective than to present this 'constructed truth', created by the European man, as coming from the folkloric tradition—that is, the common property of the people and an ancient one—of the 'dark continent' itself?

Encounters

The 'contact zone' (Pratt) that brought Favr's, El'kind's, and Brovtsyn's studies to life remains substantially opaque—there are simply no recollections of the interactions that undoubtedly occurred during the process of measuring African people, from the initial meeting to its conclusion. In this sense, the three texts present a sanitised

the tales himself (which is doubtful, as the anthology spans many different African cultures and languages), or whether he relied on already published material (for instance, Schlenker's). For his part, Schlenker, a German missionary and linguist (1810-1880), transcribed Temne folklore in the Temne language, which he had studied, and translated it into English following a recommendation from the Basel Mission, who deemed German impractical; cf. A. Jones, 'Still Underused: Written German Sources for West Africa before 1884', *History in Africa*, 1986, 13, pp. 225-244 (p. 243). On this topic, cf. also Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa*; S. Pugach, *Africa in Translation. A History of Colonial Linguistics in Germany and Beyond, 1814-1945*, Ann Arbor 2012, <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.372421>. Schlenker went on to compile the *Grammar of the Temne Language* (1864). On Schlenker's activities in Port Loko between 1840 and 1850, see S. Strickrodt, 'African Girls' Samplers from Mission Schools in Sierra Leone (1820s to 1840s)', *History in Africa*, 2010, 37, pp. 189-245, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2010.0027>

narrative that glosses over the real-life experience and contributes to the depersonalisation of the participants, who are effectively regarded as passive objects. Of course, these were scientific studies, which are naturally prone to dry prose and a strict focus on the matter under investigation. They were also written for a specialist audience, who did not necessarily expect an account of the events surrounding the measurements.

Travel writing maintained the same opacity, albeit to a lesser degree. This was perhaps facilitated by the superimposition of the scientific language and proximity to the natural sciences that were in vogue in the eighteenth century on the 'sentimental', 'personal', and 'subjective' travel literature of the nineteenth century. As has been demonstrated, these seemingly incompatible trends continued to coexist, resulting in travelogues that were highly subjective—in that they focused on the traveller's personal experience—while also adopting a 'scientific' perspective when describing foreign lands and their inhabitants.¹⁰⁴

Russian travelogues on black Africa display traits that are entirely consistent with Western colonial travel writing, while also introducing an element of exceptionalism to the discourse stemming from Russia's unique political and cultural position. The texts examined here span for roughly seventy years, from Egor Kovalevskii's 1849 *A Journey to Inner Africa* to Valentin Dogel's 1916 *A Naturalist in East Africa*. Despite the profound and rapid societal changes that occurred in Russia and Europe during this period and which inevitably informed literary genres, it is unproductive to presume a chronological evolution in the way these travelogues discuss Africa and its people. Indeed, the portrayal of black people in the 1910s remains consistent with that of the mid-nineteenth century. Setting aside the chronological parameter, other, more useful parameters come to the fore: the position held by the visited African region and the peoples encountered within the Western hierarchical ranking of world civilisations; the existence of political or economic interests between Russia and the place visited by the Russian traveller; and the author's profession and literary ambitions. Therefore, shared imagery and rhetorical strategies coexist alongside diverse perspectives and sensibilities.

104 Cf. M. L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London-New York 2008.

In terms of how black people were represented, two partly interconnected aspects emerge from the analysis of the travelogues: the use of racialised language, and the tendency—which, at first glance, seems paradoxical for this literary genre—to shy away from direct encounters with natives in favour of lengthy descriptions clearly influenced by ethnographic (and occasionally anthropological) language, thus maintaining (and even indirectly reinforcing) the opacity of the ‘contact zone’.

A vocabulary of race has indeed been noted by Edyta Bojanowska in relation to Ivan Goncharov’s portrayal of the people he encountered during his long journey through Africa and Asia: while highlighting the writer’s contradictions in his portrayal of and attitude towards the natives, the scholar maintains that, despite the author’s lack of interest in the emerging racial science, the book is rich in ‘racialized descriptions of various populations and hierarchies based on race’, so that it becomes ‘a creeping racialization of ethnic groups and nations, Goncharov’s principal categories’.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, race emerges as a central category in all the examined travelogues, even when presented as a cultural construction that is detrimental to the development of humankind. Furthermore, many elements of Goncharov’s portrayal of the ‘other’ body—including his belief in monogenism, his faith in the progress of black people under white guidance, and his fixation on corporeality and materiality (skin colour in particular)—are also common traits in the other travelogues, where descriptions of locals often mingle with reflections on Russian identity and the nature of European colonialism.

The obsession with the black body goes hand in hand with a conspicuous refusal to recount direct encounters with the local population, which could have resulted in descriptions of particular individuals. For the most part, natives are described using rhetoric already established in ‘scientific’ ethnographic writing. Rather than being seen as individuals with specific physical traits and life trajectories, they are reduced to general types—a sublimated idea largely detached from context:

105 E. M. Bojanowska, *A World of Empires. The Russian Voyage of the Frigate Pallada*, Cambridge-London 2018, p. 219, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv25250ck>. The scholar points out that the original, nineteenth-century version of the book actually differs significantly from later editions—expunged of the most disturbing racialised passages—and even from the American translation (1987), which is based on the expunged ones (p. 215).

In general, the Kaffirs are physically and morally superior to all the peoples in southern Africa; in terms of intelligence and many other qualities they resemble the *redskins* of North America. They are said to be wise in counsel and brave in battle, witty and generous, grateful for the smallest favour, and patriots in the broadest sense of the word. Their height reaches 6,7 feet; there are no small or puny people among them. There is so much nobility and grace in the movements and manners of the Kaffirs that an English traveller called them a nation of gentlemen.¹⁰⁶

Tall, well-built Negroes with a piece of leather tied around their thighs and the inescapable spear in their hands, sometimes with a shield made of buffalo hide. They wear metal ornaments on their legs and arms, shells, pieces of leather and thin sticks in their ears, nostrils and lips. The Negroes are thickly greased with sheep fat, especially the hair, which is braided into plaits and sprinkled with the red dust that covers the laterite soil. They are members of the Massai [*sic*] tribe, one of the most warlike and intransigent of the negro tribes, which have caused much trouble to the European *Kulturträgers*.¹⁰⁷

The most typical representatives of their people are the Hadendoa, with whom I had the most contact. They consider themselves to be a chosen tribe, as indicated by their tribal name, which is composed of the words *hada*—chief and *endoa*—people. [...] Physically, the Hadendoa are tall and slender with copper-red skin. [...] The features of the elongated face are very beautiful: high, sloping forehead, almost eagle nose, expressive, burning eyes. The scanty facial hair, the thick but not ugly lips, the sometimes-darker skin colour, and finally the strongly curled and rather long—but not woolly—hair, indicate a greater or lesser percentage of negro blood [...].¹⁰⁸

Comparing this descriptive mode, which progresses through generalisations, with the previously discussed ethnographic and anthropological essay writing reveals similarities and differences. Medical-anthropological descriptions appear to be based on meticulous and detailed examinations of specific bodies, with aggregate interpretations only being drawn at a later stage. However, generalisation always occurs: the subjects of anthropological study

106 A. Vysheslavtsev, *Ocherki perom i karandashem iz krugosvetnogo plavaniia v 1857, 1858, 1859 i 1860 gg.*, Saint Petersburg 1862, p. 82.

107 V. Nikitin, 'Na beregakh Viktorii Niiantsa', *Priroda*, 1914, 15, clmn. 585-608 (clmn. 593-594).

108 I. Puzanov, 'Ocherki Severo-Vostochnogo Sudana', *Zemlevedenie*, 1912, 1-2, pp. 163-210 (p. 197).

are only considered in terms of the characteristics they share, while the characteristics that distinguish their bodies from one another are ignored, which ultimately results in the construction of a depersonalised body.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, even the more discursive ethnographic pieces focus on the masses in terms of both physical characteristics and behaviour/customs. In this regard, travel writing represents a missed opportunity to highlight the value of direct interaction with locals, which could have been useful in addressing relevant issues or providing readers with valuable insights into distant peoples they would never meet in their lifetime. Immersed in a sea of 'otherness', (Russian) travellers seemed to resort to generalisation as a 'strategy of distance', a kind of detachment from the unknown. The mere existence of individuals—potentially more dangerous in their concreteness—is thus exorcised, while abstract types emerge: a 'speechless, denuded, biologized body'¹¹⁰ thus begins to take shape.

This does not mean, of course, that the Russian eye did not linger on the black bodies, in itself a 'phenomenon [*iavlenie*] so new' that one '[does not] know what to look at: their faces, their clothes, their jewellery, their behaviour?'.¹¹¹ Difference was perceived first and foremost in racial terms, something that was facilitated by the widespread—and, to the Russian sensibility, disconcerting—habit of nudity. Recalling his time in the Benishangul region, Egor Kovalevskii reflected upon his initial bewilderment at the sight of naked people, whilst quickly normalising it (and, consequently, domesticating it and making it harmless):

At first the sight of this naked humankind strikes you as barbaric; the coal-black skin-color amazes you; but then, accepting it as some kind of special dress, you become accustomed to it. Were it a white person, you think, then, of course, his nakedness would be disgusting as it would define every part of his body; but he is black, so everything is merged together in a single vague color. Eventually, the very color no longer

109 In addition, Alexander Butchart has observed that Western medical descriptions of black bodies limited themselves to the bodies' external appearance for several centuries, rendering them a 'surface', bodies 'without volumes'. It was only with the advent of missionary medicine over the course of the nineteenth century that black bodies suddenly acquired volume, depth, and (even!) a soul. Cf. Butchart, *The Anatomy of Power*.

110 Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*, p. 52.

111 I. Sokolov, *Dnevnik ekspeditsii v Keniiu i Ugandu v 1914 godu*, Saint Petersburg 1999, p. 43.

alarms you, as you find certain charm in this black, greased skin, smooth, tender, and glossy like kid-skin.¹¹²

While for Kovalevskii it was precisely the primary marker of racial difference—blackness—that transformed a potentially disgusting spectacle into an object of admiration, in the eyes of Petr Krasnov the unpleasantness and disgust caused by the sight of Somali boys could only be overcome by their submission to clothing:

At first glance, they are disgusting because of their dark colour, their nakedness. Especially horrible are those whose skulls are clean-shaven, or covered with yellowish-brown sun-bleached hair. But take a closer look at the thin, rather slender bodies of the Somalis and you begin to reconcile yourself. Those who are at least somewhat dressed are not even bad. [...] Clean white clothes soften the disgust at the sight of the black body: in its own way, it is not bad.¹¹³

Though disgust was not necessarily caused by physical traits perceived as ‘strange’—admired descriptions of statuesque physiques are the flip side of the coin, even among authors repulsed by blackness—black bodies were frequently described in exaggerated terms that resulted in openly grotesque portrayals. ‘Hottentots’, universally thought to be at the lowest level of civilisation, were particularly used for this purpose. Aleksei Vysheslavtsev, whose passion for drawing and painting is evident in the vivid descriptions featured in his writings, turned them into grotesque caricatures on the verge of monstrosity: he dwelled on facial features (‘the nose is barely noticeable and flattened, but with widely distended nostrils; the lips protrude and hang down, forming at least a third of the whole face’), unusual proportions (‘nature has endowed these “beauties” with the smallest arms and legs, so that the shoes and gloves of nine-year-old European children fit adult Hottentots’), and pungent smell (‘these people have another unpleasant characteristic—a strong “own smell”, so that an hour later it is possible to tell whether a Hottentot was in the room’). He also characterised

112 E. Kovalevsky, *A Journey to Inner Africa*, Amherst 2020, p. 142.

113 P. Krasnov, *Kazaki v Abissinii*, Saint Petersburg 1900, p. 90. Krasnov repeatedly stressed the revulsion he experienced in the presence of the black body; for instance, cf. also ‘it is difficult to get used to the black body of the Somalis, to look at them unfazed’ (p. 101); ‘it was unpleasant to feel those black bodies so close, to see the smiles that revealed a row of even white teeth’ (p. 137).

‘Hottentot’ women as particularly ugly and freakish (‘It is difficult to imagine anything more disgusting than an old Hottentot woman [...] married women are distinguished by unusually long breasts, which they throw over their backs or tuck under their arms to feed the child, who usually sits on the mother’s back’).¹¹⁴

While these descriptions are, in fact, abstractions of a direct and concrete experience that is instead concealed—and in this way the bodies lose their tangibility, becoming collective representations of an entire group of depersonalised individuals—the inclusion of visceral sensations in an otherwise sanitised narrative works by engaging the reader on an emotional level, averting the possible alienation caused by the arid scientific language. Disgust—which is ‘a form of action, not a reaction’, aimed at ‘bridg[ing] self and other’,¹¹⁵ since to feel it is to establish a connection, an intimacy of sorts with the object that causes it—is particularly relevant in a colonial setting: if, on the one hand, it points to the perceived necessity of dissociating oneself from the colonial ‘other’, on the other it betrays not only a relationship in place, but also an emotional involvement so significant that it causes a bodily reaction. As it has been pointed out, ‘disgust arises in reaction to unwelcome identification and also to difference that is difficult for us to comprehend and digest and therefore disturbing’,¹¹⁶ whilst the object of repulsion serves as a surrogate for the ‘negative’ qualities of the self. In this context, it is racial difference per se that triggers this

114 Vysheslavtsev, *Ocherki perom i karandashem*, pp. 72-73. The motive of the unpleasant smell, so frequent in colonial literature in general, can often be found in Russian writings, too. In some cases it was, however, presented as a negative myth that needed to be debunked. Cf. for instance Kovalevskii’s treatise: ‘It is said that negroes, from birth, exude an unpleasant smell which characterizes their race alone, as well as certain animal species. Odd though the claim is, it is nearly always used as an accusation with a view to denigrating or destroying a particular people. [...] To corroborate such an opinion, its proponents cite dogs trained to hunt hapless negroes by scent. I shall forego any discussion of this barbaric habit practiced by European colonists [...]; let me note instead that the very invention of it required little intelligence: it is easy to teach a dog to recognize a slave, for all negroes rub their bodies with a certain substance containing fat. [...] I can assure you that a negro taken as a child into a European home is as clean and neat as any European servant [...]’, Kovalevskii, *A Journey to Inner Africa*, pp. 193-194.

115 D. Durham, ‘Disgust and the Anthropological Imagination’, *Ethnos*, 2011 (76), 2, pp. 131-156 (pp. 150-151), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2010.547941>

116 S. B. Miller, *Disgust. The Gatekeeper Emotion*, Hillsdale 2004, p. 159. On disgust, cf. also W. I. Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust*, Cambridge-London 1997.

feeling, with skin colour coming into play long before more specific physical features are considered. In several cases, the Russians recycled racial imagery and the poetics of disgust from texts firmly rooted in the Western colonial tradition, though, as for Goncharov's encounter with the 'Bushmen', their revulsion 'feels visceral, and not just book-learned'.¹¹⁷ In certain instances, Western-derived colonial descriptions merged with Russian imagery, thereby acquiring novel meanings and suggesting new implications. Vysheslavitsev's striking image of the 'Hottentot' women's breasts can be traced back to at least Peter Kolb's *The Present State of the Cape of Good Hope* (1719);¹¹⁸ to a Russian reader, however, this image would certainly be reminiscent of the iconography of Baba Yaga, the physically repulsive old witch from Slavic folklore, whose drooping breasts could be described as hanging over the shoulders. An association between blackness and impure forces was thus subliminally suggested, while repulsiveness was accentuated by alluding to a disgusting figure from the readers' own folkloric tradition.

The evocation of more pleasant feelings arising at the sight of the black body was less frequent. Admiration usually translated into the adoption of the semantic sphere of art; describing Shambala people, Sergei Averintsev marvelled at their aesthetic, statuesque qualities: 'The figures of both men and women are characterised by beauty of form and strength; the proportions of the individual parts are unusually interesting and harmonious. [...] The women's gait is surprisingly graceful, apparently developed by carrying all sorts of weights on their heads [...] light, simple and beautiful, easily balanced. What a wonderful material for a sculptor and artist!'.¹¹⁹ Similarly, Ivan Puzanov aestheticised the Hadendoa, at times emasculating them (the hairstyle of the men is compared to that of Japanese women), at times referencing the classical tradition ('they are a people of Antinous and Apollo rather than of Hercules') or the biblical one ('When I saw the slender bronze figures of the Hadendoa [...] I found myself involuntarily transported back to the time of our ancestor Abraham. The old men in particular

117 Bojanowska, *A World of Empires*, p. 221.

118 On this matter cf. A. Mielke, 'Hottentots in the Aesthetic Discussion of Eighteenth-Century Germany', *Monatshefte*, 1988 (80), 2, pp. 135-148.

119 S. Averintsev, 'Po poberezh'iu chernogo kontinenta (iz zapisnoi knizhki naturalista)', *Priroda*, 1912, 12, clmn. 1441-1468 (clmn. 1447-1448).

[...] reminded me of some of the biblical patriarchs'),¹²⁰ while Krasnov openly marvelled at the sight of two Somali boys dancing ('What a pose! How much plasticity there was in the bent arm thrown back behind the head, in the elastic torso, the strong legs; how much expression in the fiercely smiling face!').¹²¹ This voyeuristic lingering on the black body has the ultimate effect of aestheticising it, a mechanism that 'does not so much falsify as it takes hold of and commodifies reality, securing it for the expansion of the observer's sensibility'.¹²² Compared to inanimate objects (statues, paintings, mythical figures that have no connection with real life), black people's bodies become passive spectacles without agency, and part of the collection of curiosity the authors brought back to Russia—if only in writing. Paradoxically, these kinds of descriptions, while focused on the concrete body, ultimately create a distance between the writer/reader and the men described, who become mere abstractions and are reduced to prototypes.

Oftentimes, the world of art was replaced by that of animals as a second term of comparison, resulting in the creation of a peculiar 'bestiary'. Indeed, in the sphere of cultural production

Zoomorphic images are [...] a tool for excluding and displacing certain people from the universal social community (which usually means the 'self/us' community) when the 'other/others' are no longer perceived as autonomous subjects but as objects driven by irrational motives. [...] Zoomorphic images (as an antipode to people or the 'self') justify the exploitation and humiliation of the enslaved, contempt for and violence towards enemies, and even afford a 'reasonable' justification for the extermination of the latter.¹²³

Significantly, in these travelogues only black people (and especially 'Negroes', 'Hottentots', 'Bushmen') were explicitly associated with or linked to animals, while 'lighter specimens', such as Cape Malays, were compared to people from other parts of the world—but always to those who were considered inferior to great Russians or Europeans on the

120 Puzanov, *Ocherki Severo-Vostochnogo Sudana*, pp. 197, 199, 203.

121 Krasnov, *Kazaki*, p. 138.

122 D. Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire. Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration*, Durham-London 1993, p. 59.

123 A. Rezvukhina *et al.*, 'The Russian Imagological Bestiary: The Zoomorphic Image of the Enemy ("Other") at the Turn of the Century, 1890-1905', in Parppei and Rakhimzianov (ed. by), *Images of Otherness in Russia*, pp. 295-328 (p. 301).

hierarchical ladder. For example, Vysheslavitsev compared a Malay boy to 'one of our Gypsies'. The only exceptions to this rhetoric about black people seem to be Kovalevskii, who, although relying on a 'bestiary' for the most part, at times introduced the criterion of class: thus he compared 'Negroes' to French Cagots, 'reduced to a state of cretinism', to Belarusians living in the Russian Empire, or to French peasants living far from the main roads or cities; and Ivan Sokolov, who stated the similarity of the 'Waganda people' to 'our *muzhiki*' if not for their black skin. Class and race thus merged as categories for accounting for human difference, while a clear (and safe) distinction was still maintained between ethnic Russians and exotic Africans. Nevertheless, despite these rare occurrences, authors mostly resorted to animals to draw comparisons with black people, ranging from general references to an 'animal quality' to specific animals known for a particular stereotypical trait. The quality they most wanted to emphasise was wildness: 'Negroes' movements were 'mostly frantic, like those of animals', frightened 'Negroes' ran 'like wild chamois', 'Negro mothers' were driven 'by an animal instinct', 'Negroes' followed the example of animals and killed the weak members of their community (Kovalevskii); 'Hottentots' devoured food like wolves, their offspring searched for food on the ground like monkeys, and on the whole were 'half-animals' (Vysheslavitsev); prisoners in Cape Town or Harar prisons were depicted as wild beasts in captivity who tried to resist taming (Goncharov, Vysheslavitsev, Krasnov). Yet when it came to portraying servants—with whom they typically interacted the most—writers conveniently conjured up a wholly distinct imagery by associating them with dogs, the symbol of domestication, devotion, and reliance on their masters (Krasnov). This kind of representation was an effective way of averting the dangers posed by the perceived unbridled savagery and (re)establishing control over an alien environment. Another way of taking control and redressing the imbalance caused by the disorientating new (and black) reality was to make fun of it, hence the inclusion of funny animals—or at least animals that could be used for comic relief, such as monkeys and frogs. The movements of the arms and legs of Somali boys in the water were thus 'frog-like' (Krasnov), while 'negro boys' were remembered for effectively replacing monkeys as evening entertainment: 'After dinner, they made a little negro boy—there being no monkeys in Doui—drunk, and he fooled around and

grimaced no worse than a monkey', recalled Kovalevskii.¹²⁴ In all of these cases, reducing black people to the level of animals functions not only as a strategy of debasement, but also as a kind of abstraction (and thus a kind of insubstantialisation):¹²⁵ the real, tangible bodies virtually disappear and are replaced by their animal simulacra.

On the contrary, white people—usually Europeans with various ranks within the colonial administration, or fellow travellers—are solidly grounded, even when they are openly mocked or criticised for their excessive exploitation of the natives and the land: their figures are solidified by references to their name, nationality, profession, or rank, as well as to their specific interactions with the authors. For example, despite being published in a specialised journal primarily focused on nature and scientific discoveries, Ivan Puzanov's essay recounting his journey to East Africa contained an extensive section about his encounter with two fellow academics, one Czech and one Swiss. Eager collectors of ethnographic material, they had arranged with the company Pathé to film in Africa, particularly hunting scenes which would later be shown in Europe. In this enterprise, which Puzanov deemed to have been particularly expensive for Pathé, was also involved the French director Alfred Machin, whom he met on his way back to Europe.¹²⁶ This kind of detail was reserved for Europeans, as was the rhetorical structure used to describe them. For instance, when comparisons were required, the second term of comparison was certainly not an animal; rather, authors demonstrated a greater degree of creativity. Vysheslavtsev's comical depiction of European colonial agents as Gogol's and Fonvizin's trivial characters is particularly noteworthy, as it debases them on a moral level, while preserving their intrinsic humanity and tying them to Russians—albeit farcical and mediocre ones:

I should also add that I got to know all the doctors and even the missionaries in the places where I happened to be; I add this because most of them seemed to me quite odd people. Among others, one looked like Manilov, with a Dutch twist, another was clearly Mikhail Semenovich

124 Kovalevskii, *A Journey to Inner Africa*, p. 184.

125 On abstraction and insubstantialisation in colonial writing cf. Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire*.

126 Cf. I. Puzanov, 'Ocherki Severo-Vostochnogo Sudana', *Zemlevedenie*, 1914, 3, pp. 96-98. Puzanov recalls watching 'Pathé's breathtaking hunting series' once back in Moscow.

Sobakevich. [...] the entire conversation was in the spirit of Sobakevich. When I mentioned Bain's road, he said: 'Why do we need this road? Is it for baboons to walk along?'. [...] Next to this personification of Sobakevich sat his son, a real Mitrofanushka, who remained motionless; while his father spoke, the child gazed open-mouthed and looked submissively into his father's eyes. So many Russian memories...¹²⁷

Although reflections on Europeans as generic national groups with essentialised traits—mainly English and German—are present when the authors consider their modes of colonial rule, specific encounters and contacts with them are conspicuous and detailed in the travelogues, which is significant in itself given the numerical inferiority of the Europeans to the native Africans. In other words, it was certainly easier to meet black people than Europeans, but this did not translate into articulated narratives of encounters with the black population, quite the opposite.

Usually, the only two cases in which specific black individuals were explicitly mentioned and described—and verbal interactions were reported—were those of servants and the military (the latter particularly in relation to the Ethiopian context). Irrespective of the authors' personal stance towards black servants—with some demonstrating a notable degree of empathy regarding their living conditions and the treatment they experienced at the hands of Europeans—a discernible sense of condescension can be detected in their portrayal of the interpersonal dynamics between Russian travellers and African servants. Averintsev devoted many passages to denouncing racial discrimination in German East Africa, where 'the complete unwillingness to see a negro as a human being, like a European, reminded me of the worst pages in the history of our serfdom', so much so that 'it is difficult for us Russians to imagine the depths to which the unjustifiable contempt of whites for blacks usually reaches'.¹²⁸ He drew attention to the separate hotel entrances for white and black people, the strict rule according to which 'Europeans' must travel in first class carriages, 'Hindus' and 'Goans' in second class, and 'Negroes' only in third class, as well as labour exploitation and social stagnation ('There are absolutely no European workers, no "white" proletariat. Every European in the colony is paid

¹²⁷ Vysheslavtsev, *Ocherki*, p. 108.

¹²⁸ Averintsev, *Po poberezh'iu*, 2, clmn. 217.

handsomely and is always a superior, a master, [...] a being of a higher race; the natives have no right to be on an equal footing with him or to do the same work as him. It must also be said that every effort is being made to ensure that this situation will continue in the future; [...] never will the black man be lifted out of subordination, never will he become a master, and he will always remain only a servant of the European').¹²⁹ Among the few to present an attempt at 'reverse gaze', Averintsev exposed the problem of alcoholism in the colonies not in relation to black people (typically portrayed as having adopted Western habits and being unable to control themselves), but rather with regard to the Europeans, explaining that 'the negroes, seeing the manners of the whites, have even coined a saying: "Drunk as a European!"'.¹³⁰ Yet, for all this supposed condemnation of Western attitudes, he wrote about his servant Bakari with condescending tones, portraying him as a clumsy child lost to vice, whose behaviour was apparently inherent in his race:

[...] another time he scrubbed away the soot and broke thin porcelain cups into pieces... but it was unthinkable to be angry about it—Bakari came to me with such a perplexed look on his face and pointed silently at the porcelain fragments that I involuntarily laughed... Eventually, Bakari became homesick [...] and began to disappear somewhere... I was later told that he went to a negro village and spent all his time there gambling at dice; negroes are terrible gamblers, and during my illness Bakari lost the warm blanket I had bought him, his white shoes and most of the money I had given him for food...¹³¹

In other cases, a rhetoric of contempt and debasement was largely employed when describing interactions with local servants. Krasnov, for instance, insisted on the ineptitude of Somali and Abyssinian servants, which led to denigratory remarks from him ('black scum [*svoloch*]', 'amazing lazybones') and his fellow Cossacks ('"How stupid you people are"', said Arkhipov contemptuously'), and even to an attempted beating: 'This made me angry. "Et bien je vous batterai..."', I told them, pointing to the stick. This threat brought them into a completely cheerful mood. [...] What a weak people they are! [...] Their black arms, without any signs of muscle, swung like whips, their legs could barely hold them

129 Ibid., clmn. 220.

130 Averintsev, *Po poberezh'iu*, 12, clmn. 1459.

131 Averintsev, *Po poberezh'iu*, 2, clmn. 237.

under the weight of the packages'.¹³² In contrast, the relationship between Krasnov and Waldi, the servant of his tentmate, is one of ambivalence: while Waldi is not devoid of resourcefulness, he is extremely submissive and attentive to his master, yet he pretends high tips and, like a naughty child, drinks a lot until he is reprimanded by Krasnov, the master/father figure. The black servant seems to evoke in the author at times irritation, at times pity, at times curiosity: a connection between them is apparently established when Krasnov tries to imagine Waldi's thoughts and depicts their previously separate lives merging together. Yet this temporary communion soon reveals its fleeting nature: 'You will forget him as soon as you board the steamer and feel the familiar rhythm of European life; he will forget you when, jumping up and down and shaking his thalers, he runs away from you [...]. You will go about your business [...], and he will find another *geta*, whom he will also look after'.¹³³

Alongside servants, the military was the other category in which specific individuals could be mentioned by name and rank, and granted stand-alone descriptions. This is particularly evident in the case of Ethiopia, whose army's senior officers became a regular feature in Russian travelogues. Pictured as 'children of the desert', Abyssinian infantrymen were praised both for their courage and physical qualities, while their way of attack was described as 'terrible, unbearable for Western European nerves', and 'a noisy hurricane, full of screams, shrieks'.¹³⁴

It is indeed a very masculine world: the Africa (re)constructed through the eyes of these Russian travellers is conspicuously devoid of women. Male bodies—black, white, strong, weak, with or without agency—are virtually everywhere, while female bodies are carefully concealed. This is not necessarily a prerogative of the Russian eye, but rather it is rooted in the dichotomy between the incorporation of 'sexual imagery to create and sustain the heroic stature of male colonizers who conquered and penetrated dangerous, unknown continents, often characterized by the fertility of both indigenous vegetation and women'—thus leading to the construction of a 'sexual space'¹³⁵—and

132 Krasnov, *Kazaki*, p. 104.

133 *Ibid.*, p. 256.

134 *Ibid.*, p. 376.

135 A. Blunt and G. Rose (ed. by), *Writing Women and Space. Colonial and Postcolonial*

the silencing of African women—both literally and metaphorically.¹³⁶ Even when they are mentioned, women are noted to play a minor role in these highly male-centred texts, oftentimes only functioning as symbols of ‘repressed sexual anxieties of numerous kinds’, whose exploration— forbidden (or at least highly immoral) in a European setting—is suddenly possible in an exotic, amoral (in the sense that it lies outside the space of Western ethics) setting.¹³⁷

However, a peculiarity of the Russian case is that while female African figures are extremely scarce in travelogues, they become quite popular in fiction. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the case of Petr Krasnov, who, despite not registering the presence of women in his travelogue, went on to author two novellas centred around Ethiopian women (how they are portrayed is a separate issue—the focus here is on the mere presence or absence of women in Russian writings on Africa).¹³⁸ In the travelogues, however, women only appear in passing, through sporadic ‘snapshots’ of different sensibilities, ranging from more ‘scientific’ approaches to their bodies (‘Somali women have a well-developed, even large, pelvis and their breasts are conical. [...] There is an interesting way of preserving virginity before marriage: girls at a young age have the edges of the *labia minora* cut off and the wounds sewn together’),¹³⁹ to being made effigies of the ‘bad mother’ who neglects her children or the ‘insatiable and prolific lover’ (Vysheslavitsev on ‘Hottentot’ women). But, whatever the case, mentioning women was usually done in passing.

When exceptions occurred, it was usually to exploit the trope of the hyper-sexualised woman being potentially nefarious for the white man, which is consistent with what Bojanowska has noted within

Geographies, New York-London 1994, p. 10.

136 Cf. for instance A. P. A. Busia, ‘Silencing Sycorax: On African Colonial Discourse and the Unvoiced Female’, *Cultural Critique*, 1989-1990, 14, pp. 81-104, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1354293>: ‘The unvoicing of the black woman is literal, and her essence projected only as a void. In the colonial novel, the colonized male encounters not himself but his antithesis: the colonized woman encounters only erasure. [...] These mythologies pervade not only the fiction but also the travel literature which is its kin’ (p. 95).

137 Cf. R. Stott, ‘The Dark Continent: Africa as a Female Body in Haggard’s Adventure Fiction’, *Feminist Review*, 1989, 32, pp. 69-89.

138 The topic of African women in Russian fiction will be examined in Chapter 5.

139 P. Shchusev, *Iz puteshestviia v Abissiniiu*, Saint Petersburg 1897, p. 3.

Ivan Goncharov's travelogues. I will provide the examples of Egor Kovalevskii and Evgenii Avgustus, who, in very different contexts, have both reckoned with the 'African woman', reacting differently to the threat they ascribed to her. Here, colonial and gender imagery deeply rooted in the Western canon merge: indeed, as it has been observed, 'Female sexuality, troublesome at the best of times in male literature, is regarded with an attitude bordering on neurotic in the already tortured relationships on display in the colonies'.¹⁴⁰ In his travelogue, Kovalevskii devoted a lengthy passage to the court of Nasra bint 'Adlan in Sennar, informing the Russian public about the princess herself and the general atmosphere of her household. The Sudanese princess was already familiar to readers of European literature, having been described by Karl Lepsius in letters published in German and foreign newspapers after his journey through Egypt and Nubia in 1842-1845, and consequently released in a separate edition in 1853. Kovalevskii was certainly familiar with Lepsius's work, as he repeatedly referenced him in his book. Just a few years later, another Western traveller, the American Bayard Taylor, would publish his own travelogue (*A Journey to Central Africa*, 1854), in which he also described Nasra. Despite their common subject, the three descriptions of the Sudanese noblewoman vary significantly, to the extent that Nasra appears as three different individuals. This was apparently not unusual, given that even local sources, both oral and written, described the princess in very different ways.¹⁴¹

Nasra bint 'Adlan was born into the Funj royal house at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and despite her family's misfortunes (her father and other relatives were killed during the Turkish conquest of the Funj state), she grew up to become one of the most powerful figures in the region. She successfully managed agricultural enterprises, various trades (including the slave trade) and prostitution, relying extensively on slavery. When the three men, at different times, met her, she was

140 A. P. A. Busia, 'Miscegenation as Metonymy: Sexuality and Power in the Colonial Novel', in O. Oy  w  m   (ed. by), *African Gender Studies. A Reader*, New York-Basingstoke 2005, pp. 245-257 (p. 248). Cf. also Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire*, pp. 170-183. Spurr connects 'the eroticization of the colonized' to 'a set of rhetorical instances—metaphors, seductive fantasies, expressions of sexual anxiety—in which the traditions of colonialist and phallogocentric discourses coincide' (p. 170).

141 I. Salim al-Hasan and N. McHugh, 'Sitt Nasra bint 'Adlan: A Sudanese Noblewoman in History and Tradition', in G. R. G. Hambly (ed. by), *Women in the Medieval Islamic World. Power, Patronage, and Piety*, New York 1999, pp. 537-549.

almost fifty years old and at the peak of her success. Lepsius and Taylor emphasised her reserve, elusiveness, elegance, and grace, as well as her 'almost masculine talent and energy' (Taylor). They also hinted matter-of-factly—and without much judgement—at the perceived promiscuity of her court: Lepsius reported that she had offered him an enslaved girl (which he declined in favour of a young enslaved boy, much to the princess's dismay), while Taylor dwelled on the young, naked enslaved girls who attended the dinner in his honour.¹⁴² There was no explicit mention of Nasra's involvement in the sex trade, and neither Lepsius nor Taylor ever reported that their virtue was endangered, either directly by Nasra or by her local entourage. Conversely, Kovalevskii portrayed his encounter with Nasra as a test of virtue, which he successfully passed thanks to his moral integrity. The princess and her court are described as the remains of a bygone era: she 'was once beautiful [...]; now she is an old woman', while her 'palace'—not worthy of this name—is presented as merely 'a fortified group of houses' which Turkish authorities love to visit knowing that there 'they will find rum, vodka and women!'. While Lepsius and Taylor emphasised the fact that Nasra clearly preferred to dine alone, Kovalevskii presents her as enjoying the dinner in his honour immensely, to the extent that, despite her Islamic faith, she even indulged in drinking—something the moralist Kovalevskii explicitly criticises and resolutely distances himself from, by refusing copious amounts of alcohol. It soon becomes clear that drinking is not the only vice at Nasra's court. Indeed, the Russian traveller is accompanied to a brothel by one of the princess's servants—himself portrayed as rather effeminate. There, the author once again has to defend his virtue and chastity against the vicious attacks of a depraved society:

A number of women of diverse colors, yellow, red, greenish, and completely black, their arms folded across their chests, their eyes cast down, wearing traditional dress—that is, the costume worn by their great-grand-mother Eve—stood along a wall in a servile manner. The bed was on the opposite side; next to it was a little table upon which stood various oils, including rose oil, in disgusting little jars. I guessed what the matter was, yet still asked my guide, whose face and voice were

142 Cf. K. R. Lepsius, *Letters from Egypt, Ethiopia, and the Peninsula of Sinai*, London 1853, p. 180; B. Taylor, *A Journey to Central Africa: or, Life and Landscapes from Egypt to the Negro Kingdoms of the White Nile*, New York 1854, p. 295.

not very different from those of the unfortunate female slaves in the room, what it was all for. 'To rub you with oil.' 'But who shall rub me?' 'They shall!' 'And what shall follow next?' 'They shall remain at your service.' 'But what can they possibly do at night?' 'They shall remain standing there all night—unless you find other things for them to do,' he added with an arch smile. 'No! It is too much!' And with that, to the great surprise of Nasra's loyal servant, and perhaps to the even greater surprise of his hospitable mistress, I told him to lead these ranks of Sennaar beauties away, refusing the pleasure of my body being rubbed, as well as various other pleasures.¹⁴³

Thus, the Sudanese princess is presented as the epitome of degradation, both physical—she is now just an old woman, with only a memory of her former beauty—and moral: she does not follow Islamic doctrine, she is bitter about the loss of her family's greatness and enjoys tempting men with alcohol and women. Rather than presenting it as one of the region's most widespread businesses, prostitution is depicted as a test that the prototypical positive hero—embodied here by Kovalevskii—must pass. In other words, it is a deeply personal matter: resisting women's temptations on the edge of civilisation, in a land where transgression is permitted. Yet Kovalevskii's moral compass does not fail him. In becoming the ultimate victor, he diminishes Nasra's power and influence over men, which the other European travellers felt and witnessed with great astonishment.

The woman Evgenii Avgustus met could not have been more different from Nasra, but her function within the narration was indeed the same. As discussed in the previous chapter, Avgustus constructed South Africa as a white male dominion, from which black people were essentially excluded. Natives are cited extremely rarely, merely in relation to their function as servants, and are thus entirely dependent on and linked with Europeans. There are only three instances in which Avgustus deviates from this perspective. The first is his description of a 'Kaffir' spy who was taken prisoner and then shot. In this case, he dwelled on the corporeality of a man who would soon be dead ('A naked bronze body, muscular and sinewy, stuck out from beneath his tattered clothes. Fear had turned his face, which bore traces of cuts and bruises, into a greyish shade of brown, so that it took on something

143 E. Kovalevsky, *A Journey to Inner Africa*, pp. 213-214.

of a dirty-yellow hue, like the skin of his palms').¹⁴⁴ In another case, a Zulu servant is deemed particularly worthy of mention as he turns out to be literate and fluent in English—much to Avgustus' surprise.¹⁴⁵ The third recollection of specific individuals concerns an encounter with an elderly black man who offers Augustus food and accompanies him to his village—the only native settlement described by the author. Once inside a hut, a woman enters:

I was still growing accustomed to the darkness when a woman came in, and showing off her *dazzling white teeth*, placed in front of me some earthen bowls with milk, pumpkins cut in half and flat cakes of maize flour baked in ash. The woman said something in her *sonorous African language*. [...] The *scent* of her *bronze body*, *naked* to the waist, wafted over me; her *saggy breasts* dangled right in front of my nose. First I drank the milk, [...] then I devoured the flat cakes and poked around in the pumpkin. All the while she continued to *babble* and *laugh*, poured me more milk, unwound the dirty rags from my feet [...]. 'Two shillings, two shillings, baas!' the old man said [...]. My charming hostess burst *into high-pitched laughter* and moved even closer to me. At last, I realised what was happening. [...] when I had trustingly entered the hospitable dwelling of this Uncle Tom, I actually found myself in the charming company of a black pimp and his charming lady, abundantly garnished with a *foul-smelling oil*.¹⁴⁶

Far less refined and powerful than Nasra, this nameless temptress, a 'chocolate-coloured Circe',¹⁴⁷ becomes the embodiment not only of the supposed sexual proneness and animal-like freedom of Africans, but also of the long-standing trope of the fallen woman. She is described in essentialised traits—the white teeth, the bronze, naked body, the saggy breasts, and pungent odour—and she is evidently deprived of agency, being effectively at the mercy of black and white men alike. Indeed, the conversation and transaction occur between the two men, whereas the woman is excluded; her 'sonorous African language' is incomprehensible to the author, who simply hears babbling and laughter instead. The entire scene is constructed through a series of reminders of

144 B. Gorelik (ed. by), *A Russian on Commando. The Boer War Experience of Yevgeny Avgustus*, Johannesburg 2022, p. 93.

145 Ibid., p. 182.

146 Ibid., p. 149. Italics are mine (A.F.).

147 Ibid., p. 150.

bodily functions, intended to elicit an equally physical response from readers, such as repulsion or crass laughter—a far cry from sanitised scientific writing. The only reason Avgustus, who describes himself as no saint, does not surrender to the black man's proposal is the fact that the sour milk makes him feel sick: 'I was saved by an event that even the most extreme representatives of naturalism never mention in their novels or dramas. In short, the sour milk I had drunk had its trademark effect on my stomach, and I had to rush headlong out of the hut. No wonder the French have a saying: *L'estomac est l'ennemie de l'amour!*'.¹⁴⁸ Thus, in this blunt episode, it is not the author's morality that saves him from debasement, nor does he ever feel that his virtue is under threat. However, the possibility of debasement is swiftly dispelled by a visceral (quite literally) reaction of utter rejection. Although he used colonial language and imagery to describe this essentialised African prostitute, Avgustus did not necessarily associate this kind of 'filthy behaviour' (to which he was clearly accustomed) with Africa per se. Instead, he attributed the transactional aspect of the arrangement to the influence of the West ('No wonder the railway and the telegraph passed so close by the hut: civilisation had done its job').¹⁴⁹ Thus, if sexual freedom and animality are presented as intrinsic to the nature of black women, corruption, depravity, and promiscuity are seen as characteristics of white men.

* * * * *

Between the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, biological determinism significantly impacted the renewed interest in measuring the 'colonial body', which easily became a spectacle, the object of the Western gaze both in the colonies and outside of them, through the proliferation of ethnographic museums, where skulls and skeletons were collected, measured, and studied,¹⁵⁰

148 Ibid., pp. 149-150.

149 Ibid., p. 149.

150 On this matter see for instance A. Laukötter, 'The "Colonial Body" as Object of Knowledge in Ethnological Museums', in S. Jobs and G. Mackenthun (ed. by), *Embodiments of Cultural Encounters*, Münster-New York-Munich-Berlin 2011, pp. 181-200. As will become clear in the following chapter, unlike in Europe, Russian collections from Africa usually did not include skulls or skeletons.

or through the aforementioned popular ethnic shows. At the same time, while being the object of (pseudo)science, in Western society 'the body functions as a privileged trope [...]. The body's metaphoric standing renders it an exemplary historical map of social relations; the model of the physiologically healthy body was a common means of conceptualising psychological, national, literary and racial health'.¹⁵¹ If this is true also with regard to Westerns' own bodies, 'in classic colonial discourse [...] the body is that which is most proper to the primitive, the sign by which the primitive is represented. The body, rather than speech, law, or history, is the essential defining characteristic of primitive peoples. According to this view, they live, in their bodies and in natural space, but not in a body politic worthy of the name nor in meaningful historical time'.¹⁵²

As this chapter shows, Russian non-fiction about Africa adopted European ways and practices of looking at the black body (physical anthropology, medicine, travel encounters), as well as rhetorical strategies—from classification to aestheticisation, from debasement to eroticisation. The same occurred in texts that did not even feature a direct gaze, and which instead repurposed the Western gaze on Africa for a Russian readership. Notwithstanding the various approaches to and views on race and the hierarchisation of humankind, the procedure that seems to transcend different genres and authors is that of abstraction achieved through depersonalisation. Firstly, despite the supposedly 'scientific nature' of anthropological, medical and ethnographic studies, 'black people' emerge as a highly fictional and empty category—there is simply no consensus on who they actually are. Secondly, for all the apparent realism transpiring from the travelogues, black people are ultimately reduced to their shared characteristics or their function within colonial society, with individuality completely lost. In this sense, the obsession with the black body—part of the Western tendency to believe that visual observation is the means to understand the 'other'¹⁵³—paradoxically leads to a progressive detachment from it and the creation

151 G. C-L. Low, *White Skins/Black Masks: Representation and Colonialism*, London 1996, p. 13.

152 Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire*, p. 22.

153 On 'visualism' cf. J. Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Objects*, New York 2014, and especially chapter 4 (pp. 105-142).

of empty simulacra in its place.

Embracing a certain type of rhetoric and viewpoint enabled these Russian authors to perceive themselves—and, by extension, their readers—as part of Europe, in that they adopted Western discourse and practices which emphasised their distance from black Africans—even when those Africans were Ethiopians, their ‘brothers in faith’. Stressing their European identity was thus paramount, even when they criticised Western colonial dynamics that negated the common mould of humankind. Interestingly, this criticism was never accompanied by any reflection on similar dynamics in place in their homeland, which, even by default, effectively constructed colonial Africa and the Russian dominions (and thus European powers and Russian power) as two completely separate entities.

4. Collectors. African Material Culture on Display

The antique shops I have described are of great interest to any lover of African ethnography, for in them, among the inevitable mass of things of little value, sometimes knowingly fake, one can buy objects of great scientific value for a pittance. Any ethnographic museum that wishes to enrich its African collections and does not have sufficient funds to organise a special expedition to the inaccessible regions of Africa should bear this in mind.

Ivan Puzanov¹

In February 1897, the illustrated journal *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia* published a review of the ‘Abyssinian exhibition’, which was held in the main building of the Russian Red Cross in Saint Petersburg and organised by the military officer Konstantin Zviagin shortly after he returned from the Red Cross expedition to Ethiopia. While not much is known about Zviagin’s life, it is possible to follow the traces he left as a disseminator of knowledge on Ethiopia in Russian society. According to several periodicals that advertised the event, the ‘Abyssinian exhibition’ in Saint Petersburg was a success and attracted around 6,500 visitors, which in turn led to it being taken to Moscow, Kharkiv, Odessa, and Kyiv.² Zviagin himself travelled with the exhibition around the empire, inspiring collateral endeavours such as the composition of the *Abyssinian War March* by the military orchestra conductor Viktor (Franz) Marechek.³

1 I. Puzanov, ‘Ocherki Severo-Vostochnogo Sudana’, *Zemlevedenie*, 1914, 3, p. 73.

2 For the Moscow exhibition, see for instance ‘Izvestiia i zametki’, *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*, 1897, 1, pp. 216-217; for the Kharkiv exhibition, see ‘Abissinskaia vystavka’, *Iuzhnyi krai*, 21.11.1897, p. 3; for the Odessa exhibition, see ‘Abissinskaia vystavka’, *Kievolianin*, 24.01.1898, p. 3. Cf. also *Russkii invalid*, 23.01.1898, p. 2, where it is reported that after a month in Odessa, the exhibition would move to Kyiv.

3 Cf. ‘Abissinskii voennyi marsh’, *Iuzhnyi krai*, 08.12.1897, p. 3; V. Marechek, *Abissinskii*

That same year, the exhibition catalogue was published, accompanied by an introduction written by Zviagin in which he explained why this initiative had been pursued: 'To satisfy the Russian society's interest in the sanitary detachment in Abyssinia, an exhibition was organised to provide an opportunity to learn about Abyssinia, a relatively unexplored country, its inhabitants, and the environment in which the Russian detachment lived and worked for six months. The exhibition also aimed to familiarise visitors with the detachment's equipment and, where possible, its activities in Abyssinia'.⁴ Although the press only associated Zviagin with the event, it appears that it was actually the result of a collaborative effort involving other members of the expedition, including general Nikolai Shvedov, doctors David Glinskii and Nikolai Brovtsyn, and hieromonk Aleksandr Golovin. They all contributed by donating objects and photographs, drawing maps and tables, and helping with the general setup.⁵ The exhibits were divided into three sections (*otdeli*), presenting the public with 1) the results of the Russian sanitary detachment—including tables showing the number of people treated according to tribe (*plemena*), age, sex, and illnesses; medical equipment; bullets retrieved during operations; samples of Ethiopian medicines and equipment; amulets; a model of the Russian ambulatory in Entoto; photographs; 2) non-sanitary equipment—including tents, kitchenware, and maps with the detachment's itinerary; 3) ethnographic objects. The final section was the most conspicuous, offering a wide variety of objects from the everyday lives of Abyssinian, 'Galla' (Oromo), and Somali peoples: clothes, jewellery, amulets, weapons and shields, cutlery, and prayer books had been carefully collected by the members of the expedition, who, as it appears, in several cases had received them as gifts from Ethiopians.

It was certainly an eclectic and spontaneous collection, betraying an amateurish character due to the collectors' lack of proper ethnographic training. While it was praised for the abundance of objects and photographs on display, it also attracted some criticism, particularly from specialists. Noting the fragmentary nature of Zviagin's collection

voennyi marsh na temu abissinskikh napevov: v pamiat' abissinskoi vystavki v Khar'kove, Kharkiv 1897.

4 *Katalog abissinsko-sanitarno-etnograficheskoi vystavki*, Saint Petersburg 1897, p. I.

5 *Ibid.*, p. II.

and the imbalance between the different categories of exhibits, the journal *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie* (the official publication of the Imperial Society of Devotees of Natural Science, Anthropology, and Ethnography) nevertheless concluded that '[...] whatever the gaps in the collections, which could not always satisfy the ethnographer, the idea of introducing the general public of Saint Petersburg and Moscow to Abyssinia, even if only with the help of random collections that were at the disposal of the organisers of the exhibition, can only be accepted with a wave of sympathy and appreciation'.⁶

This was not Zviagin's only attempt to popularise Ethiopia. Indeed, he had already published two essays on the country⁷ and was reportedly giving popular lectures illustrated with magic lantern slides, an activity that evidently started in conjunction with the exhibition,⁸ but that continued in subsequent years with the involvement of various establishments. Thus, for instance, a lecture was reported at the Kazan Theological Academy, blessed by the Archbishop of Kazan and open to students, their families and professors (1898),⁹ and another at the Nikolaev Engineering Academy in Saint Petersburg (1902), offering officers, superiors, and students geographical and ethnographic details on the country, along with a selection of magic lantern slides.¹⁰ A few years later, the lectures were published separately by Ivan Sytin's publishing house as part of the series 'Readings for the People' (*Chteniia dlia naroda*), and were intended for public reading at the Solianoi Gorodok in Saint Petersburg. The book also contained a list of forty-seven pictures that were to be projected during the reading to help familiarise the audience with this exotic place and its people: portraits of Menelik II and his wife, ethnographic 'types' of Ethiopians, 'Galla' people, and Somalis, landscapes and traditional housing, animals, and scenes from everyday life.¹¹

The first 'Abyssinian exhibition' also prompted similar events to be

6 *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*, 1897, 1, p. 217.

7 Cf. K. Zviagin, *Osnovnoe ustroistvo sovremennoi Abissinii*, Saint Petersburg 1895; K. Zviagin, *Ocherk sovremennoi Abissinii*, Saint Petersburg 1895.

8 Cf. *Iuzhnyi krai*, 16.11.1897, p. 3; *Russkii invalid*, 23.01.1898, p. 2.

9 *Tserkovnye vedomosti, izdavaemye pri Sviateishem Pravitel'stvoiushchem Sinode*, 1898, 43, p. 1619.

10 *Russkii invalid*, 14.12.1902, p. 3.

11 K. Zviagin, *Abissiniia. Chtenie dlia naroda*, Saint Petersburg 1910.

organised in the following years, including at the Academy of Sciences in Saint Petersburg in 1903¹² and on the Nevskii Prospect in 1907-1908. The latter showcased materials collected by military medic Sergei Sason and was seen as a continuation of Zviagin's efforts to popularise Ethiopia,¹³ while being advertised as an 'ethnographic and zoological display of the fairy-tale country of the black Christians' in friendly relations with Russia.¹⁴

Despite the fact that it cannot be considered representative in terms of reach and ramifications, Zviagin's example effectively demonstrates a series of interconnected mechanisms within Russian society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which will be discussed in this chapter: the collection of other cultures by private individuals or organised structures such as museums; the emergence of photography for documentary purposes and as a means of preserving memories for personal enjoyment; the democratisation of the access to knowledge through the public opening of museums and exhibitions; and the organisation of lectures and readings for uneducated audiences, made more accessible by the projection of illustrative images via magic lanterns.¹⁵ It also highlights the enduring importance of the written word; as it has been observed, 'While exhibitions and museums proper attend to material objects, the discourse constructed around them concerns the portrayal of these objective realities in light of national ideologies, public opinion, and personal preferences'.¹⁶ Indeed, reviews such as the one published by *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia* were hardly ever neutral. Instead, they steered the reader towards a specific interpretation

12 V. Semenova, 'Sposoby prezentatsii efiopskoi ikonografii v muzeinom prostranstve Rossii i problemy ee interpretatsii', *Radlovskii sbornik*, 2015, pp. 214-222 (p. 215).

13 Cf. 'Raznye izvestiia', *Novoe vremia*, 24.12.1907, p. 5.

14 Cf. 'Abissinskaia vystavka (afisha)', *Zritel'*, 1908, 1, p. 16.

15 On this topic, and to understand how Zviagin's lectures could have been conducted and organised cf. Ya. Agafonova, 'The Common Reader in Public Readings with Magic Lantern Slides in Late Imperial Russia', *Russian Literature*, 2022, 129, pp. 73-93, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ruslit.2021.12.001>. Cf. also A. Kotomina, 'Svetovye i tenevye kartiny i "iskusstvo proektsii" v Rossii kontsa XIX-nachala XX vv.', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 2012, 99, pp. 135-170. On how lantern slides were exchanged among Western scholars who used them in their lectures cf. E. Edwards, 'Exchanging Photographs: Preliminary Thoughts on the Currency of Photography in Collecting Anthropology', *Journal des anthropologues*, 2000, 80-81, pp. 21-46, <https://doi.org/10.4000/jda.3138>

16 K. Dianina, 'Museum and Message: Writing Public Culture in Imperial Russia', *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 2012 (56), 2, pp. 173-195 (p. 174).

of the exhibition or museum in question, as well as towards a particular positioning of Russia within the context. While the general rhetoric towards Ethiopia was one of friendship due to shared beliefs and enemies, a closer analysis of the discourse surrounding Zviagin's work reveals a more complex dynamic. After explaining how the exhibition had been organised and how the various objects were displayed across three rooms, the anonymous reviewer took the opportunity to share their personal observations on Ethiopian culture and how it differed from the Russian one. Thus, they stated that 'the images painted with oil colours on canvas cannot be compared even with our worst *lubki*', that the surgical equipment used by the Abyssinians 'is primitive, of course, and astonishingly naïve', or even that 'this ethnographic and, from our point of view, prehistoric weaponry is still used in Abyssinia'. An evaluation of the different ethnic groups inhabiting the region was also provided. While ethnic Abyssinians 'can be called beautiful' (though they are later labelled superstitious and credulous), Somali and 'Galla' people were described as 'quite ugly' (*dovol'no bezobrazny*), belligerent, and semi-savage.¹⁷ As a result, the review is valuable both as a source of information on the exhibition and its structure—it even provides two photos of the displays—and as an opportunity to emphasise Russia's superiority and progress over a potential ally that could never challenge the status of the tsarist empire, even in the distant future.

In the span of a mere fifteen years, at the height of modernism, the qualitative evaluation, at least, was bound to change slightly: reporting on the Ethiopian paintings brought back to Russia by the poet Nikolai Gumilev in 1911, the journal *Sinii zhurnal* compared them favourably to the paintings displayed at the Union of Youth's exhibition in Saint Petersburg: 'In terms of conception and drawing technique, the Africans are not only no worse than Russian modern artists, but they even surpass them in many respects'.¹⁸ However, such an assessment did not necessarily stem from an appreciation of Ethiopian art, but rather from a lack of consideration for the artistic experiments of the Union

17 'Abissinskaia vystavka', *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia*, 22.02.1897, p. 193. It should be noted that Zviagin's exhibition catalogue lacked this kind of negative evaluation and was much more objective. Nevertheless, stereotypes were still employed when providing brief descriptions of 'Galla' people and Somalis.

18 'Iskusstvo v Abissinii', *Sinii zhurnal*, 1911, 18, p. 12.

of Youth members. Thus, the captions accompanying the reproductions of the paintings collected by Gumilev betrayed a customary sense of superiority towards Abyssinians, who were considered to be at a much lower level of civilisation than the Russians. For example, commenting on a painting depicting a comet sighting in an Ethiopian village, the anonymous author humorously wrote that 'the Abyssinians' knowledge of astronomy is nil. They are a strange people; their religion is not profound, and they have no special beliefs or legends'.

Through reviews and catalogues, the ethnographic collections even reached a public that never actually visited museums and exhibitions, shaping their perception of the 'other' and contributing to the discourse on human diversity. In this period, 'the printed word' was still 'the main vehicle through which institutions of culture in tsarist Russia reached a broader audience'.¹⁹ At the same time, many of the items collected were not available to the general public as they were often stored in warehouses due to the limited capacity of the museums. Yet, they are still interesting in their own right, regardless of their actual impact on society as a whole. In fact, they are evidence of the various forms (more or less structured, more or less 'scientific') of collecting the 'other' that emerged in late imperial Russia as a result of the rise of anthropology and ethnography as disciplines. Africa was very much part of this collecting trend: to provide just an example, it is estimated that the Kunstkamera's (MAE) collection of African artefacts grew by several thousand items between 1894 and 1914, as part of a broader initiative to expand the museum's holdings.²⁰

This chapter will focus primarily on the Kunstkamera's African collection, which is undoubtedly the most substantial of its kind, although not the only one.²¹ It will trace its origins highlighting,

19 Dianina, *Museum and Message*, p. 174.

20 P. Matveeva, 'Vse chelovechestvo edino': V.V. Radlov i MAE, Saint Petersburg 2014, p. 134.

21 For instance, the MGU Anthropological Museum holds Viktor Mashkov's Ethiopian collection, which was acquired in 1939 after being displayed in other museums, and Vladimir Troitskii's Central African collection, which was donated by him in 1914. Cf. E. Balakhonova, 'Afrikanskii kollektsii iz Moskovskogo publichnogo i Rumiantsevskogo muzeia v Muzei antropologii MGU', *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta. Antropologiya*, 2009, 1, pp. 17-26; E. Balakhonova, 'V.V. Troitskii i ego kollektsiia v Muzei antropologii', *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta. Antropologiya*, 2009, 3, pp. 55-65. The Ethnographic Museum of the University of Kazan also holds

in the process, the interconnected web that linked this Russian institution with European collectors, ethnographers, and curators. Although it primarily comprised ethnographic objects, the collection also included a few photographs taken by Russians in Africa—a section that was significantly expanded during the Soviet era, mainly through private donations. Thus the discourse will shift from African objects, which the public could admire within the MAE, to photographs of African people and lands—in their own right a way of collecting the ‘other’. While photographs remained excluded from the museum’s permanent exhibition for the most part, they could still reach the public through the editorial market, as they were printed to illustrate journal articles and books. In each case, as they were being used for a specific purpose within a publication, they also acquired new meanings.

Evidently, Russian ethnographic and anthropological museums were primarily preoccupied with showcasing the ethnic diversity of the empire itself; however, they—along with individual subjects—also participated in collecting and appropriating foreign cultures, sharing with Western colonial powers discourses over diversity and practices of acquisition.²² It is possibly the sector in which Russian specificity is least evident, and a convergence with Europe becomes apparent.

fin-de-siècle African collections, which were mainly acquired from Europe; cf. E. Gushchina, ‘Etnograficheskie kollektsii kafedry geografii i etnografii Kazanskogo Imperatorskogo universiteta’, *Izvestiia Obshchestva arkhologii, istorii i etnografii pri Kazanskom universitete*, 2017, 4, pp. 101–119; A. Farkhutdinova et al., ‘Kollektsiia oruzhiia narodov Afriki v sobranii Etnograficheskogo muzeia Kazanskogo universiteta’, in *Aktual’nye nauchnye issledovaniia. Sbornik statei X Mezhdunarodnoi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii: v 2 ch.*, I, Penza 2023, pp. 191–196.

22 On colonialism and collecting, which has obvious repercussions on present-day museum holdings, cf. for instance T. Barringer and T. Flynn (ed. by), *Colonialism and the Object. Empire, Material Culture and the Museum*, London–New York 1998, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203350683>; A. Maxwell, *Colonial Photography and Exhibitions. Representations of the ‘Native’ and the Making of European Identities*, London–New York 1999; E. Edwards, *Raw Histories. Photographs, Anthropology and Museums*, Oxford–New York 2001; C. Gosden and C. Knowles, *Collecting Colonialism. Material Culture and Colonial Change*, London 2001; the special issue ‘Anthropology, Collecting and Colonial Governmentalities’, *History and Anthropology*, 2014, 2; H. Turner, *Cataloguing Culture. Legacies of Colonialism in Museum Documentation*, Vancouver–Toronto 2020; J. Zimmerer, K. S. Todzi, and F. Odenwald (ed. by), *Displacing and Displaying the Objects of Others. The Materiality of Identity and Depots of Global History*, Berlin–Boston 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111335568>

Towards a Museum of Human Diversity

Although the Kunstkamera was the first public museum to be founded in Russia (1714), it arguably remained a 'cabinet of rarities' until the second half of the nineteenth century. During this period, it underwent a gradual reorganisation and development amid an unprecedented surge in interest in public collections, which, by the end of the century, led to the establishment of around eighty new museums, many of which were of general interest, particularly in the provinces.²³ The popularisation of culture for the masses, which was responsible not only for the growth of museums, but also for the boom in educational publications, was a direct consequence of, and a driving force behind, the Great Reforms era and the spread of the populist movement. Indeed, many of those involved in museum management came from the populist *milieu*: having 'internalized the *narodniki*'s approach to ethnic and political difference', they experimented with ethnographic fieldwork during their exile in Siberia following their political activities. As it has been noted, 'although their preoccupation with the non-Russian residents owed a lot to their contempt for autocratic authority, their scientific interest corroborated Russia's imperial nature and thus indirectly fostered political rule through autocracy. In the end the exiles' ethnographic curiosity was a kind of affirmation of the empire'.²⁴ This was a trait shared by a period when nationality was becoming an increasingly central concept in administration, culture, and society: more often than not, ethnographic interest was directed towards the various peoples inhabiting the Russian Empire. It was in this spirit, for instance, that the first Moscow ethnographic exposition was organised in 1867 by the Society of Devotees of Natural Science, Anthropology, and Ethnography (one of the main promoters of the newly established ethnographic discipline),²⁵ with the primary goal of displaying the variety within the empire while

23 Cf. Dianina, *Museum and Message*, p. 176.

24 R. Cvetkovski, 'Empire Complex: Arrangements in the Russian Ethnographic Museum, 1910', in R. Cvetkovski and A. Hofmeister (ed. by), *An Empire of Others. Creating Ethnographic Knowledge in Imperial Russia and the USSR*, Budapest-New York 2014, pp. 211-251 (p. 222).

25 Cf. for instance R. Lipets and T. Makashina, 'Rol' Obshchestva liubitelei estestvoznaniia, antropologii i etnografii v organizatsii russkoi etnograficheskoi nauki', *Ocherki istorii russkoi etnografii, fol'kloristiki i antropologii*, 1965, 3, pp. 39-60.

simultaneously emphasising its unity, as well as the mastery of ethnic Russians. Intended as a response to similar endeavours that were already widespread and popular in the West, the exposition can certainly be viewed as an attempt to demonstrate that Russia was keeping up with the times.²⁶

In the following decades, exhibitions of this kind were organised throughout the empire, becoming very popular and attracting an astonishing number of visitors despite the scarce publicity and the customary lack of experience of the organisers. The various ethnicities of the empire were gradually asked 'to first identify the specifics of a "national style". Prizes were awarded to those regions whose presentations were regarded the most convincing and that offered a great number of attractions to highlight their uniqueness and independence', while they were encouraged to host such events themselves.²⁷ Thus, although they were clearly inscribed in an imperial centre/periphery dynamic, they often became the product of an articulated dialectic between different actors, whether ethnically Russian (representatives of the official power) or not. In other words, it was not necessarily a one-way process carried out exclusively by the ruling elite, and as such this phenomenon should be carefully studied on a case-by-case basis before any general assumptions are made. For instance, analysing the phenomenon of collecting Asian artefacts, Adele Di Ruocco has highlighted the difference between public collections held in Siberia, which contained 'voluntary donations from the local Buriat population, who commonly considered the museological space as something familiar, intimate, and beneficial for the whole community', and the imperial (or Moscow- and Saint Petersburg-based) collections, which

26 Cf. for instance N. Nait, 'Imperiia napokaz: Vserossiiskaia etnograficheskaia vystavka 1867 goda', *NLO*, 2001, 51, pp. 111-131; G. Krivosheina, 'Long Way to the Anthropological Exhibition: The Institutionalization of Physical Anthropology in Russia', *Centaurus*, 2014 (56), 4, pp. 275-304, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1600-0498.12072>; M. Kerimova and M. Zolotukhina, 'A New Turn in Russian Ethnography. Science and Cultural Politics at Moscow's First Ethnographic Exhibition of 1867', *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*, 2022 (31), 2, pp. 112-132, <https://doi.org/10.3167/ajec.2022.310207>

27 I. Kouteinikova, 'Tashkent in St. Petersburg. The Constructed Image of Central Asia in Russia's Nineteenth-Century Ethnographic Exhibitions', in F. Giese, M. Volait, and A. Varela Braga (ed. by), *À l'orientale. Collecting, Displaying and Appropriating Islamic Art and Architecture in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, Leiden-Boston 2019, pp. 151-162 (p. 153), https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004412644_014

‘were formed either to satisfy the taste of private collectors [...] or as a pedagogical tool to educate the urban population on the multi-ethnic character of the vast Russian Empire’.²⁸ What state institutions, such as the IRGO or the Russian Academy of Sciences, were certainly carrying out, were research expeditions within the empire, which resulted in the establishment of substantial collections of material culture.²⁹ Displayed at the ethnographic and anthropological exhibitions, but also forming permanent museum collections, these objects were the result of fieldwork, which, in line with Western scientific trends, was considered the most reliable way of providing a basis for studying a culture alongside participant observation.³⁰ As was the case in the West, ethnographic objects ‘became a potent instrument of identity-making—ethnographic displays were a visualization of as well as confrontation with the Other, but in the same way they manifested political dependencies and cultural hierarchies’.³¹ Photography was also becoming an increasingly useful tool for documenting Russian activities in the field and gathering ‘scientific’ evidence that was effective in anthropological enquiries, as proven by recent studies that have examined the relationship between photographic collections and the imperial management of the peripheries.³² Perhaps the only distinctive feature of the scientific and cultural dynamics that were otherwise largely shared with Europe was the prevailing rarity of Western-style ethnic exhibitions showcasing,

28 A. Di Ruocco, ‘Russian Conceptualizations of Asia. Archaeological Discoveries and Collecting Practices in Russia at the Turn of the Twentieth Century’, *Journal of the History of Collections*, 2016 (28), 3, pp. 437–448 (p. 440), <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhc/fhw018>

29 For an overview of the phenomenon cf. T. Staniukovich, *Etnograficheskaiia nauka i muzei*, Leningrad 1978.

30 Cvetkovski, *Empire Complex*, p. 223.

31 Ibid., p. 213.

32 See for instance S. Abashin, ‘Vlast’ i fotografiia: vizual’naia reprezentatsiia v imperskoi ramke’, *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, 2012 (84), 4, pp. 120–138; H. S. Sonntag, *Genesis of the Turkestan Album 1871–1872: The Role of Russian Military Photography, Mapping, Albums and Exhibitions on Central Asia*, PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison 2011; E. Tolmacheva, ‘Early Field Photography and Visual Documents of Northern Indigenous Cultures. Ivan Poliakov’s Collection, 1876’, *Sibirica*, 2017 (16), 1, pp. 6–30, <https://doi.org/10.3167/sib.2017.160102>; T. Saburova, ‘Geographical Imagination, Anthropology, and Political Exiles. Photographers of Siberia in Late Imperial Russia’, *Sibirica*, 2020 (19), 1, pp. 57–84, <https://doi.org/10.3167/sib.2020.190105>; D. Gutmeyr-Schnur, ‘Visually Integrating the Other Within. Imperial Photography and the Image of the Caucasus’, in K. Parppe and B. Rakhimzianov (ed. by), *Images of Otherness in Russia*, Boston 2023, pp. 225–249.

live, the different populations of the empire: it was more common in Russia to have people from outside the empire on display—though this was still rare.

Indeed, even though a great deal of effort was devoted to studying the various ethnic groups within Russia's borders, peoples from different parts of the world were also subject to scrutiny. As such, they were the destination of ethnographic expeditions mainly by private individuals and were exposed to the same collecting dynamics. The *Kunstkamera* was certainly the institution most interested in hosting artefacts from foreign cultures, so much so that at the beginning of the twentieth century it even changed its 1879 title, 'Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography predominantly of Russia', dropping the phrasing 'predominantly of Russia'. Motivated by political and intellectual reasons, this move was a reaction to the newly established Russian Ethnographic Museum (1902), which, with its focus on the empire, 'served as a platform where ethnographic features were translated into imperial identity patterns that regulated the relations between the different peoples in Russia'.³³

The MAE, for its part, tried very hard to maintain a clear-cut and distinct identity that would emphasise universality and academicism. In 1903, Vasilii Radlov—the MAE director from 1894 to 1918—reported that an academic museum (i.e., the MAE) should 'build an exhibition illustrating the evolution of human culture from the prehistoric period to the highest cultures of the modern day, using ethnographic materials from various tribes and peoples', with the intent of providing 'a fairly complete idea of the development of culture and a true conviction about the psychic unity of mankind and the uniformity of the laws of its development'. In this regard, such a museum should have focused mainly on primitive peoples, while the Russian Ethnographic Museum on the ethnography of 'Russia's civilized peoples', especially the Slavic ones.³⁴

Radlov and Lev Shternberg, who joined the MAE in 1901 as senior curator and continued to work there until his death in 1927, were particularly instrumental in promoting this openness to incorporate

33 Cvetkovski, *Empire Complex*, p. 214.

34 Staniukovich, *Etnograficheskaiia nauka i muzei*, pp. 139-140. English translation from S. Kan, 'Evolutionism and Historical Particularism at the St. Petersburg Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography', *Museum Anthropology*, 2008 (31), 1, pp. 28-46 (p. 34), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1379.2008.00003.x>

other cultures into the museum's exhibition halls, making them the true main focus. While the MAE had secured overseas collections in previous years too, it was only with Radlov and Shternberg that a strong drive to acquire new items emerged, alongside the proper systematisation of exhibits. To expand the holdings, they sponsored Russian expeditions to various parts of the world and tried to strengthen ties with Western ethnographic museums, even promoting trips for staff to visit collections in Copenhagen, Berlin, Dresden, Paris, Vienna, London, and so forth.³⁵ Their efforts to establish a 'museum of universal culture' (*muzei obshchechelovecheskoi kul'tury*) were directly linked to their interest in contemporary evolutionary theories borrowed from Lewis Morgan and Edward Tylor, whose system 'relied on the assumption that human culture was characterized by a dynamic moving from a simple to a complex formation of civilization, regardless of specific cultural preconditions'.³⁶ A number of fellow scholars and explorers shared their views and general approach, contributing in various capacities to the MAE's reorganisation, as well as to the publication of articles and essays in its support. For instance, before he died in 1895 shortly after returning from Ethiopia, the Russian explorer Aleksandr Eliseev wrote a piece aimed at encouraging the public in Saint Petersburg to visit the MAE, where they could 'learn the foundations of the most interesting of sciences—the science of man and his culture—through its collections'.³⁷ Significantly entitled *A Museum of Human Culture*, the essay popularised the Tylorian views on the evolution of cultures—endowed with a life cycle—as well as the necessity for collaboration between ethnography, ethnology, anthropology, linguistics, and archaeology in order to fully comprehend the differences in humankind. In this scenario, the exhibition of material culture played a fundamental role:

35 On this cf., for instance, Matveeva, 'Vse chelovechestvo edino', pp. 82–88. Exchanges were particularly established with the American Museum of Natural History of New York (via Franz Boas, who was in correspondence with Radlov and Shternberg, the latter of whom travelled to the USA in 1905), the Ethnographic Museum of Buenos Aires (via Juan Ambrosetti), the Museums for Ethnology of Berlin, Leipzig and Hamburg (via Hermann Meyer), and the National Museum of Natural History in Washington (via Aleš Hrdlička), cf. pp. 136–138.

36 Cvetkovski, *Empire Complex*, p. 222.

37 A. Eliseev, *Iz istorii kul'tury. Obzor etnograficheskogo i antropologicheskogo Muzeia Imperatorskoi Akademii nauk*, Saint Petersburg 1895, p. 8.

Comparing the same objects and worldly techniques, clothing, weapons, and household items from different modern cultures provides a fascinating subject for reflection and draws a complete picture of the development of these things. A collection of all kinds of utensils, ranging from the adobe pots used by primitive peoples or modern Australian ‘savages’ to Sevres porcelain, Chinese vases and crystal, as well as a collection of weapons used by ancient and modern peoples, both civilised and ‘savage’—isn’t all this a complete history of human culture in itself?³⁸

The fact that many of the MAE’s entourage, including Shternberg, had been closely associated with the populist movement and had spent their exile in Siberia in close contact with the indigenous population translated into profound sympathy towards (still) primitive peoples; thus, ‘Shternberg’s admiration for the members of tribal societies linked to each other by kinship bonds and religious ideology rather than the coercive institutions of a state, brought him closer to such French socialist ethnologists as Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss and even to Boas and the Boasians’, the latter of whom he met in the early 1900s.³⁹ Although the new anthropological school with a focus on race was gaining ground in the scholarly circles of Saint Petersburg University—particularly through the Russian Anthropological Society (RAO)—the activities of the MAE remained largely autonomous in their pursuit of evolutionary ethnography, despite the fact that several associates were also members of the RAO.⁴⁰ This approach influenced the field activities of MAE members (for example, their awareness of the need to learn the languages of the peoples they were examining), as well as the organisation and planning of the museum as a whole and its exhibitions. Until Radlov’s time, there had been no systematisation of the display order, which he considered completely outdated, especially in light of the state of European museums at the time. Thus,

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 7–8.

³⁹ Kan, *Evolutionism and Historical Particularism*, p. 29. For a detailed biography of Lev Shternberg, his adherence to the populist movement, his expeditions to the Amur region, and his work as an anthropologist and ethnographer see S. Kan, *Lev Shternberg. Anthropologist, Russian Socialist, Jewish Activist*, Lincoln-London 2009, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1dfnts6>. Cf. also *Lev Shternberg – grazhdanin, uchenyi, pedagog. K 150-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia*, Saint Petersburg 2012.

⁴⁰ Mogilner, *Homo Imperii*, p. 84.

he promoted the detailed cataloguing of thousands of objects, a project carried out by scholars such as Sergei Oldenburg, Vasilii Bartol'd, and Vladimir Bogoraz between 1898 and 1902-1903. The various materials were only organised afterwards, according to Shternberg's ideas. The initial classification was based on the geographical origin of an artefact (first its continent, then its specific country), while subsequent classifications depended on geographical, ethnic, and linguistic data. As presented in the 1904 MAE guide, objects were positioned according to an evolutionary principle within the arrangements, from the simplest to the most complex version of a given category, which was indeed one of Shternberg's theoretical standpoints.⁴¹ In a manifesto of sorts, he set out the main guidelines necessary for establishing a modern MAE-like museum: while acknowledging the difficulty of the task, he stressed the need for synergy with the archaeological and anthropological sciences, and the museum's dual function in society (to implement research activities and promote education). In Shternberg's own words:

The academic museum's primary purpose is to serve as a scientific institute and a laboratory for specialists engaged in the study of cultural history in the broadest sense of the word, an institute that should be equally important for ethnologists, archaeologists, and historians.

At the same time, the museum also fulfils an important pedagogical function. Here, teachers of ethnography can demonstrate to their students, using selected material, what they have been teaching them in the classroom.

Recently, [...] the importance of studying ethnography has become better understood in our pedagogical circles, and not only students of higher educational institutions, but also students of national universities and secondary or lower education institutes, along with their supervisors, visit the museum to study it. Thus, the museum is of pedagogical importance not only for the capital, but for Russia as a whole [...].⁴²

41 Staniukovich, *Etnograficheskaia nauka i muzei*, p. 145. For the guide, see *Putevoditel' po Muzeiu antropologii i etnografii imeni Imperatora Petra Velikogo. Otdel etnograficheskii*, Saint Petersburg 1904. Cf. also L. Shternberg, *Muzei antropologii i etnografii imeni Imperatora Petra Velikogo*, Saint Petersburg 1912, p. 462: 'For example, the weapon section would contain a special display of axes, ranging from Palaeolithic axes to the most sophisticated and modern American models. To fulfil its dual purpose, therefore, every ethnographic museum should have two special sections: one morphological and the other evolutionary'.

42 Shternberg, *Muzei antropologii i etnografii*, pp. 455-456.

According to the scholar, a museum of such proportions and scope could no longer rely solely on sporadic donations from travellers and explorers. Instead, it should promote scientific expeditions to the far corners of the world to gather knowledge about different peoples and preserve their culture amidst the relentless European expansion. Moreover, the objects acquired should be studied in their original context at first, for as long as necessary to fully comprehend their meaning within the culture in which they were created: 'Simply collecting artefacts is not enough; they must be studied comprehensively *in situ*. Studying a given collection also requires a comprehensive study of the people who created these objects. [...] The only rational approach [...] is thus to send out special expeditions. Each expedition should remain *in situ* until the nationality in question has been studied in depth, including linguistically'.⁴³ Although it was certainly an ambitious and unattainable programme, especially given the scarcity of financial resources available to the museum, it is significant for a number of reasons: the promotion of close ties between ethnography, anthropology, and archaeology; its pedagogical function, which transformed the MAE from an exclusive institution, usually frequented by the upper classes or select experts, into a public space; the firm interest in scientific research and in the importance of understanding a given culture prior to collecting its objects; the aspiration to guide long-lasting expeditions (which beforehand happened only sporadically, for instance in the case of the museum's involvement in Vasilii Junker journeys in Africa and Nikolai Miklouho-Maclay in Oceania). Indeed, in the early twentieth century the MAE successfully sponsored a number of expeditions, including Nikolai Gumilev's 1913 expedition to Ethiopia, and the 1914-1918 expedition to India and Ceylon led by Aleksandr and Liudmila Mervart, before World War I brought an end to such projects.⁴⁴

43 Ibid., p. 457.

44 Interestingly, neither Gumilev nor the Mervarts were professional ethnographers, although they had received specific training from Radlov and Shternberg prior to their departure. A brief list of early twentieth-century MAE-related expeditions is provided in P. Matveeva, "Vse chelovechestvo edino", pp. 126-128. The Mervarts' expedition and their ethnographic activities are discussed, for instance, in A. Vigasin, 'Aleksandr i Liudmila Mervart: u istokov otechestvennogo tseilonovedeniia i dravidologii', in D. Tumarkin (ed. by), *Repressirovannye etnografy*, II, Moscow 2003, pp. 375-398; N. Krasnodembskaia, 'L.Ia. Shternberg i indiiskaia ekspeditsiia MAE', in *Lev Shternberg – grazhdanin, uchenyi, pedagog*, pp. 32-65; I.

African Objects Arrive at the MAE

Although acquisitions only became more systematic from the end of the nineteenth century, collecting foreign and exotic cultures had already been a significant part of the MAE's activities from the beginning, albeit in a less intentional way. For example, the Japanese collection dates back to the *Kunstkamera's* founder, Peter I, while Chinese artefacts, which had become popular in noble households and the tsar's palaces, were soon given a dedicated section in the museum. Tibetan texts were also gathered, and artefacts from Oceania were first donated in the late 1770s by the third expedition of British explorer James Cook, followed by donations from the first Russian circumnavigation voyage (1803-1806).⁴⁵

As it was not on Russia's main routes, Africa met a somewhat different fate: the continent was represented only briefly through two small collections, apparently acquired in the late 1810s, which were lost at some point.⁴⁶ Before Vasilii Junker replenished it in the late 1870s, the MAE's African section had only received three other collections. The first one, comprising thirty-three objects of Egyptian material culture, was secured in 1838 as a gift from Christian Frähn, a German-born historian and orientalist, director of the Asiatic Museum in Saint Petersburg.⁴⁷

Kotin, N. Krasnodemskaia, and E. Soboleva, 'Pervaia russkaia etnograficheskaia ekspeditsiia na Tseilon i v Indiiu (1914-1918)', *RUDN Journal of Russian History*, 2019 (18), 3, pp. 619-641, <https://doi.org/10.22363/2312-8674-2019-18-3-619-641>

- 45 A. Sinitsyn, 'The Early Japanese Collections in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (*Kunstkamera*) of the Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg', in J. C. Baxter (ed. by), *Interpretations of Japanese Culture: Views from Russia and Japan*, Kyoto 2009, pp. 373-394; R. Berezkin, 'Chinese Objects in Eurasian Empire: On the Cultural Meaning of Chinese Art in Russia in the Late 17th-Early 18th Centuries', *Frontiers of History in China*, 2018 (13), 1, pp. 127-159, <https://doi.org/10.3868/s020-007-018-0007-7>; A. Zorin, 'The History of the First Tibetan Texts Acquired by the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences in the 18th Century', *Journal of the International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies*, 2015, 19, pp. 184-142; E. Govor, 'Oceania in Russian History: Expeditions, Collections, Museums', in L. Carreau *et al.* (ed. by), *Pacific Presences. Oceanic Art and European Museums*, I, Leiden 2018, pp. 169-195.
- 46 The most conspicuous of them (thirty-one objects) was part of the collection of Vasilii Golovnin, vice admiral and commander of the sloop *Diana*, which set out on a voyage around the world (1807-1809), and of the frigate *Kamchatka*, with which he completed a second circumnavigation (1817-1819). Cf. *Ko dnuu 70-letiiu V.V. Radlova*, Saint Petersburg 1907, p. 93.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 94. Apparently, the objects were bought in Cairo. Cf. G. Gotsko, *Istoriia otdela Afriki MAE*, in *Sobraniia Muzeia antropologii i etnografii AN SSSR: K 100-letiiu obrazovaniia pervogo akad. etnogr. tsentra*, 35, Leningrad 1980, p. 188-196 (p. 188). The collection is now available online, <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/>

The second one was the result of an exchange with the Copenhagen Museum, which provided a few items from West and Central Africa (1862). Four years later, twenty-four West African objects were gifted by French captain Léopold Garraud, who was later appointed colonial governor of Gabon (1871-1873).⁴⁸ Consisting of objects from Gabon and Cameroon, this was the first African collection at the MAE based on the material culture of Sub-Saharan Africa.⁴⁹

In the following years, there was an exponential rise in the number of African artefacts. Western explorers and colonial agents played a significant role in this process, acting as both private donors and creators of collections held in European museums that exchanged exhibits with the MAE. One such figure was the Czech explorer Emil Holub (1847-1902): after spending a total of eleven years in Southern Africa on several expeditions, Holub had amassed an impressive ethnographic collection, which he originally displayed in several temporary exhibitions, the last and most comprehensive of which took place in Prague in 1892. Unable to find a single museum willing to host his entire collection, which was criticised for being overly amateurish, Holub began to dismantle it, distributing the objects among a number of institutions around the world. For this reason, seventy-seven of the objects ended up at the MAE in 1894.⁵⁰ Following the explorer's death, his widow, Rosa Holubová, tried to sell the MAE another part of her late husband's collection in 1903—this time, however, with no success due to the museum's lack of funding.

Perhaps the most significant contribution came from Hans Meyer, a German explorer, geographer, and professor of colonial geography at the University of Leipzig since 1899. Meyer came into contact with

OBJECT?fund=26&person=3552734

48 G. Gotsko, *Istoriia ot dela Afriki MAE*, p. 188. A few items are available online, <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/OBJECT?fund=26&person=3515760>

49 Kh. Tur'inskaia, 'Kamerunskie etnograficheskie kollektsii v sobranii MAE RAN', *Afrikanskii sbornik*, 2009, pp. 156-164 (p. 157).

50 Some of them can be seen online, <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/OBJECT?fund=26&person=3513085>. On Holub cf. J. Jiroušková *et al.*, *Emil Holub's Collection in the National Museum*, Prague 2011; M. Šámal *et al.*, 'Výstava Dr. Emila Holuba v Praze v roce 1892', *Journal of National Museum, History Series*, 2012 (181), 3-4, pp. 18-34; M. Šámal, *Emil Holub. Cestovatel, etnograf, sběratel*, Prague 2023; T. Winter (ed. by), *Emil Holub*, Prague 2023. For more on Holub's African exhibitions amidst the Czech national interest in its own folk art, see also T. Winter, 'African Artefacts and Czech Folk Culture in Prague Around 1890', *World Art Studies*, 2022, pp. 143-150.

Radlov through the Russian ethnographer Bruno Adler (1874-1942), who completed his education in Leipzig before working at the MAE and being appointed extraordinary professor at the University of Kazan (1911), where he later founded the Ethnographic Museum. From the late 1880s onwards, Meyer travelled extensively throughout the newly established German East Africa, becoming, after several attempts, the first European to ever reach Kibo peak (promptly renamed after the emperor Wilhelm II) of Mount Kilimanjaro (1889), the highest 'German mountain'. A keen supporter of German colonialism, Meyer was a well-known figure in his time, when 'the "conquest" of Kilimanjaro was more than just one man's heroic adventure; it was a highly publicised event, a point of convergence for the emerging academic discipline of geography, the building of the German nation and European imperialism'.⁵¹ On his return to Germany following his successful expedition, Meyer brought with him an extensive collection of geological samples, ethnographic artefacts, plants, and insects, as well as photographs and drawings documenting African life. This vast material was quickly systematised and transformed into imperial knowledge: maps were drawn up, drawings and photographs were turned into engravings that circulated among publishing houses and journals, objects were sent to museums and universities, and travel notes were turned into books, mostly written in the style of colonial adventure novels.⁵² From 1900 onwards, Meyer began a significant collaboration with the MAE, effectively becoming its first trustee and involving also his brother Hermann, a seasoned traveller and colonial actor himself (especially with regard to Brazil). Their activities in Russia—which have not yet been extensively studied and require specific archival research—were not limited to the donation of large collections (although this was certainly one of the main long-lasting results), but also entailed providing financial support to the MAE. It was apparently Meyer—who was already embroiled in Russian affairs through the publishing house Prosveshchenie (1896-1922), which he

51 B. Michel, 'Making Mount Kilimanjaro German: Nation Building and Heroic Masculinity in the Colonial Geographies of Hans Meyer', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 2018 (44), 3, pp. 493-508 (p. 494), <https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12283>

52 *Ibid.*, p. 503.

helped found as a branch of the Bibliographisches Institut in Leipzig—who contacted Radlov with a proposition:

Your Excellency [...] has entered into negotiations with the Berlin Museum regarding the acquisition of a collection of Benin bronzes. As someone who has been collecting these remarkable and rare antiquities of the vanished Negro culture [...], I am interested in the intended acquisition by the Imperial Academy in Saint Petersburg. It would be a great pity for ethnographic science if this collection were not given to a single museum, but instead were scattered among various institutions. Therefore, I would like to offer sixteen bronzes, of which you have photographs, as a gift to the Imperial Academy.⁵³

The bronzes, alongside other artefacts from the Kilimanjaro region, officially became part of the MAE in September 1900.⁵⁴ From that point onwards, collaboration between the Meyers and the MAE could only increase. The brothers helped the museum acquire new collections from all over the world. As far as Africa is concerned, Hans donated another part of his collection to the MAE in the early 1900s, and Hermann served as the intermediary in Bruno Adler's acquisition of Alfred Mansfeld's 500-item collection from Cameroon in 1909. Mansfeld, a German doctor who first travelled to Cameroon in 1896, was stationed there as a colonial officer from 1904 to 1914. During this period, he amassed a significant collection of ethnographic and zoological specimens, which he subsequently sold to several European establishments. His correspondence with various individuals, particularly concerning the acquisition of Cameroonian artefacts by the MAE in competition with the Hamburg Ethnological Museum, provides valuable insight into the competitive nature of the trade of colonial and ethnographic collections, and demonstrates how everyday objects from other cultures were transformed into commodities with both symbolic and monetary value in the new market for which they were intended.⁵⁵ In addition to

53 Letter to Vasilii Radlov, dated 27.03.1900, cited in E. Soboleva, 'Brat'ia Gans i German Meiry kak sozidateli Muzeia antropologii i etnografii v kontse XIX – nachale XX vekov', *Rossiia i Germaniia*, 2011, 1, pp. 48-53 (p. 49).

54 The collection is now also available online: <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/ALBUM/1242134468>

55 On this cf. R. Tsogang Fossi, 'Itinerary of a Cameroon Cross River Collection in Art Market Networks. An Analysis of Transaction Correspondence between Hamburg-Berlin-Leipzig', *Journal for Art Market Studies*, 2020 (4), 1, <https://doi.org/10.23690/jams.v4i1.101>. In fact, the entire issue is dedicated to African collections on the

supporting the MAE's acquisition of the Mansfeld collection, Hermann Meyer contributed to the purchase of approximately 1,200 woven items from the Upper Congo region in 1910, which had previously been stored at the Stockholm Museum.⁵⁶ Over the years, the Meyers also donated substantial sums of money, which were used to fund ethnographic expeditions and modernise the museum's furniture and interiors. In recognition of their ongoing support for the MAE, they were awarded several honours and were appointed to its trustee board.⁵⁷

In addition to those of Holub and the Meyers, another significant collection of more than 200 Akamba artefacts assembled by the Swedish ethnographer Gerhard Lindblom was acquired from the Stockholm Museum in 1913 as part of duplicate exchanges. Before becoming director of the Stockholm Museum and a professor at Stockholm University, Lindblom travelled through eastern Kenya (1911-1912) to make ethnographic observations through fieldwork. He documented his experiences in a book entitled *The Akamba in British East Africa*, and also wrote fiction set in Africa. In the eyes of Radlov and Shternberg, the Stockholm collection presented a valuable opportunity to expand the MAE's African collection, which had been recognised as an autonomous entity under the title of 'African Section' in 1911 (*otdel Afriki*).⁵⁸ Thanks

trade market. In 1912, another part of the Mansfeld collection was purchased by Jan Czekanowski from the Berlin Museum, which sold him 544 objects (duplicates) for around 2,200 marks through Bernhard Ankermann. Cf. E. Soboleva, *Afrika v Muzei antropologii i etnografii (konets XIX v. – 1920-e gody): kollektsii i sotrudniki*, in *Afrikanistika v MAE RAN: k iubileinym datam*, Saint Petersburg 2021, p. 20.

56 Soboleva, *Brat'ia Gans i German Meiery*, p. 52; Soboleva, *Afrika v Muzei antropologii i etnografii*. It was customary for museums to exchange objects with one another, utilising the duplicates to acquire new specimens that were not yet represented in their own holdings. For more information on the international trade and exchange of African objects, see the special issue 'Africa: Trade, Traffic and Collections', ed. by F. Bodenstein, *Journal for Art Market Studies*, 2020 (4), 1.

57 Soboleva, *Brat'ia Gans i German Meiery*; Kh. Tur'inskaia, *Kamerunskie etnograficheskie kollektsii*, pp. 158-159; Matveeva, "Vse chelovechestvo edino", pp. 165-167. Part of Meyer and Mansfeld collections is available online: <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/OBJECT?fund=26&person=3515208>; <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/OBJECT?fund=26&person=222>

58 On the exchanges between the MAE and the Stockholm Museum cf. E. Soboleva, 'Perepiska L.Ia. Shternberga i K.V. Khartmanna kak istochnik po istorii kollektsii Peterburgskogo i Stokgol'mskogo etnograficheskikh muzeev', in *Lev Shternberg – grazhdanin, uchenyi, pedagog*, pp. 96-119. On Lindblom, cf. W. Östberg, "He who carries the spear" – Gerhard Lindblom's Fieldwork in Eastern Kenya. 1911-1912', *Manuscripta Orientalia*, 2010 (16), 2, pp. 35-48. Cf. also U. Hannerz, 'Swedish

to the MAE's collaboration with museums in Berlin, Leipzig, Hamburg (which granted the MAE part of Leo Frobenius's collection gathered in West Sudan, among other artefacts), Munich and so forth, other duplicates were also being acquired consistently.⁵⁹ In exchange, the MAE was usually requested to provide Siberian or Central Asian artefacts.

The constant trade between the MAE and its European counterparts, backed by the intense scholarly relationships established between specialists of different countries, was not the only way in which the MAE's African collection grew. Russian subjects were indeed integral to the process, particularly (though not exclusively) with regard to Ethiopia. Undoubtedly, the first significant Russian contribution to the creation of the museum's African section came from Vasilii Junker's 1879 Central African collection, comprising approximately 1,900 objects. Its impact was immediately recognised (and amplified) within the MAE, where it was swiftly associated with a rhetoric of Russian grandeur, according to which Russia was not far behind Europe. In a formal document, it was recognised that

[...] In spite of our remote geographical position in relation to Africa, we had the good fortune to establish ourselves, from the very beginning, if not above all the major Western European museums, at least alongside them, thanks to Dr Junker. A native of Saint Petersburg and one of the most famous African travellers, he brought the entire collection he had amassed in Central and Northern Africa to our museum as a gift.⁶⁰

Similarly, and not without some exaggeration, Fedor Litke, the then president of the Russian Academy of Sciences, wrote to the Minister of Public Education that

Until now, the Academy's ethnographic collections contained only a small number of objects from Africa, specifically from its Western coast, which was well-known to Europeans and frequently visited by their

Anthropology in the Rear View Mirror: Before 1960', *Kritisk etnografi. Swedish Journal of Anthropology*, 2023 (6), 1, pp. 81-106, <https://doi.org/10.33063/diva-497389>

59 The list is detailed in E. Soboleva, *Afrika v muzee antropologii i etnografii*. The exchange of duplicates and the acquisition of pieces from foreign museums' collections did not involve only African artefacts. The same procedure has been noted with regard to Oceania, for instance Cf. Govor, *Oceania in Russian History*.

60 SPbF ARAN, f. 2, op. 1 (1878), d. 6, l. 32-32 ob., quoted in Soboleva, *Afrika v Muzei antropologii i etnografii*, p. 10.

ships. This represented the most tangible gap in our collection. However, thanks to Mr Junker's generous donation, the African section has grown so much that it is now one of the best parts of the collection.⁶¹

Within this rhetoric, Junker's efforts could grant Russia a degree of primacy in an area (colonialism in Africa) which had traditionally been a Western monopoly. A first rough description of the collection divided the items into the following categories: skulls of inhabitants of the Upper Nile and their everyday accessories; objects belonging to Arab tribes in Sudan and to the 'negroes of North-Eastern and Central Africa'; an Egyptian mummy from Thebes; and photographs depicting the various 'types' of African peoples.⁶² After spending several years behind closed doors due to a lack of suitable spaces, Junker's collection was displayed in the first permanent exhibition held in the new building on Tamozhennyi Lane. Curated by the ethnographer Fedor Russov, the exhibition was finalised in 1889 after receiving the formal approval of Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich. However, it did not open to the public until 1891 due to a lack of funds to pay the museum guards.

The items, sorted into main sections according to their provenance, rather than by their respective collectors (with the exceptions of Miklouho-Maclay and Junker) were displayed in two rooms, the first one containing material culture from Russia, Asia, Africa, and Australia, the second one featuring objects from the Americas, as well as skulls, skeletons, and casts of the various human 'races'. This was indeed the first opportunity to present such an eclectic collection to the public, particularly with regard to Africa. The fact that Junker's collection was not limited to Northern Africa—the region that was best known and most widely studied—but instead provided insights into the peoples of Central Africa, including the 'exotic', 'fascinating', and 'obscure' Aka people and Azande, made it especially valuable. Weapons, musical instruments, clothes, jewels, talismans, ritual masks, tableware, utensils, and wooden human figurines were complemented by the

61 Quoted in Gotsko, *Istoriia ot dela Afriki MAE*, p. 189.

62 A. Sobchenko, 'Etnograficheskaia kollektsiia V.V. Iunkera po narodam Afriki v sobraniakh Muzeia antropologii i etnografii', *Sbornik muzeia antropologii i etnografii*, 1953, 15, pp. 411–447 (pp. 415–416). The skulls were later moved to the Anthropology section (*otdel*), while the mummy was moved to the Hermitage.

visual representations of their sublimated creators: staged ethnographic photographs, most likely taken in studios.⁶³

The Collection Grows: A Reading Through the Museum Guides and Beyond

Evidently, not all of Junker's items were on display due to the limited space, which meant that a selection had to be made. This opens the question of the dichotomy between the MAE's collections in their own right and what visitors could really see, which was only a fraction of the total material. The dichotomy became even more evident in the following years, when other collections gathered by Russian subjects began to implement the African section. A useful resource for understanding the evolution of the exhibition are the museum's guides (*putevoditeli*), which are particularly insightful as they provide a glimpse into the curators' involvement with their audience. The first to appear, in conjunction with the opening of the MAE to the public, was the 1891 guide edited by Russov: a seventy-page booklet created to counterbalance the absence of captions or explanations on the shelves and in the cabinets. It soon became a staple and was constantly updated in line with the growth of the exhibition and its reorganisation. The guides could be purchased at the entrance for around thirty kopeks and could easily be carried around by visitors, being the only tool available to provide information on the displayed pieces.⁶⁴ They did not feature any images, but comprised dense lists of artefacts, occasionally accompanied by brief information on their geographical region of origin, destination, or use; this kind of data became increasingly detailed over the years. From the outset, they were never intended to be scientifically accurate: 'This publication is not

63 Junker's collection is partially available online: <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/OBJECT?fund=26&person=3509185>; <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/OBJECT?fund=44&person=3509185>. For a description of the collection, cf. A. Sobchenko, 'Etnograficheskaia kollektsiia V.V. Iunkera po narodam Afriki'; A. Sobchenko, 'Kollektsiia V.V. Iunkera po pigmeiam v sobraniakh Muzeia antropologii i etnografii', *Sbornik Muzeia antropologii i etnografii*, 1955, 16, pp. 308-321.

64 A brief discussion on such guides is provided in M. K. Franz, 'A Visitor's Guide to Shamans and Shamanism. The Kunstkamera's Russian and Asian Ethnographic Collections in the Late Imperial Era', *Sibirica*, 2020 (19), 1, pp. 41-56, <https://doi.org/10.3167/sib.2020.190104>

a scientific description of the collections (it would take years to compile such a catalogue); it is simply an index of the ethnographic collection on display', was clearly stated at the time.⁶⁵

As far as the African section is concerned, the 1891 guide explicitly cited only the name of Junker, and said nothing about the provenance of the other items. For example, no information was provided about the collector(s) of the weapons, jewellery, cutlery, and musical instruments that were showcased in the first cabinet, which was devoted to the 'Negroes of the Gulf of Guinea coast'—even though the exoticism of toponyms such as 'Dahomey' or 'Ashanti Empire' definitely made the cabinet intriguing to the public. Similarly, the guide explicitly marked a shelf containing objects from Northern Egypt as not being part of Junker's collection, without making the actual collector known.⁶⁶ Apart from these two cases, the rest of the African section comprised objects donated exclusively by Junker, while his photographic material was not included in the exhibition. The section hosted a dozen cabinets, five showcases and a few shelf units. In addition to the aforementioned items from undeclared collectors, it displayed the material culture of 'Negroes from East and Central Africa', the Azande people ('Niam Niam'), the Mangbetu (also known as the 'Monbuttu'), 'Arab tribes', the Abyssinians, the Aka and other unspecified peoples. Occasionally, when an item was particularly cumbersome, it was simply placed near a cabinet.

On a few occasions, the guide provided more than just a list of objects, offering some kind of explanation or evaluation ('people of wealth and importance do not leave without such a bench, carried behind them by a man', 'rattles made from turtle skulls are worn around the neck and are also attached to the neck of animals in the form of bells', 'a fearsome throwing weapon of the Niam Niam, called *pinga*, consisting of several blades arranged in opposition to each other. When released from the hand, the *pinga* is given a horizontally twirling motion, like a boomerang. Usually, the *pinga* is used like a sickle-shaped weapon.

65 SPbFA RAN, f. 142, op. 1, ed. khr. 53, l. 64, quoted in E. Sherstennikova, 'Rabota s posetiteliami v Muzee antropologii i etnografii v kontse XIX – nachale XX v.', *Molodezhnyi vestnik SPbGIK*, 2018 (9), 1, pp. 151-154 (p. 152).

66 *Putevoditel' po muzeiu Imperatorskoi akademii nauk po antropologii i etnografii*, Saint Petersburg 1891, pp. 31, 38.

Two *pingas* are attached to the inner side of a wicker shield', 'The reed arrows used by the Bongo, Mittu and Monbuttu tribes are evidence of their advanced iron production techniques, but also of their extreme cruelty').⁶⁷ Thus, despite its overall conciseness, the guide also helped shape the visitors' perception of Africa, even offering accounts of the ferocity of its inhabitants.

Over the next few years, the African section remained substantially the same, with the 1898 guide reflecting only two major new contributions: the collections of Emil Holub and Nikolai Leont'ev. Due to the vagueness of the guide, it is not possible to determine the exact number of objects from Holub's collection that were displayed. However, it is certain that more than thirty items made it to the exhibition, representing a previously absent area of Africa (the south). Among the Bantu and 'Bushmen' material culture specimens, three animal-themed petroglyphs were particularly valuable due to their rarity and antiquity, and were explicitly praised by the guide. On his part, Leont'ev's name, the third to be reported in the booklet alongside Junker and Holub, was linked to his first Abyssinian collection, which he brought back in 1895 and donated to the MAE.⁶⁸ While it is unclear exactly how many of the 104 items were on display, it is certain that visitors could see a large number of Abyssinian jewels and weapons. During his subsequent visits to Ethiopia, Leont'ev continued to collect various objects, amassing an impressive collection of over 1,000 items. However, these were not destined for the MAE immediately, but were originally intended for a much broader international audience, that of the 1900 Paris Exposition. Surprisingly, Leont'ev did not participate in the exposition with his compatriots in the Russian pavilion, but instead presented the artefacts he had collected in Ethiopia in the pavilion of colonial France. The inclusion of Ethiopia in the French division was surprising in itself, given that it was not a French colony. However, this part of the exhibition also included territories with which France simply had some involvement. Due to its proximity to Djibouti, which

67 *Putevoditel'*, 1891, pp. 32, 33, 35, 40-41.

68 *Putevoditel' po muzeiu Imperatorskoi akademii nauk po antropologii i etnografii*, Saint Petersburg 1898, p. 68. Another name that was mentioned was that of a certain 'Liander', who was responsible for a smaller collection of Cameroonian objects, including idols.

had already become a French colony, Ethiopia was very much on the French radar. Among the other display cases, 'In the vestibule, Count Léontieff exhibited wild animal skins, weapons, photographs, [...] and, in particular, a superb sheaf of elephant teeth worth over 600,000 francs'.⁶⁹ The collection earned Leont'ev a gold medal,⁷⁰ and was also mentioned in the popular press: for instance, *L'Exposition en famille*, an illustrated periodical that covered various pavilions and events of the exposition, included a chapter entitled *Other Small Frances*, which recounted that

This pavilion is reserved for French establishments scattered all over the world, including in Obock, Mayotte, Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, Tahiti, and other islands in Oceania. [...] Obock opens the series with a fine exhibition showcasing the Ethiopian Empire. Abyssinians products are extremely rich, and we can foresee the great expansion that this country will undergo when, with the help of the great French and Russian civilisers, Negus Menelik will succeed in establishing extensive communication routes. [...] In the display cases, I admire the weapons, jewellery and ornaments from the collections of Prince Henri d'Orléans and Mr Léontieff. The photographs and plans are informative. They are in every room. There are even mutoscopes showing scenes of native life, that can be operated free of charge.⁷¹

Clearly, not only was Leont'ev's collection mentioned and well received, but the civilising role of Russia was also recognised alongside that of France: the reader was encouraged to believe that Menelik's Ethiopia could only have become a great economic force thanks to these two powers. Leont'ev's photographs were perhaps the items of the collection that circulated the most among the public at that time, given that they were included in Iulii Elets' retelling of Leont'ev's adventures in Abyssinia (1898). Following the conclusion of the Paris Exposition, Leont'ev opted to donate his entire collection to the Russian Museum; however, it was not until 1925 that the items were transferred to the MAE.

The 1900 guide reveals the significant inclusion of the Ethiopian collection of Anatolii Gudzenko (1868-?), a Russian officer, traveller, and

69 J. Charles-Roux, *Exposition universelle de 1900. Les colonies françaises. L'organisation et le fonctionnement de l'exposition des colonies et pays de protectorat. Rapport general*, Paris 1902, pp. 187-188.

70 Ibid., p. 452.

71 'L'Exposition en famille. Revue illustrée de l'Exposition universelle de 1900', 05.06.1900, pp. 169-170.

member of the Red Cross mission to Ethiopia, in the exhibition. However, it was placed in a separate section that hosted new acquisitions from all over the world. Gudzenko's collection included everyday objects, manuscripts, weapons, jewellery, clothes, musical instruments, and even photos which, unlike in other cases, were displayed alongside the artefacts.

With the exception of Gudzenko—who continued to collaborate with the MAE on the occasion of other travels (for instance, to China)—no significant additions were made to the African exhibition in the subsequent years. However, its overall rearrangement, caused by the museum's expansion to four rooms (which resulted in the relocation of African artefacts to the fourth room alongside items from Indonesia, Polynesia, and Australia), determined a more structured subdivision of the objects according to the region of the continent and then to the ethnicity of the people who had made them. The MAE's expansion had an impact on the overall configuration of the exhibition, too: while in the past the first room was occupied by specimens from within the Russian borders (something that was unusual in itself, given that the most prominent European ethnographic museums adopted an evolutionary order from the most primitive regions of the world to the most developed), and the last place was held by the Americas, now the exhibition opened precisely with the Americas, then shifted to Asia, Oceania, and Africa.

In addition to disclosing this shift, the 1904 guide marked a departure from its precursors, as it incorporated a page and a half of commentary on Africa and information regarding some of the populations whose artefacts were on display. The guide was thus evolving into an increasingly didactic instrument designed for the untrained visitor who, instead of the minimal captions present in previous editions, now had a more comprehensive context within which to appreciate the objects on display. The broad educational nature of the guide, which was not intended for a specialised audience of scholars, is evidenced by the overall vagueness of the commentary, as well as by its generalisations and arbitrary nature. Thus, the 'Bushmen' were said to lead 'a miserable existence' (*zhalkoe sushestvovanie*), but 'despite their low level of culture, their drawings engraved on the rocks are striking'; the Mangbetu 'are the most cultured Negro people, but they practice cannibalism'; the 'Niam Niam' are 'a warlike and musical people who practice cannibalism', while the Cameroonians are deemed to have been spoilt by contact with Europeans

(‘long years of contact with Europeans made them a trading nation and contributed not insignificantly to the corruption of their customs’).⁷² In the introductory paragraphs, special attention was given to explaining visitors the most recent ‘discoveries’ (*izyskaniia*) regarding the African population, which was divided into three main groups: ‘1) the native Negro races; 2) the Hamites, who migrated in ancient times; 3) the Semites, who arrived in historical times’. The various peoples (the terms *rasa* and *narod* are used interchangeably) are characterised in more detail:

The oldest inhabitants of Africa and its original population are most likely the light-brown, small-statured Hottentots and Bushmen, who were pushed to the southern end of the continent and resemble the dwarf tribes of Central Africa, the so-called Pygmies. The nucleus of the population is made up of ‘Ethiopian-type’ Negroes, who now occupy most of the continent. This type is characterised by dark brown skin, woolly hair, prominent cheekbones, thick lips, and a flattened nose.

Even if the population had largely mixed over time, due to the lack of geographical borders in Africa, ‘the Negroes of Africa constitute a single race, for the predominant and most persistent racial traits are the connecting thread between the various Negro tribes’, while language seemed to be the most obvious dividing element. The introduction concluded with an interesting remark that effectively placed Africa at a higher level of civilisation than Australia, which was located immediately before it: ‘Passing from our Australian collections, which belong to a stone culture, to those of Africa, it is clear that Africa, culturally speaking, belongs entirely to the iron culture’.⁷³ Thus, while the evolutionary principle could be applied to the arrangement of objects within a given cabinet, it was not intended as the basis for the exhibition as a whole, nor was it implemented in subsequent years. Even Shternberg’s 1912 manifesto, previously cited, noted the fluctuating nature of the entire exhibition, which alternated between levels of civilisation.

Although it was not explicitly mentioned in the guides, in 1905 the MAE also acquired the collection of 41 objects retrieved by Aleksandr Miagkov during the 1904 Russian geological expedition to Ethiopia, led

72 *Putevoditel’ po muzeiu Imperatorskoi akademii nauk po antropologii i etnografii*, Saint Petersburg 1904, pp. 176, 177, 189-190.

73 The quotes are all from *Putevoditel’*, 1904, pp. 173-174.

by Nikolai Kurmakov.⁷⁴ Miagkov (1870-1957), a mining engineer born in a prominent family of the Kostroma governorate who in his youth held close the ideals of the populist movement, had already participated in geological expeditions to Siberia and Manchuria prior to his experience in Ethiopia. Apparently, his activity as a collector was not exclusively driven by personal interest, but to some extent was moulded by the MAE, which gave him an 'excavation permit' (*otkrytyi list*) to retrieve ethnographic and zoological specimens.⁷⁵ Among the various objects from everyday life, a series of clay figurines—fetishes which Miagkov took from a sanctuary in the Welega province—stands out.⁷⁶ Despite their obvious relevance, the guidebooks suggest that the clay figures, and indeed the entire Miagkov's collection, were not exhibited in the cabinets devoted to Abyssinia until perhaps 1911-1912.⁷⁷ Nor were the 166 photographs taken by several members of the expedition, which did not reach the MAE until 1928, when they were purchased from a bookshop in Saint Petersburg.⁷⁸

From 1896 and up until 1911, the African collection had been managed by Evgeniia Petri (1858-1923), the estranged wife of the more renowned

74 See Chapter 1. The collection is partly available online, <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/OBJECT?fund=26&person=3517428>

75 Gotsko, *Istoriia otдела Afriki* MAE, p. 191.

76 V. Semenova, 'Ethiopian Photo Collections 1896-1913: Some Aspects of Arrangement, Attribution and Interpretation', *African Research and Documentation*, 2019, 135, pp. 71-85 (p. 79), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305862X00023906>

77 The 1912 guidebook references 'clay hut tops and ancestral and animal figures' in the section devoted to the Oromo ('Galla'), though the collector's name is not provided. Cf. Ia. Chekanovskii, *Putevoditel' po Muzeiu antropologii i etnografii imeni Imperatora Petra Velikogo. Afrika*, Saint Petersburg 1912, p. 23.

78 V. Semenova, *Ethiopian Photo Collections*, pp. 78-79. It was precisely during this period that Miagkov's collection began to gain recognition among scholars, cf. for instance D. Ol'derogge, *Gliiane figurizy iz iugo-zapadnoi Abissinii (predstavleno akademikom E.F. Karskim v zasedanii Otdeleniia Gumanitarnykh Nauk 24 oktiabria 1928 goda)*, in *Sbornik Muzeia antropologii i etnografii*, VIII, Leningrad 1929, pp. 324-329. It is quite peculiar that the interest in Miagkov's collection emerged at a time when he was already living abroad. Indeed, the revolution found him living in Ukraine for work purposes. After being arrested by Petliura's followers for being a *moskal* and narrowly avoiding execution, he lived with his family in Zhytomyr for two more years. In 1920, the family decided to emigrate and settled in Prague, where Miagkov died, after spending time in other parts of Europe, including Poland, where his brother-in-law Boris Savinkov, a former terrorist from Narodnaia Volia and now a member of the White movement, was living. For more information on the family's experiences before and after emigration, see the testimony of Miagkov's daughter, Lidiia Uspenskaia: S. Chuikina, 'Interv'iu s Lidiei Aleksandrovnoi Uspenskoii (1906 g. r., urozhdennoi Miagkovoi)', *Ab Imperio*, 2004, 1, pp. 309-356.

Eduard, who also ran the Indonesian, Oceanian, and Indian collections. Born in Simferopol, where she studied before completing her education in Saint Petersburg and Bern, Evgeniia Petri was employed by the MAE in 1896. Although she specialised in the Oceanian collections,⁷⁹ she also worked hard to expand the other collections she was in charge of—managing the correspondence with European museums, registering items, and spending time abroad in order to familiarise herself with foreign collections and institutions. Her letters from this period further clarify the circulation of ethnographic objects within European and Russian establishments, and reveal how the artefacts, and these institutions themselves, were perceived by the scholar. In 1906, after visiting several German museums, she wrote to Radlov, praising the Berlin collection of African and Oceanic artefacts, which she was able to examine in its entirety thanks to the director, Felix von Luschan, who showed her items that were usually unavailable to the public. At the same time, however, she criticised the way the artefacts were displayed, stating that ‘the material is haphazardly displayed, the collections overlap and the cupboards are very crowded’.⁸⁰ A few days later, she reported on a successful acquisition from the Leipzig Museum: ‘We received, among other things, several spiked idols from the Loango Coast, which are rare specimens in general, and something else, also, from the same region: splendid dancing masks (wicker), and an expensive (100 marks) negro dancing ornament (East Africa). All in all, including the weapons, there are around 100 items’.⁸¹ As a matter of fact, it was under Petri that the MAE stepped up its exchanges with Western museums, acquiring several collections from the Congo, Guinea, Western Sudan, and Cameroon. Typically, the original collectors were not listed in the guidebooks. An exception, due to his notoriety, was Leo Frobenius, whose items from the West African expedition (1907–1909) were acquired from Leipzig in exchange for objects from the Russian North.

Petri’s involvement with the African collection came to an end in late 1910, after Radlov decided to strengthen the MAE’s team by hiring five new specialists. The specialist assigned to work on the African collection was

79 Petri also authored the 1914 guidebook dedicated to the Oceania section, cf. E. Petri, *Putevoditel’ po Muzeiu antropologii i etnografii imeni Imperatora Petra Velikogo. Okeania*, Petrograd 1914.

80 Letter to V. Radlov, 28.06.1906, quoted in Soboleva, *Afrika v muzee antropologii i etnografii*, p. 14.

81 Quoted in *ibid.*

Jan Czekanowski, who had gained widespread recognition in Europe for his museum expertise and his ethnographic and anthropological studies, following his participation in the Duke of Mecklenburg's expedition to German East Africa (1907-1909). Born in the Russian Partition of Poland in 1882 to a family of Polish and German descent, Czekanowski had a truly international background. After attending school in Warsaw and Libau, he enrolled at the University of Zurich to study physical anthropology, anatomy, and ethnography. He also gave lectures on the measurement and statistics of human skulls. Shortly after earning his PhD, he was offered by von Luschan a position at the Royal Museum of Ethnology in Berlin (1906), where he began working in the Department of Africa and Oceania while continuing his mathematical studies at university. His accomplishments and passion prompted von Luschan to encourage Czekanowski's participation in von Mecklenburg's expedition to Central Africa. This endeavour was very much in the public eye, as its high cost and general scope were at the centre of heated debates in the press. Indeed, apart from the ten specialists who were to conduct research in various branches of science (ethnography, anthropology, zoology, geology, and so forth), an astonishing number of African crew members (between 650 and 800 people) were employed. The overall costs, covered by the African fund of the Reichskolonialamt, by scientific institutions (such as the Berlin Museum of Ethnology) and private donors, was estimated to be between 110,000 and 200,000 marks.⁸² Meyer was among those who expressed support for the expedition, further emphasising the scientific significance of the undertaking in his newspaper, the *Tägliche Rundschau*. Czekanowski, who was granted a stipend by the government, was tasked with 'acquiring and describing crafts, tools, weapons, costumes, ornaments, sending them to Berlin, and documenting his work by several means including photographs (on glass plates) and recordings (on phonograph rolls)'.⁸³ Over the course of two years, he

82 Cf. C. Stelzig and K. Adler, 'On the Preconditions, Circumstances and Consequences of Collecting. Jan Czekanowski and the Duke of Mecklenburg's Expedition to Central Africa, 1907-8', *Journal of the History of Collection*, 2000 (12), 2, pp. 161-176 (pp. 163-164), <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhc/12.2.161>. On Czekanowski's activities, especially in relation to museums and the impact he had on international scholarship (though the Russian Empire is not considered), cf. A. Jones (ed. by), *Jan Czekanowski. Africanist Ethnographer and Physical Anthropologist in Early Twentieth-Century Germany and Poland*, Leipzig 2002.

83 J. Bar and M. Tymowski, 'Jan Czekanowski, a Polish Anthropologist between Two Eras of European Cultural History', in *Bérose—Encyclopédie internationale des histoires*

amassed a collection of over 4,000 ethnographic objects, 700 photographs, 87 phonograms, more than 1,000 skulls, and 36 plaster casts of human faces. In addition, he recorded the measurements of 4,500 individuals.⁸⁴ His impressive findings were published in a series of studies in which he tackled various aspects of local cultures, such as rituals, traditions, society, languages, folklore, and political organisation, despite being primarily a physical anthropologist.⁸⁵ Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the MAE was interested in adding not only a recognised scholar to its personnel, but also someone who had gained experience in the field, was a collector himself, and had direct knowledge of Africa—at least its German parts. Following Radlov's recommendation and with the approval of the majority of the Historical-Philological Department of the Imperial Academy of Sciences (IFO IAN), Czekanowski was appointed junior custodian of the MAE's African collection. He held this position from late 1910 until 1913, when he became a professor of anthropology at the University of Lwów.

During this short period, he used his extensive network of contacts at European research institutions and museums to significantly expand the MAE's African collection through a variety of acquisitions. It was during his time that the African department (*otdel*) was properly established within the museum, and Czekanowski himself wrote the guidebook for the newly opened room devoted entirely to Africa. It is a valuable source of information not only on how this section was organised, but also on the theoretical framework used by Czekanowski to contextualise the collection and illustrate it to the public. As in the previous cases, the guidebook was sold at the entrance for ten kopeks.⁸⁶ Having emphasised the challenging circumstances faced by the MAE, which was dependent on third- or even fourth-hand collections, Czekanowski proceeded to provide an overview of the African continent, adopting an anthropological perspective before considering linguistic and ethnographic aspects. His studies as a physical anthropologist are clearly evident and add a new dimension to the guidebook. For instance,

de l'anthropologie, Paris 2023, <https://www.berose.fr/article2971.html?lang=fr>

84 Ibid. Czekanowski's collection was divided between the Berlin and the Leipzig Museums.

85 Ibid. He also wrote a diary, cf. J. Czekanowski, *Dziennik kolumny antropologiczno-etnologicznej ekspedycji do Afriki Środkowej w latach 1907-1909*, I-II, ed. by J. Bar and M. Tymowski, Kraków 2023.

86 Cf. Soboleva, *Afrika v muzei antropologii i etnografii*, p. 19.

he stated that 'The central part of the continent west of the Nile', in itself an 'enormous anthropological province', 'is inhabited by dark-skinned, muscular, short-legged, broad-shouldered and short-headed elements'; similarly, 'The area south of the Congo Basin and Lake Victoria is inhabited by tall, well-built dolichocephalic people. The northern and north-eastern parts of the African mainland are occupied by medium to long-headed, long-faced and narrow-nosed populations, characterised, in addition, by even lighter skin tones. [...] The Mediterranean coast forms a separate anthropological province, closer to southern Europe'.⁸⁷ The scholar underlined the importance of combining anthropological observations with linguistic and ethnographic ones—the only way, in his opinion, to gain a comprehensive understanding of a given territory. This is why he first addressed the spread of languages across the continent before dwelling in some detail on the ethnography of the various peoples: 'The inhabitants of the African continent are not a culturally homogeneous group. On the contrary, if we consider the spread of various spiritual and material cultural phenomena among them, such as weapons, household utensils, buildings, jewellery and customs, we will find a number of cultural provinces that differ greatly from each other'.⁸⁸ He then proceeded by recounting the specificities of each culture, noting for instance that 'Abyssinia, with the Somali peninsula, forms a sharply distinguished cultural province, very rich in Asian elements; it is characterised by: round leather shields, head benches, swords, the harp, and the practice of circumcision', while 'the west African cultural province stands out the most. It is characterised by the four-cornered hut, the bow with an oblong cross-section and a rattan bowstring, [...] the wooden signal drum, the west African guitar, [...] and circumcision', and 'the western Sudanese area is distinguished from the rest by the abundance of Indian elements. Here it is worth noting the familiarity with the bronze technique [...]'.⁸⁹ This overview concluded with a few paragraphs devoted to the history of the migrations within the continent, which determined the current distribution of the various 'types'. A table showing combinations of 'anthropological types', 'languages', and 'cultural provinces' was also included, along with

87 Chekanovskii, *Putevoditel'*, p. 4.

88 Ibid., pp. 5-6.

89 Ibid., pp. 6-7.

two maps to help visitors visualise the linguistic distribution and the ‘distribution of African cultural phenomena’ (i.e., where swords, ‘Zulu’ shields, four-cornered huts, and so forth are used).

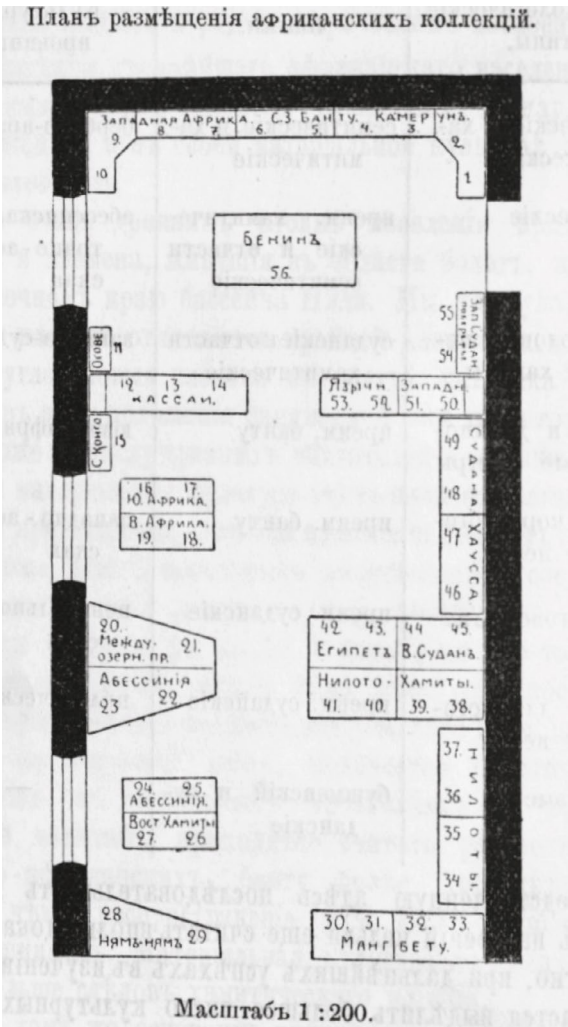


Fig. 4.1 ‘Plan for the Display of the African Collection’, in Ia. Chekanovskii, *Putevoditel’ po Muzeiu antropologii i etnografii imeni Imperatora Petra Velikogo. Afrika*, Saint Petersburg 1912, p. 10.

Czekanowski then began to describe the new exhibition, providing a useful plan that shed light on the actual structure and order of the African room. A significant renovation was evident: upon entering

the room, visitors had to proceed counter-clockwise, beginning with the West African display cases on their right. They would then have encountered display cases dedicated to Central, Southern, and Eastern Africa. They would have paused to view the artefacts from Abyssinia and the 'Niam Niam' and Mangbetu peoples, before moving on to those from the Nile peoples of Egypt and Eastern Sudan. The exhibition concluded with artefacts from West Sudan, Guinea, and Benin, which were displayed in a case immediately opposite the entrance door. In this way, both the visitor's experience and the display of the African cultures came full circle. In comparison with previous editions, Czekanowski paid more attention to providing brief descriptions and characterisations of the various peoples cited, as well as listing African tribal names unfamiliar to visitors. Interestingly, he did not shy away from highlighting the museum's deficiencies; in fact, he seemed keen to inform the public that there was still much to be done to turn the MAE into a proper ethnographic museum that could compete with its Western counterparts. Thus, he revealed that 'The negro population of central Sudan is represented in the Museum only by collections from its southern representatives. Only Niam Niam and Mangbetu are represented in the Museum. The large tribes of the centre, such as the Banda and the Isakara, are not represented at all, nor are there any collections from the Chad basin',⁹⁰ while the Gulf of Guinea was represented only through Dahomeyan and Liberian artefacts, the pagan tribes of western Sudan—still under-researched—were represented only by Togo, and so forth. Although it may seem strange that the guidebook emphasised what the MAE did not possess, this was probably an attempt to defend the entire department against potential criticism, particularly from specialists who were familiar with the undoubtedly richer European collections. As in previous versions, only a few collectors' names ended up being quoted in the guidebook: Mansfeld, Garraud, Holub, Junker, R. P. L. Embile, Hans Meyer, Gudzenko, Leont'ev, Vorob'ev (for the Egyptian section), and Frobenius. In all the other cases, Czekanowski either wrote down the European provenance of the objects ('German museums', for example), or resorted to the term *sbornaia kollektsiia*, which can be roughly translated as 'assembled collection'.

90 Ibid., p. 27.

The guide, which was apparently in high demand, contained inconsistencies between the numbering and the actual display cases, and it was reprinted in 1918 after being properly edited and updated. By that time, Czekanowski had already left Russia and devoted himself to the ethnogenesis of the Slavs, a subject that occupied him during the second half of his career. Upon Czekanowski's departure from the MAE, the African department was once again placed under the direction of Evgeniia Petri, who continued to lead it until 1918, promoting further acquisitions. The years 1913-1914 were particularly fruitful for the MAE, as it obtained two important collections: one from Ethiopia and the other from Algeria. These collections were the result of two expeditions organised by the MAE itself, led by Nikolai Gumilev and Sigizmund Smogorzhevski (Zygmunt Smogorzewski), respectively.⁹¹ Furthermore, the doctor Aleksandr Kokhanovskii had just returned in 1913 after spending around eight years in Ethiopia, bringing back 241 objects and more than a thousand negatives which were promptly donated to the MAE. In addition to the artefacts, he also amassed a valuable collection of manuscripts and Abyssinian art; some of the paintings found their way to the MAE, while others were purchased by private collectors, including the renowned Egyptologist Boris Turaev (1868-1920). Interestingly, many of the paintings circulated also outside the museum or Turaev's own home: indeed, the scholar devoted a publication to describing them and reproduced thirty of them in black and white at the end of the article. Recognising the current worldwide interest in Abyssinian painting, Turaev subdivided Kokhanovskii's collection into three main categories, i.e. 'paintings of religious content executed in the traditional style' (though some of them already showed Western influences), 'images of a secular nature, also in the traditional

91 Zygmunt Smogorzewski (1884-1931) was born into a Polish family in the Kaunas Governorate. He spent his childhood in Saint Petersburg, where his father was stationed, and graduated from Saint Petersburg University with a degree in Oriental Studies in 1909. He became a professor a few years later. In 1912, he undertook a scientific mission, first to France and southern Italy and then to Algeria, where he also served as vice-consul for Russia. During his time there, he made several scientific observations and collected local artefacts and valuable manuscripts. Along with Jan Czekanowski, Smogorzewski went on to establish the Polish Oriental Society in 1922. Cf. A. Chodubski, 'Zygmunt Smogorzewski', *Internetowy Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, <https://www.ipsb.nina.gov.pl/a/biografia/zygmunt-smogorzewski>

style, depicting scenes from contemporary court and military life, portraits and so forth', and finally 'paintings executed in the style of new European painting, observing light and perspective', which the scholar seemed to value less and were therefore not included in his description. The other author of the publication, art historian Dmitrii Ainalov (1862-1939), agreed with Turaev, writing that 'like Chinese and Japanese painting, Abyssinian painting seems to have been completely taken over by European influences', thereby losing its identity.⁹² These major acquisitions, along with the Akamba artefacts from the Stockholm Museum collection of Gerhard Lindblom, marked the end of the pre-war period for the MAE's African department.

It is difficult to establish how the African exhibition was received over the years, or the exact number of visitors who saw the MAE's collections. While we wait for the opportunity to examine the MAE's archives, we can rely on recent studies that shed some light on the matter, even though they do not provide a complete picture. Radlov and Shternberg's desire to make the MAE an educational institution for the general public resulted in the decision to open its doors three days per week (rather than two). Radlov justified this by saying that interest in the museum was increasing: 'The experience of the last few months, when the museum was open to the public twice a week, has convinced me that the public is very interested in it, as evidenced by the large number of visitors. Taking into account the fact that [the museum] has a more significant number of employees with the newly approved staff [...], I find it possible and desirable to open to the public three times a week from 1 January 1899'.⁹³ This clearly demonstrated both the public's growing interest and the director's efforts to disseminate knowledge; in fact, this decision, along with general advertisements for the collections, was widely publicised in the press.⁹⁴ Thus, the MAE opened its doors on Mondays, Fridays, and Sundays from 12pm to 3pm (though it was possible to extend the opening hours for visitors with specific purposes), and waived the

92 B. Turaev and D. Ainalov, *Proizvedeniia abissinskoi zhivopisi, sobrannye d-rom A.I. Kokhanovskim*, Saint Petersburg 1913, pp. 199-200, 215. Kokhanovskii's collection of Ethiopian Christian paintings is available at <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/ALBUM/1242186919>. The 'modern' samples of Ethiopian art are included in the doctor's general collection, see <https://tinyurl.com/am3zfxjz>.

93 Quoted in Sherstennikova, *Rabota s posetiteliami*, p. 152.

94 Ibid., p. 152.

entrance fee to encourage attendance. The only expense, though entirely discretionary, was the guidebook. It was not until 1903 that the idea of an entrance fee was tentatively considered as an experiment and limited to just one opening day. Following the rearrangement of 1912, the opening days changed and increased to four—as did the opening hours, from 11am to 4pm. It was decided that the entrance would be free on Sundays and Mondays, while visitors should pay twenty-five kopeks to see the exhibition on Thursdays and Fridays. While it is not possible to determine exactly what kind of public visited the MAE—with regard, for instance, to social class, educational level, profession, age, or gender—it is feasible to establish that the museum was open to both individual visitors and group excursions. As a matter of fact, the MAE used to record group visits in a special notebook called the ‘journal of excursions’, which is still held in the archives of the Saint Petersburg branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences and can provide useful information on such groups.⁹⁵ For instance, they were usually from ‘educational institutions, military units, charitable and labour societies’, and had to ask for permission—as well as for a guide, if needed—prior to their visit.⁹⁶ Among them, the Imperial School of Jurisprudence, the Tsarskoe Selo Real School, the School for adult workers of the Trubochnyi zavod, the Cadet Corps of the Emperor Alexander III, and the women’s commercial school ‘M. Glagoleva’ can be recounted. As part of its dissemination and educational project, the MAE would also organise special seminars and lectures for teachers, students, and workers:

Between 1904 and 1905, a series of lectures on anthropology and ethnography were organised and delivered at the Museum for the

95 ‘Zhurnal zapisi ekskursii, posetivshikh Muzei. 21 ianvaria 1899-29 dekabria 1921’, SPbF ARAN, f. 142, op. 1 (do 1918), ed. khr. 36, 154 l. Apart from the entries regarding group visits, this journal does not seem to provide much information on individual visitors; cf. Cvetkovski, *Empire Complex*, p. 245: ‘From the late tsarist period a comment book of the academy museum has survived, but the quality of an ordinary entry put down between 1899 and 1917 is fairly modest. Aside from date, name, and region of origin, most entries do not contain any other useful information about the visitor’.

96 E. Sherstennikova, ‘Evreiskie blagotvoritel’nye organizatsii i uchebnye zavedeniia – posetiteli Muzeia antropologii i etnografii v kontse XIX – nachale XX veka (po dannym ekskursionnogo zhurnala MAE 1899-1921 gg.)’, *Kunstkamera*, 2020 (8), 2, pp. 181-190 (p. 183).

pedagogical staff of the Smolensk School for Workers. This experience was repeated in 1905-1907, but this time for students of Lesgaft's courses. In 1906, a seminar for secondary school teachers was organised. Finally, from 1907 to 1911, a series of lectures was delivered to students of the Saint Petersburg Geographical Circle. Workers' circles were organised at the museum, and their participants attended lectures at the MAE exhibitions. During this period, attendance at the MAE reached almost 30,000 people per year.⁹⁷

Despite the many difficulties, such as a lack of funding and inadequate spaces, the MAE succeeded in becoming a hub for the democratisation of ethnographic and anthropological knowledge, thus effectively spreading a specific way of thinking about the 'other' to different social groups, which was largely developed in collaboration with European colleagues.

Photographic Collections and their Circulation

Though photographs played a significant role in the collection of the African 'other', they were rarely exhibited. Instead, they found their way to the MAE and other institutions several years after they were taken, which suggests that they were originally intended for a more private audience. In several cases, they were evidently enjoyed at home, as a reminder of past adventures. In fact, this was the case also with other material culture collections, which were not assembled with a museum in mind, but were the result of private collecting. The ethnographic and photographic collections from Ethiopia of the doctors Mikhail Lebedinskii and Nikolai Brovtsyn, for instance, were acquired by the MAE only in the 1920s and early 1930s, while Boris Turaev used to privately collect artefacts, manuscripts, and art from Egypt and Ethiopia and describe them in several publications, sharing his findings with other specialists.⁹⁸ This private dimension is also testified by written sources: in his obituary of Aleksandr Eliseev,

⁹⁷ Sherstennikova, *Rabota s posetiteli*, p. 153.

⁹⁸ Cf. for instance B. Turaev, *Efiopskie rukopisi v Sankt-Peterburge*, Saint Petersburg 1906; B. Turaev, *Neskol'ko egipetskikh nadpisei iz moei kolleksii i iz Moskovskogo Rumiantsevskogo muzeia*, Saint Petersburg 1912; B. Turaev, 'Abissinskaia politicheskaiia lubochnaia kartina moego sobraniia', *Khristianskii Vostok*, 1914 (3), 2, pp. 195-196.

Dmitrii Mamin-Sibiriak described the explorer's house as a true museum:

[...] everything here reminded him of Japan, Africa, Arabia, Ceylon, the tundra of the far north and the Siberian taiga. It was like a museum, not compiled at random, but with strict selection. There were botanical specimens, entomological collections, zoological rarities, curiosities, and a lot of ethnographic material: everyday objects from different tribes, fabrics, cloths, toys, and so on. Everything was arranged in strict order, reminding the owner of his distant travels. A special place was occupied by a unique library of books in three languages.⁹⁹

Similarly, in one of his novellas Petr Krasnov included the character of a doctor, who had travelled across the world amassing albums of photographs that he proudly showed to his friends.¹⁰⁰ Thus, collecting foreign cultures was not limited to the confines of state institutions, but rather was an endemic practice shared by a variety of individuals from various social classes in the tsarist empire.

Even though photographic collections were not usually made available to the general public, some found a way to circulate within Russian society: photographs were reproduced in journals and books, or sold and collected as postcards. In this context, the term 'collection' encompasses various scenarios: on the one hand, the act of photography itself is an act of collecting what is around us; on the other hand, photographs were physical objects, and as such they were part of albums, collections, publications. They were exchanged between different individuals and countries, changing not only their owners but also their meaning, which undoubtedly fluctuated according to the context in which they were received and understood. Thus, while material culture storage had only two main recipients (institutions such as museums, and private proprietors), photographs were part of a more stratified dynamic: they had highly different audiences and purposes that constantly shifted. Their origin could also vary significantly: they could have been explicitly commissioned by museums, or they could have been the result of a traveller's spontaneous interest. Moreover, their

99 D. Mamin-Sibiriak, 'A.V. Eliseev. Stranichka iz vospominanii', *Mir Bozhii*, 1895, 7, pp. 37-48 (pp. 40-41).

100 The novella, entitled *Aska Mariam*, will be analysed in Chapter 5.

usage and circulation were closely linked to how the image of Africa was shaped—whether intentionally or not—in *fin-de-siècle* Russia. Indeed, thanks to the press, photographs were much more likely to infiltrate Russian households than African artefacts.

The rapid spread of photography and its use for both ‘scientific’ and leisure purposes is attested to by a large body of diverse sources. It was certainly perceived—and canonised—as a vital tool for anthropometric measurements and anthropological studies in general, as well as ethnographic observations, although this distinction did not exist from the outset. Photographing the ‘other’ was not a random activity, but had to adhere to certain established parameters. For example, in 1880, a commission was appointed to create a collection of ‘types’ from Caucasian tribes for the MAE. As stated in a letter to the president of the Imperial Academy of Sciences,

In the opinion of many people, the photographs currently available on the Caucasus do not represent either the desired uniformity of size or the necessary guarantee that the individuals depicted belong to a given nationality. Therefore, it is considered essential and desirable to compile such a collection on the following grounds: 1) to depict each individual at the most blooming age (men at 20-21, women at 16-20), a) *en face*, b) in strict *en profil* and c) in full height, in the first two cases—if possible—without a headdress and as a waist portrait (for anthropological use), in the last case for an ethnographical representation; 2) the size of the photograph is assumed to be the one of an ordinary plate of glass or a fourth of a sheet of ordinary writing paper.¹⁰¹

This was in response to several attempts to establish guidelines for ‘scientific’ photography, which started in the context of the First All-Russian Ethnographic Exhibition in 1867 without reaching any definitive conclusions. The only outcome was the distinction between ‘ethnographic’ and ‘physiognomic’ shots, which was a novel concept on the international stage.¹⁰² In the following years, which were characterised by the popularity of photo albums depicting the

101 SPbF ARAN, f. 2, op. 1, ed. khr. 6, l. 17-19 ob., quoted in E. Soboleva, ‘Osnovnye napravleniia raboty MAE s fotomaterialami v kontse XIX – nachale XX veka, in Illiustrativnye kollektsii Kunstkamery’, *Sbornik MAE*, 2014, 59, pp. 257-286 (p. 258).

102 On this matter cf. Elias, *Picturing ‘Russia’s Orient’*, pp. 64-67.

various populations of the empire,¹⁰³ there was also a progressive institutionalisation of photography by cultural and research institutes, including the MAE. In an attempt to move beyond buying and selling anthropological and ethnographic photos from Western sources or non-professional photographers—such as travellers who found themselves acting as ethnographers and anthropologists by chance—the MAE increased its efforts in the field of photography. This resulted in part of its premises being reserved for a photographic laboratory (1901). The main figure associated with both the theorisation of these genres of photography and the actual realisation of shots depicting the various populations of the empire was undoubtedly Samuil Dudin, who became the director of the MAE's photography division in the year it was established (1911). Prior to obtaining this position, he had already been working at the MAE for several years, participating in expeditions as a photographer and ethnographer. His approach to field photography certainly impacted the development of the ethnographic and anthropometric genres, as well as the implementation and modernisation of the equipment.

As photography became institutionalised and adopted by the educated elite as a means of documenting human diversity, it also slowly began to enter the public domain. Specialised periodicals such as *Fotograficheskii vestnik* began to appear, discussing technical and theoretical aspects; the Russian Photographic Society was founded in 1894; and photography became increasingly used as the basis for the illustrated press. By the early 1900s, photography had become such a popular topic that related articles were also being published in non-specialised journals. Taking a closer look at the journal *Vokrug sveta* provides us with two examples that shed light on how photography was perceived and constructed in relation to Western and Oriental (or exotic) actors. In 1905, an illustration was published under the title *The Sultan of Morocco Photographing the Women of his Harem*.

103 Cf., for instance, Sonntag, *Genesis of the Turkestan Album*; M. Dikovitskaya, 'In the Beginning Was the Image: Russian Ethnography and Colonial Photography in Turkestan, 1860s to 1870s', in M. Morton and B. Larson, *Constructing Race on the Borders of Europe. Ethnography, Anthropology, and Visual Culture, 1850-1930*, London 2023, pp. 187-206, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350182356.0012>



Fig. 4.2 'The Sultan of Morocco Photographing the Women of his Harem',
Vokrug sveta, 1905, 44, p. 697.

In the image, Abd al-Aziz bin Hassan can be seen giving instructions to the women he intends to photograph, holding a modern photographic apparatus in his left hand. While he seems passionate about this activity, the women, elegantly dressed in Oriental clothes and jewellery, are clearly not invested: one is covering her face with her right hand, while the other two are not looking towards the camera and have their eyes closed, suggesting that they perceive it as an invasion of privacy. The figure of Abd al-Aziz could easily be replaced by any colonial photographer of the time who was familiar with the reluctance of locals to be photographed. However, the fact that he is a local adds another layer of meaning to the representation: the photographic apparatus becomes the symbol of the Sultan's weakness and of his

departure from Islamic traditions by giving in to the Europeans, which transforms him into a ridiculous and grotesque figure. The photograph description states that

Contrary to the teachings of the Koran, the leader of the Moroccan believers became so enthusiastic about photography that, had he applied the same level of commitment to affairs of state, he might have saved his empire from the hands of the Giaours. [...] From the moment he had a camera in his hands, the Sultan forgot all about his other toys—cars, bicycles, and various other mechanical marvels [...]. Many of the photographs taken by the Sultan have appeared in various illustrated publications. [...] About two years ago, at the suggestion of a commercial agent in Morocco, Abd al-Aziz ordered from France ten thousand francs' worth of photographic paper for printing pictures. If the Europeans intend to boycott Morocco, the country's ruler surely doesn't need to fear a shortage of photographic paper for his pictures.¹⁰⁴

This kind of mockery, depicting the Sultan as a child playing with his toys, was certainly not directed at photography itself. Less than a year later, *Vokrug sveta* devoted two issues to the photographic achievements of the German hunter and photographer Carl Georg Schillings (1865–1921), author of the book *With Flashlight and Rifle: A Record of Hunting Adventures and of Studies in Wild Life in Equatorial East Africa* (1905) and frequent visitor of German and British East Africa. The article—a loose review of the book interspersed with biographical information—highly praised Schillings' accomplishments, depicting him as an 'incredible person' and the 'hero' of photography. In a significant departure from the evaluation of the Sultan's passion as foolish, Schillings' activities in Africa are regarded as a scientific innovation and even, to a certain extent, as an art form: 'This was not the project of a hunter, but rather the vision of a scientist and an artist. And, indeed, there was much to be fascinated by'. The colourful descriptions of Schillings taking pictures of the wildlife transform him into a man of action, and turn his activity into an adventure into the depths of the African continent, full of perils and danger, but also of potential.¹⁰⁵

While this level of praise was certainly not the norm, it is clear that

104 'Marokkskii sultan, fotografiruiushchii dam svoego garema', *Vokrug sveta*, 1905, 44, p. 702.

105 'Okhota s fotograficheskim apparatom v debriakh Afriki', *Vokrug sveta*, 1906, 33–34, pp. 523–526, 539–541.

none of the Europeans or Russians involved in colonial photography were mocked or criticised. As previously mentioned, both specialist and popular publications about Africa often featured an array of photographs, some of which were acquired by the publishing houses from Europe, while others were the work of Russian travellers. The fact that they were commonly published and used to validate an author's experience or perspective on the African continent clearly indicates the importance attributed to photography, even in less educated contexts. Furthermore, it should be noted that the editorial market was the primary means by which the general public could access pictures of Africa. Although illustrated journals tended to accompany articles with drawings, which was considerably cheaper than printing photographs, by the 1910s photographs began to be included more frequently in print. The fact that, in many cases, the provenance or authors of these materials were not stated, not to mention the details behind their creation (i.e., people involved, consent to being photographed, staged/not staged), did not affect the 'truthfulness' and 'adherence to reality' that they seemed to possess inherently. A 1916 issue of *Vokrug sveta* introduced its readers to the appearance of the 'young citizens of Cameroon' by displaying two photographs of Cameroonian children taken by 'an English ornithologist living among the Bulu tribe, [of which] he took some shots at the request of an anthropologist friend'.¹⁰⁶ No names or further details about the Englishmen were provided, while the pictures were used to document a local practice, i.e., the particular way of cutting the boys' hair. A brief comment about the 'poor way of dressing' was also included, emphasising how, for the Bulu people, hairstyle was more important than clothing. This echoed the publication of a photographic collection depicting life in Central Africa as captured by 'German scholars' in 1910-1911, which did not provide not only the names of the explorers, but also details about the expedition itself.¹⁰⁷ These are quite unique cases in that a reference to the photographer—albeit vague—was at least included. The majority of the other examples do not have this fortune, with no hint as to who took the photographs—making them strangely opaque in comparison to the more common drawings,

¹⁰⁶ 'Tunye grazhdane Kameruna', *Vokrug sveta*, 1916, 17, p. 269.

¹⁰⁷ E. T., 'V debriakh Tsentral'noi Afriki', *Vokrug sveta*, 1914, 8, p. 125.

which at least bore the signature of the artist or lithographer.¹⁰⁸

Unsurprisingly, matters changed when it came to Russian explorers and scientists, their endeavours in Africa and the creation of their own collections. It was quite common to supplement the accounts of their travels, made available to the general public, with a selection of pictures taken during their visits to Africa. Newly established specialised periodicals helped the process. One such example is the journal *Priroda*, through which the Russian Academy of Science intended to disseminate knowledge about geography, ethnography, and the natural sciences to the general public. Founded in 1912 following other failed attempts to establish a publication of this kind, *Priroda* published articles on Africa from the outset, covering topics ranging from questions related to colonialism to the biographies of renowned explorers such as Livingstone, and from descriptions of African flora and fauna to reports by Russian travellers. Here, the authors—often professors or soon-to-be professors—had the opportunity to recount their experiences to a non-specialised audience and publish the visual materials they had collected. Zoologist Sergei Averintsev, who spent a period of time at the Amani Research Institute in the Usambara Mountains and visited other parts of East Africa, accompanied his unofficial reportage with five photographs.¹⁰⁹ The detailed captions clarify that the primary function of the photos was to demonstrate the readers what the author was describing in the text, anchoring their imagery of a far-away and ‘exotic’ place to a specific context. Thus, a shot of Tengen station—with the railway in the foreground, a train from Tanga on the left, the station building on the right, and a group of locals in the centre—was used to illustrate the popularity of this ‘European way of transportation’ even among the native population, while a photo of the Amani Institute surrounded by greenery showed how a modern research infrastructure complete with entomology, botany, and chemistry laboratories could be established in a tropical forest. Notwithstanding Averintsev’s critical stance towards the way Europeans—especially the Germans—treated

108 See for instance the photographic material in ‘*Priroda i liudi ekvatorial’noi Afriki*’, *Vokrug sveta*, 1913, p. 165; ‘*Dlinnaia sheia – pervoe uslovie krasoty*’, *Vokrug sveta*, 1914, 13, front cover; P. Bel’skii, ‘*Ekzoticheskie vladeniiia Germanii*’, *Vokrug sveta*, 1914, 43–45, pp. 685–690; 701–706; 720–726.

109 S. Averintsev, ‘*Po poberezh’iu Chernogo kontinenta*. Iz zapisnoi knizhki naturalista’, *Priroda*, 1912, 2 (clmn. 211–240), 12 (clmn. 1441–1468).

the natives, these pictures did nothing but emphasise the Western contribution to the modernisation of the region, while the remaining three showcased to the Russian public an incredibly generic and vague landscape. Two years later, hydrobiologist Vasilii Nikitin added an ethnographic dimension to his own reportage by publishing several photographs of the indigenous people of East Africa.¹¹⁰ For the most part staged portraits, since the locals are caught in a still pose while looking at the camera, these images accentuate the helplessness of the subjects, powerless before the photographer's gaze, though clearly inscribed in their context of belonging (natural environment, dwellings).



Fig. 4.3 'Swahili women (Mombasa)', in V. Nikitin, 'Na beregakh Viktorii Niiantsa', *Priroda*, 1914, 5, clmn. 589.

Journals for a specialised audience published photographs, too. In some cases, the inclusion of Western images (which were often unacknowledged) shows the interesting dynamics by which colonial

110 V. Nikitin, 'Na beregakh Viktorii Niiantsa', *Priroda*, 1914, 5, clmn. 585-608.

imagery transcended borders and contributed to shaping a common image of Africa throughout the empires. The compelling series of essays by the young scholar Ivan Puzanov about his research journey to Sudan in 1910 included a significant photographic collection demonstrating the natural environment, urban centres, and local 'types'. Published in *Zemlevedenie*, the journal of the Imperial Society of Devotees of Natural Science, Anthropology, and Ethnography founded by the anthropologist Dmitrii Anuchin, the essays were consistently illustrated with pictures taken by the author himself, as well as images reprinted from Western sources—mainly colonial postcards—which were mostly unacknowledged. In his treatise, Puzanov often alluded to his work as a photographer, which was not always the standard practice. Thus, he recommended that other potential travellers arrive in Egypt with fully functioning photographic equipment, as Cairo lacked good photography shops, and recorded his interactions with the local people who appeared in his photographs:

I went several times to a Sudanese village, whose pointed 'tokuli' were visible on the horizon, to take photos and familiarise myself with the life of its inhabitants. I was not particularly successful: the men, it's true, would pose willingly and were generally quite sociable and friendly, but the women, who were of particular interest to me due to their typicality, would run away shrieking every time I pointed my camera at them. One angry woman even threw a bottle at her young offspring, who had agreed to pose for me.¹¹¹

I was suddenly surrounded by a bunch of ragged children annoyingly begging for tips, and adults who offered to pose for photographs or to arrange a sample match with swords and shields—naturally, in exchange for a decent reward.¹¹²

Once in Khartoum, he recalled asking Andrew Balfour, the director of the Wellcome Tropical Research Laboratory, for permission to photograph 'one of the most valuable objects' in the ethnographic collection at the Gordon Memorial College: a war drum belonging to the Azande people, whose picture he included in the essay.¹¹³ Despite challenges

111 I. Puzanov, 'Ocherki Severo-Vostochnogo Sudana', *Zemlevedenie*, 1912, 3-4, pp. 133-134.

112 I. Puzanov, 'Ocherki Severo-Vostochnogo Sudana', *Zemlevedenie*, 1914, 3, p. 110.

113 *Ibid.*, p. 93.

with the apparatus and the locals, his incessant search for worthy shots testifies to his desire to document and collect the reality around him, thus constructing a broader picture of the relatively unknown Sudan for the benefit of the Russian public. However, this activity, for all its accomplishments, seemed insufficient: although it is not possible to determine who made the final decision—the author or the journal's editors—a closer inspection of the images included in Puzanov's essays reveals that some are, in fact, the work of others. It is particularly tricky to distinguish between Puzanov's photos and those taken by someone else, since the author only explicitly acknowledges the paternity of his shots in a few cases. Moreover, there was no criterion for selecting and inserting shots taken by other photographers; it seems that Puzanov had no particular reason to resort to other collections. Thus, 'other' could be a 'traditional' ethnographic portrait of a young Beja man, actually shot by Luigi Fiorillo; a 'natural shot' of ethnographic quality of a woman styling another woman's hair; or a 'Sudanese woman, light type' and 'Sudanese woman, dark type', which were actually part of G. N. Morhig's postcard collection and revealed a change of title (the original title being *Omdurman Beauty*). Little is known about the lives of Luigi Fiorillo (1847-1898) and G. N. Morhig. Fiorillo was an Italian photographer who opened a studio in Alexandria and became famous for his photographs documenting the Middle East, Northern Africa, and Sudan, receiving awards at international competitions; G. N. Morhig was a Lebanese man who moved to Sudan as part of the Egyptian Army Medical Corps, and later studied in Khartoum and London; back in Khartoum, he became the owner of the establishment known as the English Pharmacy (or English Drugstore), as well as a photographer and publisher active between 1910 and 1939. Both Fiorillo and Morhig played a key role in amassing extensive collections of colonial postcards, which featured not only their own photographs, but also pictures taken by others (Morhig, for example, incorporated photographs taken by the Czech hunter Richard Storch and the Sudan-based railway engineer George Ronald Storrar).¹¹⁴ It is plausible that, while in Africa, Puzanov acquired some

114 Cf. Morhig's collection at the Pitt River Museum, Oxford: <https://southernsudan.prm.ox.ac.uk/search/photographer/Morhig/index.html>; cf. also K. J. Hickerson, 'Portraits, Postcards, and Politics: Mobilizing Sudanese Visual Culture', *Durham Middle East Papers*, 2023, p. 107.

of these postcards and later used them to illustrate his essays when his own collection was insufficient, particularly for portraits of local people, which he found most challenging to photograph. Whatever the case, Puzanov is a striking example not only of how colonial imagery circulated trans-continentially, through a process that involved actors from various backgrounds and cultures, but also of how easily these pictures could change status, target audience, and, consequently, meaning. They were originally intended for a cheap industry that was very much in vogue at that time in both the West and Russia,¹¹⁵ an industry used to dealing with colonial enterprises, thus enabling even the lower classes to collect—i.e., to possess—a symbolic fraction of the colonies (which made them all unequivocally part of the colonial project). One of the first examples of mass-produced visual content, the colonial postcard industry was certainly not an unambiguous genre: several studies have since shown its intricacies, highlighting how pro-colonial (or pro-imperial) imagery coexisted with anti-colonial sentiments, local publishers with metropolitan ones, and state agenda with personal inclinations.¹¹⁶ Assuming that Puzanov bought these postcards while in Africa, their primary goal would have been accomplished in this case, too: exotic objects in the hands of the scholar, a tangible reminder of his journey and a testimony of his involvement in collecting other cultures—other bodies, one may add, since they are photographs of individuals—they functioned, at least initially, as personal trophies. Yet, their inclusion in Puzanov's publication shifted their target from a private audience—not necessarily educated—to a clearly educated public, primarily of scholars, to whom they were presented as specimens of ethnographic photography. In this respect,

115 For the Russian context cf. for instance A. Rowley, *Open Letters: Russian Popular Culture and the Picture Postcard, 1880-1922*, Toronto 2013.

116 P. Goldsworthy, 'Images, Ideologies, and Commodities: The French Colonial Postcard Industry in Morocco', *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 2010 (8), 2, pp. 147-167, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17460651003693337>; P. M. Burns, 'Six Postcards from Arabia. A Visual Discourse of Colonial Travels in the Orient', *Tourist Studies*, 2004 (4), 3, pp. 255-275, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468797604057327>; R. J. DeRoo, 'Colonial Collecting. French Women and Algerian cartes postales', in E. M. Hight and G. D. Sampson (ed. by), *Colonialist Photography: Imag(in)ing Race and Place*, Abingdon-New York 2005, pp. 159-171; N. Mozokhina, 'Pre-Revolutionary Postcards with Views of Turkestan', in *Photographing Central Asia*, pp. 217-247, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110754469-008>

the change of title from the more broadly appealing *Omdurman Beauty* to the more scholarly *Sudanese Woman*. *Light/Dark Type* is no surprise. These images, products of mass consumption destined for leisure-type collecting, were transformed into scientific and valuable proof of certain peculiar characteristics of distant tribes. This shift occurred very subtly and remained virtually unnoticed, at least by Puzanov's readers, who were not informed of the images' origins. It also added a Western flavour: nudity, a rare find in Russian ethnographic photography, was conversely commonplace in the European production, where the 'trope of the "naked native"' replaced the 'nudity inherited from the classical tradition', becoming instead 'emblematic of colonial primitiveness, savagery, and inferiority. Scientists excited by the prospect of uncovering truths quite literally elided undress and discovery, and nakedness as a means of documenting human "types" simultaneously became a lucrative avenue for photographers whose *cartes-de-visite*, postcards, and even studio portraits adopted the language of anthropology as a shrewd sales technique that allowed naked images to avoid the taint of pornography and the accusation of immorality'.¹¹⁷ As previously mentioned, despite the fact that this Western trend was well known in Russia, it appears that Russian photographers avoided including nudes altogether in their collections,¹¹⁸ as can also be seen from the photographs taken in Africa.

In other cases, the photographs chosen to accompany a publication were intended to emphasise Russia's role in the continent and its successful establishment of positive relationships with other countries. Of the vast photographic collection of doctor Mikhail Lebedinskii, for example, just nine pictures were selected to accompany his commentary on the construction of the first hospital in Ethiopia. Looking at them, the absence of locals becomes apparent: the landscapes included are conspicuously devoid of people. Locals reappear only when it is necessary to illustrate the Russian successes in the region, as in the case of the shot of Menelik outside the building where surgeries were

117 P. Levine, 'Naked Truths: Bodies, Knowledge, and the Erotics of Colonial Power', *Journal of British Studies*, 2013, 52, pp. 5-25 (pp. 8-9), <https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2012.6>. On this matter, cf. also P. Sigal, Z. Tortorici, and N. L. Whitehead (ed. by), *Ethno-pornography: Sexuality, Colonialism and Archival Knowledge*, Durham 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478004424>

118 Cf. Elias, *Picturing 'Russia's Orient'*.

conducted, surrounded by his entourage and by the Russian personnel. The entire report was indeed intended as a celebration of Russia's own civilising mission in Ethiopia through medical diplomacy, and locals did not feature in it if not for stressing the tsarist empire's achievements.¹¹⁹ However, a look at the collection reveals that Lebedinskii was indeed interested in the more ethnographic side of photography. His shots can be divided into three main categories: landscapes, which sometimes encompass only nature and at other times showcase signs of the country's modernisation, such as bridges and the railway, or tangible signs of the European presence, such as the British embassy; testimonies of Russian activities and the people involved; ethnographic portraits of locals.¹²⁰ Despite the presence of more 'traditional' ethnographic portraits—evidently staged and usually relying on a neutral background to focus the viewer's attention on the given 'type'—Lebedinskii's collection mostly shows a less codified approach to the genre. Locals are portrayed in their natural environment, often engaged in their daily activities—even when their pose and their gaze directed toward the lens suggest they were evidently aware of being photographed and were complicit in it. But the collection also offers a rare glimpse of the Russian presence in Ethiopia, with domestic scenes—quite unique—that alternate with more official pictures, like those centred around the hospital (MAE I 349-69; MAE I 349-72) or portraying the Cossack convoy (MAE I 349-76).¹²¹ The seriousness of the latter shot is interestingly challenged and overturned in an ambiguous photograph captioned 'The Russians in Local Traditional Costumes with Ashkers' (MAE I 349-279)¹²². The

119 M. Lebedinskii, 'Pervyi gospiial v Abissinii', *Istoricheskii vestnik*, 1912, 11, pp. 811-826. More on this topic in Chapter 3.

120 Lebedinskii's collection was sold to the Kunstkamera in 1935 by his wife, and 497 photographs are now available online for public viewing. Cf. <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/OBJECT?fund=44&person=3528989>. The whole collection amounts to 397 printed photographs and three albums, for a total of 586 items. Cf. V. Semenova, 'Efipskie fotoillustativnye kollektsii MAE RAN: k atributsii sobraniia vrachei russkogo otdeleniia Krasnogo Kresta (1896-1906)', *Sbornik muzeia antropologii i etnografii*, 2019 (66), 2, pp. 194-207 (p. 197).

121 Cf. <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/OBJECT/93449?query=349-69&index=0>; <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/OBJECT/93453?query=349-72&index=0>; <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/OBJECT/93457?query=349-76&index=0>

122 <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/OBJECT/93799?query=349-279&index=0>

ambiguity in interpreting the picture stems first and foremost from the fact that the circumstances surrounding it were not recorded: it is unclear why the Russians dressed up as Ethiopians, what the purpose of the photograph was, and who it was intended for. Hypotheses and speculations are, therefore, inevitably flawed, and should be treated with caution. Usually, 'cultural cross-dressing' has been associated with cultural appropriation and mastery over the colonial 'other', with the process of 'going native', or, more recently, with a performative quality noticeable in orientalist portraits.¹²³ However, this was certainly not an instance of 'going native',¹²⁴ and labelling it 'cultural appropriation' seems perhaps excessive. The Russians are depicted alongside the Ethiopians, and despite the serious look of all the bystanders a certain playfulness can be detected in the musical instruments—incongruous in a military portrait—and in the European hat worn by one of the Russians, which invalidates his adoption of the natives' clothes and makes him an involuntary sample of 'reversed' mimicry. The whole affair thus seems a travesty of sorts, perhaps a playful diversion—though how the Ethiopians perceived it remains unknown. In any case, to a contemporary Russian this picture should have conveyed, alongside an undeniable element of playfulness, a sense of domestication, in that the 'savages' were easily exorcised and rendered harmless by the (apparently sanctioned) adoption of their clothing and the ensemble shot. The same sense of successful acclimatisation to the new country is conveyed by the pictures of Russian women and children—including Lebedinskii's wife and daughter—who are often depicted playing with monkeys while retaining an unmistakably European appearance without any risk of 'going native' (MAE I 349-388).¹²⁵ More traditional, formal portraits are also present, such as the photograph of Lebedinskii, his wife and a local servant boy holding a parasol outside the doctor's

123 Cf. for instance T. Mayer, 'Cultural Cross-Dressing: Posing and Performance in Orientalist Portraits', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 2012 (22), 2, pp. 281-298, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186312000168>

124 A clear example of 'going native' are however the photographs portraying the soldier-turned-painter Evgenii Senigov in Ethiopia, which are part of Aleksandr Kokhanovskii's collection at the *Kunstkamera* (cf. for instance MAE 2097-332). On Senigov, cf. Chapter 1.

125 <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/OBJECT/93880?query=349-388&index=0>

hut in Addis Ababa (MAE I 349-590).¹²⁶ Overall, however, it is clear that these pictures—perhaps with the exception of those documenting the hospital’s activities—were intended for private use. This is particularly evident when compared with the pictures of Russian settlers in Ethiopia from Kokhanovskii’s collection, which was intended for the museum from the outset. Here, Russians are often portrayed in group photos, dressed in their very best clothes, and with little to no indication as of their whereabouts if not for the captions (‘Members of the Russian Colony in the Russian Mission in Addis Ababa’, MAE 2097-287).¹²⁷

Elsewhere, I have attempted to categorise the main traits in depicting the (Ethiopian) ‘other’ in Nikolai Gumilev’s photographic collection, which range from staged ethnographic portraits, to portraits of notable people, to the cliché of the white master among black people, and pictures showing the locals in their everyday activities.¹²⁸ The same distinction applies to the other photographic collections from Ethiopia, including those by Lebedinskii, Kokhanovskii, Davydov and Dragomirov (MAE 4028), as well as the collection from the 1904 Russian geological expedition. However, I maintain that the collectors’ different purposes and intellectual starting points impacted how they represented themselves—and the other Russians—within this exotic setting. In Gumilev’s case, the fact that the MAE entrusted him with collecting objects and taking ethnographic photographs reflects a clear power imbalance between him and the subjects of his observations: even disregarding the white/black dynamic (which certainly was in place), this imbalance is still embedded in every scholarly enterprise, as the authority ultimately lies with the person producing knowledge. Essentially, his position as a white, ‘European’ scholar scrutinising the black body is clearly palpable. In this regard, the other collections perhaps offer more varied perspectives, and they certainly provide more glimpses of the interactions occurred between Russians and black

126 <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/OBJECT/94073?query=349-590&index=0>

127 <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/OBJECT/78921?index=35&paginator=album&albumId=1242883654>. Exceptions would include pictures of Evgenii Senigov, testifying to his adoption of Ethiopian customs, or a photograph of the Trofimovs with a Turk and their pets (MAE 2097-277).

128 Cf. A. Frison, ‘On Colonial Bodies: Poetics and Politics of Blackness in Russian Modernism’, *Journal of European Studies*, 2025 (55), 1, pp. 49-68, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00472441251316871>

people than contemporary travelogues did. Of particular significance is the collection from the Russian geological expedition (MAE 3819), which contains not only ethnographic portraits and scenes of everyday life, but also documentation of the Russians' journey from Addis Ababa to the gold mine in the Welega province, as well as of the work carried out at the site. To the present-day observer, they are a striking example of the coexistence of various dynamics at play: on one hand there are photographs conveying a (perhaps myopic) sense of a true collaboration between Russians and Ethiopians, like those portraying them side by side engaged in activities related to the mine (MAE 3819-146, 3819-162)¹²⁹ or in group portraits (3819-32).¹³⁰ On the other hand, there are also strong reminders of the power relations in place, which manifest themselves in different ways: from shots of the 'Russian Imperial Mission' building (MAE 3819-42, 3819-45),¹³¹ a concrete marker of the Russian presence in the territory—yet strangely eery, as there are no people in sight—to the stunning yet disturbing picture of a hundred enslaved women bearing gifts for the members of the Russian geological expedition on behalf of a local commander (MAE 3819-66), which not only illustrates the power dynamics between Russians and Ethiopians, but also amongst the Ethiopians themselves.¹³²

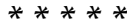
These photographic collections, which have yet to be properly analysed, remain strangely opaque to this day. Only a brief caption accompanies them on the *Kunstkamera* website, while the precise circumstances surrounding their creation, as well as any accounts from the photographers or collectors, remain obscure. Perhaps only extensive archival research could shed light on these actors' intentions and perspectives, and enable us to reflect on whether the photographs convey them, as well as on the extent to which much larger colonial and imperial dynamics prevail over the photographers' subjectivity.

129 <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/OBJECT/84830?query=3819-146&index=0>; <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/OBJECT/84847?query=3819-162&index=0>

130 <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/OBJECT/84716?query=3819-32&index=0>

131 <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/OBJECT/84726?query=3819-42&index=0>; <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/OBJECT/84729?query=3819-45&index=0>

132 <https://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/OBJECT/84750?query=3819-66&index=0>



Noting that 'some sort of "gathering" around the self and the group [...] is probably universal', with 'all such collections embody[ing] hierarchies of value, exclusions, rule-governed territories of the self', James Clifford has made the point of stressing how, in cultures other than the Western ones, collecting is not necessarily 'a strategy for the deployment of a possessive self, culture, and authenticity', but can have other functions (for instance, redistribution).¹³³ The same can be said with regard to cultures, in that 'the Western practice of culture collecting has its own local genealogy, enmeshed in distinct European notions of temporality and order'.¹³⁴ In this scenario, collecting also becomes a means of preserving what can be lost in time in terms of authenticity: appropriation is not suitable for indigenous peoples, who should remain in a perpetual state of stillness despite contacts with the West. This yearning for possessing—including possessing the 'other' and their culture—has translated into the appropriation and accumulation of non-Western objects which 'have been classified in two major categories: as (scientific) cultural artefacts or as (aesthetic) works of art',¹³⁵ thus belonging to either an ethnographic or an art museum. This trend became especially visible from the beginning of the twentieth century, when artistic value began to be attributed to non-Western artefacts on a large scale. In fact, "'a process of aestheticization" [...] took place from the eighteenth century onward. What is called savage or primitive art covers a wide range of objects introduced by the contact between African and European [...] into the classifying frame of the eighteenth century. These objects, which perhaps are not art at all in their "native context", become art by being given simultaneously an aesthetic character and a potentiality for producing and reproducing other artistic forms'.¹³⁶

As we have seen, the main recipient of (black) African collections in Russia remained the ethnographic museum, with the aesthetic value being attributed only sporadically perhaps until the publication of

133 J. Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Cambridge-London 1988, p. 218.

134 Ibid., p. 232.

135 Ibid., p. 222.

136 V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa. Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*, Bloomington 1988, p. 10.

Voldemar Matvejs's (1877-1914) *The Art of the Negroes* (1919).¹³⁷ An art critic and member of the Russian avant-garde group Union of Youth (*Soiuz molodezhi*), Matvejs travelled to Europe in 1913 to visit several ethnographic museums, creating an impressive collection of photographs of exhibits from Easter Island and Africa which were published in his posthumous essays on their respective arts. His artistic and aesthetic evaluation of African statues, especially with regard to volumes and plasticity, seem all the more pioneering since, in the very same year, Gumilev was writing an (unfinished) essay on African art which began as follows: 'For many people, the combination of the words "African" and "art" will seem strange. After all, we are used to thinking of art as part of a culture, which we understand as the ability to accumulate and transmit knowledge and sensations through monuments, oral traditions, and social institutions. However, there is little evidence of such a culture among African tribes'.¹³⁸ In his evaluation of African objects as art, Matvejs interpreted them as the concrete proof of the preservation of ancient cultural languages with which Europeans had long been estranged (in other words, of authenticity), whilst also advocating a quite condescending re-evaluation of 'Negroes' as 'thoughtful people'. Through the numerous photographs, his book contributed to the circulation of European collections of African artefacts in Russia, while his theorisations were instrumental in the development of Russian primitivism:¹³⁹ collecting, appropriation, and re-elaboration were now also codified practices of the arts.

137 V. Markov, *Iskusstvo negrov*, Petrograd 1919. Matvejs published under the pseudonym Vladimir Markov.

138 N. Gumilev, *Afrikanskoe iskusstvo*, in N. Gumilev, *Sobranie sochinenii v 10 tomakh*, VII, Moscow 2006, p. 183.

139 Cf. for instance K. Ichin, 'Istoki russkogo avangarda: Afrika', *Slavic Almanac*, 2011 (17), 2, pp. 147-162; J. Howard, I. Bužinska, and Z. S. Strother (ed. by), *Vladimir Markov and Russian Primitivism. A Charter for the Avant-Garde*, London 2015.

5. Disguises. Black Africa at the Service of the Arts

He viewed her as an exotic servant, like the leopard skins, shields, and spears that travellers in Abyssinia would have. He had dressed her in a European costume, but it looked ridiculous on her, so he let her wear an old chiton at home, made of pure silk and lined with lace. She was even more beautiful in this garment. However, when she went out in the street wearing dark skirts, a blouse and a hat, all the antique beauty of the primitive East disappeared, and she looked ridiculous.

P. Krasnov¹

In the previous chapters I have examined how black Africa was transformed into an object of knowledge in late imperial Russia through the production of maps, travelogues, ‘scientific’ essays and collections, directed at educated and uneducated classes alike. Simultaneously, it also became a popular subject in both lowbrow and highbrow fiction, channelling modern anxieties about a rapidly changing world—especially with regard to the concept of purity within gender and racial dynamics. Contributing to this fictional construction of black Africa were not only famous writers—of whom Nikolai Gumilev is undoubtedly the best known—but also lesser-known authors who produced popular literature set in Africa, aimed at a less educated readership or children.² This chapter examines a range of texts from both popular and highbrow culture, in order to identify the main themes explored by various authors in association with the African continent, and to clarify how this specific

1 P. Krasnov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, I, Podolsk 2018, p. 458.

2 For an overview of the expanding readership in Russia between the nineteenth and the twentieth century cf. for instance J. Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read. Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917*, Princeton 1985; D. Rebecchini and R. Vassena (ed. by), *Reading Russia. A History of Reading in Modern Russia*, II, Milan 2020.

place functioned as a vehicle for expressing *fin-de-siècle* racial, societal and cultural tensions.

The production of original Russian prose set in Africa must be considered within the context of European colonial literature translated into Russian and circulating among readers from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards. It is well documented, for instance, the role played by the works of Thomas Mayne Reid, Jules Verne, and Louis-Henri Boussenard on the young minds of future writers Nikolai Gumilev and Andrei Belyi. This type of literature transcended the book market, as it was also often printed in illustrated journals and thus read by the public in instalments. *Vokrug sveta* (*Around the World*) was particularly prone to publish this material alongside informative articles on the colonies or accounts on the life and adventures of prominent Western explorers. Novels such as Boussenard's *Aventures périlleuses de trois Français au Pays des Diamantes* or Henry Rider Haggard's *Nada the Lily* were published in instalments, while individual chapters of colonial novels, like Bertram Mitford's *Forging the Blades*, were presented to the reader as stand-alone short stories.³ Cheap editions of translated colonial novels also began to appear: while the most translated authors were certainly Louis Jacolliot (*La Côte d'Ebène. Le dernier des négriers*, 1876), Thomas Mayne Reid (*The Bush Boys*, 1856; *The Young Yagers*, 1857; *The Vee-Boers*, 1870), and Haggard (*King Solomon's Mines*, 1885; *She*, 1886; *Jess*, 1887), works by other authors from the Western colonial canon were not lacking either: from Robert Michael Ballantyne's *Black Ivory* (1873) to Eginhard von Barfus' *Vom Kapnach Deutsch-Afrika* (1888) or *Im Diamantenlande* (1890), Kurt Wildenstein's *Dolf der Burenheld* (1900), or August Niemann's *Pieter Moritz, der Burensohn von Transvaal* (1885).⁴ These books were extremely

3 Cf. 'Pokhitteli brilliantov. Roman L. Bussenara', *Vokrug sveta*, 1886, 1-50; 'Chernaia liliia. Roman iz iuzhno-afrikanskikh nravov. Raidera Khaggarda', *Vokrug sveta*, 1892, 19-36; 'Vozhd' zulusov. Rasskaz M. Mitforda', *Vokrug sveta*, 1908, 12, pp. 197-199. Boussenard's novel was later published in a separate edition by Ivan Sytin (1891) and Petr Soikin (1911), while Haggard's by Soikin in three editions under the title *Nada* (1903, 1904, 1915).

4 Cf. L. Zhakolio, *Bereg Chernogo Dereva. Peschanyi gorod*, Saint Petersburg 1882; M. Rid, *Sochineniia. Okhotnich'i rasskazy iz zhizni afrikanskikh i amerikanskikh obitatelei. V 20 tomakh*, Moscow 1864-1876; R. Khaggard, *Kopi tsaria Solomona*, Saint Petersburg 1891; R. Khaggard, *Ona*, Saint Petersburg 1887; R. Khaggard, *Dzhess*, Moscow 1896; R. M. Ballantain, *Chernaia kost', ili torgovlia negrami v Zapadnoi Afrike*, Saint Petersburg 1875; E. Barfus, *Prikliucheniia v Afrike*, Saint Petersburg 1889; E. Barfus, *V strane almazov*, Saint Petersburg 1893; K. Vil'denshtein, *Dol'f—geroi bur*, Saint

popular, as evinced by the various re-éditions issued before the 1917 revolution: Jacolliot's *La Côte d'Ebène*, after being selected by the writer and translator Elizaveta Akhmatova for publication in her instalment *Sobranie inostrannykh romanov, povestei i rasskazov v perevode na russkii iazyk* (*Collection of Foreign Novels, Novellas and Short Stories in Russian Translation*), was included in Jacolliot's collected works printed by the publisher Petr Soikin in 1910; Haggard's *King Solomon Mines*, which appeared for the first time for Aleksei Suvorin's publishing house, was also later picked up by Soikin, who re-edited it two times, in 1911 and 1914, while the novel was simultaneously translated also for Nikolai Askarkhanov's publishing house under the title *Otkrytie klada korolia Solomona* (*The Discovery of King Solomon's Treasure*, 1896; 1911); She was published by three different publishers, Vissarion Komarov (1887), Suvorin (1902), and Soikin (1903); Niemann's *Pieter Moritz* was issued twice by Al'fred Devrien. While they were all undoubtedly products of the colonial metropolis, they sparked a diverse discourse on race, the role of Europeans in Africa, coloniality, and slavery, given that their authors did not necessarily share the same views on these issues. Readers were thus exposed to an articulated colonial imagery, in which anti-slavery—in itself a topical issue in post-1861 Russia—went hand in hand with explicit praise of European colonial policy, and where the focus was not only on white characters in an exotic land, but also on black protagonists (*Nada the Lily*).

Drawing on Western imagery and rhetoric, Russian literature on black Africa exploited this new and exotic setting for several purposes, such as transposing issues that could have been perceived as uncomfortable in a Russian setting to an alien one, and contributing to the modernisation of genres and the expansion of popular literature's themes. In all these cases, black Africa effectively served as a disguise, whilst disguises and identity alterations were also often part of the plots. From popular to 'canonical' literature, the following analysis will reflect on the main themes at the heart of these publications, while also highlighting mechanisms of appropriation, rewriting, and the insertion of a Russian twist in the treatment of Africa.

Petersburg 1900; A. Niman, *Piter Morits, molodoi bur iz Transvaalia*, Saint Petersburg 1900.

Modern Tales, Tales of Modernity: Adventure Novels for the People

Often inspired by Western colonial writers, authors of popular (and lowbrow) literature relied on an African backdrop to address contemporary issues—such as slavery and European colonialism—whilst using established narrative structures. In fact, the ‘newness’ of these books derived primarily from the unusual setting, which contributed to the modernisation of genres with an ancient tradition, such as the fairy tale or the adventure novel. The Africa (re)created by these writers was all the more abstract because most of them had never actually travelled there, drawing instead inspiration from historical events reported in the press or from similar works published in Europe. Their novels and short stories were primarily aimed at children, though the cheapness of the books and the simplicity of the style made them appealing also to lowbrow adults. Commenting on an adventure novel entitled *In the Jaws of a Crocodile*, bibliographer, educator, and book historian Nikolai Rubakin noted the flashy and sensational cover, the general vagueness of the setting, the absurdity of the plot, and lamented the appeal of such books on the public: ‘[These books] are all written according to the same recipe: a brave hero, a beautiful heroine, a terrible villain, blood, revenge, mystery. [...] People read them like fairy tales, they still read them, and they will continue to read them until books with the same fascination, but with a higher content, reach people alongside this nonsensical *lubok* literature’.⁵

In the Jaws of a Crocodile (1889) was written by *lubochnyi* writer Nikolai Pazukhin (1857-1898), among many other similar efforts.⁶ In

5 N. Rubakin, ‘Kriticheskie zametki o literature dlia naroda’, *Russkoe bogatstvo*, 1889, 8, pp. 169-185 (p. 173).

6 N. Pazukhin, *V pasti krokodila*, Moscow 1894. Pazukhin’s book was published by Gubanov for the first time in 1889, but the previous year a similar story was published by Abramov without any reference to the author. It appears to be a shorter and simplified version, with variations in the names of the protagonists, the omission of Louisa’s cousin, and, most notably, the fact that it was Louisa who ended up in the mouth of the crocodile and was rescued by the younger of the two friends, who later married her. This change is also reflected on the cover, which shows a young woman (rather than a young man) caught in the animal’s jaws. Cf. *V pasti krokodila*, Moscow 1888. On the *lubochnaia literatura* and its evolution, cf. for instance Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read*, pp. 59-108.

this sense, Rubakin's take on the vagueness of the setting was accurate: Africa (as well as the very generic Russia at the beginning of the story) did not matter per se, since the incredible adventures of the two protagonists could have taken place anywhere. The plot was evidently implausible: two men (one of whom, bizarrely, is a relative of Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky) meet by chance and leave Russia for Africa, where they begin to hunt along the Nile. There they are acquainted with an American family, saving their daughter Louisa from a tiger (sic!) and fighting against her jealous cousin who is in love with her. While searching for a bird to present to her, the younger man ends up in the mouth of a crocodile, but is rescued by his friend. He later marries Louisa and goes to America with her, while his friend remains in Africa.

Despite the absurdity of the story and the frequent lack of logic, the book went through three editions within a few years (1889; 1891; 1894), which is a testament to its popularity. Exoticism and otherness do not play a significant role here. In fact, they are constantly downplayed: the unusual circumstance that both protagonists—two Russian subjects—have had previous experience in Africa is reported matter-of-factly, as is the fact that one of them—nicknamed 'African man' (*afrikanets*)—has lived there (but where, exactly, is not disclosed), or that the younger one was about to marry an African woman (*afrikanka*), but called off the wedding due to her parents' objections. Even though the whole continent is deemed 'wild' (*dikii*), as are its people, the latter are always described as friends, which greatly reduces the distance between the two protagonists (doubling for Russians and thus Europeans, even though one is a Cossack and the other a Circassian) and their black counterparts. Nevertheless, they are both glad to have the chance to meet and speak with the American family (other 'educated Europeans', sic!), as 'it would not be fun for us to live with savages and not be able to talk to people of our own level of development'.⁷ As a matter of fact, these friendly savages have no relevant role in the story and are completely relegated to the background; they are not even the villains, as that role is played by Louisa's American cousin. Unnecessary in the economy of the narrative is also Africa, important only because it enables adventures with particularly dangerous animals such as tigers (!) and crocodiles.

7 Pazukhin, *V pasti krokodila*, p. 23.

Any attempt at plausibility, whether in the plot or in the setting (the natural environment) is thus completely lost: it just so happens that the encounter between Russian subjects and Americans, and the adventures that ensue, take place in Africa.

Lowbrow books could also take a more grounded approach to Africa, although they still focused on 'European' travellers, rather than on African people. Nevertheless, they placed the wild adventures of the protagonists in a more or less historical context, offering simplified versions of the military and political events that actually took place. In some cases, they were not even original works, but rather ingenious rewrites of European travel literature. Two examples of such rewriting are particularly noteworthy: *Tamira, the Queen of Madagascar* by one Karl Bogen (1901), and *The Germans in Africa* by one Maks Liudvig (1903), both published by Ivan Sytin's publishing house, and both posing as original works of fiction written in Russian by unknown—or undisclosed—authors (Bogen and Liudvig are most likely pseudonyms).⁸

Tamira tells the story of a failed French diplomatic mission to Madagascar, narrated through the voice of a Frenchman called Duvignaud, a member of said mission. Although no timeframe is provided, so that the events narrated could have taken place at any time, it is clear that the adventure was fuelled by France's desire to establish fruitful relations with the 'mysterious queen of Bombetoka' against Great Britain's interests in the same region. This at least places the story in colonial times, anchoring it to the rivalry between France and Great Britain; however, no other historical clues are offered to the reader, who could interpret Duvignaud's journey as a complete fiction. Indeed, many elements—both stylistic and plot-related—point towards the adventure novel genre: from the opening, which serves as a modern 'once upon a time' ('War broke out between England and France'—but no year or context is provided), to the frequent allusions to the mysteriousness of Madagascar and the perils of the journey for a European, to the figure of the Portuguese translator, who later turns out to be deceitful,

8 K. Bogen, *Tamira, koroleva madagaskarskaia*, Moscow 1912; M. Liudvig, *Nemtsy v Afrike*, Moscow 1903. As far as I know, these books have never been studied before, nor their 'forgery' exposed—not even in the coeval reviews. Their existence surely arouses curiosity about Sytin's (and similar publishers') publishing policies, as well as about the elusive authors behind such rebranding efforts.

to the encounter with a savage, 'other' reality (cruel rituals, general backwardness), to the queen's deception (she had already made arrangements with the English), and the safe return to France. In fact, the book is heavily based on some chapters of Louis Garneray's *Voyages, aventures et combats* (1833), a semi-autobiographical and sensationalist account (the veracity of which has often been disputed) on Garneray's maritime adventures. This work had already appeared in a shortened Russian translation in *Otechestvennye zapiski* (1852) under the title *Memories of Life at Sea*.⁹ Bogen's version completely failed to acknowledge the French original, shamelessly replacing Garneray with the fictional character Duvignaud, enriching the narrative with additional dialogue and altering small details. Thus, the openings differ slightly—in that Garneray does not mention a 'war' between England and France—as do the endings: both dwell on the fact that, although unsuccessful, the diplomatic mission had the merit of unravelling the mystery of the kingdom of Bombetoka (or Bombetoc) and its queen, who is explicitly called 'Tamira' only in Bogen's version, whereas in the French original and in the 1852 translation the elusive queen remained nameless. The book became a commercial success and was reprinted in 1911 and 1912.

Even more ingenious was the second falsification, *The Germans in Africa*, a colourful mixture of fairy tale, travel literature, and adventure novel. It purports to recall the incredible African adventures of a young shoemaker's apprentice, Gottlieb Keller, but a closer reading reveals the composite nature of this work: the central chapters—those set in Africa—are a rewrite of Oskar Baumann's *In Deutsch-Ostafrika während des Aufstandes* (*In German East Africa During the Rebellion*, 1890), while the general framework of the story (the beginning and the end) is a fairy-tale graft that has no connection with Baumann's account.¹⁰ In this

9 Louis Garneray (1783-1857) was a French writer, painter, and sailor who spent many years sailing the Indian Ocean first as an employee of the French navy and then as a corsair. He wrote about his adventures in several books, most notably an autobiographical trilogy, often exaggerating the extent of certain events, or even fictionalising them. Cf. L. Garneray, *Voyages, aventures et combats*, Paris 1887. For the Russian translation see L. Garnere, 'Vospominaniia o zhizni na more', *Otechestvennye zapiski*, 1852, 10-12.

10 Oskar Baumann (1864-1899) was an Austrian cartographer and geographer. Having already produced maps of German East Africa, a region he had visited on multiple occasions, in 1888 he embarked on an expedition to the Usambara region with the German geographer Hans Meyer. Their expedition was cut short due to the

tale, the young and inexperienced hero must prove himself to the father of his beloved in order to be permitted to marry her. Being the book set in modern times, the test that Gottlieb must pass (a 'great deed'—*velikii podvig*) involves acquiring landownership in Africa and fighting for the betterment of humanity against the institution of slavery:

Whoever wishes to marry Agnes must discover or conquer some land, or he will never see my daughter again. What a thing! In Africa they buy up thousands of poor negroes, stuff them on ships like herrings, send them across the sea and sell them! This practice cannot be tolerated! The slave traders must be wiped out or killed! Whoever does this will be my son-in-law.¹¹

Thus Gottlieb sets off for Africa, determined to accomplish his mission. His journey through Suez to Aden, Lamu and Zanzibar, then Bagamoyo and Pangani coincides with that of Baumann; even their travel companion, the geographer Hans Meyer, is the same, as is the main event of their African experience, i.e., their captivity and meeting with the Arab merchant and plantation (and slave) owner Abushiri. After regaining their freedom Baumann and Meyer cut their expedition short, but in *The Germans in Africa* young Gottlieb has still to prove himself. He therefore decides to remain in Africa and enlist in the German army to fight against the Abushiri rebellion, though no details of his actions in battle are provided. Interestingly, he manages to enlist by deception: since the army does not accept German volunteers, he disguises himself as a Somali with the help of his friend Ali, darkening his already tanned skin. In this way, the German shoemaker Gottlieb is accepted in the army and 'recruited as a Somali' by virtue of a performative act. The disguise and the creation of a new identity—black, African—will also affect his return home. When he unexpectedly appears at Agnes's door, he is not initially recognised precisely because of his darkened skin, which makes him appear foreign to her. The misunderstanding is amplified by the fact that the faithful servant Ali—himself a 'true' Somali—has decided to accompany Gottlieb to Germany, which further reinforces Agnes' perception that she is dealing with two people from

Abushiri Revolt. In addition to maps, Baumann published several books (including essays and travelogues) on Africa. Cf. M. Unangst, *Colonial Geography: Race and Space in German East Africa, 1884-1905*, Toronto 2022.

11 Liudvig, *Nemtsy v Afrike*, p. 8.

exotic lands. Ultimately, Gottlieb's identity is restored, and despite his still poor means, he is allowed to marry the woman of his dreams since he has fought against the pro-slavery Abushiri.

In this case, it is the introduction of fictional characters such as Gottlieb, the shoemaker, and Agnes—as well as Gottlieb's motive for going to Africa and his cooperation with the German forces—that creates distance from Baumann's account. Every other detail—from the names of historical figures such as Meyer and Abushiri, to those of the locals encountered during the journey, specific incidents that occurred along the way, descriptions, and even dates—matches Baumann's travelogue perfectly (with the exception of a few cuts, presumably to make the book more appealing and readable to its lowbrow readership). Of particular relevance is the conversation between Gottlieb, Meyer, and Abushiri (in reality between Baumann, Meyer, and Abushiri), in which the Arab merchant explains the motives behind the revolt he is leading and openly criticises German expansionism in Africa, thus effectively undermining German power to the Russian public:

'You Germans have undermined the Hindu merchants who were willing to give us money, and we could no longer stand it! A handful of Germans seemed to us like a bunch of naughty little boys who are looked at with a smile at first, but when they become too annoying, they are thrown out of the room. [...] Tell me, what did the Germans want in East Africa, and why did they not stay in their own country?' [...] At that, Abushiri shook his head and blew as if he wanted to wipe Germany off the face of the earth.¹²

By inserting fairy-tale motifs and sanitising certain passages—such as the crude details of Baumann's and Meyer's captivity—Liudvig effectively reduced the historical significance of the source material to make it suitable for a general readership, including young people accustomed to reading exotic adventure novels.

The unacknowledged appropriation of real people's life stories and their transformation into modern tales or adventure novels that appeal to the Russian public is a phenomenon that should be studied in its own right, as its scope goes beyond the mere representation of black Africa. It is certainly peculiar: the Russian editorial market was not lacking in

12 Ibid., pp. 89-91.

translations of European travelogues or official retellings of the 'lives and adventures' of famous European explorers. Yet, their accounts also seem to have been used as material suitable for the creation of modern tales, in which the hero is not a prince (or an aspiring one), but an explorer, conqueror, or diplomat, who must travel to the distant realm of colonial Africa in order to prove himself, and whose great deed is not necessarily accomplished. Book covers often helped to emphasise the adventurous aspects of these seemingly made-up stories, as well as their chronological elusiveness. The 1912 cover of *Tamira* is particularly revealing: the setting bears no resemblance to the African landscape described in the book, the uniforms and clothes appear outdated and incongruous, while the female figure is misleading in that she is as far removed as possible from the Bombetoka queen (notably, she is white and dressed in European attire).



Fig. 5.1 K. Bogen, *Tamira, The Queen of Madagascar*, Moscow 1912, front cover.

Alongside these dubious cultural products, which raise questions about plagiarism, there were also original works, which were mainly focused on the issue of slavery. The most famous example is probably Konstantin Staniukovich's *Maksimka* (1896), which, already a commercial success in imperial times, enjoyed a new life in the Soviet era when it was adapted for the screen in 1953, and it remains popular to this day. The enduring success of this novella is easily explained by its central theme—slavery—as well as by its positive portrayal of Russian sailors, who rescue a black boy after he survives the wreck of a slave ship bound for America, care for him and even integrate him into Russian society upon their return home. Essentially, it is a dramatisation of the slave trade—an issue with which Staniukovich was familiar, having spent three years sailing around the world on board a ship of the Russian imperial fleet (1861-1863). The question of slavery was also central to his semi-autobiographical work *Around the World on the 'Korshun'*, published in 1895 shortly before *Maksimka*. More of a travelogue than an adventure story (of the sea voyage variety), this book explicitly condemned the slave trade and portrayed Russian sailors as emotionally close to black Africans, if not in essence:

Although the sight of these black, half-naked, or even almost naked *arapy*, as the sailors called the negroes, aroused some doubts as to whether they were created in the image of God and belonged to the human race (there were even bold attempts on the part of the sailor Kovshikov [...] to equate the negroes with monkeys, or even with tailless devils, or, God forbid, devils), the sailors' attitude towards them was extremely friendly and in some cases even touching, testifying to the tolerance and fraternal attitude of the ordinary Russian towards all people, even if they were *arapy* and even of dubious human origin. Ashanin noticed this humane trait in Porto Grande and then observed it in Russian sailors as they continued to meet people of all colours and races. Not the slightest racial arrogance, not the slightest hint of religious intolerance.¹³

The closeness of the sailors (proxies for Russia) to black people (proxies for Africa) is stressed in many passages, which are simultaneously charged with other implications, too. For instance, finding common ground through music not only reinforces the perception of a real bond between the sailors and the Africans, but also marks the exclusion

13 K. Staniukovich, *Vokrug sveta na "Korshune"*, Saint Petersburg 1896, pp. 166-167.

of the only other European present: a Portuguese man who does not appreciate African popular music at all. In another case, offering European clothes to a black man is not only a charitable effort, but also a way of mastering him while making fun of his disproportionate joy ('What are you so happy about, blackface [*chernomazyi*]?', laugh the sailors at his excitement).¹⁴

Maksimka reproduced these very same trends. In Aleksandr Flerov's *Index of Books for Children Aged 7-14*, Staniukovich's short novel was praised for arousing 'sympathy and respect for ordinary people who, thanks to common sense and a good heart, have managed to rise above tribal [*plemennyye*] and national prejudices'.¹⁵ Perceived from the very beginning as a motivational story that should encourage the public to morally accept the 'other', it nevertheless remained very much rooted in the imagery of its time. In this case, the (negative) force that pan-humanism must overcome is not embodied by a Portuguese man or any other European, but by the pompous captain's servant, who looks down on the sailors and dismisses the emaciated black boy they rescued as nothing more than a savage: when asked about the boy's fate, he replies that he will be discharged as soon as they reach Cape Town, because 'What else could we do with a black heathen like that? Ruddy savages—that's all they are', to which the ship's carpenter quickly rebuts 'Savages or not, they're God's children same as you and me'.¹⁶ Indeed, the boy's savagery is not in dispute: the two factors that redeem him in the eyes of the sailors are his belonging to the human race and the terrible past he has endured, much of which is reminiscent of Russian serfdom. On this basis, they set out to introduce him to proper (Russian) civilisation. Their efforts are met with the extreme docility, gratefulness, and curiosity of the 'negro child'. Indeed, he is constructed as the perfect subject to domesticate, demonstrating that the Russians do it better through gentleness and patience, with superior results (not once does the child complain or rebel against the sailors, instead displaying a 'grateful outcast-dog expression').¹⁷ And so, as 'he hasn't any other

14 Ibid., p. 168.

15 A. Flerov, *Ukazatel' knig dlia detskogo chteniia (v vozraste 7-14 let)*, Moscow 1905, p. 490.

16 K. Stanyukovich, *Maximka. Sea Stories*, Moscow 1956, p. 27.

17 Ibid., p. 31.

name', the boy is promptly (re)named Maksimka (he was rescued on Saint Maxim's day), and dressed in new clothes, much to his delight. Being 'a bright kid, even if he is a blackie',¹⁸ Maksimka is also taught Russian by the rude and often drunk Luchkin, who has surprisingly taken him under his wing. Even though Luchkin is mocked by his fellow sailors for his 'nanny-like attitude' towards the boy, and the two are even described as 'friends', the inequality between them persists and is never truly overcome (for example, Maksimka always follows Luchkin around 'wherever he went like a little dog').¹⁹ His domestication is complete when, fearing disembarkation at Cape Town, he willingly gives up his (apparently uncertain) identity and expresses his wish to become 'a Russian sailor'. His proposition is heartily accepted by the crew, but knowing the Russian language is not enough: he needs to be baptised so that his soul can be saved, and only then will he become 'a Russian negro', i.e., an exotic conquest attainable without drawing any blood. Just as his new life depends entirely on the Russian sailors, his new identity is inextricably linked to them: his baptism not only officialises his new name, but also provides him with a surname, Zabiiaikin, after the name of the ship that rescued him. The obvious trope of the white saviour, embodied in this case by sympathetic Russians who oppose the slave trade in the name of a common humanity and the scars of their own institution of serfdom, finds its counterpart in the fact that it is Maksimka (i.e., a 'black saviour') who rescues Luchkin from a future marked by alcoholism. Thus, the author introduces an element of reciprocity into their dynamic, though Luchkin continues to act as Maksimka's warden until the very end. A tale of a successful domestication of the savage in the Russian context, the book functioned as a reassurance of civilisation's victory over perceived primitiveness and backwardness, ultimately expressing hope for the betterment of humanity through Russia's example.

The trope of the white saviour, however, was not always associated with Russians—in fact, at the same time, authors continued to perpetuate it with regard to Europeans, despite acknowledging their role in the exploitation of Africa and its people. Consequently, Europe could be constructed as the ultimate master of Africa, responsible for

18 Ibid., p. 46.

19 Ibid., p. 72.

either its destruction or its salvation. In *The Zanzibar Fugitive*, a novella by the geographer and school teacher Nikolai Berezin, the plot revolves around Mambo, a young black man living on the shores of Lake Victoria. Hearing the stories of a former traveller, he begins to dream of reaching the sea and going to Zanzibar. Recruited to be a porter for a German gentleman, he leaves his village and arrives in Bagamoyo, where he falls ill and is left alone by the other members of the caravan. He meets an old Arab man who deceives him and sells him as a slave to work on a plantation in Zanzibar. Fortunately, he attracts the attention of a passing German, who rescues him. Back in his village, he will never tell anyone of his time as a slave.

It is effectively a coming-of-age story set in colonial Africa, a backward place ('the dirty, smelly huts of the negro village') where boys race against lizards and monkeys, to which they are also compared ('a small, thin and ugly, ape-like negro boy').²⁰ Mambo is the prototype of the curious boy, then young man, who dreams of reaching out into the world, experiencing something first-hand and acquiring knowledge. However, he is bound to become disillusioned, and will return to his village with a new understanding of life. It just so happens that the reality around him is that of a colonial environment where slavery still exists; thus, instead of an amiable old lady who later turns out to be a witch, the evil force here is the old Arab man who offers the naïve Mambo shelter, drugs him with hashish and puts him in a wooden box with other slaves. Although the exact time period in which the story is set is unclear, the events certainly take place during the German presence in East Africa, at a time when Arab slave traders were still flourishing. Constant reminders of this specific historical period help to anchor this coming-of-age story in reality, as do the abundant colonial literature clichés that assert world order: for instance, the 'big fat negro' who recruits Mambo is 'very proud of the fact that he had been in the service of the white masters';²¹ the white master whose caravan Mambo joins exploit the black porters who are never let

20 N. Berezin, *Zanzibarskii beglets*, Saint Petersburg 1903, pp. 3, 4. Berezin was familiar with the African setting, having popularised European colonial literature by translating and adapting books by Stanley, Nachtigal, and Neufeld, many of which reported on slavery. Some elements of Mambo's troubled journey to Zanzibar mirror the (quite obscure) life of Ndugu M'Hali, a young slave who later became Stanley's adopted son and was given the name Kalulu.

21 Ibid., p. 8.

to rest; Mambo does not question the fairness of his employer per se, but only because he would like to drink beer and dance (he 'was madly in love with dancing, to which he devoted himself to the point of complete self-forgetfulness. He galloped like an antelope, kicked like a zebra, spun round, shook his head frantically [...] and waved his arms as if he were a frightened chimpanzee');²² other black men are complicit with the old Arab and escort Mambo and other little slaves to Zanzibar; Europeans are portrayed as constantly battling against the slave trade led by the Arabs, an interference which the complicit blacks explain to Mambo as a consequence of their foolery and jealousy towards the Zanzibar Sultan. Now exploited on a Zanzibar plantation owned by an old and blind Arab, Mambo, despite his intelligence and courage, is unable to free himself: his attempt fails miserably and leads instead to terrible tortures. Freedom comes in the form of a *belyi spasitel'* (white saviour): a German man 'dressed in white flannel', a true *deus ex machina* who listens to Mambo's story and sets him free. As in traditional tales, when the hero-Mambo returns home after being presumed dead for a long time, he is celebrated: his adventures become famous and he soon marries, having gained valuable experience. However, his time as a slave will forever haunt him: considered a shameful fate by the society to which he belongs, it will remain a dark secret, carefully concealed and repressed.

Thus it appears that in Berezin's imagination black people can either live in total and blissful ignorance of the modern world, secluded in their remote and backward villages, or exist passively at the complete mercy of Arabs or Europeans. True emancipation is certainly not (yet) possible, as evidenced by the fact that Mambo, once freed, simply returns to where he came from: the modern world—where time passes, things happen, society changes—is no place for him, and he goes back to his ahistorical village. It is a frequent trope in the construction of the 'African other', according to which 'the savage [...] lives in a continual state of self-presence, unable to leave that trace on the world which serves as the beginning of difference, distinction, opposition and hence progress. This failure leads to the identification of Africans with the unchanged and ever self-present earth, the primitive rock formation serving as a metaphor for the silence, denseness, and historical immobility of the

22 Ibid., pp. 10-11.

people themselves'.²³ In this respect, his final 'victory' is tainted by the knowledge that, outside the confines of his village, he remains an insignificant figure devoid of any authority. For all his vitality, he is indeed powerless and passive; without the help of the Europeans, he would have remained a slave. Yet Berezin also provides glimpses of resistance, such as when he describes the black porters' impromptu performance in which they mimic and mock the 'white gentleman':

Then the actors took the stage: one walked in front of the cackling crowd, imitating the 'white gentleman's' gait, his squeaky voice, his haughty look; [...] a third [...] showed how the cook was preparing the 'white gentleman's' dinner, while Mambo [...] imitated the *Feldwebel* and shouted the words of a German command which he did not understand. [...] At his grimaces the negroes would die laughing [...].²⁴

However, this act of resistance, which uses mockery and laughter to debase the coloniser, can only be carried out within the clear-cut and secure confines of a pantomime, without any significant effect on reality.

African Women and Russian Men: The Crisis of Identity in Petr Krasnov

In Chapter 3, I pointed out that Petr Krasnov, in his travelogue on Ethiopia, never focused his attention on the women he encountered, so much so that this could be interpreted as a repression mechanism in psychoanalytical terms. In fact, although women are conspicuously absent from his autobiographical writing, they are at the very centre of his novellas and short stories set in Ethiopia, in which they play a fundamental role. The first to be published was *The Love of an Abyssinian Woman* (later retitled *Terunesh*, after its female protagonist), which appeared in two issues of *Niva* in 1900, and was included in an anthology of Krasnov's prose in 1903 alongside two other Abyssinian-themed works: a second novella entitled *Aska Mariam* (written in 1900), and a short story entitled *The Guereza*.²⁵ These three texts have more in

23 D. Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire. Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*, Durham-London 1993, p. 99.

24 Berezin, *Zanzibarskii beglets*, pp. 11-12.

25 P. Krasnov, 'Liubov' abissinki', *Niva*, 1900, 46 (pp. 911-912, 914-915, 918); 47 (pp. 931-932, 934-935, 938); P. Krasnov, *Liubov' abissinki: povesti i rasskazy*, Saint Petersburg

common than just their exotic Ethiopian setting: they are also linked thematically by the female characters who, in turn, open up a new range of turn-of-the-century themes. These include the insecurity arising from the new role of women in society, the anxiety about the possibility of 'going native' in savage lands and racial mixing, the fascination with the occult and the popularity of reincarnation theories, and, more generally, the crisis of one's own identity.

Plot-wise, *Terunesh* tells the story of a young Russian man called Ivan Andreev, who leaves his precarious life with his wife Ania in order to earn money for a Russian company in Abyssinia. As he becomes 'a true Abyssinian', he gradually forgets Ania and falls in love with Terunesh, a local girl, whom he soon marries. They live happily for a while, but her apparent neediness and lack of interests outside of marriage start to bother Ivan, who grows apart and begins to long for Ania. When he learns of Terunesh's pregnancy and receives a letter from Ania, he decides to leave his Ethiopian wife and return to Russia, thus prompting Terunesh to commit suicide in front of him. The memory of Terunesh will haunt him forever, even though he does not consider himself fully responsible for her death.

In *Aska Mariam* the setting shifts between Saint Petersburg and Ethiopia: musician Aleksandr Panaev is deeply in love with his fiancée Nina Sergeevna, an accomplished pianist. To Panaev's despair, she falls ill and dies. At night, during her vigil, he begins to hallucinate: he sees her waking up and telling him that she is reborn, urging him to search the world for her. She speaks a few words in a foreign language, and Panaev is suddenly transported to a distant, exotic, and unknown land, with vegetation unfamiliar to him and black people dancing around a fire in what appears to be a welcoming ceremony for a three-day-old child, Aska Mariam. Panaev wakes up, dismisses the dream and lives in seclusion for fifteen years. One day, at a friend's house, he sees a photo of the mysterious city he had dreamt about and, having discovered that it is Harar, soon leaves for Ethiopia, where he searches for a young girl called Aska Mariam. When he finds her, he is soon disillusioned: there are no similarities between her and Nina, apart from her surprisingly blue eyes. Nevertheless, as she likes him, he decides to take her back to

1903. For later editions, cf. P. Krasnov, *Terunesh. Aska Mariam. Povesti*, Berlin 1921; P. Krasnov, *Terunesh. Povest'*, Munich 1947.

Saint Petersburg and sets her up in what used to be Nina's apartment. Soon, unaccustomed to the harsh climate, Aska Mariam falls ill; it is only on the verge of death that she seems to remember her former life. When she dies, Panaev buries her next to Nina.

Unlike these two novellas, the short story *The Guereza* is probably semi-autobiographical. While the plot revolves around a hunting expedition in the Ethiopian forest rather than a love story, it is once again a female character—albeit an animal one—who causes the narrator to experience a crisis. One evening during the Easter festivities, the author is chatting with a Frenchman, responsible for the construction of the telephone line between Addis Ababa and Harar,²⁶ and one of his young helpers. They start to talk about the monkeys living in the forest where they are spending the night, the infamous mantled guerezas, which are believed to be the souls of moneylenders punished by God for their sins. The following day the author sets out to hunt the guerezas, but his initial enthusiasm soon fades when he kills a female guereza, the mother of a little cub. This event deeply shocks the author, who, alone in the exotic forest on Easter night, begins to torture himself for killing the ape mother, all the more so because, if the Abyssinian legend is to be believed, he has actually killed a woman. In the morning, he returns to the camp where the Frenchman lives, bringing the little cub with him. The Frenchman assures him that no murder has been committed and suggests that they take the cub to the Jardin de Plantes in Paris or to the zoo in Saint Petersburg. However, the author's conscience is not at rest.

All three texts revolve around a fatal encounter between a Russian male protagonist and an Abyssinian female counterpart, an encounter that proves itself decisive for both of them: while the female characters die as a result of it, the former are affected in their minds and thoughts by the deaths they have caused. Through this symbolism, Krasnov suggests that a successful, peaceful, and fruitful integration between two cultures so different from one another is not possible, neither in Abyssinia nor in Russia. Religion, which functioned as the primary catalyst of pro-

26 In the short story, the Frenchman is named Richard Doyen. It is, most likely, an alias for 'monsieur Drouin', who is mentioned by Krasnov in his travelogue as an employee of the telephone company, and is also quoted in other contemporary sources. Cf. for instance S. Vignéras, *Une mission française en Abyssinie*, Paris 1897, p. 82.

Abyssinia propaganda in tsarist Russia, is not necessarily a common ground through which harmony can be achieved. Instead, the point of contact between the two cultures is only glimpsed, a utopian mirage that not only fails to materialise, but even turns into its tragic opposite: death (in the case of the female protagonists) or the loss of the self (in the case of the male characters).

While all three pieces are titled after the respective female figures, the two women and the monkey are not necessarily relevant in themselves, but rather for the ruinous effect they have on their counterparts. Consequently, they are the driving force behind their destiny, which could have been entirely different if not for the fatal encounter. As for the men, they come to terms with their actions in different ways. Andreev, the most selfish and cold-hearted of the three, is forever haunted by the memory of Terunesh, whom he blames for his joyless life: from the moment he is reunited with his first wife Ania, he is 'poisoned' by the memory of the young Abyssinian ('The grey face of Terunesh, her smashed skull and the ugly, twisted eyes, flashed in my mind for a second. And the moment of happiness was poisoned. And she, that little Abyssinian girl, poisoned every moment of joy, excitement, fascination... [...] And the memory of her death seemed to be the revenge of the miserable Terunesh!').²⁷ Panaev, on the other hand, will live with the guilt of having brought Mariam to Saint Petersburg, rather than to milder regions like Crimea; having lost his musical talent, he is in every way a shell of the man he once was: 'But all this was not easy for him. When he sometimes had to play in salons, his violin did not obey the bow well, his forty-year-old eyes could hardly see, and his grey head would shake sadly...'.²⁸ Finally, the narrator of *The Guereza*, who is an almost overconfident hunter at the beginning of the short story, begins to question hunting itself after killing the mother monkey: 'But my celebration was spoiled, my celebration was ruined by this hunt... by this murder. Isn't hunting and murder essentially the same thing?'.²⁹ However, their fate does not seem to be a satisfactory retribution for all the loss and disruption they have caused: indeed, the tragic deaths of the female characters remain largely unpunished.

²⁷ Krasnov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, I, p. 431.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 461.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 436.

A closer look at the two novellas reveals further parallels. Firstly, Terunesh and Aska Mariam are not the only women associated with Andreev and Panaev. In contrast to these exotic beauties, there are the pale, almost emaciated figures of Ania and Nina, whose blue eyes are their most striking feature. They are the protagonists' first loves, who are soon replaced by their dark-skinned, alluring 'others'; yet this replacement occurs in different ways, and has different meanings for the two men. Andreev leaves his wife behind voluntarily and settles well in Abyssinia; in fact, it is one of his new acquaintances there who suggests that he should marry a local woman to help him keep his house in order and become 'a true Abyssinian'. This suggestion prompts Andreev to mentally review the local women, lingering on their bodies: he recalls 'naked chests as black as ebony', 'bony shoulders poking out from under dirty rags', 'colourful scarves and shawls, pearl and rings', and 'dark expressive eyes'.³⁰ Indeed, they embody the temptation of the flesh, which can be freely indulged in a savage place where traditional (Russian, European) moral codes and social norms seemingly hold no value. Notably, Andreev is drawn to Terunesh because of her appearance, which he describes using a combination of orientalist stereotypes, racially charged language, and pure desire:

She was very young and very beautiful. Her dark, almost black face, with short, thick, curly hair, shone with such youthfulness, naivety and correctness of features that it was even involuntarily attractive. [...] The nostrils of the straight and thin Jewish nose, not too large and regular, were swollen, and the thin, beautifully shaped lips occasionally flashed a smile. [...] She seemed to me like a bronze almah that had leapt out of the window of an elegant Parisian shop. Everything about her was so beautiful, so graceful, so full of warlike Abyssinian nobility, that it was impossible not to gaze at her. And I followed her, admiring her relaxed posture, her slender frame and the beautiful curve of her dark, graceful neck. She turned and looked at me, and my heart leapt. What did she think of me? But her dark eyes with brownish white glowed with affection and welcome, and seemed to beckon me to follow her. I was a Russian commoner and she, apparently, the daughter of a noble Abyssinian, but what of it—at that moment I knew and remembered only one thing: that I was white and she was black, and therefore there

30 Ibid., p. 408.

was no class difference between us!³¹

Significantly, the protagonist disregards class—one of the languages of difference of the Russian Empire—in favour of race, which, until this point, he had apparently been oblivious to. A telling example of ‘racialization’,³² the passage transforms Ethiopia into a land of opportunity, offering not only economic prospects, but also the chance to improve one’s social standing. The protagonist does not view miscegenation and ‘going native’ as potential threats to his integrity; rather, he sees them as a way of climbing the social ladder. However, Andreev’s enthusiasm is soon tempered by the realisation that within the Ethiopian society class is still more important than race, and white superiority is certainly not a given: Terunesh’s father, a high-ranking military officer, initially rejects Andreev as a suitor because he is a simple merchant. This cultural clash is conveniently overcome only by virtue of the protagonist’s Russianness (and the help of gifts and money): he is not ‘a vile Italian dog’, but a ‘Muscovite, the brother of those glorious Muscovites who tamed our horses, and a friend of their [...] doctors. He is a Christian and believes as we do. He worships Saint George, prays in our churches, and Abune Petros [...] does not hesitate to talk to [him]’.³³ Krasnov thus infuses the narrative with a touch of Russian exceptionalism, suggesting that the protagonist’s Russianness is what effectively secures him a convenient marriage with Terunesh. For her part, she is described from the outset as being very keen to marry Andreev, although her motives remain unclear: she is always presented to the reader through the volatile eyes of the male protagonist.

As the narrative progresses, it emerges that she is, in fact, a fourteen-year-old child, which Andreev acknowledges by shifting from an erotic vocabulary to one of almost chaste endearment (‘child’—*rebenok*; ‘little

31 Ibid., p. 410.

32 Cf. E. M. Bojanowska, ‘Race-ing the Russian Nineteenth Century’, *Slavic Review*, 2021 (80), 2, pp. 258–266, where she defines it as a ‘dynamic process’ connecting ‘discourses of race with social relations and political practices’ thus providing ‘an opportunity to discuss authors and characters as “making” and “doing” race’ (p. 261), <https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2021.86>. Cf. also M. Mogilner, ‘When Race Is a Language and Empire is a Context’, *Slavic Review*, 2021 (80), 2, pp. 207–215, <https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2021.73>

33 Krasnov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, I, p. 413. Abune Petros (1882–1936) was an Ethiopian bishop, executed by Italian troops for taking part in the resistance during the second Italo-Ethiopian war. He is regarded as a national martyr in Ethiopia.

girl'—*malen'kaia devochka*; 'little wife'—*maliutka-zhena*; 'capricious child'—*kapriznyi rebenok*), despite the fact that sexual relations clearly start soon after the wedding. While marriage at such a young age was widely acceptable in Ethiopia, this was not the case in late imperial Russia, where women could marry from the age of sixteen (and men from eighteen).³⁴ This is another (Russian) social norm that Andreev violates—quite incidentally, just as he does with bigamy. Ethiopia becomes a place where everything is permitted outside the confines of laws, moral codes, or religious requirements; in this sense, it doubles for the Caucasus as a space where the Russian man can act as free as he pleases.³⁵ In terms of his love life, Andreev has indeed many literary antecedents, beginning with the protagonist of Pushkin's *The Prisoner of the Caucasus* and Lermontov's Pechorin (*Bela*). The possibility of bypassing social norms in an 'exotic', 'other', 'savage' environment—as well as the related motif of doomed love—is only reinforced by the fact that, according to Russian law, the legal marriage age was lower in the Caucasus (fifteen for men, thirteen for women). Thus the titillating prospect of a union with an underage local girl, appealing both for her exotic nature (which the groom is set to tame) and for the transgressiveness of it all, is conveniently reduced to harmlessness, since the transgression is actually legal in the country in which it takes place (be that the Caucasus or Abyssinia).

The marriage between Terunesh and Andreev is described from Andreev's own perspective as a happy one at first, based on the former's complete obedience and submissiveness: she goes along with whatever her husband is up to, she tries to learn Russian, she even wishes, for his sake, that he would return to his homeland where he would be happier, hoping to joining him there. For that, Andreev loves her 'like one loves a

34 Cf. K. Annenkov, *Sistema russkogo grazhdanskogo prava*, V, Saint Petersburg 1905, p. 28.

35 On the relationships between Russian men and Caucasian women in Russian nineteenth-century literature, cf., for instance, P. Scotto, 'Prisoners of the Caucasus: Ideologies of Imperialism in Lermontov's *Bela*', *PMLA*, 1992 (107), 2, pp. 246-260; S. Layton, 'Ironies of Ethnic Identity', in L. Bagby (ed. by), *Lermontov's A Hero of Our Time. A Critical Companion*, Evanston 2002, pp. 64-84; L. Zhigunova, 'Empire's Erotic Conquests: Circassian Women in Russian Romantic Literature', *Gorizonty gumanitarnogo znaniia*, 2018, 6, pp. 178-203, <http://dx.doi.org/10.17805/ggz.2018.6.13>. Cf. also S. Layton, 'Eros and Empire in Russian Literature about Georgia', *Slavic Review*, 1992 (51), 2, pp. 195-213, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2499527>

devoted dog'.³⁶ However, as with Pechorin and Bela, the more Terunesh becomes attached to Andreev, the colder and less loving he becomes towards her. This internal shift is reflected in Andreev's renewed perception of Terunesh's physicality: now, and perhaps even more so given that she is pregnant with his child, he no longer sees the young girl as either a sinuous temptress or a dear child. Instead, she becomes utterly repulsive: now 'a madwoman', 'this little brown Abyssinian [...] disgusts me with her pink heels and palms. Her thin, passionate lips make me angry, and that nose with the flared nostrils, that slavish, submissive expression of the whole face...'.³⁷ But Terunesh is not just a docile creature: she dreams of leaving her country and following Andreev to Russia, which could become her second home. For this, she is doubly punished: by her husband, who leaves her without even a word of farewell, and by her people, to whom she is a traitor, guilty of intimately betraying her country for Russia and therefore worthy of imprisonment. By the end of the story, the transformation of Terunesh is complete. When she manages to catch up with Andreev's caravan, she appears to him aged and dishevelled ('Her dirty, dusty, sweat-soaked shirt was torn, her haggard face aged many years. Only her eyes burned with a wild glow. Mimosa thorns were stuck in her curly head, dust powered her dark curls. Her legs and arms were dark with scrapes and wounds, with terrible bruises'),³⁸ but this does not deter the man from his intention to return to Russia alone, nor does it arouse compassion in him. Looking back, Andreev regrets not realising that 'there was a soul in that small dark body', but admits that 'the proud European looked at her as an unnecessary woman in the way, an unloved dog that could be kicked out with his foot', thus sealing her destiny: echoing the fate of the Circassian woman at the centre of Pushkin's *The Prisoner of the Caucasus*, she throws herself into the turbulent Awash river and dies hitting her head against the rocks.

As she becomes increasingly attached to the stranger who has come to her land, Terunesh undergoes a significant transformation, from a beautiful and vibrant creature to a grey, motionless corpse with a smashed skull and twisted eyes. It is essentially a progressive physical

36 Krasnov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, I, p. 415.

37 Ibid., p. 420.

38 Ibid., p. 429.

deterioration that culminates when she openly breaks the laws of her country, escapes from prison, and attempts to reunite with her husband and flee to Russia. Her part of the tale thus embodies the motif of the colonial subjects who, despite their attempts to grasp 'Europeanness', inevitably fail to achieve it. If, however, in colonial discourse most commonly 'the natives [...] are reviled for their non-Western otherness, yet ridiculed for their attempts to imitate the forms of the West',³⁹ in Krasnov's narrative Terunesh is not the object of laughter, but rather a tragic heroine. Even her failed attempts to master the Russian language appear, in Andreev's eyes, as an endearing act and one which he 'loves', appreciating the efforts of his subdued wife. As for Andreev, he shows no real awareness or remorse: his actions are presented to the reader without any judgement (infidelity and bigamy included) and thus they are completely normalised, as is his attempt at going native, which seems to stem more from the need to integrate into the new society in which he lives, than from a desire to embrace his hidden wild side. His internal journey, however, is one of disillusion: he has moved from thinking that he could succeed in becoming part of another culture to acknowledging that he will always remain a Russian. In this regard, it is during an official ceremony in the presence of Menelik II that he detaches himself from 'the mass of people who were strangers [*chuzhdye*] to me' whilst feeling 'defenceless' [*bezzashchitnyi*].⁴⁰ His realisation of the impermeability of these two different worlds is reinforced, in the following chapter, by the words of Terunesh's sister, who, on the contrary, understands that everyone must stay in their place and that merging cultures is ultimately unattainable ('My sister is wrong. A hen likes eggs, but not cow's milk—an Abyssinian cannot want to live in Russia').⁴¹ Yet, although he remains Russian at heart, Andreev has been touched by the 'other'; tellingly, when he reunites with Ania, they do not recognise each other. To further complicate this negotiation of identities, 'Europeanness' comes into play—but it is not necessarily something to aspire to: when Andreev defines himself as a 'European', he does so as a form of self-criticism, against his own arrogant and unforgiving side. Conversely, his ultimate acceptance of a Russian identity—the only identity possible—means he

39 Spurr, *The Rhetoric of the Empire*, p. 84.

40 Krasnov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, I, p. 422.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 427.

is not destined to suffer the same tragic fate as Terunesh.

Aska Mariam revisits these motifs, introducing significant variations to the characters. In contrast to the cocky Russian-European man that Andreev is at the beginning of *Terunesh*, Panaev is not remotely interested in Ethiopia, nor does he seek to become rich through lucrative trade with the country. His journey is neither a search for fortune nor a search for a new identity. In fact, what he is looking for in Ethiopia is Russia (i.e., the deceased Nina, with whom he remains deeply in love for years after her death). His relationship with Aska Mariam is not based on deceit or a desire to assume another identity; rather, it is a desperate attempt to reunite with his former lover. Thus, Krasnov introduces the themes of the occult and reincarnation, which were very popular in turn-of-the-century Russia,⁴² and links them to other modern concerns, such as exoticism, otherness, and blackness. In fact, the entire novella is constructed around Panaev's journey towards an alternative form of spirituality, which is explicitly non-Christian, non-Orthodox, non-Russian. In line with the modernist tendency to construct Africa—along with other 'Oriental' spaces—through imagery (and a lexicon) that alludes to hallucination, delirium, and illusory reality (a concept defined by David Spurr as the rhetoric of 'insubstantialisation'),⁴³ Panaev's initial encounter with Ethiopia occurs in a dream. What he sees, hears, and even smells is nothing more than a fleeting vision that eludes him when he wakes up:

He was lying on the edge of a low hill covered with dry yellow grass. It was night. But not the dark, cold, rainy night of Saint Petersburg, but the hot, bright night of the south. The high sky was covered with big, bright, big stars, and the huge disc of the moon shone softly among them. [...] Below, on the mountains themselves, stood the black walls of a mysterious city, the wide gates were covered with uneven planks, and at the entrance slumbered a sentry with a spear, in a white cloak,

42 Cf. for instance G. Hassall, 'Notes on the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions in Russia and its Territories', *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 1993 (5), 3, pp. 41-80, [https://doi.org/10.31581/jbs-5.3.3\(1993\)](https://doi.org/10.31581/jbs-5.3.3(1993)); B. G. Rosenthal (ed. by), *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, Ithaca 1997; J. Mannherz, *Modern Occultism in Late Imperial Russia*, Ithaca 2012; B. Seidel-Dreffke, 'Effects of Theosophy on Russian Cultural History', in H. M. Krämer and J. Strube (ed. by), *Theosophy across Boundaries: Transcultural and Interdisciplinary Perspectives on a Modern Esoteric Movement*, Albany 2020, pp. 425-454.

43 Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire*, pp. 141-155.

with bare head and bare feet. At the gate grew a huge tree, so big that ten men could barely hold it up, and a whole caravan rested in its shade. Small donkeys with sacks on their backs mowed the grass, and men and women, black with curly hair, crouched by the blazing fire. The elusive smell of the East wafted through the air: the smell of incense and antiquity, the smell of sun-dried dirt, the smell of lemon trees, bananas, and coffee flowers. Below, under the cliff of the hill on which Panaev lay, was a sandy road. At the side of the road grew tall cacti, like candles in candelabras, with ugly, fleshy shoots reaching upwards; behind the cacti were round huts made of poles woven from straw, with conical roofs and mats for doors. [...] And in front of them a crowd of black men were dancing wildly, stamping their feet and waving their spears and white cloaks. Their eyes burned with joy, and they repeated the same phrase in chorus, and when they had said it, they began to dance again, stamping their feet and kicking up dust. At the cactus wall, black women with naked heads covered with a mop of short curly hair, dressed in long yellowish-white shirts like ancient chitons, crouched on their knees with their hands around their knees, as if motionless and frozen.⁴⁴

His journey to Ethiopia (and the quest for a new, more valid spirituality capable of reconciling him with Nina's untimely death) lasts fifteen years, from the moment he dreams of this exotic and mysterious place, to the moment he actually arrives there. But before he can actually move around this foreign land, speak its language and meet its people, he sees it a second time indirectly: not as a romantic dream, but in a more prosaic photograph taken by one of his acquaintances ('In front of him was a photograph of the mysterious city he had seen in his dream [...]. The same large gate, covered with uneven planks, [...] a crowd of black men in white cloaks [...]. There was a fig tree that ten men could barely reach, and in its shade donkeys were resting with sacks on their backs [...]. Here is a crowd of black people with spears and cloaks, dancing on the dusty road').⁴⁵ Thus, an element of detachment between the protagonist and Ethiopia is constantly emphasised; even when Panaev finally arrives there, he continues to doubt the reality of his surroundings ('[...] and he shook himself in the saddle to make sure that this was not a new dream').⁴⁶ His physical journey to Harar is, unsurprisingly within the canon of travel literature, one of struggle—embodied in the dichotomy

44 Krasnov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, I, pp. 440–441.

45 Ibid., p. 443.

46 Ibid., p. 447.

white/black (he is 'terrified of spending the nights in the desert, alone and white among a crowd of black savages')⁴⁷—and of attempting to adapt to the local way of life ('He hunted, killed antelopes [...], shot wild boars in the gorges of the mountains, guarded against leopards, and on dark nights, leaning over a lantern, he studied the Abyssinian language').⁴⁸

But his journey is also—and most importantly—one that leads from Western rationality to 'Oriental' spirituality. As a matter of fact, at the beginning Panaev constantly questions the validity of his mission. In Djibouti, for instance, he dismisses his dream as 'nonsense' (*erunda*) and tries to rationalise it by convincing himself that he had actually seen an image of Harar somewhere before Nina's death; later, already in the African wilderness, his rational side emerges again, this time raising doubts about reincarnation and his own mental health:

'Surely it is nonsense', he said to himself, 'to look for some Negro girl in the wilds of Africa and think that in her I shall find the soul of my Nina. And how will I find her? [...] Where will I look for something I have never seen before? This is a chase after a ghost, a search for a dream I had fifteen years ago [...] in a painful moment of my life! Am I a madman?'⁴⁹

His doubts are dispelled by no other than Ras Makonnen, who is described here not so much as a military man, but rather as an Oriental sage with knowledge of the mysteries of the universe. Although he also refers to God when explaining the credibility of prophetic dreams, his overall conduct and words seem more aligned with non-Christian spirituality, especially since he claims that Panaev is the first white man he has met who believes in the supernatural. Moreover, this revelation comes after a kind of initiation: Makonnen offers Panaev *tej*, a honey wine typically brewed in Ethiopia and usually consumed by prominent figures or in special occasions, but presented to the reader as a mysterious, intoxicating liquid that can be drunk after removing a silk handkerchief covering the glass 'to ward off evil eyes'. Elements that bring readers back to the supernatural, and thus to a hallucinated reality viewed through the lens of a man torn between reason and irrationality, are indeed

47 Ibid., p. 445.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid., pp. 445-446.

plentiful in this African setting: from the hypnotic, mesmerising song performed by Aska Mariam, which conjures up images of 'dark ages of chains, slavery, shame, and death', to the girl's 'witch-like' mother.

It is a dark dream, one in which Panaev finds himself alone amongst people who are completely alien to him. If in *Terunesh* Krasnov portrayed the protagonist's attempt to merge with a different culture, here he highlights the cultural differences between Russians and Ethiopians. The otherness that envelopes Panaev contributes to further destabilise his fatigued mind, and does not seem to solve his problems: indeed, when he finally meets Aska Mariam, he is struck by how different she is from his beloved Nina. This difference manifests itself first and foremost in the physical appearance: while Aska Mariam has blue eyes, so that 'it was as if a white, and not a black person was looking at him', she is 'no prettier than the other ['Galla'] women: just as black, with a small cheekbone, short, and curly-haired'. Significantly, familiarity stems from the only physical element shared with the white race, the eyes, which, incidentally, are traditionally regarded as the door to one's soul. However, this is just another illusion: Aska Mariam's eyes lack 'the deep expression' of Panaev's former fiancée.

The relationship between the Russian man and his 'dark-skinned captive' is revealed to be one of mastery and compliance, which is conveyed in many ways, from their age difference—she is fifteen, Panaev is forty—to her being compared to a dog. Throughout the novella, her childlike, puppet-like essence remains constant as she is gradually domesticated and brought into 'proper civilisation' by her Russian master, who bathes her, dresses her, and teaches her how to behave properly. As a result, she becomes 'more attractive, more tender', even showing signs of 'coquetry'. Even if Panaev judges her efforts positively while they are still in Ethiopia, once she touches the Russian soil she becomes nothing more than 'an original servant, an exotic object [...] like leopard skins, shields and spears', a souvenir brought back from a foreign country.⁵⁰ More importantly, she is a prime example of Homi Bhabha's mimicry: a hybrid, an in-between figure who has lost her 'true' essence and is therefore perceived as grotesque and potentially threatening. In Saint Petersburg, she is completely out of place: European

50 Ibid., p. 458.

clothes 'looked ridiculous on her', and 'when she went out in dark skirts, a blouse and a hat, all the ancient beauty of the primitive East was lost in her'.⁵¹ In Krasnov's view, her ambivalent position and the corruption of her Oriental essence are unsustainable and ultimately fatal. Indeed, ambivalence persists until the very end: unlike Panaev, who manages to convince himself that Aska Mariam is the reincarnation of Nina based on just a few words she utters and her singing, the readers are left wondering. Is Panaev just a madman, as his final description suggests? Or has he discovered a deeper truth and unveiled the most sought-after mystery of life? Whatever the case may be, the underlying motif is that of questioning cultural hybridity, which all the main characters in the novella aspire to: Panaev to reembrace the love of his life, Aska Mariam to please him, and Ras Makonnen to modernise his own country ('Take care of her, teach her something good, something European, and when you are tired of her, send her back here. There is a great need for educated, skilled people in our country', he tells Panaev).⁵² Even this wish remains unfulfilled, as the newly educated Aska Mariam falls ill and abruptly dies along with the white master's (in this case Panaev's) efforts to civilise her. As for why Nina's soul has (potentially) moved to inhabit the body of a 'black savage', thus shifting from civilisation to primitivism, no explanation is given. Could she be the incarnation of Russia, sharing with Europe a potentially dangerous attraction to exoticism and primitivism?

Krasnov's reflection on modern-day colonial and cultural dynamics thus operates through three different female archetypes—the femme fatale; the childlike, submissive type; and the mother—which in some instances even overlap (Terunesh first appears as a femme fatale, then as a child, and finally as a future mother). They embody the exotic, they trigger the male protagonists' inner crisis, and they all meet the same end—death—which alludes to the ultimate extinction of the natives at the hands of Western colonists, whether cultural or physical. Yet, the encounter does not leave their Russian murderers the same: from Andreev to Panaev to the unnamed hunter of *The Guereza*, they demonstrate varying degrees of self-awareness regarding their accountability for the women's ultimate demise. Krasnov's usage of imagery, themes, and

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid., p. 457.

lexicon deeply rooted in colonial literature makes these works suitable for being analysed through the lens of postcolonial theory, particularly with regard to concepts such as 'alterity', 'ambivalence', 'authenticity', 'colonial desire', 'contact zone', 'exoticism', 'going native', 'hybridity', 'mimicry', 'miscegenation', 'orientalism', 'othering', 'subaltern', even though the two macro-entities involved, Russia and Ethiopia, did not share colonial relations—and, in fact, Ethiopia was an independent state. 'Abyssinia' is treated like any other 'exotic', 'savage' country, in which white master/black servant relations occur—only this time the white master is the non-colonial Russian. Certainly, this construction was facilitated by the recycling of tropes that had already been established in Russian literature in relation to the Caucasus. However, colonial complicity⁵³ is manifested here in the desire to replace European colonialists by sharing their discourses and rhetoric, but rejecting their political control over African people—at least in words. Krasnov presents this softer approach in a favourable light, interspersing the novellas and short stories with positive comments about Russians made by Abyssinians who are otherwise critical of Westerners. For their part, the three protagonists construct their Russianness as both part of and alien to the 'European' realm: it is a constantly shifting identity, but one that, when it adopts Western habits and attitudes towards indigenous peoples, is equally capable of inflicting pain and causing destruction.

Resisting Hybridity and Miscegenation: Russian Modernism and its Responses

Highbrow literature—or at least literature produced by high profile or accomplished authors—responded in a similar manner to the pressures of early twentieth-century social changes by incorporating Africa into its discourse on modernity. Elsewhere I have tried to demonstrate how black Africa became one of the tools (and by no means the only one) for channelling the anxieties of a rapidly changing world, especially those related to gender roles and racial mixing.⁵⁴ In the process, individual

53 Cf. S. Tuori, S. Irni, and D. Mulinari (ed. by), *Complying with Colonialism: Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Nordic Region*, Farnham 2009, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315573212>

54 Cf. Frison, *On Colonial Bodies*.

poetics merged with Western-derived racial (and colonial) rhetoric and with a specifically Russian point of view, rendering the final products—be they poetry, prose, or even plays—complex and stratified. Even the works of Nikolai Gumilev, which have often been criticised as displaying an imperialist and colonial attitude, have recently been shown to be more layered and multifaceted than previously thought.⁵⁵

The literary (as well as pictorial) experimentations of Russian modernists relied quite extensively on the imaginary construct of Africa, be it the more familiar but still orientalist northern region (especially Egypt), a land of spirituality, mysteries, and self-discovery, but also ambiguity (Ivan Bunin, Konstantin Bal'mont, Kuz'ma Petrov-Vodkin, Izabella Grinevskaia among many others), or the savage, largely unknown, dangerous, and potentially fatal yet seductive black heart (Nikolai Gumilev, Andrei Belyi, Lev Bakst). Moreover, with the advent of primitivism and the accordance of an aesthetic value to African material culture, what had previously been of interest only to ethnographers was given new attention in the arts.⁵⁶ Of course, Africa was not the only source of inspiration for this generation of artists, nor the only catalyst for their experimentations. It was, however, one of the vehicles through which they were able to explore both the themes they were interested in and the stylistic choices they were adopting. In many cases, Africa served as a disguise or camouflage, providing a means of addressing uncomfortable issues from a safe distance. It was certainly a game of mirrors, in which the question of Russian identity, along with gender roles and miscegenation (all highly relevant to the Russian context), would invariably come to the surface, albeit more or less explicitly.

In line with European contemporary works and much in the spirit of Krasnov, women played a significant role in the Russian modernists' (re)creation of Africa. This is not surprising. In a study about the feminisation of Africa's landscape in three variations (*virgin*, *femme fatale*, monstrous mother), Rebecca Stott has, for example, pointed out how myths and fears of Africa merged with myths and fears about

55 Cf. for instance G. Walker, 'Songs of Africa: The Native Voice in Four Poems by Nikolai Gumilev', *Urbardus Review*, 2003, 7, pp. 73-106.

56 Instrumental, in the Russian context, was the figure of Voldemars Matvejs. Cf. Chapter Four.

the 'new woman' and argued that both are 'determined and shaped by evolutionary debates about the "nature" of the natural world'.⁵⁷ Oftentimes, the interest was geared towards an exploration of female sexuality, or rather a male fantasy of it,⁵⁸ and it went hand in hand with the conquest/penetration (ideal or real) of the land. The beginning of Gumilev's short story *African Hunt* is a striking example of the latter tendency: the author recalls how 'old vignettes often depicted Africa as a young girl, beautiful despite the crude simplicity of her form, and always, always surrounded by wild animals. Monkeys swaying above her head, elephants waving their trunks behind her, a lion licking her feet, a panther lounging on a sun-warmed cliff nearby'. It is, in other words, a female savage with an animalistic quality that, from the safe distance of Europe, appears to be in danger of disappearing forever as colonisation and modernity begin to tame her. However, this could also be just a false alarm: the European who has been to Africa knows, as Gumilev points out, that there are still numerous spots where the land remains exactly 'as it was thousands of years ago', with unnamed rivers, silent deserts, and hidden forests populated by wild and untamed beasts and ancient tribes whose women 'dare only to walk on all fours in the presence of men'. To enter this land ('so different from ours, vast, terrible, and marvellously beautiful')—and therefore to conquer this still wild, beautiful, and unsettling woman—a man 'must temper both his body and his spirit': in 1914, the year in which Gumilev worked on this short

57 R. Stott, 'Scaping the Body: Of Cannibal Mothers and Colonial Landscapes', in A. Richardson and C. Willis (ed. by), *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact. Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*, New York 2002, pp. 150-166 (p. 150), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-65603-5_10. Elsewhere, Stott had also noted that in a colonial author such as Rider Haggard, native women play a minor role because the writer's narrative targeted primarily male readers, and thus they function as 'repressed sexual anxieties of numerous kinds'. This discourse 'emphasizes the importance of male camaraderie and [...] implicitly warns of the debilitating effects of women'. Cf. R. Stott, 'The Dark Continent: Africa as a Female Body in Haggard's Adventure Fiction', *Feminist Review*, 1989, 32, pp. 69-89, <https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.1989.20>. While native women generally play a minor role also in the Russian production of knowledge about Africa (see for instance their absence from Russian travelogues), they seem to be central to multiple works of fiction.

58 Cf. S. L. Gilman, 'Black Bodies, White Bodies: Towards an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth Century Art, Medicine and Literature', *Critical Inquiry*, 1985, 12, pp. 204-242, <https://doi.org/10.1086/448327>; A. P. A. Busia, 'Miscegenation as Metonymy: Sexuality and Power in the Colonial Novel', in O. Oyèwùmí (ed. by), *African Gender Studies. A Reader*, New York-Basingstoke 2005, pp. 245-257.

story, there was still room for male adventure.⁵⁹ Here the author adopts a European perspective—and by extension, makes his readers adopt it as well: from the opposition of culture (Europe) *vs* nature (Africa), to the symbolic destruction of the African land (the hunt, which does not bother the narrator *per se*, but which returns in his final dream in disguise), the narrator is clearly part of the Western world—as are his Russian readers.

While relying on the same equation between Africa and the female body, Andrei Belyi came to a different conclusion. In his *African Diary*, written shortly after his trip to Northern Africa in 1911, he created a monstrous female figure, deformed and unsettling, who is revealed to be the inevitable product of European colonialism. Criticising France's disproportionate expansionism in Africa, Belyi offered two contrasting portraits of the country, both of which were female: if past France was a slender Frenchwoman with a slim waist, then colonial France became a repulsive, fat 'negress' (*negritianka*), whose body is sick as she suffers from elephantiasis. Thus, through the depiction of the female body, the author creates an opposition between a safe, 'normal' past and a degenerate, sick present, which is embodied by a black woman. Undoubtedly problematic, this metaphor also contains a rejection of European colonialism, since for Belyi it is colonial France, not Africa *per se*, that is the sick organism. As will be elaborated further on, the author was particularly disturbed by one of the direct effects of Western colonisation, namely the cultural mixing and consequent 'degeneration' of European culture. In this scenario, Russia is presented as a separate entity because it did not participate in Western expansionist ventures, was not guilty of the same misdeeds, and therefore did not suffer the same cultural consequences.

Far from being only used as metaphors of colonial relations or countries, black women also played a part as characters or even primary figures in modernist works. This type of iconography, in which black women were no longer supporting characters but the focus of the artist's attention, had begun to take root in Russia already in the last decades of the nineteenth century, with artists such as Il'ia Repin, Vasilii Polenov, and Konstantin Makovskii. Paintings such as

59 N. Gumilev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 10 tomakh*, IV, Moscow 2005, pp. 100-101.

Portrait of a Negro Woman by Repin (1875-1876) or *The Egyptian Girl* by Polenov (1876), exhibited in 1876 in Saint Petersburg, were perceived by contemporary critics as a novelty precisely because their only subject was a black woman, who not only did not function as a mere accessory, but reclaimed her own subjectivity through the importance the painters accorded to her face and gaze.⁶⁰ To paint them, both Repin and Polenov relied on black models whom they had met during their time in Paris. In each case, the models were orientalised, dressed with 'traditional' dresses, extracted from their European current context and put in an 'Oriental' setting, which added to the ambiguity of the paintings. During the same period, Konstantin Makovskii embarked on a series of journeys to Northern Africa and Ethiopia, which resulted in numerous studies and paintings of exotic landscapes and African people. Among them, *Young Girl with a Burnous* (*Devushka v burnuse*, 1870s) and the stunning *Negro Woman* (*Negritianka*, 1870s) constitute further examples of portraits of black women in which the painter's attention was primarily focused on the face, eyes, and expression, since the rest of the body was chastely covered by clothes. Both portraits, which are indebted more to the ethnographic canon than to the orientalist tradition in the absence of an explicitly 'Oriental' setting (the women are depicted against a plain and undefined, light-coloured background), are conspicuously devoid of sexualised undertones or even subtle erotic elements. On the contrary, what clearly emerges is the individuality of the two women: one shy and melancholic, the other exuberant and lively, with a broad smile on her face.

It took literature a little longer than painting to place black women at the centre of a work of art. Indeed, Krasnov's novellas from 1900 can be considered the precursors to later works by more well-known authors. Gumilev certainly populated his African writings with women more frequently than any other author; for him, the exotic, non-Russian setting was often a welcome disguise for dealing with personal matters, cloaking them in a mysterious and mystical aura. Two short stories, thematically related to several of his poems, seem particularly relevant, not only because they share mercurial (and black) female characters,

60 On this topic, see M. Taroutina, 'Exotic Aesthetics: Representations of Blackness in Nineteenth-Century Russian Painting', *Slavic Review*, 2021 (80), 2, pp. 267-279, <https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2021.81>

but also because they both explore the theme of female virginity, safely transposed into the African (and therefore 'other') context. Both came out in 1908—*Princess Zara* in the journal *Russkaia mysl'*, while *The Devil of the Forest* in *Vesna*—and both are rarely mentioned in Gumilev's personal writings or correspondence, which makes the reconstruction of their composition particularly challenging. Set in an unspecified contemporaneity when Europeans have already penetrated the African continent, *Princess Zara* revolves around the meeting between a young African man from Lake Chad and the princess of Madagascar, after he has travelled far and wide in order to tell her that she is the reincarnation of the 'fair maiden' (*svetlaia deva*), Allah's favourite creation, who lives in the forest near where his tribe lives and is worshipped by all, and that she must follow him back there. But the princess's response does not align with his expectations; on the contrary, she tests him to see if he will succumb to her seduction, and hints that she has already given herself to a European man. The revelation that she is neither a virgin nor a possible object of worship leads the man to kill himself in front of the motionless Zara, who is revealed to have lied to him about losing her virginity. If in *Princess Zara* the point of view is that of the African man from Lake Chad (it is his journey towards loss of faith and disillusionment, while the princess remains inscrutable until the end), *The Devil of the Forest* shifts perspectives several times. Set during the time of Hanno the Navigator (fifth century BC) along a Senegalese river, the story begins with the train of thoughts of a baboon, shifts to Hanno's perspective and concludes with the young Carthaginian woman who becomes the unwilling object of desire for the two male characters. A worshipper of the goddess Ishtar, the Carthaginian maiden is attacked by the lascivious baboon, who dies from a snake bite just before he succeeds in possessing her. Rescued by Hanno's entourage, she is initially condemned to death, as she is believed to have been violated by the baboon, thus angering Ishtar; when Hanno intervenes, she accepts to become his wife instead. Before entering his tent on the wedding night, she sees the baboon's head on a spear and kisses it, effectively losing her innocence.

Although these short stories have, on the whole, received little critical attention in comparison with Gumilev's other works, a few studies have already pointed out their extremely rich intertextual references, the many inspirations—both personal and literary—behind them, the richness of

their symbolism and their connection with other works by Gumilev. In particular, one could cite Mayne Reid, Kipling (especially for his short story *Bertran and Bimi*), Gustave Flaubert, Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, Rider Haggard, the 'beautiful lady' of the Russian symbolists, but also Friedrich Nietzsche, occultism and mysticism (including Elena Blavatsky's theosophy).⁶¹ In terms of Gumilev's personal history, the theme of virginity (threatened virginity, loss of virginity, or women lying about it) is linked to his relationship with Anna Akhmatova, who, long pursued by the poet, had revealed to him in 1907 that she was no longer a virgin. This strongly affected Gumilev, who, according to Akhmatova, 'acknowledged only girls and could not feel anything for a woman', a 'mania' that translated into a proliferation of 'pure girls' in his works.⁶² Evidently, this theme is not confined to the African continent, and these short stories—along with the poems featuring other black women—should not be regarded necessarily as a closed cluster within Gumilev's oeuvre. What should be pointed out, however, is the fact that Africa provided him with the best possible scenario to deal not only with the loss of purity and the existence of non-conforming female figures, but also with other themes closely related to modernity, like the alienation of men from nature, faith, and destiny. The African continent is constructed as a space which is not doomed with the loss of certainties *yet*: unlike the Western world, its still 'wild' heart, its brutal and animalistic core suggest the possibility of an alternative to modernity and change. However, this possibility is becoming increasingly unlikely as change gradually permeates the continent: indeed, the subtext tradition *vs* modernity (or primeval state *vs* civilisation) is vital for both short stories. The alternative princess Zara is faced with is that of a life of chastity and being forever the object of worship, i.e., the possibility of transcending the trivial existence to which she has become accustomed in depraved Zanzibar and of rising to the rank of a divinity. The two settings in which she is imagined—her palace in Zanzibar and the forest described to her by the African man as her future home—are constructed

61 A review of studies and potential sources of inspiration is provided in N. Gumilev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 10 tomakh*, VI, Moscow 2005, pp. 363-378, 398-404.

62 In 1925, Akhmatova discussed this with Pavel Luknitskii, who was collecting material on Gumilev's life. Apparently, the idea of Akhmatova's 'impurity' never ceased to torment him, so much so that after their divorce in 1918 he asked her for the name of the man who had taken her virginity. Cf. P. Luknitskii, *Acumiana. Vstrechi s Annoi Akhmatovoi*, I, Paris 1991, pp. 142-143.

by Gumilev in a surprisingly similar way through a heavy use of vivid colours (red, black, gold, green, orange, pink, silver), which contrast with the black and white palette at the beginning and the end of the story (the dark, bronze body of the African man—who at the same time is also described as pale—and the snow-white camel that is supposed to take Zara to the forest, brutally killed by a hyena). Both spaces are lush, rich and attractive, colourful and vibrant; but one is artificial, man-made, the other is completely untouched nature. What the African man offers her is also an escape from the façade of civilisation and a return to a communal life in nature, which is now only possible in the heart of Africa.

Zara's failure to understand the offer and her equivocation about the man's proposal is not as simple as it seems. She is not, in fact, already inevitably corrupted by Zanzibar's promiscuous society, nor is she intrinsically depraved or vulgar. She is, however, already the object of another, more prosaic cult, that of the flesh. In this respect, she is effectively constructed as an idol, the antithesis of the 'fair maiden' not because of any loss of purity, but because she stands for a different kind of deity. Thus, while the 'fair maiden' is obviously associated with light and an ethereal principle (she is, indeed, an essence for which the body is merely a vehicle), Zara is extremely tangible: her 'coral lips', 'slender figure', bare arms covered with bracelets, and 'dark curls' make her a corporeal entity.⁶³ At the same time, the leitmotif of her otherworldly stillness, the beautiful eyes that seem 'to have been created not for love but for something higher',⁶⁴ as well as the atmosphere that surrounds her and envelopes the African man (the lingering, intoxicating, almost ritualistic scent of musk, Indian perfumes and young female body, the deafening silence of the harem) detach her from the plan of reality and transform her into a somewhat indifferent effigy, oblivious to the world. Her otherworldliness is also emphasised by the contrast with the other two female characters in the short story, the old woman who agrees to accompany the African man to the princess after receiving a bribe, and the black slave who keeps Zara company: while the latter is nothing more than an 'obedient dog',⁶⁵ the former pretends to care for the princess but is instead corrupted by the society in which she lives, taking money

63 Gumilev, *Polnoe sobranie*, VI, p. 53.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid., p. 54.

and laughing and winking when she leaves Zara and the man alone. The fact that the old woman is originally from the same tribe as the African man, who acts as a messenger of true faith, purity, and chastity, further complicates the scenario and contributes to the overall sense of ambiguity that pervades the story. Indeed, a closer look reveals that the 'Zogar tribe' on Lake Chad—and by extension the African paradise promised to Zara—is not without its own flaws. If Zanzibar is depicted as the reign of depravity and moral corruption, the two representatives of the Zogar community are also both associated with money and trade in relation to the princess. Despite the fact that, as he tells it himself, the African man has undergone many trials—reminiscent of fairy-tale motifs—to get closer to Zara (from surviving tropical fevers, to fighting savages like the Azande and Nyamwezi, to killing giant snakes), his final step is to bribe the old woman, an act that diminishes the nobility of his intentions. Simultaneously, the elderly woman condemns the inhabitants of Zanzibar for treating Zara as a commodity (*tovar*), yet her own actions are indistinguishable from theirs. For both of them, Zara is the object of a transaction, even if the man seems strangely unaware of it. He is a man of his time—modernity—a hero who is no longer whole: although he comes from a state of communion with nature where it is still possible to worship with apparent purity—something which can now only occur in the depths of Africa—he is nevertheless forced to resort to subterfuge in order to approach his 'fair maiden'. And perhaps this is why he is doomed to fail: the world has changed, and with it customs and beliefs.

It is a modern fairy tale, one in which the flawed hero fails the ultimate test set by the cold and distant anti-heroine, one in which he dies as a result of the assumptions he makes on the basis of misinterpreted signs (the stars 'deceiving and encouraging, like the eyes of a girl who has sinned and wants to hide her shame', the promiscuous harem, and so forth). It is also a tale in which the woman decides for herself—though her decision is considered counterproductive, since she has lost 'the possibility of unimaginable happiness'.⁶⁶ And finally, it is a tale in which an African princess, an African beauty, imagines a European as her first seducer, a motif that is also found in Gumilev's contemporary poem

66 Ibid., p. 56.

Lake Chad, in which a Chadian woman falls in love with a European, leaves her husband and follows the white man to France, only to be condemned to a life of degradation and prostitution.

In *The Devil of the Forest*, however, this third element between primeval and new Africa is absent, being that the story is set long before European colonialism. Consequently, everything is played out in the contrast between animality and civilisation, transgression and norm, while the presence of the white man is removed from the equation. This does not mean, however, that the world described by the author is not marked by racial dynamics: through the eyes of the baboon, the reader learns that there are two separate peoples in Africa, the blacks, who are slaves, and the people with 'light golden skin', i.e., the noble inhabitants of Carthage. Within the framework of the story, black people are evidently on a lower level of civilisation and closer to beasts, as suggested by the mention of the baboon's previous sexual encounter with a black woman, who seems to have enjoyed it: 'He [the baboon] was reminded of the young Negro girl he had recently caught alone in the forest, and the moans and cries that had escaped her lips as he had shamelessly toyed with her body'.⁶⁷ They also seem to give in easily to the pleasures of alcohol, thus earning the contempt of the Carthaginians. On the contrary, for the civilised Carthaginians, defloration by a baboon is a sin punishable by death; the whole encounter between the young woman and the animal is marked by terror (*uzhas*), aversion, and struggle, not pleasure. From the very beginning, the woman is characterised in ambivalent terms: she is apparently powerless (she is referred to as a victim—*zhertva*—and a child—*rebenok*), but her resemblance to the ivory statues placed in the temples of Ishtar suggests a special connection between her and the goddess. This ambiguity imbues the rest of the narrative and the woman's relationship with the Carthaginian men. Not only is she the victim of the baboon (i.e., the beast), but she is also in danger of becoming the victim of the priests who judge her, keen to burn her alive on a pyre (after all, 'It is always nice to look at the body of a beautiful maiden surrounded by the red snakes of the flames').⁶⁸ Later, when she is about to spend the wedding night with Hanno, she is also associated with terms and images that point to her submissiveness: her passive body is prepared for the

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 65.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 66.

night by slaves, in her nervousness and anticipation she is compared to a 'captive bird' (*plennaiia ptitsa*) and plans to tell Hanno that she is his slave (*rabynia*) and he her master (*vlastitel'*). At the same time, however, she always retains a certain power; for instance, it is because of her own appearance that Hanno is smitten with her, decides to challenge the priests and marries her. More importantly, her impulsive decision to kiss the dead baboon allows her to regain independence and agency in her relationship with Hanno. Indeed, by this act she demonstrates that she is in control of her own sexuality, choosing for herself the moment in which she is to lose her innocence. Interestingly, her choice is one that forever links her to bestiality—albeit tamed.

In the final chapter of the story, Gumilev provides a clear distinction between the two opposing worlds—the animal and the civilised. The former is carefully removed from the confines of the Carthaginian camp, though its threat can still be perceived through odours and sounds: 'Quickly, the dark, terrible African night descended upon the land, and the wild scent of roaming beasts replaced the smell of flowers and grasses. Like the rumble of falling rocks came the roar of a hungry, golden-horned lions. The poisoned arrows of the Nubian hunters kept them away from the camp. Occasionally, there would be a momentary shrill moan from a doe caught in its sleep, echoed by the laughter of hyenas'.⁶⁹ The latter thus appears as a pure space, one in which the loss of virginity is inscribed in tradition, in ritual, in marriage; in other words, it is a 'civilised' act. However, the stability of this institution—and, one may add without any stretches, of this patriarchal society (the official power lies with the priests and Hanno)—is challenged by two outsiders, the woman and the (tamed) beast. In the safety of the camp, the dead baboon is no longer a threat; in fact, he is utterly powerless, deprived of his formidable body not just because he is dead, but also because he has been mutilated. The roles are reversed: it is not he who pursues the woman, but he who becomes the passive object of the 'strange pity' she feels at the thought of him struggling in vain against the power of her protector, the goddess Ishtar. Thus she overcomes her previous fear and disgust—even though he remains a 'monster' (*chudovishche*) up until the end—and gives him her innocence. The impromptu kiss breaks several

69 Ibid., p. 67.

taboos—zoophilia, necrophilia—and becomes a truly transgressive act that neutralises the sacralisation of the institution of marriage; partially, this is also the result of the woman taking charge. Described as ‘utterly different’ (*sovsem drugaia*) after the event, she is indeed an agent of chaos and (tamed, safe) bestiality within the boundaries of civilisation.

Marriage is not the only institution whose standing is called into question in this short story; religion is another. The cult of Ishtar is presented as a convenient excuse that people repeatedly use to their own advantage: the priests for the morbid pleasure of seeing a virgin at the stake, Hanno for the chance to possess her, and the woman herself for the thrill of deciding independently on her own innocence. This begs a host of questions: Does Ishtar exist within the story’s economy, or is she merely a convenient explanation for random events (such as the invisible snake bite that kills the baboon) and a justification for human actions? Does she prompt the woman to kiss the beast, or does the woman kiss him because she is a devotee of the goddess of love, eroticism, and fertility and feels reassured by her protection, which has apparently saved her from being raped by the baboon? This ambiguity points to a crisis in spirituality and remains unresolved, contributing to Gumilev’s portrayal of the modern crisis of values.

Gumilev’s Africa is indeed an entity that transcends time in that, regardless of the timeframe in which the author sets his works, it is always instrumental in addressing issues related to the modern world. This is perhaps most evident in one of his lesser-known pieces: the long poem *Mik*, which he wrote between 1913–1914, but continued to work on until 1918. Gumilev’s longest poem, it was intended as a modern revival of the epic genre; interestingly, the poet believed that exotic lands were the only possible setting for such a work. Contemporary periodicals, reporting on the poem’s first reading in 1914, conveyed Gumilev’s ideas on creating of a modern epic:

Gumilev read a long (960-line) poem by him, *Mik and Louis*, and then presented his views on the epic genre, to which he ascribes his poem, and its current potential. The main idea was that the only area in which great epic creativity is still possible is ‘exotic’ poetry [*poeziia ‘ekzoticheskaiia’*]. [...] During the debate, most of the speakers, while acknowledging the poetic merits of the poem, disputed the author’s theoretical views; the

general question of modern epic poetry remained open.⁷⁰

In both ancient and modern epic, Gumilev considers three elements to be necessary: religious, collective and individual. These main prerequisites contribute to the creation of the myth, for the myth-making beginning is also a feature of the true epos. The poem *Mik* is an attempt to revive the epos. The plot is mythological, although it is taken from contemporary life in Abyssinia [...].⁷¹

Thus Gumilev's response to the debate surrounding 'modern epic poetry' was that it should be exotic while incorporating the religious, collective, and individual elements necessary for myth-making. In modernist fashion, the result, the poem *Mik*, is a hybrid for a number of reasons: it is set in modern, colonial times, but parts of it convey a sense of primeval or even ahistorical times, so that Mik's journey is not only a physical but also a temporal one; it has a wide variety of sources, from colonial adventure novels to Ethiopian folklore, from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* to the *Divine Comedy* and classic Russian works such as Mikhail Lermontov's *Mtsyri*; and, for all its modernity, it relies on iambic tetrameters, i.e., a classic metre in Russian poetry.⁷² But the one element that holds all this composite material together—or, perhaps better put—the one element that transcends all these very different inputs and holds them together, is precisely the colonial one. Indeed, coloniality emerges in this poem as the true marker of modernity.

Set in Ethiopia, the poem revolves around two young boys, the African Mik, son of the king of a tribe defeated by Menelik II, who has taken him prisoner, and the Frenchman Louis, son of the French consul. Following Mik's escape from his captivity, the two of them embark on a series of adventures in the African wilderness. Accompanied by a befriended baboon, the pair eventually arrive in a mysterious 'city of monkeys'. Thanks to his whiteness, his rifle and his apparently good nature, Louis becomes king of the apes. Soon bored, he follows the advice of a devious hyena, who urges him to go 'where the panthers live' to extend his rule over them. The French boy hands over his throne

70 Litotes, 'Obshchesvto revnitelei khudozhestvennogo slova', *Apollon*, 1914, 5, p. 54.

71 Ts., 'Sovremennaia epicheskaia poema', *Zlatotsvet*, 1914, p. 18.

72 Cf. L. Allain, 'La recherche de la forme longue dans la poesie de N.S. Gumilev', in S. Duffin Graham (ed. by), *Nikolaj Gumilev 1886-1986. Papers from the Gumilev Centenary Symposium*, Berkeley 1987, pp. 7-26.

to a worried Mik and disappears into the forest. After a while, Mik and the monkeys decide to follow Louis, and find him on the verge of death, surrounded by bloodthirsty panthers. Mik buries his friend and, overcome with grief, asks the Spirit of the Forest for permission to follow Louis into the Land of the Dead. Although the two friends will never be reunited, Mik comes to understand that Louis is now in heaven. Back in the real world, Mik's fortunes change for the better: not only does he become rich after helping an English merchant collect elephant tusks, but he also climbs the social ladder by becoming one of Menelik's advisors.

The action takes place in three different spaces: historical Africa, where events take place and history unfolds (chapters 1-3); atemporal, primordial Africa, inhabited by wild beasts, cryptic, unfathomable humans and supernatural beings (chapters 4-8); the world of the afterlife (chapter 9). The final chapter (10) brings the reader back to historical Africa, thus closing the circle. Despite their different characterisations and the different roles they play in the development of the characters' arcs, the three spaces share one essential element: they are all deeply informed by racial politics. Most importantly, the space Gumilev creates in this modern epic poem is a rigidly hierarchical one, in which racial boundaries are clearly defined, never questioned, and active to the end. In this respect, the author departs quite significantly from other treatments of racial mixing that will be analysed later, by presenting a world in which those who try to transcend the limits imposed by nature or society ultimately fail: this is the fate of Louis, for example, who, being a human, wants to become king of the apes and then king of the panthers. Interestingly, he does not have the wisdom to understand the doomed nature of his attempt; instead, it is the baboon—the representative of nature—who acts as the depositary of a seemingly ancient wisdom that governs behaviour in the world: 'The baboon listened sullenly / to the boy from distant lands, / who wanted to leave his home / and become the king of monkeys. / With his animal heart he sensed / that there is a law in this world, / which gave everyone the possibility / to experience one thing: / for some—life among city delights, / for others—the smell of desert grasses'.⁷³ Louis,

73 N. Gumilev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 10 tomakh*, III, Moscow 1999, p. 16.

however, is white, as Gumilev repeatedly stresses (even making him whiter than white when he describes him paling), and acts with the arrogant attitude of a colonial agent—he is, after all, the consul's son. At the other end of the spectrum, black Mik remains more in touch with nature, having befriended the baboon, communicating with him 'in monkey language' (*na obez'ian'em iazyke*), and preventing a massacre of elephants by persuading the English ivory trader to take the tusks from animals that had already died. However, his own attempt to transcend boundaries by travelling, whilst still alive, to the land of the dead to reunite with his friend, is still unsuccessful: not only does he fail to reach him, but he will never be able to, as souls are sent to different places after death according to their race. Indeed, during Mik's journey into the afterlife, the reader comes to understand that there are two separate places for souls to go. This is not a traditional hell *vs* heaven dichotomy, but a deeply disturbing separation of souls based on the colour of the skin. When Mik enters the land of the dead accompanied by a monstrous snake, he soon realises that he is surrounded only by the souls of black people and asks his guide about it: "Answer me: why / do only black people live here, / and why haven't I seen any white people?". The beast replies: "All white people are like sorcerers, / all baptised at birth, / so that when they die Christ / will take them with him to heaven".⁷⁴ This revelation is quite bizarre: the religious factor seems to be a weak excuse for separating black and white people, given that not all white people are Christian and people of colour can also be Christian—Ethiopians being a prime example. In this cosmogony, which is essentially based on race, Mik can visit the bleak land of the dead black people, but cannot reach the lustrous heaven, where the souls of white people reside. To discover Louis' fate, he must enlist the help of an intermediary, a skylark capable of flying to immeasurable heights: only in this way he will find out that Louis is in the seventh circle of heaven—reminiscent of Dante—and is now a member of the archangel Michael's army. Thus, although Louis seems to be punished with death for his arrogance—or *hybris*, given the epic nature of the poem—he is ultimately rewarded with a high position in paradise, having risen to the role of a celestial warrior. By contrast, Mik's successes in the real world seem rather mundane, especially as he

74 Ibid., p. 33.

is ultimately destined for the desolate lands where black souls go.

In this modern cosmogony, then, even the afterlife is affected by the racial dynamics at play in the everyday world, which is clearly a colonial one. Louis, tellingly named as a French monarch, is characterised not only as a white boy with 'big, bold eyes' that 'burn with a bright flame' and with a Eurocentric attitude that makes him disregard those around him, but also as Mik's protector ('I will take my pistol / and the three of us will go. [...] You will not perish with me / neither without food, nor without fire'), the quintessential white saviour. It is only after meeting him that Mik and the baboon finally manage to escape their captivity, while whiteness is being used by Louis as a weapon to save his black friend when he is briefly captured by a slave trader ('Let go of him, you fool, you freak! / I am white, from my land / big ships will come / and with them thousands of soldiers. / Let go of him!').⁷⁵ On the other hand, Mik's physical weakness—a trait not usually associated with black characters, the epitome of physical strength and vitality—goes hand in hand with his deferential, respectful, and cautious attitude, which, while highly moral, also points to the trope of African idleness, the inability to act, that is widespread in colonial writing. Their relationship, although friendly, remains unequal, and in their dynamic the authority always lies with the son of the French consul, not with the son of the king of an African tribe. Indeed, Mik is portrayed as a subordinate in his relationship with Louis, as well as in his interactions with the Abyssinians who have captured him; at one point he is even punished for his laziness by being given a woman's job, which further emasculates him and makes him the object of the Abyssinian girls' mockery. In this respect, his triumph at the end of the poem and subsequent rehabilitation within Ethiopian society seem to be due less to his own abilities or moral qualities and more to the English merchant's benevolence in leaving Mik a fortune as a gesture of goodwill.

This kind of relationship is evident throughout the story, including the section set in the depths of the African jungle, i.e., primordial Africa. Mik is never in control: for instance, it is Louis who frees the baboon's offspring from captivity (a pointless effort, as the young baboon apparently enjoys captivity given that he is learning human behaviour); it is Louis who is

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 18.

the object of desire of the mysterious and bewitching princess-temptress; and it is, once again, Louis, who is the one to become king of the monkeys ('Louis has a gun, he's a charmer / and he's white and funnier').⁷⁶ His domineering attitude is perhaps what has caused the most outrage in Soviet commentators, accusing Gumilev to be a writer of the 'imperialist bourgeoisie'.⁷⁷ However, the author remains distant from both the African and European parties, without endorsing either of them. Rather, he adopts the position of a detached observer who merely takes note of the contemporary reality without necessarily approving of it or denouncing its evils. Thus Louis, for all his power, is at the same time a ridiculous creature ('I'm almost ten years old / and I've never been king', he states; he puts on 'his most imperious face' when negotiating with the keeper of the baboon's offspring; he is regarded by the princess as a 'sweet boy' (*milyi mal'chik*), not a man as he would like, and is widely ridiculed by her and her entourage; and he becomes king of the apes, not of a human kingdom). Similarly, his father, who brings Western technology to the Abyssinian chief Ato Gano to impress him, is laughed at by the same chief (himself a drunkard blind man), who remains rather indifferent, for instance, to the telephone: 'Satisfied, drunk, galloping home / Gano chatted to himself: "Oh, the *frenji* [foreigners]! How clever they are / at inventions and frivolities! / They love to put a screamer / in a box, so he can scream from there.. / But in battle, I bet my head, / none of them will defeat / me, poor, stupid, and blind. / We are not monkeys, and we / do not need various children's rubbish"'.⁷⁸

The world that Gumilev creates in the poem is one in which very little movement is allowed. As previously mentioned, the boundaries are clear, and most attempts to cross them are unsuccessful. Only two characters seem able to change their initial position: one is Mik, whose identity shifts from that of a chief's son to that of a slave to that of a wealthy man; the other is the baboon's offspring, who is domesticated and begins to behave like a human, even preferring captivity to a life of freedom. However, the transgression of boundaries is merely an illusion; ultimately, the baboon's offspring is destined to remain an animal (and

76 Ibid., p. 24.

77 For the reception of the poem after its publication and in Soviet times, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 304-310.

78 Ibid., p. 16.

a ridiculous one at that, dancing, rolling the hoop, and wearing red trousers—a grotesque caricature), while Mik will become one of the miserable black souls wandering the joyless and gloomy afterlife. The author thus offers readers a reassuring—if somewhat bitter—picture of the world, in the sense that everything remains safely in its place; cosmos ultimately prevails over chaos, order is preserved. It seems that modernity has been defeated by other, more powerful forces (both natural and cosmic), which guarantee the continuity of the *status quo*.

While this ‘epic Africa’ does not allow for hybridity, the Africa recreated by other artists could definitely be marked by it, even becoming one of the main vessels for dealing with this (modern) issue. Artists such as Lev Bakst used the black body to play with gender, creating ephebic (*Young Dahomeyan Boy*, 1895) or deeply unsettling androgynous figures (*Negro [Black with Gold]*, *Silver Negro*, 1910; *Danseur noir*, 1912), in themselves a popular theme in contemporary literature and a model for subverting traditional gender roles in everyday life.⁷⁹ At the same time, authors such as Andrei Belyi used Africa as one of their sources of inspiration to address fears of racial mixing and of the dissolution of ‘traditional’ cultures as a result of cultural hybridity. While he relied on Jews and East Asians to address miscegenation within Russia’s borders,⁸⁰ he ultimately resorted to Africa when discussing the fate of Europe, thus effectively creating two incompatible entities with very different fates. In 1901, long before his own trip to Northern Africa (1911) during which he began to formulate his ideas about the links between European colonialism and the decline of Western civilisation, he had

79 Cf. Frison, *On Colonial Bodies*. On androgyny in turn-of-the-century Russian literature and culture, cf. O. Matich, ‘Androgyny and the Russian Silver Age’, *Pacific Coast Philology*, 1979, 14, pp. 42-50; E. Grigor’eva, ‘K voprosu o topike androginizma v russkom literaturno-filosofskom modernizme: komparativnyi vzglad sub specie semiologiae’, in D. Ioffe (ed. by), *Diskursy telesnosti i erotizma v literature i kul'ture epokha modernizma*, Moscow 2008, pp. 358-381; N. Budanova, ‘Utopian Sex: the Metamorphosis of Androgynous Imagery in Russian Art of the Pre- and Post-Revolutionary Period’, in C. Lodder et al. (ed. by), *Utopian Reality: Reconstructing Culture in Revolutionary Russia and Beyond*, Leiden 2013, pp. 25-41, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004263222_004

80 Cf. S. S. Lim, ‘Pan-Mongolians at Twilight: East Asia and Race in Russian Modernism, 1890-1921’, in R. Kownar and W. Demel (ed. by), *Race and Racism in Modern East Asia. Western and Eastern Constructions*, Leiden-Boston 2014, pp. 153-175, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004237414_007; H. Mondry, ‘Petersburg and Contemporary Racial Thought’, in L. Livak (ed. by), *A Reader's Guide to Andrei Belyi's Petersburg*, Madison 2019, pp. 124-137.

already written a small poem with the closing epigraph 'Regarding the future pan-negrism'. In it, he created the prototype of his later 'mulattos' (*mulaty*), a black man disguised as a European and therefore perceived as a threat: 'The moon shone with a misty blur... / In a cylinder, leaning proudly, / There walked a black-faced negro with his big lips... / The cursed face laughed. / The boys surrounded him in a ring, / And they shouted and whistled loudly, / And he threatened them with his black face / In a column of silver blizzard'.⁸¹ This image reappeared soon after in his *Second Symphony* (1902), in which the Europeanised 'Negro' is also referred to as 'the future master of the world'. Years later, in 1924 Soviet Russia, Belyi would explain this:

I end [the *Symphony*] on a note of extreme pessimism, with the picture of the extinction of the human race (in this sense, the 'negro with the big lips' that appears in the fourth part was for me at that time the unconscious image of universal feralization and degeneration); Europe is threatened not only by pan-Mongolism, but also internally by the man-beast, by the negro-man that dwells within us.⁸²

A similarly nefarious image recurs in Samuil Kissin's *pièce* *The Negro's Revenge* (1908), in which a 'tormented negro' (*oburevaemyi negr*) wanders through Saint Petersburg, beating a drum and exclaiming 'I will take my revenge' at the representatives of various social classes, only to be crushed to death without fulfilling his purpose. Significantly, Petersburgians are shown discussing the apocalypse and dancing the cakewalk: cultural contamination and the decline of the West are once again linked.

For both Kissin and early Belyi, Russia, being part of Europe, is a potential victim of the 'negro'. Belyi's perspective started to change after his contact with the colonial reality of Northern Africa, when he began to see in colonial Europe a doomed fate of total cultural decay (cultural hybridity) from which Russia would escape. Africa (and black Africa in particular) had now become the nemesis of Europe: choosing France as a showing example, Belyi envisioned a near future in which African garrisons would occupy the villages and towns of the motherland, having learnt the most modern combat techniques. Belyi drew this

81 A. Belyi, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy*, II, Moscow 2006, p. 439.

82 A. Lavrov and J. Malmstad (ed. by), *Andrei Belyi. Avtobiograficheskie svody*, Moscow 2016, p. 68.

kind of prophecy from the novel *The Black Invasion* by Émile Driant (1894), in which the officer predicted the defeat of France by its own colonies in 1925.⁸³ For Belyi, however, France is the architect of its own disintegration, as its greed for conquest, which led it to possess an area twenty-two times the size of France, would inevitably backfire and wipe out all its traditional culture. French (and, more generally, European) imperialism, justified by the need to bring civilisation to populations that, from a Western point of view, lack it, is in fact a symptom of an ongoing cultural crisis, in which Europeans are sinking into a new barbarism. Transplanted onto foreign soil and freed from the constraints of their society, civilised Europeans reveal that 'blond beast, hungry for prey and victory' which Nietzsche believed to be latent in the depths of every 'aristocratic race'. The 'blond beast' that Belyi mentions in his *African Diary* manifests itself with the traits of the *Kulturträger*, whose apparent desire to spread culture and civilisation conceals the need to vent his own brutal instincts, to give voice to his thirst for conquest. In this sense, it has been noted that, for the writer, it is not Africa per se that causes the decadence of Western society, which is already the victim of a severe internal crisis, but rather its role is to facilitate its collapse.⁸⁴ For Belyi, the most immediate consequence of the colonial affair is the birth of a new hybrid culture, grotesque for the unexpected associations that characterise it. The Arabs depicted in *Travel Notes* and *African Diary* are ridiculous and grotesque as they dress in Western style and speak in broken French or English; similarly, in the essay *The Crisis of Life* (1918), it is the Europeans who have 'exoticised' themselves, so much so that 'Polynesia, Africa, Asia have seeped into its [Europe's] blood: here they simmer, here they wander and roam [...]. Europe is a mulatto'.⁸⁵ Indeed, disturbing hybrids begin to populate Belyi's writings. As I have noted elsewhere, 'in *African Diary* Belyi plays with corporeality, anthropophagy and illness when constructing a disturbing metaphor in which colonial France is equated to an enormous 'negress' (*negritianka*):⁸⁶

83 A. Belyi, *Putevye zametki. Tom I: Sitsiliia i Tunis*, Berlin 1922, p. 274.

84 Cf. G. Walker, 'Adumbrations of the End in Andrei Belyi's Treatment of Africa', *Russian Review*, 2001 (60), 3, pp. 381-403 (p. 396), <https://doi.org/10.1111/0036-0341.00176>

85 A. Belyi, *Na perevale. I. Krizis zhizni*, Petrograd 1918, p. 83.

86 Frison, *On Colonial Bodies*, p. 60.

[...] all the skin-coloured offspring rush about loudly, oozing and bubbling in the arteries of the country's organism, drawing the blood of the nation from the head, the European and well-known France, into its black African heart; I'm scared for France—the one we know [...]; the blood—a black blood—will flow with enormous energy to the head [...] and the European France will suffer a stroke: its head will become black. [...] [France's] centre is not in its head, but in its legs; the head is thinning (drop in birth rate): the head is slimming down, slimming down, slimming down; and the legs are swelling and swelling, blackening; such swelling is a disease: elephantiasis. [...] I must admit, the miniature French woman does not have a very thin waist; France is getting fat very fast: she is a negress.⁸⁷

This sickened French body is all the more grotesque and monstrous since it has acquired new habits (indeed, a whole new other culture): 'Its symbol is not the Gallic cock; its dance is not the quadrille: its symbol is the giraffe; its dance the cancan'.⁸⁸ Indeed, as it has been noted, in colonial literature 'the anxiety surrounding the possible breach of cultural boundaries between settler and native populations was expressed through the language of contagion',⁸⁹ a language in which illness and health were used as powerful metaphors of colonial reality. Tellingly, it is an exotic, tropical illness that seems to affect this deformed European body. Contamination and hybridisation do not occur only in the colonies—creating ridiculous, Europeanised Africans—but in Europe, too, and with daring consequences:

The civilisation of the future France is rapidly boiling in the fertile rays and tropical hot forests; neo-Frenchmen are appearing among the Nigerians, and Nigeria is ripening in the heart of the Frenchwoman; regiments of Senegalese riflemen are multiplying rapidly, forming perhaps the most loyal and bravest part of the growing army, and threatening in the future the African colonies of England, which does not know how to take up the souls of the Sudanese: I know this for a fact: in the future European war, the black army will be the bulwark of France. We will be horrified!⁹⁰

Years later, writing about early-1920s Berlin, Belyi would create another

87 A. Belyi, 'Afrikanskii dnevnik', in *Rossiiskii arkhiv*, Moscow 1994, pp. 330-454 (p. 366).

88 Ibid.

89 G. C.-L. Low, *White Skins/Black Masks: Representation and Colonialism*, London 1996, p. 162.

90 Belyi, *Afrikanskii dnevnik*, p. 367.

monstrous figure, reminiscent of ancient Egyptian frescoes: the 'man with the dog's head', a hybrid figure who wanders the streets of the German capital along with swarms of 'mulattos', i.e., German people who have adopted exoticism into their everyday lives. African drums can be heard throughout the city, while women wear colourful Oriental silks, and primitive artefacts are the main attraction in modern museums. This creature between human and animal, a novel Osiris, leads the 'mulattos' to perdition, making them proper 'negroes': indeed, for Belyi the 'negro' that roams through Europe is the 'savage in us', what leads us to self-destruction by virtue of senseless and wild dances (like the fox-trot and the cakewalk), drugs (cocaine), alcohol, and prostitution. Writing soon after his return to Soviet Russia, and desperately needing to dispel his own relationship with the now outdated Symbolism, Belyi ended up envisioning a very different destiny for Russia. According to the author, his country had succeeded in renewing itself through the cathartic experience of the revolution, which caused the immediate collapse of the old Russia and the emergence of the new world, immune to the 'negrisation' or 'mulattisation' that had affected the West.⁹¹

Belyi certainly took an extreme approach to the issue of hybridity, superimposing racial language on fears of cultural contamination and creating highly charged images. However, this does not mean that other approaches did not exist. Simultaneously, Russian exceptionalism could also acquire other forms. Aleksandr Benua's *Alphabet in Picture* (1904) offered his young Russian readers, for instance, a more reassuring—and at the same time flattering—solution. An abecedarium for children of the elite, able to afford such a polished and expensive publication, the book functioned as a compendium of turn-of-the-century culture, conjugating the author's interest in Russian folklore and fairy tales, theatre, exoticism, and is seemingly blind to social issues.⁹² At the very core of it lies a black character, a young black boy which is simultaneously the recipient of the abecedarium and one of its protagonists, given that he is chosen to represent the letter 'A' as an *arap*.⁹³ Thus he inhabits an in-between space:

91 Cf. A. Belyi, *Odna iz obitelei tsarstva tenei*, Moscow 1924.

92 Cf. S. Pankenier Weld, *An Ecology of the Russian Avant-Garde Picture Book*, Amsterdam-Philadelphia 2018, pp. 31-43, <https://doi.org/10.1075/clcc.9>

93 It should be noted that this was not Benua's first choice to represent the letter A (the words *Apollon* and *angel* were originally chosen). Evidently, the author then decided to give the 'arap' a more prominent role in the publication. Cf. *Azbuka v kartinakh*

he is portrayed reading a book alongside Russian white children in the title page (so he clearly lives within Russia, not in Africa), but he is also put in the fictional space of a stage (in the illustration for the letter 'A' he is effectively on a stage, dressed with exotic clothes and armed with a threatening blade and an ambiguous smile). Therefore, he is also a performer of sorts, whose own perceived identity could be inauthentic. If at the beginning of the book his presence and role within Russian society are thus ambivalent—and ambivalence creates uncertainty and anxiety—at the end he is shown as having been assimilated by Russian society: he is portrayed as writing 'I have learnt to read and write in Russian'. His threat has been averted, even though, it should be noted, he still misspells some words: can he be completely and utterly successfully 'tamed'? Or will something 'alien' forever remain inside him? In any case, it is Russian education and culture that have brought him from the 'darkness of ignorance' to the 'light of knowledge', which anticipates certain trends of Soviet books for children dealing with Africa and its 'acculturation', mocked and ineffective if carried out by Europeans, successful and glorified if carried out by the Soviets.⁹⁴

While ultimately rendering the black boy inoffensive, Benua still made him extremely ambiguous by resorting to stylisation and the grotesque, transforming him into a caricature that could be laughed at in all the various contexts in which he was presented to the reader—whether as a puppet-like figure on the stage, or as an 'almost peer' of Russian children whose knowledge of Russian did not live up to the standard. Thus mockery and laughter emerge as strategies for exorcising the anxieties stemming from the prospect of miscegenation—a desperate attempt to fight the 'paranoid threat of the hybrid'.⁹⁵ Unsurprisingly, these strategies became the main language for depicting blackness in Russian cabaret, which resulted in disturbing and tasteless plays that trivialised racial issues while conveniently removing Russia from the discussion. Indeed, in these rather vulgar pieces the action (and the discourse surrounding hybridisation) focused solely on black people

Aleksandr Benua [*Faksimil'noe vosproizvedenie*], Moscow 1990, p. 71. On the word *arap* cf. Chapter 3.

94 Cf. for example S. Adlivankin, *Malen'kii chernyi Murzuk*, Moscow 1926; S. Tret'iakov, *Pashka i papashka*, Moscow 1926.

95 H. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London-New York 1994, p. 116.

and Europeans, with Russians being excluded from the latter group. *Vampuka, the Bride of Africa* opened in 1909 at the cabaret theatre The Crooked Mirror and immediately attracted the attention of the masses, becoming a hit despite mixed reviews. Originally written in 1900 by prince Mikhail Volkonskii (1860-1917), a prolific author experimenting with several literary genres, it was set in a fictional Ethiopia governed by king Strofokamil IV (a speaking name—as many others in the play—being an obsolete word for ‘ostrich’). The plot revolves around Strofokamil’s pursuit of an African princess from another tribe, Vampuka, who is in love, however, with the young Lodyre. At the end of the play, the *deus ex machina* is revealed a European who up until the end is disguised as a savage thanks to a ‘naked costume’: once he removes it and reveals his true identity—that of a conqueror—he gains the authority to order Strofokamil’s execution and arrange the marriage of Vampuka to Lodyre. Here, hybridism occurs within the African context and is associated with a European man whose identity shifts, making him the ultimate performer. It is, effectively, a testament to the shapeshifting abilities of the European colonists, capable, through deception, of prevailing with ease on an African king and posing as saviours. At the same time, black people were portrayed as lacking any agency and being dependent on the benevolence of the white man for their bright future. Even more problematic was the 1910 Petr Potemkin’s *Blek end Uait. A Negro Tragedy*, which was later slightly reworked (1912) and became part of the permanent repertoire of The Crooked Mirror just like *Vampuka*. A ‘farce of miscegenation’,⁹⁶ *Blek end Uait* not only was centred around a mixed-race marriage, but played with hybridisation by relying for the most part on a pidgin English phonetically transcribed with the Cyrillic alphabet and freely translated for the benefit of the public by the ‘assistant director’ (*pomoshchnik rezhissera*). He was the one to explain to the public that the troupe was ‘American, or rather a Negro one [*negritianskaia*], because they are all black. Or rather not, since Dzhon is white and Molly is also not completely black, since she is the cousin of a Negro king and the other cousins were not entirely black’. Despite the fact that the black characters are clearly African Americans and speak English, Nikolai Ul’ianov’s costumes drew on orientalised

96 L. Senelick (ed. and trans. by), *The Crooked Mirror. Plays from a Modernist Russian Cabaret*, Evanston 2023, p. 128, <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.17957873>

Arab iconography comprising sirwal trousers, pointed shoes, a turban, and a dagger, which added a further layer of hybridity.⁹⁷ The mixed-race Molly (who, in the 1910 version, was actually black) is also defined as 'airish' (Irish), so that hybridity manifests itself in multiple ways within the farce. The hero is white-skinned John who falls in love with Molly. In order to gain her attention, he decides to disguise himself by painting his own skin black. Nevertheless, Molly rejects him; when he cries the black paint starts to disappear, revealing John's whiteness. The blacks, who, as the 'assistant director' puts, 'hate the white race', decide to lynch him, but he is saved by the arrival of 'Sherlock Holmes, Nick Carter, Nat Pinkerton' (in the 1910 version by policemen). Molly will eventually fall in love with him, while his rival Jack, a black man, dies by suicide. Setting aside the farcical and tasteless elements, the play ultimately focused on the issue surrounding mixed marriages, which appear to be resisted by both white and black people—yet the union between Molly and John is ultimately secured, thanks to the arrival of three white men, while the black characters are defeated. The most problematic voice is certainly that of the assistant director, who not only espouses racist rhetoric by attributing a penchant for lynching to black people and stating that 'they rejoice over the death of the white race' in the 1910 version, but is also deeply misogynistic, complaining about 'how treacherous women are' given that 'they' display a rapid change of heart. Thus racial and gender dynamics intersect once again in the discourse constructed around the rapidly changing and unsettling modernity.

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In his seminal essay *Critique of Black Reason*, Achille Mbembe has noted the ambiguity of the term 'Africa', which, functioning as a mask, creates doubles and conceals what is underneath: "The name 'Africa' plays the role of the mask in the drama of contemporary existence. Each invocation of the name covers the body of the individual in a sea of opaque fabric. It is the very essence of the name that invites such a foundational process of

⁹⁷ See two sketches in E. Petrovskaja, 'Absolutno nechitaemaia...', *Moskovskii nabliudatel'*, 1992, 9, pp. 54-57. All the quotes from the play are from the reprinted 1912 version in E. Petrovskaja, 'Absolutno nechitaemaia...', pp. 56-57.

erasure and veiling [...].⁹⁸ It appears to be, in other words, an 'empty form'.

Modernism(s) made Africa an integral part of their artistic experimentations, which were heavily informed by racialisation and a poetics of race; indeed, 'In the elliptical time schemes, kaleidoscopic narrative patterns, and elaborate psychological landscapes that comprise modern fiction, race serves as an entry point into artistic creativity [...] and an encrypted cipher for modernity itself'.⁹⁹ Thus, artistic representations of black Africa and blackness in the modernist period overall transcended the nineteenth century tendency to consider 'racial codes' as 'reliable signs of human character', instead 'transform[ing] the outward signs of race into artistic content notable for its *unreliability*'.¹⁰⁰ As evidenced throughout this chapter, the process of using black Africa as a canvas to express modern anxieties and to renovate and reinvent well-established genres (from tales to epic poems) was very much alive in the Russian context, despite the fact that the tsarist empire had fewer close contacts and relations with Africa than Western colonial empires. Perhaps even more significant is the fact that the 'African canvas' was employed uniformly in Russian literature, from lowbrow to highbrow cultural products, thus creating a fascinating and varied imagery at the disposal of a multi-class readership. Issues such as miscegenation were solved differently—from the reinforcement of an ultimately unshakable *status quo*, to the creation of apocalyptic scenarios—, while the exploration of gender dynamics resulted in the proliferation of black female characters fatal for men (be they Russian, European, or African)—even when men served as their demise. In addition to these cross-cutting themes traceable in Western modernism(s), however, a discourse on Russianness—specific to the tsarist empire—also emerged. As evidenced, it usually emphasised the many facets of Russian exceptionalism—from being the prime example of white saviour, civiliser and domesticator, to being destined for a fundamentally different future to the gloomy one envisaged for Europe. Thus, in the context of Russian modernism the 'African canvas' served also the significant purpose of reflecting on and (re)negotiating one's relationship with Europe, breathing new life into long-standing debates on Russian identity.

98 A. Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, Durham-London 2017, pp. 50-51.

99 U. Seshagiri, *Race and the Modernist Imagination*, Ithaca-London 2010, p. 12.

100 Ibid., pp. 8-9.

Conclusion

By adopting a broad lens, rather than focusing on a specific case study, this book has demonstrated the extent to which black Africa was constructed and represented in Russian imperial culture through a variety of media—from maps to scientific essays, from museum collections to fiction, from anthropometric measurements to painting. It has also pointed out how the production of knowledge about this continent was effectively addressed to (and reached) multiple social strata, who were therefore equally exposed to topical themes like European imperialism or slavery, as well as to colonial and racial language. In doing so, however, this study has also revealed the significant ties between Russia and the European countries in terms of knowledge (co)production. Indeed, the flow of theoretical approaches and practices between them, aimed at creating colonial knowledge (in the case of Europe) and modern knowledge (in the case of Russia), was so prominent that it affected disciplines such as geography and physical anthropology, as well as practices such as collecting, photographing, and fictionalising black Africa. Whilst it was evidently a matter of colonial control for Europe, for Russia—excluded as it was from possessing actual African colonies—it was more a matter of demonstrating that it shared a common, modern language with Europe, a language that was incidentally steeped in colonial and racial rhetoric. Even the presence of exceptionalist traits, from a general disregard of polygenism to the reassuring trope of Russians as better examples of white saviours, cannot deny the existence of a shared discourse on black Africa created from the very same mould. As a matter of fact, this aspect is so significant that scholars should consider the theoretical links between European and Russian colonial discourses when studying Russia's practices of control and production

of knowledge with regard to its own internal colonies.¹

This book therefore argues in favour of pursuing further research into the transnational aspect of *fin-de-siècle* Russian knowledge production, which could be particularly fruitful in relation to colonial or colonial-adjacent topics. While still advocating for particularism, the book makes the case for shifting from a purely exceptionalist perspective to analysing and understanding the lines of continuity with European scientific and cultural discourses on colonialism. Thus, it may help to shed new light on this issue and possibly to overcome a centric approach that largely ignores the broader context of the scientific and cultural interrelations in the era of modern empires. As such, this perspective favours the investigation into ‘the transformation of what one might call “science in Russia” (that is, science that happened in the geopolitical space defined by Russia, which had been taking place at the very least since the early eighteenth century) into “Russian science”—the assimilation and adaptation of scientific traditions and institutions into Russian culture so that they became an integral part of Russian culture’.² At the same time, however, it also champions broadening the scope of such research to investigate how, and with what results, Russian science—whose connection with European academia was certainly more obvious—influenced texts and practices aimed at a middle- or lowbrow readership, thereby permeating the public sphere and involving a variety of private actors with their own interests and agendas. In this sense, the cultural production of Africa in late imperial Russia was truly a transnational phenomenon, that is one that incorporated diverse ‘individuals, groups, movements, business

1 This line of research has been pursued, for instance, during the international conference *Comparing Colonial Discourses: Africa and the Caucasus in Russian Thought* (University of Padua, 18–19 October 2023).

2 M. D. Gordin and K. Hall, ‘Introduction: Intelligentsia Science Inside and Outside Russia’, *Osiris*, 2008 (23), 1, pp. 1–19 (p. 11), <https://doi.org/10.1086/591867>. Cf. this entire issue, entitled *Intelligentsia Science: The Russian Century, 1860–1960*. On the advantages and limits of a transnational approach in the study of the history of knowledge cf. for instance the *British Journal for the History of Science’s* issue *Transnational History of Science* and especially: S. Turchetti, N. Herran, and S. Boudia, ‘Introduction: Have We Ever Been “Transnational”? Towards a History of Science Across and Beyond Borders’, *BJHS*, 2012 (45), 3, pp. 319–336, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007087412000349> and M. Walker, ‘The “National” in International and Transnational Science’, *BJHS*, 2012 (45), 3, pp. 359–376, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007087412000398>

enterprises', not (just) statal structures.³ The specific topic of this book—the Russian representation of Africa—calls for a transnational approach with regards to Russia and colonial Europe, but effectively follows in the footsteps of a recent outpouring of scholarship that, based on the peculiar nature of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, has applied this approach to the study of cultural dynamics within (as well as beyond) Russia's own borders—which in turn has prompted a re-evaluation of the nature of 'Russian studies' per se.⁴

With regard to the specific themes of this book, the transnational perspective has already proven fruitful in relation to the study of the development of race science in Russia from the nineteenth century onwards, with works that have put Russian scholars and discourses in a global context.⁵ However, examining the Russian representation of Africa has proven to be a useful tool for demonstrating the pervasiveness of transnationality in terms of knowledge production, with race science being just one aspect of it. The individual actors involved, notwithstanding

3 On the difference between 'international' (as stemming from state relations and projects) and 'transnational' as the product of often unpredictable individuals and groups cf. U. Hannerz, *Transnational Connections. Culture, People, Places*, London-New York 1996 (and p. 6).

4 On this cf. for instance K. M. F. Platt (ed. by), *Global Russian Cultures*, Madison 2019, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvfjcxzz>; V. Strukov and S. Hudspith (ed. by), *Russian Culture in the Age of Globalization*, Abingdon-New York 2019; A. Byford, C. Doak, and S. Hutchings (ed. by), *Transnational Russian Studies*, Liverpool 2020, where the editors underline that 'the transnational approach seeks to account, simultaneously, for two equally important parallel processes on which language and culture as phenomena depend—the ongoing complex and diverse construction of "the national" through particular forms of boundary-making that goes on around language and cultures, and the continuous parallel processes of crossing and transgressing, relativizing or reconfiguring, breaching or transcending the boundaries thus constructed. The transnational thereby helps us to navigate between the Scylla of essentialism (e.g., in the case of Russian studies, the fetishization of Russianness as a fixed identity) and the Charybdis of globalism (such as postulates that the linguistic and cultural specificity of things "Russian" are sheer ephemera in a highly globalized world). Thus, it is critical to the transnational approach not only to aim to avert tacit essentializations of nationally circumscribed cultures, but also to avoid falling victim to the complementary risk of turning all cultural flows into a single all-subsuming global process' (pp. 6-7).

5 Cf. for instance M. Mogilner, *Homo Imperii. A History of Physical Anthropology in Russia*, Lincoln-London 2013; D. Rainbow (ed. by), *Ideologies of Race. Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union in Global Context*, Montreal 2019. This echoes a global trend, with works such as R. McMahon (ed. by), *National Races. Transnational Power Struggles in the Sciences and Politics of Human Diversity, 1840-1945*, Lincoln 2019, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjsf4cz>

their different backgrounds, political views, and interests, were all deeply connected with European cultural institutions and scientific outputs: they had direct ties with their Western peers, with whom they often exchanged views; they studied abroad and read European scientific literature and fiction; they visited European museums and collaborated with European societies and organisations.⁶ At the same time, in their pursuit of knowledge about Africa, they were occasionally sponsored—financially or spiritually—by Russian state structures, which entered the race for Africa quietly but effectively. Projects such as the construction of the first hospital in Ethiopia demonstrated a keen interest in the continent's politics, serving as a means to counterbalance European powers and, at the same time, to prove Russia's modernity to the world. While having actual African colonies was not necessary to fulfil these two main objectives, understanding and appropriately using the language of modern science was. The involvement of structured cultural establishments, like museums and research institutes, serves as further evidence of this, and simultaneously highlights the efforts to democratise knowledge for the people in *fin-de-siècle* Russia.

Examining the ways in which knowledge about Africa was articulated within the Russian Empire also enables us to argue against viewing such knowledge as merely derivative. The fact that the Russian discourse over Africa and its peoples was, overall, in continuity with the European one, does not mean that there were no original traits, nor should it negate the existence of rather interesting implications. For one, the persistence of typically colonial rhetoric and strategies of representations in the cultural construction of a space that was not subjected to the Russian power goes in favour of the 'colonialism without colonies' approach: drawing and describing the African lands allowed the authors to indulge in a virtual conquest by renaming places, erasing local people from representations of their lands, or creating a fictionalised reality with little connection to the actual one, but whose master was exclusively its own creator; observing the black body closely through the lens of the rising physical anthropology, and describing it using racial language allowed for the dematerialisation of said body—

6 While this study has focused on the Russian side of this cultural dialogue, it remains to be seen how, if at all, these Russian actors influenced their European counterparts.

so stereotyped and essentialised that it effectively lost all its potential danger, becoming tame and inoffensive; collecting African cultures and actively trying to expand the Russian holdings was another effective way to claim ownership of the continent by transference; and transforming it into a useful metaphor for dealing with modernity functioned as a mechanism for reclaiming control over the elusive, rapidly-changing, and unsettling reality created by colonialism. In all these cases, Russians effectively contributed to the Western construction and dissemination of a colonial discourse surrounding black Africa. At the same time, these mechanisms for accounting for an 'other' reality also bore an original touch: a significant body of knowledge about Africa circulating in late imperial Russia was not simply imitative, but rather was created by actors who had direct contact with the continent or its people, and who often regarded European colonialism at best as an ambivalent phenomenon susceptible to causing both debasement and advancement in the people subjected to it. Thus two opposing yet coexisting rhetorics emerged as a consequence of engaging with Africa: the reassurance that Russia was a highly civilised and modern country that belonged to the Western world; and the exceptionalist view according to which Russia was a better example of 'white master', able to achieve the betterment of black people without resorting to violence. These rhetorics, both extremely convenient in the construction of the Russian self, were developed in parallel by actors who knew the continent well and those who never had direct contacts with it, which testifies to their significance in late imperial Russia's culture. Having established how the Russian discourse on black Africa worked, as well as its scope and implications, we hope that further in-depth studies will contribute not only to discussions about Russo-African relations, but also to reflections on Russia's relationship with colonialism and Europe.

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About the Team

Alessandra Tosi was the managing editor for this book.

Adèle Kreager and Tricia De Souza proof-read this manuscript. Ewan Vellinga compiled the index.

Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal designed the cover. The cover was produced in InDesign using the Fontin font.

Annie Hine typeset the book in InDesign. The main text font is Tex Gyre Pagella and the heading font is Californian FB.

Jeremy Bowman produced the PDF, paperback, and hardback editions and created the EPUB.

The conversion to the HTML edition was performed with epublius, an open-source software which is freely available on our GitHub page at <https://github.com/OpenBookPublishers>

Lucy Barnes was in charge of marketing.

This book was peer-reviewed by Allison Blakely, Boston University and Nicole Svobodny, Washington University in St Louis. Experts in their field, these readers give their time freely to help ensure the academic rigour of our books. We are grateful for their generous and invaluable contributions.

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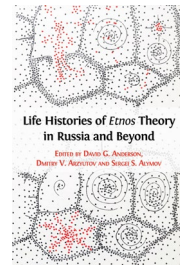
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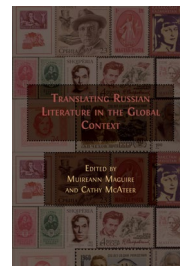
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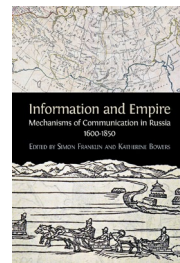


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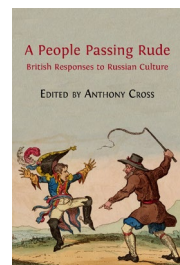


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