

## ON THE QUESTION OF AFRICAN “PROTEST IDENTITY”

© 2024 E.V. Kharitonova

KHARITONOVA Elena Vladimirovna, PhD (Psychology), Associate Professor, Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Civilization and Regional Studies, Institute for African Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russian Federation. ORCID: 0000-0003-3446-8886. E-mail: evh1956@mail.ru

**Abstract.** The article presents an analytical review of approaches to the emergence of African protest identity. It examines the causes and forms of protest identity in Africa, both historically and in the present. The African protest identity is associated with colonial cultural pressure and constitutes a reaction to the discrediting of African culture and the personality of an African. Two opposing approaches to colonization are highlighted in the research. The Eurocentric approach considers colonization to be a beneficial, civilizing project, whereas Africans themselves see it as a tragedy that led to an identity crisis and the construction of new forms of identity (E. Blyden, “The Negritude” by L.S. Senghor).

The African protest identity was formed in opposition to the white man’s culture and the white race as a whole. The mechanism of its formation includes the creation of new binary oppositions, the change of evaluation poles, and placing an emphasis on the uniqueness and superiority of African culture and the African man. Historical analysis and the method of comparative analysis are used in the research to identify differences and taboo areas in intercultural interaction. It is concluded that African protest identity, in most of its manifestations, is anti-colonial, anti-globalist, racial, and civilizational in nature. The processes of formation of “anti-neocolonial” African protest identity can intensify and take the form of aspirations for sovereignty, subjectivity, for the search for one’s own way. This requires a separate study, which the author has already begun. This article can be considered a continuation of the author’s previously published material, “Value-semantic blocks in the images of African poetry (in the context of historical and social changes).”

**Keywords:** Africa, postcolonialism, neocolonialism, intercultural interaction, Afrocentrism, “Negritude”, stigmatization, protest identity

DOI: 10.31132/2412-5717-2024-68-3-64-79

**For citation:** Kharitonova E.V. On the Question of African “Protest Identity”. *Journal of the Institute for African Studies*. 2024. № 3. Pp. 64–79. <https://doi.org/10.31132/2412-5717-2024-68-3-64-79>

Dry your tears, Africa!  
Your children come back to you,  
their hands full of playthings  
and their hearts full of love.  
They return to clothe you  
in their dreams and their hopes.

*Bernard Binlin Dadié<sup>1</sup>*

## INTRODUCTION

The term “protest identity” is not universally recognized in the system of academic science. It is used in political science studies, where protest is defined as “a certain way of identification in the conditions of identity crisis, the ‘removal’ of which is carried out through the self-organization of communities and associations based on the identity of resistance, and it is for them that protest moods are characteristic... In essence, “protest has the function of creating collective identities that must be demonstrated in the public space” [Zhade, Ujhu 2022: 237–243]. Thus, the subject of analysis in this paper is the interconnectedness and interdependence of African protest in its various forms and manifestations and the related identification of Africans.

This state (the state of seeking, self-determination, self-awareness) is usually associated with “protest potential” and “protest behavior”. And if in socio-humanitarian knowledge identity is defined as a person’s awareness of himself through a set of stable characteristics, as an answer to the question “Who am I?”, then, as a working definition of protest identity, we can take the search of an individual or a social group (of any order of magnitude, up to the race and civilization level) for an answer to the questions “Who and what is my (our) opponent-antipode?”, “What kind of person I (we) do not want to be?”. In this regard, defining one’s identity comes through confrontation and protest. In addition, since African protest identity is closely connected to the tragic events of the slave trade, colonial oppression and humiliation, and the devaluation of their own way of life and culture, it has a strong component of self-affirmation and “revenge.”

The American social psychologist Erik Erikson, who defined identity as a set of self-interpretations related to individual self-esteem and rooted in social processes and cultural traditions, used the concept of “negative”, or crisis identity [Erikson 1968: 172–176]. Negative identity is a form of personal and collective identity “by contradiction,” by indicating who “I” or “my” group does not consider itself to be, who it considers its opponent to be, what values it rejects.<sup>2</sup>

The basis of negative identity is not similarity to one group or another (it can be race, a concept such as “colonizer” or “civilization”—for example, white civilization, Western civilization) but difference (a conscious desire to be different, to be better, to feel superior). Psychologically, this process may be based on both an unwillingness to be similar to the object of opposition and an inability to be similar. Negative identification is usually the result of oppression, humiliation, and devaluation. Thus, the psychological goal of negative identification is to overcome one’s humiliation, insecurity, and uncertainty by constructing an alternative psychological reality. Negative identification is

---

<sup>1</sup> Dadié B.B. (1985). Dry Your Tears, Africa. In: Isidore Okpewho (Ed.). *The Heritage of African Poetry: An Anthropology of Oral and Written Poetry*. Essex: Longman.

<sup>2</sup> Zygmunt A.I. Negative Identity. *Great Russian Encyclopedia*. (In Russ.). <https://bigenc.ru/c/negativnaia-identichnost-979ab8> (accessed: 03.05.2024)

a way of overcoming a fragmented view of oneself; it is a way of answering the question, “Who am I? Whom am I with? To which environment or community do I belong? What am I for (what is my mission)?” It is a way of achieving inner integrity through opposing (by the method of “definition by negation”—I am not like them) and constructing an identity with qualities different as compared to the reference group.

Thus, according to E. Erikson, negative identity is peculiar to individuals and communities who, being put in opposition to another group, seek to find themselves, to be convinced of their own significance, and to demonstrate that significance to the world. Protesting against humiliation and devaluation can encourage (motivate) an individual and/or community to engage in creative activity and take the form of a positive construction of a new reality.

The forms of African “protest” generated by and directly related to colonialism are very diverse. One can find many precedents, cases, and specific facts that indicate “postcolonial” protest sentiments. It should be noted that postcoloniality itself (if we consider it not as a historical period but as a socio-psychological state) can be assessed as a complex of special feelings, thoughts, actions, and moods.

Protest sentiments include “revenge” sentiments, which manifest themselves at different levels of cognitive complexity and in different value-semantic spheres. Examples of revenge are the Africans’ perceptions of their own superiority, especially in the area of preserving the system of Christian values and ethics, as opposed to the European “new ethics” (“*we are different, we are better*”). An example of the philosophical-conceptual embodiment of “revenge” can be found in Léopold Sédar Senghor’s theory of Negritude [Senghor 1962; Senghor 1964], especially in its original version of “black racism” (which L.S. Senghor later abandoned).

“So that hereafter we may cry ‘here’ at the rebirth of the world being the leaven that the white flour needs. For who else would teach rhythm to the world that has died of machines and cannons?” wrote L.S. Senghor<sup>3</sup>.

The ideas of unity and solidarity common to all African peoples define the identity of the African, the ideas of Pan-Africanism as the unity of destiny, and the ideas of the unity of the black race in general. The manifestation of collective protest identity, namely racial protest identity (“we are black”, “the black race is one”), can be seen as the solidarity of peoples who have been victimized by colonial regimes or racial discrimination. And finally, the various futurological projects that are united by the “African dream” are, in essence, a protest. It is a protest against centuries of oppression, discrimination, poverty, humiliation, and destruction of the foundations of the basic African (“essentialist”) identity [Fedotova 2013: 53–56].

One example is the project to build in Senegal, 100 km from Dakar, the “city of the future”—Akon City,<sup>4</sup> the main idea and mission of which is to open new opportunities for all African Americans who face racial discrimination and to show Africans the realization of their dream of a prosperous continent. Here again we see a racialized “protest identity” that stands for “We Can!”. Another example is the African Union’s political strategy document, Agenda-2063, adopted in Addis Ababa in 2015, which embodies Africans’ dreams of agency, sovereignty, prosperity, and justice. The document

<sup>3</sup> Senghor L.S. Prayer to Masks. *All Poetry*. <https://allpoetry.com/Prayer-To-Masks> (accessed: 29.04.2024)

<sup>4</sup> Zuikova A. Futurology. Akon City: American Rapper is Building his City of the Future in Senegal. *RBC Trends*. 24.09.2020. (In Russ.). <https://trends.rbc.ru/trends/futurology/5f6859dc9a7947261312541d> (accessed: 29.04.2024)

states that the “Africa we dream of” is “an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, governed by its own citizens and a dynamic power on the global stage.”<sup>5</sup>

Thus, if we take into account the presence of two approaches to the consideration of identity, namely, naturalistic-essentialist and constructivist, then these forms of contemporary African “protest” identity can be attributed to the forms of identity actively constructed by African society, African organizations, and African intellectuals [Fedotova 2013: 53].

### PROTEST AGAINST COLONIAL CULTURAL PRESSURE (ON THE CAUSES OF AFRICAN PROTEST)

Intercultural interaction generates two types of processes: on the one hand, there is cooperation and mutual enrichment; on the other hand, there is competition and pressure from the “dominant” culture, which usually occurs in the case of imposed foreign cultural influence. Historically, Africa has been a zone of intercultural interaction and a territory of powerful and aggressive foreign cultural influence, with a specific form of acculturation in which each individual as well as the social communities have to solve two problems: the protection and preservation of their cultural identity and forced adaptation to foreign cultures. In Africa, these processes have always taken a painful and even tragic form [Kharitonova 2019].

Modern cultural studies distinguish between a donor culture (“giving”) and a recipient culture (“receiving”). From the standpoint of Eurocentrism, the form of cultural impact on Africa has been defined as “acculturation” [Kharitonova 2019], and Africa, from the colonial era to the present, has been defined as a “recipient”, despite the presence of powerful cultural influences in the opposite direction, from Africa on the United States and European countries, for example, in music (jazz, blues, spirituals) and in the arts (manifested in the charm of the lively, bright, natural, expressive art schools of Poto-Poto from Congo-Brazzaville and Tinga-Tinga from Tanzania).

As early as the 1930s and 1940s, Bronislaw Malinowski, the founder of the functionalist trend in cultural anthropology, interpreted colonial cultural interaction as the contact between a more developed, active culture and a less developed, passive one [Malinowski 1997]. Europeans interpreted colonization as a civilizing project that brought the culture, education, religion, technology, and everyday benefits of European civilization to the peoples of Africa. The colonizers were convinced that modernization according to the Western model and the rejection of traditional “barbaric” and “primitive” ways of life were an absolute good and even a blessing for Africa. According to E. Said, within the framework of the “Orientalism complex” [Said 1978: 12], the white colonizers had feelings of what he called “duty” towards the natives and the desire to “ennoble” them, as well as to affirm the prestige of their homeland [Said 1994: 66]. This fact is vividly and figuratively captured in the famous poem “The White Man’s Burden” by Rudyard Kipling:

Take up the White Man’s burden—  
Send forth the best ye breed—  
Go bind your sons to exile

---

<sup>5</sup> African Union. Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. *African Union*. <https://au.int/agenda2063/overview>. 2015. (accessed: 29.04.2024)

To serve your captives' need;  
To wait in heavy harness  
On fluttered folk and wild—  
Your new-caught sullen peoples,  
Half devil and half child.<sup>6</sup>

But contrary to European ideas, it was a situation of cultural shock, crisis, and tragic upheaval for the African man. This fact was also recognized by European scholars in cultural anthropology. Thus, in the works of Octave Mannoni, it is stated that: “it is an obvious oversimplification to think of two cultures as two vessels unequally filled and to suppose that they have only to be connected up for their contents to find a common level... We are surprised, however, when we discover what parts of our civilization the colonial natives have more or less readily assimilated and what parts they have vigorously rejected. In general, it might be said that they accept everything in detail but refuse our civilization as a whole” [Mannoni 1956: 22–23]. Following this logic, we can speak both of a protest against certain details of the culture and civilization imposed by the colonizers and of a protest against the civilization of the white colonizers as a whole, and the protest identity (i.e., self-determination) of Africans can be qualified as having a generally civilizational and racial character.

In accordance with the ideas of Melville J. Herskovits, Robert Redfield, and Ralph Linton [Redfield, Linton, Herskovits 1936] about possible reactions of the recipient group to the cultural contact, in colonial and postcolonial Africa one can find a combination of adaptation processes with elements of protest reactions, which were intensified during the anticolonial struggle for independence. Colonization led to a monstrous deformation of the traditional world of the African continent and the emergence of an identity crisis involving the devaluation of values, the destruction of norms and stereotypes of behavior, and the erosion of trust in oneself and one's own culture. It was a cultural and psychological trauma that, in the terminology of psychologists, had the character of “post-traumatic stress disorder” (“PTSD”), which was reflected in African poetry and in African socio-political and philosophical concepts [Kharitonova 2019]. As the Nigerian poet Mabel Imoukhede-Segun wrote:

They trampled down all that was strange...  
They left a trail of red  
Wherever their feet had passed.<sup>7</sup>

During the years of colonization of the African continent, the meeting of temporally and typologically different cultures was aggravated by the contemptuous attitude of Europeans towards African culture, the formation of an offensive image of the African and everything “African”, using definitions with the prefix “underculture,” “undercivilization,” up to the expression “underhuman.” The colonizers introduced European norms in the sphere of everyday life, economy, and religion, which led to the destruction of the established socio-cultural ties and orientations of the traditional world. The norms and values of the African man were discredited and devalued:

---

<sup>6</sup> Kipling R. The White Man's Burden, 1899. *The Kipling Society*. [https://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poem/poems\\_burden.htm](https://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poem/poems_burden.htm) (accessed: 29.04.2024)

<sup>7</sup> Imoukhede-Segun M. (1986). A Second Olympus. In: Imoukhede-Segun M. *Conflict and Other Poems*. Ibadan: New Horn Press.

Here we stand,  
Infants overblown,  
Poised between two civilisations,  
Finding the balance irksome...

writes the Nigerian poet Mabel Imoukhede-Segun about Africans<sup>8</sup>.

Europeans believed that they were bringing enlightenment and “civilization” to African countries. In African studies, including Russian African studies, some still view colonization as a blessing for Africa, describing the changes they consider positive. For example, it is sometimes argued that colonialism gave the peoples of the African continent a new industrial development path, new skills, new dreams and prospects, led to the formation of a new social consciousness and the development of new forms of organization and business management. This point of view emphasizes that colonialism brought to life the spirit of fierce competition in all spheres of life, and this is an integral part of its legacy [Davidson, Mazov 2007: 185–190]. However, these arguments are refuted in the works of African intellectuals as well as in the materials of those Russian researchers who base their analysis on the positions of African authors. It can be argued that traditional values somehow permeate the lives of modern Africans.

In her works, leading Russian Africanist A.N. Moseyko notes that communal clan ties, ethics, and the humanistic philosophy of Ubuntu<sup>9</sup> are the basic traditional values of Africans [Moseyko 2023]. According to the typology of the Dutch sociologist Geert Hofstede [Hofstede 2011], the culture of sub-Saharan Africa is classified as collectivist. The African scholar Mercy Odoyuye stresses: “We can truly know ourselves if we remain true to our community, past and present. The concept of individual success or failure is secondary” [Odoyuye 1979: 110]. During the period of colonialism and then in the post-colonial period, traditional African values and ethics (communalism, solidarity, collectivism, and unity, which are the essence of the concept of Ubuntu) came into conflict with Western values and ethics, such as individualism, the priority of personal (rather than collective) interests, and individual success [Kharitonova 2023]. Ubuntu, as a value and ethical system rooted in traditional African culture, is an obstacle to the adoption of the Protestant work ethic by Africans [Weber 2009], because it is inherently opposed to Ubuntu: it encourages individual success and competition, is profit-oriented, and cultivates pragmatism.

The introduced and imposed values, combined with the devaluation of Africans’ own traditional values, could not but provoke protest and encourage them to seek their own way: “Having come into contact with a civilization which has over-emphasized the freedom of the individual, we are in fact faced with one of the big problems of Africa in the modern world. Our problem is just this: how to get the benefits of European society—benefits that have been brought about by an organization based upon the individual—and yet retain African’s own structure of society in which the individual is a member of a kind of fellowship.”<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Imukhede-Segun M. (1986). Conflict. In: Imukhede-Segun M. *Conflict and Other Poems*. Ibadan: New Horn Press.

<sup>9</sup> Community and humanity—“I am because we are” (Bantu language group).

<sup>10</sup> Julius Kambarage Nyerere. Quotes. <https://www.juliusnyerere.org/resources/quotes> (accessed: 29.04.2024)

## AFRICAN “PROTEST IDENTITY”: A BIT OF HISTORY<sup>11</sup>

The term “identity” became widespread during and after the struggle of African peoples for independence in the former colonies. It also became relevant in the U.S. in connection with the struggle of African Americans against racism. According to E. Erikson’s definition, identity is “subjective sense of an invigorating sameness and continuity” [Erikson 1968: 19]. Awareness of one’s own identity occurs when one relates (compares) oneself to other people, collectives, and society. The African protest identity was formed in opposition to the white man, his world, his culture. Thus, if we understand identity as the self-determination of an individual in relation to a “reference” (exemplary) person or group with whom he or she identifies, then, in the situation of protest identification, an individual endows himself or herself with other qualities, opposite to those of the reference person or group.

Protest identification in Africa is a response to the discrediting of Africans’ own culture and is formed in accordance with the classic “us vs. them” opposition by shifting the poles of evaluation. In response to the negative and disparaging image of Africa and Africans created by white colonizers, African intellectuals formed ideas about the uniqueness, identity, and superiority of African culture and personality, about the mission of Africans on Earth.

This is how the protest against the view of white supremacy, the white man, Western culture, and Western ethics was formed. Let us cite a poem “Civilization” by René Philombé, journalist, political activist, one of the founders and Secretary General of the National Association of Poets and Writers of Cameroon:

They found me in the wholesome darkness of my bamboo hut,  
they found me dressed in obom and animal skins,  
with my palaver and my torrential laughter,  
with my tom-toms, my gris-gris, and my gods.  
Oh pity! How primitive he is! Let’s civilize him!..  
And they showered upon my head their blathering books,  
then they harnessed my body with their own gris-gris,  
then they inoculated my blood,  
my clear and transparent blood,  
with greed, and alcoholism, and prostitution,  
and incest, and fratricidal politics...  
Hurrah!... For here I am, a civilized man!<sup>12</sup>

As Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt notes, one of the main aspects of protest movements is “the growing emphasis, especially within those which developed among sectors dispossessed by processes of globalization, on the politics of identity; on the constitution of new religious, ethnic and local collectivities promulgating in narrow, particularist themes often in terms of exclusivist cultural identity—often formulated in highly aggressive terms” [Eisenstadt 2010: 8]. Examples of African protest identity support this thesis.

---

<sup>11</sup> This chapter was written with the use of materials from the author's presentation at the International Likhachov Scientific Conference [Kharitonova 2019].

<sup>12</sup> Philombé R. Civilization. Unofficial translation from the original French version (*Editor’s Note*). <https://teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Civilisation-Poem-by-Rene-Philombe-943460> (accessed: 29.04.2024)

It was on the basis of African protest identity that the concept of Afrocentrism was formed [Khokholkova 2019], and the ideas of Negritude were developed [Senghor 1964]. Senghor's ideas of the unique qualities of Africans played a positive role and gave rise to the development of Afrocentrism [Khokholkova 2019: 39]. After a terrible devaluation, after all the humiliation suffered, Senghor's ideas revived Africans' faith in their own abilities and created the basis for the formation of an African civilizational identity.

The ideas of African uniqueness and superiority were embodied in the concept of Negritude, a concept close to Afrocentrism, which was developed in the works of the first president of independent Senegal, the philosopher and poet Leopold Sedar Senghor [Senghor 1964]. The philosophical content of Negritude is based on the logic of binary oppositions: European civilization—Negro-African civilization; white man—Negro-African man; discursive reason—emotionality, partisanship; cognition rational—intuitive. But the view of Negritude as “anti-racist racism” that can contribute to the destruction of all racism became, metaphorically speaking, a time bomb. It seemed as if this formula could justify various forms of manifestations of so-called “black racism.” Among the most severe contemporary manifestations of “black racism” are the killings of white farmers in Zimbabwe and South Africa in recent decades. Discriminatory actions against the white population (Afrikaners) in contemporary South Africa are particularly acute, and these are also forms of protest and revenge as a result of the trauma of apartheid. Understanding this, Senghor, already the president of Senegal, wrote that Negritude is not racism—it is a set of values of the civilization of the black world [Moseyko 2018: 15–29].

In Africa, particularly in southern Africa, protest sentiments took the form of ideas about the spiritual unity of the black race. In 1906, at Columbia University in the United States, the South African publicist and social activist, one of the founders and the president-general of the African National Congress (ANC), Pixley ka Isaka Seme, spoke of the unity inherent in the African mentality that underlies Pan-Africanism: “The African people, although not a strictly homogeneous race, possess a common fundamental sentiment which is everywhere manifest, crystallizing itself into one common controlling idea” [Ka Isaka Seme 1906].

African-American Marcus Garvey also expressed Afrocentric ideas. His “Africa for Africans” movement was based on the declaration of a “world brotherhood of the people of the black race” that would “restore the greatness of the fallen race and spread racial pride and love.” Garvey urged black Americans to return to the “land of the ancestors” in Africa, where he envisioned building an ideal state whose citizens would be all black people, wherever they lived. Garvey's ideas and activities continue to influence the protest identification of Africans, African Americans, and members of the African diaspora in Europe.

In 2020, following the murder of African-American George Floyd in Minneapolis and the intensification of the BLM<sup>13</sup> protest movement, Ghanaian authorities suggested that all African-Americans move to Africa because of discrimination in the United States. Ghana's Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture Barbara Oteng Gyasi expressed hope that the death of black man George Floyd would put an end to racism not only in the US but also around the world. She stressed that “racism in America continues to be a deadly

---

<sup>13</sup> Black Lives Matter.



pandemic, for which for more than 400 years now, our brothers and sisters in the United States of America have yearned for a cure.”<sup>14</sup>

The colonizers devalued African culture and mentality, instilling in Africans a sense of inferiority. Afrocentric concepts exaggerated the exclusivity and superiority of African culture and mentality. Thus, as the pendulum was swinging from humiliation to superiority, an African protest identity was formed.

#### AFRICAN “PROTEST IDENTITY”: CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF MANIFESTATION

Eisenstadt, speaking about modernity, associated the strengthening of protest movements and ideologies—and, consequently, of the manifestations of collective identities (including the protest identity in accordance with the “us vs. them” algorithm)—with the gradual crystallization of a new model of civilization, one of the manifestations whereof he considered “the close interweaving between these processes and the new types of orientations and movements of protest that have developed since the late sixties of the twentieth century” [Eisenstadt 2010: 7]. According to Eisenstadt, it is the activity of inter-civilizational anti-globalization and anti-hegemonic movements on a global scale that contributes to the gradual restoration of collective identities and the clash between them [Eisenstadt 2010: 6].

Modern Africa is gripped by protest sentiments that can take on religious and political overtones. A series of coups d'état in West Africa (Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Gabon, etc.),<sup>15</sup> seen in the context of the struggle against neo-colonialism and the hegemony of former metropolises, can serve as an illustration of Eisenstadt's approach. The Nigerian terrorist group of radical Islamists “Boko Haram”<sup>16</sup>, which means “Western education is a sin” in Hausa, is a protest group by its nature. It protests against Western education, culture, and science, continuing a tradition of anti-Western and anti-European protests. One of its most publicized actions was the kidnapping in April 2014 of 276 schoolgirls aged 12 to 17 in northeastern Nigeria, students at a “Western-style” school<sup>17</sup>.

At the same time, we can observe the emergence of another paradoxical and tragic form of protest for Africa—against the instability, poverty, and lack of prospects in the homeland faced by an educated young African, which, as a consequence (along with the desire for the revival and sustainable development of the continent already described), may lead to a protest against “Africanity” and the values of African culture and to an unexpected change in the perceived image of the West, from negative to attractive. Young people, the most educated part of the population, may try to emigrate to Europe or the United States. This form of protest is related to the failed expectations of the rapid success of the independent development of post-colonial Africa.

This choice is also made by Africans who are involved in the activities of transnational corporations, in Western business culture, and who are usually Western-

---

<sup>14</sup> Come to Ghana if you're unwanted – Tourism Minister to African Americans. *GhanaWeb*. 05.06.2020. <https://ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Come-to-Ghana-if-you-re-unwanted-Tourism-Minister-to-African-Americans-971839> (accessed: 29.04.2024)

<sup>15</sup> Kharitonova E. Dangerous Denouement. About Who Benefits from the Escalation around Niger and Whether Europe is Losing its Position on the Continent. *Izvestija*. 07.08.2023. (In Russ.). <https://iz.ru/1555487/elena-kharitonova/opasnaia-razviazka> (accessed: 29.04.2024)

<sup>16</sup> A terrorist organization banned in Russian Federation.

<sup>17</sup> Chibok girls: Kidnapped schoolgirl found in Nigeria. *BBC News*. 18.05.2016. <https://bbc.com/news/world-africa-36321249> (accessed: 29.04.2024)

educated. They want to leave Africa; they identify themselves with the European way of life, with Western values of individual success, career, and wealth. They are also characterized by a protest identity and are trapped between two value systems belonging to different cultures. To such phenomena, modern scholars in African studies began to apply new terms such as “migritude” (by analogy with Senghor’s concept of Negritude), “Afropolitanism” (by analogy with cosmopolitanism), emphasizing that a certain part of Africans, usually Western-educated, wants to acquire the status and identification of “people of the world” [Gavristova 2022].

The activities of the Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, whose tragic death on October 20, 2011, is, in fact, another collapse or deconstruction of the new Libyan identity that he had built during his years of rule, can be seen as a form of protest against colonialism. Gaddafi tried to realize an alternative model of life—alternative not only to colonial Africa but also to the Western world, not only in Libya but also on the African continent as a whole. This is evidenced by the characteristic traits of the society’s organization and its goals for the near future, which Gaddafi developed and recorded in his “Green Book.” First of all, it is the withdrawal from the dollar financial system enshrined in the Bretton Woods agreements and the implementation of trade with foreign economic partners not in dollars but in national currencies. Gaddafi’s plans included the issuance of the gold dinar and the subordination of the National Bank of Libya to the government of the country, the issuance of interest-free loans, the nationalization of natural resources, and the equitable distribution of income from rents among citizens, free education (including higher education), health care, and housing.

Gaddafi outlined the basic principles of a new, just order of life in his 1975 “Green Book,” where he emphasized that the Jamahiriya was a society that embodied the dream of communism, of the absence of supreme power, of the City of the Sun. “The people created the Green Book with their dreams, their hopes, their breath, their sufferings, their joys, their ideals, their wisdom, their feelings, their deeds, their sacrifices”<sup>18</sup> [Gaddafi 2016]. In other words, there was a dream in Gaddafi’s ideas, but in Libya under Gaddafi, much of the above was translated into reality.

One of Gaddafi’s most ambitious projects was the Great Manmade River (GMR). It is a vast system of pipes, aqueducts, and over 1,300 wells more than 500 meters deep that supplies water from the Nubian aquifer to the desert areas and coast of Libya, the cities of Tripoli, Benghazi, Sirte, and others. Gaddafi himself called this river “the eighth wonder of the world.”<sup>19</sup> There is an opinion that this project was one of the main reasons for Gaddafi’s elimination.<sup>20</sup> The project was being successfully implemented, and in the long term, Africa would eventually transform from a continent, most of whose territory was desert unsuitable for agriculture, into a blossoming continent capable of feeding itself and provided with fresh drinking water sufficient for the next 3–4 thousand years. During the NATO bombing of Libya, the branches of the “man-made Gaddafi River” were also targeted. The great humanitarian-economic project for the prosperity of Africa was blocked.

---

<sup>18</sup> Gaddafi M. To Soviet Readers. In: *The Green Book*. (In Russ.). <http://lib.ru/POLITOLOG/KADDAFI/greenbook.txt> (accessed: 29.04.2024)

<sup>19</sup> Pomytkin P. Gaddafi’s Grandiose Water Project. *Military Review*. 18.10.2011. (In Russ.). <https://topwar.ru/7735-grandioznyy-vodnyy-proekt-kaddafi.html> (accessed: 29.04.2024)

<sup>20</sup> Ryzhov B. The Great Man-Made River: How NATO Prevented Gaddafi from Greening the Sahara. *Ren TV*. 01.06.2023. (In Russ.). <https://ren.tv/longread/1108826-velikaia-rukotvornaia-reka-kak-nato-ne-dal-kaddafi-ozelenit-sakharu> (accessed: 29.04.2024)

The gold dinar has not come into circulation. Africa is still a continent of poverty, unemployment, insufficient access to education and healthcare; there is hunger, there is Ebola, there is a deficit of safe drinking water. And as a result, it is totally dependent on foreign investment and humanitarian aid, which allows the leading economies, mainly Western countries, to make super-profits and exploit Africa's resources. Gaddafi's anti-globalization protest was one of the reasons for his death, for blocking his strategy for the development of the African continent, for deconstructing his dream of a new African civilizational identity.

PROTEST TRANSPORTED TO ANOTHER ENVIRONMENT:  
AFRICAN "PROTEST IDENTITY"  
IN THE CONTEXT OF MIGRATION PROCESSES

After the so-called "Arab Spring," the destruction of Libya, and the assassination of Gaddafi, refugees from North and Sub-Saharan Africa poured into Europe. A famous quote from Muammar Gaddafi's last speech: "Listen to me, you NATO people! You are bombing the wall that stopped the flow of African migration to Europe, the wall that stopped the al-Qaeda terrorists. That wall was Libya. You are destroying it."<sup>21</sup>

Protests and the related protest identity of refugees and emigrants to European countries are another aspect of the problems we are considering in this research. These processes are tragic for both sides, but our research is focused on the protest identity of Africans. For them, a zone of foreign cultural influence and the need to adapt to a different culture once again arose, often associated with hostility on the part of the indigenous population of the host country. The attitudes and behavior of the representatives of the "host community" and the social environment can act as one of the potential triggers for the formation of a protest identity (based on the principle "we are different in a foreign environment"), including its radical forms.

Africans who become migrants or refugees are uprooted from their natural socio-cultural environment, where they were an organic part of their world and formed a unity with their own community. Usually, the basis of identification of the migrant community retains its traditional socio-cultural "us" based on race, ethnicity, and religion. Now they are forced to move to a different socio-cultural environment where they have become "them" to the inhabitants of the host country. This is one side of the emerging socio-psychological situation.

The second side is the perception of migrants by the residents of the host country, and here a number of problems related to social perception and intergroup interaction arise, in particular such problems as "in-group favoritism" and basic "out-group hostility" [Ageev 1990]. The lack of real information, stereotyping, and prejudices lead to an impoverished and distorted image of Africans, while real confrontations and crime chronicles set the stage for increasing hostility towards migrants and refugees.

Stereotyping in interpersonal and intergroup perception and evaluation has two aspects. On the one hand, it is a simplification of the image of the other, which facilitates categorization, while there is no shift to negative evaluation in the perception of a person or a group. This case of stereotyping can be seen a defensive reaction to the information overload. The second aspect of stereotyping leads to the emergence of prejudices and

---

<sup>21</sup> Kozlov V. Gaddafi's Last Word: You are Bombing a Wall That Blocked the Flow of African Migration to Europe. *NewsLand*. 05.09.2015. (In Russ.). <https://newsland.com/post/3674039-poslednee-slovo-kaddafi-vy-bombite-stenu-ne-propuskavshiu-potok-afrikanskoi-migratsii-v-evropu> (accessed: 02.05.2024)

preconceptions. It is especially acute in the situation of interethnic, inter-confessional, and interracial relations [Belinskaya, Stefanenko 2000].

Stigmatization is directly related to the formation of negative stereotypes, prejudices, and preconceptions. In the experiments of Robert Kleck and Erving Goffman, it was found that “normal” people tend to avoid stigmatized people and show distance and tension when communicating with them. In the experiments, people with physical and mental disabilities served as “stigmatized” people, but the authors concluded that in addition to such “discrediting” characteristics as physical or mental disability, in white society (note that these experiments were conducted in Western society), black skin color also plays the role of stigma [Pines, Maslach 2001]. Stigmatization is commonly defined as the formation of negative attitudes toward a person or group of people based on their psychological, physical, intellectual, national, racial, and other characteristics. Stigmatization leads to disapproval, condemnation, and, as a result, discrimination and is one of the factors that cause a person or social group to exhibit a certain type of behavior, including deviant behavior. According to Goffman, stigmatization deprives a stigmatized person of full social recognition in front of an audience of so-called “normal” people [Goffman 1986].

In the relationship between migrants from Africa and the “hosts,” just like in the case of the interaction between colonizers and the African population in African countries, we see the division into “us” and “them” [Porshnev 1979], stigmatization, neglect, or hostility towards Africans (in the conditions of failed multiculturalism). For example, Alfred Schütz, who studied the situation of male Cameroonian refugees and unaccompanied minors in the region of Brandenburg (Germany), wrote about the difficulties of the transition from their homeland to the host society and emphasized the great risk of social isolation [Zalewski 2022: 72–88].

These factors, in turn, generate the Africans’ protest against humiliation and marginalization, their desire for rehabilitation and revenge, and lead to the formation (if we consider the natural and spontaneous side of the process) or the construction (if the process is managed) of a protest identity.

Eisenstadt, in one of his early works, “The Absorption of Immigrants: A Comparative Study Based Mainly on the Jewish Community in Palestine and the State of Israel” (it was written before his studies on the multiple modernities), wrote about the problem of migration. In addition to the classical notions of assimilation and marginalization of migrants in the host country, he drew attention to the general social preconditions and consequences of migration both in the country of origin and in the host country [Eisenstadt 1955]. Migrants who come to Europe remember both the European colonization of countries on the African continent and the recent reasons that forced them to leave their countries. They became forced migrants because of extreme poverty, because of lack of life prospects (especially for young people), because of insecurity. All these factors were aggravated after the events of the so-called “Arab Spring,” in which the involvement of European countries played not the least role.

Along with the processes of assimilation of migrants into host societies, protest sentiments and protest identities are growing among migrants: racial, confessional, civilizational. These processes are in many ways similar to those described above but can be exacerbated by active rejection of the European “new ethics” in response to stigmatization and rejection, as well as insults of religious sensibilities. The host society (or culture) can also be said to be responsible for radicalization and protest, and stigmatization can be seen as a two-way process.

On the one hand, stigmatization leads to discriminatory attitudes towards the stigmatized person or group. On the other hand, stigmatized individuals and/or social groups (racial, ethnic, religious, and displaced—i.e., all categories of refugees, legal and illegal migrants) may be provoked to retaliatory aggression, self-assertion, defensive behavior, and revenge. If there is an active protest against the “host” culture and ethics, if the contradiction of identities is of a religious and civilizational nature, the probability of very aggressive forms of protest increases. This is especially true for migrants from the so-called African zone of instability, which includes the countries of the Middle East and North Africa.

The “Charlie Hebdo” precedent<sup>22</sup> is an example that can be qualified as a radical manifestation of protest religious identity. Situations involving caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad were perceived by one side of the conflict as entertainment, a “joke,” blague, divertissement, and a manifestation of democratic freedoms as the greatest achievement of Western civilization (“liberty, equality, fraternity”), and by the other side as an absolutely unacceptable act: an insult to the Prophet Muhammad, an insult to the feelings of believers, an act deserving of the most severe punishment; and this “punishment” in any of its forms, up to and including an act of terrorism, was qualified by the second side as a defense of the Prophet Muhammad and Islam as a whole. After the Charlie Hebdo shootings, the French were shocked, genuinely surprised, and did not want to give up their right to freedom of “creative expression.” Of course, this does not justify violence and terrorism, but it does provide an “intercultural” explanation of the situation and calls for respect for other cultural and religious identities.

The use of the method of comparative analysis can be helpful in this case. Scientific comparative studies can provide answers to questions about differences in cultures, about taboos in different denominations, about differences and peculiarities in the system of emotional reactions to different situations [Smelser 2003]. Comparative analysis in the context of the problems under consideration is aimed at finding out what is the status of a particular action, deed, statement in the system of moral and psychological coordinates of different, even opposing parties, whether there are taboo topics, and what they are. Without this understanding, gross mistakes in the intercultural and interreligious communication of our time are inevitable and will be repeated, and the potential for conflict can increase catastrophically.

In conclusion, as Eisenstadt pointed out, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, protest movements and protest sentiments in “non-Western” societies “do indeed promulgate a markedly confrontational attitude toward the West, toward what is conceived as Western, and attempts to appropriate modernity and the global system on their own non-Western, often anti-Western, terms. This highly confrontational attitude toward the West, to what is conceived as Western, is in these movements closely related either to the attempts to decouple radically modernity from Westernization or to take away from the West the monopoly of modernity and to appropriate the contemporary scene, contemporary modernity in terms of visions grounded in their own traditions” [Eisenstadt 2010: 9]. Probably, this is not the only but one of the actual modern trends.

The author understands that the research is highly controversial in many respects; it raises many questions, but probably not all of them have been resolved. The article

---

<sup>22</sup> *Charlie Hebdo* is a French literary and artistic weekly magazine of political satire. It publishes cartoons, reports, discussions, and anecdotes of a non-conformist nature. Taking left-wing and secular positions, it mocks politicians, the far-right, Islam, and Christianity. On January 7, 2015, 10 editorial staff and two police officers were killed in an armed attack on the editorial office in Paris.

presents a rather diverse panorama (both spatially and temporally) of variants of African protest and the ways of self-affirmation and self-identification associated with this protest, which we call “protest identity.”

\* \* \*

In the context of the formation of a multipolar world and the strengthening of the role of the “Global South” in general and of Africa in particular, the processes of the formation of “anti-neocolonial” protests in Africa can intensify and take on different forms, especially forms of striving for sovereignty, subjectivity, and following one’s own path. In the author’s opinion, these contemporary forms of African self-determination and self-assertion can also be considered in the context of the problem of “protest identity”; they require a separate study and additional conceptual clarification.

## REFERENCES

- Ageev V.S. (1990). *Intergroup Interaction: Socio-psychological Problems*. Moscow: Moscow University Press. (In Russ.)
- Belinskaya E.P., Stefanenko T.G. (2000). *Ethnic Socialization of a Teenager*. Moscow: Publishing House of the Moscow Psychological and Social Institute. (In Russ.)
- Davidson A., Mazov S. (2007). *African History in Documents. 1870–2000*. Vol. 2, 1919–1960. Moscow: Nauka. (In Russ.)
- Eisenstadt S.N. (1955). *The Absorption of Immigrants: A Comparative Study Based Mainly on the Jewish Community in Palestine and the State of Israel*. Glencoe: The Free Press.
- Eisenstadt S.N. (2010). Contemporary Globalization and New Civilizational Formations. *Journal of Globalization Studies*. Vol. 1. № 2. Pp. 3–11.
- Erikson E. (1968). *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Fedotova N.N. (2013). The Conceptions of Identity in the Context of Nonlinear Sociocultural Dynamics. *Knowledge. Understanding. Skill*. № 2. Pp. 52–62. (In Russ.)
- Gavristova T.M. (2022). Migritude as a Presentation of Identity. In: Krylova N.L., Ksenofontova N.A. (Eds.). *The Gender Aspect of African Culture: Between Archaic and Modernity*. Moscow: Institute for African Studies. Pp. 194–202. (In Russ.)
- Goffman E. (1986). *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. New York: Touchstone Books.
- Hofstede G. (2011). Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in Context. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*. Vol. 2. № 1. <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1014>
- Ka Isaka Seme P. (1906). The Regeneration of Africa. *African Affairs*. Vol. 5. № XX. Pp. 404–408. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.afraf.a094874>
- Kharitonova E.V. (2019). «Protesting Man» in an Era of Global Change (Based on the Case of the countries of the African Continent and the Migration Crisis in Europe). *XIX International Likhachov Scientific Conference*. (In Russ.). [https://lihachev.ru/pic/site/files/lihcht/2019/dokladi/HaritonovaEV\\_sec2\\_rus\\_040519.pdf](https://lihachev.ru/pic/site/files/lihcht/2019/dokladi/HaritonovaEV_sec2_rus_040519.pdf) (accessed: 29.04.2024).
- Kharitonova E.V. (2023). Traditional African Values and Ethics in the Mirror of Business Communications, or Why the Western Model of Capitalism Does not Take Root in Africa. *XXI International Likhachov Scientific Conference*. (In Russ.). [https://www.lihachev.ru/chten/2023/sec2/Kharitonova\\_EV\\_Traditsionnie\\_Afrikanskie\\_tsennosti\\_i\\_etika\\_2606.pdf](https://www.lihachev.ru/chten/2023/sec2/Kharitonova_EV_Traditsionnie_Afrikanskie_tsennosti_i_etika_2606.pdf) (accessed: 29.04.2024).
- Khokholkova N.E. (2019). *Afrocentrism in the USA: theory and practice of socio-cultural transformations*. Moscow: Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences Publishing House. (In Russ.)
- Lurie S.V. (2004). *Historical Ethnology*. Moscow: Gaudeamus. (In Russ.)
- Malinovski B. (1997). Scientific Principles and Methods for Studying Cultural Change. In: Mostova L.A. (Ed.). *Anthology of cultural studies*. Vol.1. Saint Petersburg: University Book. Pp. 373–384. (In Russ.)
- Mannoni O. (1956). *Prospero and Caliban. The Psychology of Colonisation*. London: Methuen et Co.
- Moseyko A.N. (2018). Leopold Cedar Senghor: a philosopher and theorist of African art. In: Elez A.Y. (Ed.). *Senegal yesterday and today*. Moscow: Institute for African Studies. Pp. 15–29. (In Russ.)

- Moseyko A.N. (2023). Value-Ethical System in Sub-Saharan Africa. From the Past to the Future. *Journal of the Institute for African Studies*. № 3. Pp. 110–124. (In Russ.). <https://doi.org/10.31132/2412-5717-2023-64-3-110-124>
- Odoyuye M.A. (1979). The Value of African Religious Beliefs and Practices for Christian Theology. In: Appiah-Kubi K., Torres S. (Eds.). *Theology on Route*. Maryknoll, New-York: Orbis Books. Pp. 103–110.
- Pines E., Maslach K. (2001). *Workshop on Social Psychology*. Saint Petersburg: Piter. (In Russ.)
- Porshnev B.F. (1979). *Social Psychology and History*. Moscow: Nauka. (In Russ.)
- Redfield R., Linton R., Herskovits M.J. (1936). Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation. *American Anthropologist*. Vol. 38. № 1. Pp. 149–152. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1936.38.1.02a00330>
- Said E.W. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Said E.W. (1994). *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Random House.
- Senghor L.S. (1964). *Liberte. Negritude et humanisme*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.
- Senghor L.S. (1962). De la Negritude. Psychologie du Negro-africain. *Diogene*. № 37. Pp. 1–15.
- Smelser N.J. (2003). On Comparative Analysis, Interdisciplinarity and Internationalization in Sociology. *International Sociology*. Vol. 18. № 4. Pp. 634–657. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580903184001>
- Weber M. (2009). *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.
- Zalewski I. (2022). Alfred Schütz Revisited: Social Exclusion of Refugees in Brandenburg. *Qualitative Sociology Review*. Vol. 18. № 2. Pp. 72–88. <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.18.2.04>
- Zhade Z.A., Ujuhu S.M. (2011). The Phenomenon of Protest Identity in Modern Russian Society. *Bulletin of the Adygea State University. Series: Regional studies: philosophy, history, sociology, jurisprudence, political science, cultural studies*. № 4. Pp. 249–255. (In Russ.)

## К ВОПРОСУ ОБ АФРИКАНСКОЙ «ПРОТЕСТНОЙ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ»

© 2024 Е.В. Харитонова

ХАРИТОНОВА Елена Владимировна, кандидат психологических наук, доцент, старший научный сотрудник, Центр цивилизационных и региональных исследований, Институт Африки РАН, Москва, Российская Федерация. ORCID: 0000-0003-3446-8886. E-mail: evh1956@mail.ru

**Аннотация.** В статье представлен аналитический обзор подходов к возникновению африканской протестной идентичности. В ней рассматриваются причины и формы протестной идентичности в Африке как в историческом ракурсе, так и в современности. Африканская протестная идентичность связана с колониальным культурным давлением и представляет собой реакцию на дискредитацию африканской культуры и личности африканца.

В исследовании выделены два противоположных подхода к колонизации. Европоцентристский подход рассматривает колонизацию как благотворный цивилизационный проект, тогда как сами африканцы видят в ней трагедию, приведшую к кризису идентичности и конструированию новых форм идентичности (Э. Блайден, негритюд Л.С. Сенгора). Африканская протестная идентичность сформировалась в противостоянии культуре белого человека и белой расе в целом. Механизм ее формирования включает создание новых бинарных оппозиций, смену оценочных полюсов, акцентирование внимания на уникальности и превосходстве африканской культуры и африканского человека. Исторический анализ и метод сравнительного анализа используются в исследовании для выявления различий и табуированных областей в межкультурном взаимодействии. Делается вывод, что африканская протестная

идентичность в большинстве своих проявлений носит антиколониальный, антиглобалистский, расовый и цивилизационный характер. Процессы формирования «антинеоколониальной» африканской протестной идентичности могут активизироваться и принять форму стремления к суверенитету, субъектности, к поиску своего пути. Это требует отдельного исследования, которое автор уже начал.

Данную статью можно считать продолжением ранее опубликованного материала автора «Ценностно-смысловые блоки в образах африканской поэзии (в контексте исторических и социальных изменений)».

**Ключевые слова:** Африка, постколониальность, неоколониализм, межкультурное взаимодействие, афроцентризм, «негритюд», стигматизация, протестная идентичность

DOI: 10.31132/2412-5717-2024-68-3-64-79

**Для цитирования:** Харитонов Е.В. К вопросу об африканской «протестной идентичности». *Ученые записки Института Африки РАН*. 2024. № 3. С. 64–79. <https://doi.org/10.31132/2412-5717-2024-68-3-64-79>