



Journalists' Contest : "Great Personalities in the History of Russian-African Relations".

Published on the RusAfroMedia website (<https://rusafroMedia.ru/>) and www.afrocentricity.info

KNOWN AND UNKNOWN PERSONALITIES : Past and present Russian-African Interdependencies

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20 May 2024

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INTRODUCTION : DEFINING GREAT PERSONALITIES

"Great Personalities" in the history of Russian-African relations has been redefined as known and unknown personalities in the recent or less recent history of Russian-African interdependent relations. It is a mix of a deep understanding of Russian-African historical relations in all key areas. Interactions, cooperation, and partnership¹ are required in political, economic, scientific, technical, social, cultural, environmental and humanitarian sectors. Depending on the "great personalities" and their teams, those identified areas have a significant potential for trust building and effective achievements.

The dynamic of Russia and Africa's interdependencies, the highlighting of selected known and unknown personalities in the Russia-Africa history, and the strategic shift towards a closer partnership between Russia and Africa require the deepening of mutual consensus and a proactive approach for inclusive people's partnerships. As a result, the shifting of western influence in Africa and in the World could be speeded up with alternative personalities with ethic. Reference to values could make the difference and enhance dramatically interdependencies between peoples of Russia and Africa.

1. RUSSIA AND AFRICA DYNAMIC INTERDEPENDENCIES

Not only "Great personalities" should be highlighted in the History of Russian-African Relations. In fact, the wording "relations" is inadequate to reflect the diversity of interactions and interdependence between four main categories of issues between Russian and African people, including decision-makers. Known and unknown personalities should be considered as great personalities in the History of Russian-African Partnerships. It is suggested to classify them in five forms of interrelated issues:

- Interactions between government officials and interdependence between security and secret services officials ;
- Interconnection between private and individual human beings as part of an international migration process² with the objective of escaping the oppression of black people and the destruction of the black civilization ;
- Partnership with non-post-colonial and non-hypocritical military and economic powers to support the fight for individual and collective sovereignty of citizens or States ; and
- Putting an end to the weight and responsibility of selected Western and African leaders in the unpaid exploitation of the African continent;
- Stopping the violation of the self-determination of the Black people, individually or collectively, to decide their own future.



Africans and Metis in Russia have gone through all these stages, during the four major periods of political governance: the Tsarist empire, the communist period under the Soviet Union, the transition period with perestroika and the Russian Federation.

The crystallization of a consensus between Russia and African states conscious of their sovereignty has been built up over eight main historical periods:

- 1.1 Before 1884-1885. During the 1880s, Europe's colonial and imperial ambitions in Africa intensified to the point of creating tensions and conflicts between the various western powers. It became urgent to sign treaties to secure their stolen properties on the back of the African people. On the initiative of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, the following countries were invited to the Berlin Conference on the division of Africa: Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, the Ottoman Empire, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden-Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The main purpose of the Berlin Conference, held between 15 November 1884 and 26 February 1885, was for 'white Europeans' to establish official rules for colonization and Western imperialism. Did the officials' representatives of Russian Empire sign the official colonization rules and the asymmetric trade relations with Africa laid down at the time of the division of Africa in Berlin in 1884-1885? The answer is no! From that day and onwards, Russia's entire strategy for dealing with the African continent stems from this strategic decision.
- 1.2 Between 1885-1917. The First World War (1914-1918) exacerbated the fragility of Russia. The defeat of the Russian Empire, an autocratic monarchy, precipitated the disintegration of the imperial regime. Before 1917, Tsarism was swept away by organized and spontaneous movements of intellectuals and the Russian people³. The consequences in Africa have mainly been the redrawing of colonial borders without the Africans, the annexation of African territories for the winners of the first world war and, above all, the intensification of the division of populations organized in a homogenous way around spaces, governance values, languages, and the principle of a peaceful living together. But also, an alternative way of positioning Africa in the international arena.
- 1.3 Between 1917-1944. The end of the Russian Empire in 1917 brought an end to the autocratic monarchy and the tsarism.
- 1.4 Between 1944-1960. The post-Second World War period (1939-1944) between Western countries, which involved large parts of the world and altered the balance of power, colonial possessions, and control within the United Nations Security Council of the Western countries, considered today to be the Global North.
- 1.5 Between 1956-1989. The Bandung Conference, held in Bandung, Indonesia from 18 to 24 April 1955 brought together for the first-time Official decision-makers from twenty-nine African and Asian countries, newly decolonized or in the process of decolonization. The official position of the Group was to reject the unilateralism alternative of the cold war forcing new countries to align or join the two opposing blocs, led by the United States of America (USA) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), known as the Soviet Union. This group known as the Third World adopted an independent position based on the "non-alignment." Later, and during the decolonization process, several countries in Africa experienced their first independencies in the 1960s, often obtained under legal arrangements with often a facility secret arrangement with forced preferential arrangements such as military, monetary, financial, economic, and trading). Those under the table arrangements enabled the colonial powers or their allies to maintain themselves with the support of African local traitors.
- 1.6 Between 1989 and 2009. On 9 November 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall resulted in the end of the Cold War and reshapes the power relations in a world undergoing accelerated changes. It is the end of unilateralism and the emergence of a multipolar world. It is in this context that the 'non-aligned' countries with NATO, created in 1949, have been able to organize themselves collectively and to



ensure their self-protection and security for their people. The creation of the Group of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) on 16 June 2009 resulted in the strengthening of a multipolar world in terms of the balance of power.

- 1.7 Between 2009 and 2022. On 24 February 2022, Russia launched a military and special operation in Ukraine NATO-Russia proxy war, which started more than 10 years ago. It is not possible to ascertain from secret defense agreements whether there was any legal arrangement prohibiting NATO from expanding eastwards and at the time of German reunification, that NATO would not expand beyond East Germany. The non-compliance of NATO agreements may have led to the annexing of Crimea. Nonetheless, the questioning of NATO and, beyond that, of the positions of the countries of the global North, which defend only their own interests at the expense of the countries with which they have asymmetrical trade, has raised awareness in Africa, among both government officials and African civil society. During the vote at the UN General Assembly on 2 March 2022 on the resolution demanding the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukrainian territory with possible condemnation of Russia, the 54 African countries, almost 27.97% of the total vote, did influence the world position but could not get to a common front at the United Nations against Russia. 28 African countries in favor of the resolution and the rest 26 countries did not support the resolution. They were split: 8 African countries absent, 17 abstained from the vote and one, Eritrea voted against the resolution.
- 1.8 Between 2022 and present: Strategic partnership between selected African countries and Russia for a renewed win-win trade, fair prices for African raw materials and industrialization, and the constitution of a geo-political, geo-economic, monetary, and financial zone of sovereignty without the Global North. Interdependency relations, cooperation and partnership between Africa and Russia have been influenced by global geopolitical dynamics and their respective national interests.

Between roughly 1600 and 2024, the number of great personalities in the History of Russian-African Relations are numerous. Some of them are well known, other are unknown. Only a few of them will be highlighted for their role in the contribution to the building of a smooth living together in peace with Russia.

The reality is that to achieve these dual objectives, all these "*great personalities*," often known and unknown personalities have at least two features in common:

- on the one hand, the fight for their independence in an environment where oppression cannot coexist with freedom of action and innovation; and
- on the other, the fight for collective sovereignty, which leads to finding partnerships that are ad hoc, opportunistic, short- or long term and tactical and strategical joint actions plans.

Paradoxically, it is a process of struggle for liberation from the yoke of those who impose a win-lose approach, a systemic oppression system and the loss of human dignity. Consequently, this fight of Russian-African, the African Diaspora in Russia and all known and unknown personalities strongly fighting for ethic, dignity, freedom, fairness, and sovereignty are part of an overall fight for sovereignty.

- Russia experienced in 1917 the termination of the Tsarism coupled with the end of the Russian Empire and the autocratic monarchy and in December 1991 with the breakdown of the policy of Glasnost, i.e. the increased openness and transparency and the Perestroika, i.e. the restructuring of the political and economic systems to end stagnation and generate wealth.... As the President, Mr. Gorbachev's efforts to reengineer the Soviet Union as a voluntary Federation ended up inside in the dissolution of the large compulsory union into 15 successor states and outside with the reunification of Germany as well as the removal of Communist leaders from power peacefully in Eastern Europe in 1989 except in Romania. Because the sovereignty of Russia was put under question, priority was given to all necessary means and partnerships to secure it in Russia, but also to share the understanding of the root causes of the struggle for sovereignty with other partners facing the same problem differently. Africa's leaders who requested the support of Russia, with no dual agendas, got the effective support of Russia.



- Africa experienced its geographical and human dislocation over almost 500 years. Russia did not split Africa and did not benefit from the 1884-1885 Berlin Conference in terms of colonization of Africa. Besides, although Africa's soldiers were numerous to die for Western Europe 1st and 2nd World War, the global North constantly refused to stop their imperialist control over Africa's people autodetermination and African Nations' sovereignty. The process of decolonization, split into political independence in the 1960s has now found a new ground for a second military, territorial and economic independence of Africa. Any country who provides support and accept to pay the international competitive prices during a win-win trade are welcomed to a large majority of the continent with more than 70 % of young people. Thereby, interdependency between Russia and Africa becomes crucial for both Africa and Russia in securing their mutual sovereignty against those in the Global North who still work with the old colonial spirit and the grabbing for free of the African important resources, including both minerals and cheap human resources for industries.

2. "ARAPS": KNOWN AND UNKNOWN PERSONALITIES IN THE RUSSIA-AFRICA HISTORY

Russian perception of Afro-Russian cannot be limited to the historical image of *"arap serving in the Tsarist Russia"*⁴.

Mikhail Fyodorovich Romanov (1596-1645) was Tsar of all Russia from 1613 until his death in 1645. He was elected by the Zemsky Sobor and was the first tsar of the House of Romanov, which succeeded the House of Rurik. He was the first ruler of the Romanov Dynasty⁵.

It is worth replacing the History of selected Russian-African Relations during the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. According to Edward Gibbon⁶, "Russians became known to the West around the 9th Century. "The name of Russians was first divulged in the ninth century by an embassy of Theophilus, emperor of the East to the emperor of the West, Lewis, the son of Charlemagne. The Greeks were accompanied by the great duke, Chagan, or Czar of the Russians. In their journey to Constantinople, they had traversed many hostile nations. A closer examination detected their origin: they were the brethren of the Swedes and Normans⁷." So, Russia was never at the heart of post-Roman Europe as it is well known today. Russia was physically isolated from the Western part of Europe. There were rigid frontiers of African kingdoms and chiefdoms in Antiquity. There is no evidence, nor credible traces of a black people's existence which could demonstrate any major African presence in Russia between the 8th-9th and the 15-16th Century.

Clearly, Russia was not part of the Atlantic slave trade, nor take proactive role in the Western Europe's scramble for Africa. Therefore, Russia had no responsibility in the colonization of the African continent. As a result, Russia was a country which hardly developed close relationships with Africa and Africans.

*"According to Ivan Zabelin a historian of Moscow, Mikhail Fyodorovich Romanov had Moor Murat and later Moor Davyd Saltanov residing at his court, on whom he lavished sumptuous clothes. Among Tsar Michael's servants were Moors who had arrived in Russia as elephant handlers (Oriental rulers loved to give elephants as gifts to Russians). According to records, in 1625 and 1626 a Moor named Tchan Ivraimov "entertained" the tsar, showing him the tricks, his elephant could perform"*⁸.

The early black Russians were brought to the empire as exotic domestics but not slaves. The difference is crucial to understand why in the Russian Empire, black personalities were neither enslaved per se, nor suffered physical discrimination. The high-quality and upper-class costume of the Moors of the Imperial Court was often the most sumptuous of all the court uniforms under the tsars⁹.

Russia was a country of serfdom, with the labor needs of the ruling class and the state met and carried out by serfs. The Imperial Court was known for its *"exotic Moorish courtiers,"* who wore some of the most elegant costumes of all the Czars' court uniforms. Their exotic foreignness and rareness made them objects of curiosity to ordinary Russians¹⁰. According to Georgy Manaev, *"there is evidence that there were Moors residing in the apartments of Sister Martha, mother of first Romanov Tsar Mikhail Fyodorovich Romanov (Michael of*



Russia). In the female half of the palace, black people performed the same function as dwarfs, holy fools and wandering pilgrims - they were objects of astonishment and entertainment for the bored women of the royal family forced to spend almost their entire life locked up in their private quarters¹¹."

In the 18th and 19th centuries, black people whether from America or Africa served at the Russian court as "araps¹²". Two dual meanings of "Arap: a black-skinned person originating from Africa, or a porter, a gatekeeper, the main job that araps were performing., often successfully, at the court in Tsarist Russia.

"The first American "arap" at the Russian court was an ex-valet of the U. S. envoy to St. Petersburg, who got his new job in 1810. Treated with dignity and respect in this job and well paid, the message spread fast in American ports. Many black personalities rushed to Russia, usually as sailors on those few ships heading to St. Petersburg." According to Nina Tarasova with reference to the State Hermitage Museum, "Maria George" originating from Cape Verde, a Portuguese colony, served at the tsarist court for many years and stayed in Russia long after Nicholas II's abdication¹³.

Sophie Buxhoeveden, a maid of honor for Empress Alexandra (Nicholas II's wife), recalled: "Black servants, dressed in Oriental clothes, gave a special, exotic taste to everything in the palace¹⁴." Their presence symbolized how large and powerful the empire was, embracing the whole world with its influence.

According to the historian Igor Zimin, "The araps were among the few at the Tsar's palace who had a salary and it was quite large." Most servants worked for room and board. This can explain why in the 19th century, many Black Africans left the United States of America and migrate to the Tsarist Russia, looking desperate to escape racism, exploitation, segregation and take the opportunity to switch to a better life. Clearly, this migration was fueled by the hope to escape the brutality of American slavery¹⁵.

Due to the U.S persecution of black people considered as a minority, the Tsarist Russia and the first decades of the Soviet Union were considered as a better alternative to the systemic trauma and widespread pervasive oppression that black people had long-faced in the many parts of the White Western world. For selected black personalities, it was "great to be Black in the Soviet Union¹⁶," for some of them today, in Russia...

According to Igor Zimin, "The first American arap at the Russian court was an ex-valet of the U.S. envoy to St. Petersburg, who got his new job in 1810. It seems that news of this fine job spread fast in American ports, and many black adventurers rushed to Russia, usually as sailors on those few ships heading to St. Petersburg¹⁷." Also, anyone wanting to serve at the court was obliged to be baptized into Christianity, not necessarily Orthodox¹⁸. Job competition was intense. During the reign of Nicholas I (1825 – 1855), the number of court araps was limited to eight. Furthermore, it was not only Americans who became araps. Nina Tarasova, who works at the State Hermitage Museum, tells the story of George Maria from Cape Verde (a Portuguese colony) who served at the tsarist court for many years and stayed in Russia long after Nicholas II's abdication¹⁹.

3. SELECTED KNOWN AND UNKNOWN PERSONALITIES IN THE RUSSIA-AFRICA HISTORY

Russia did not participate in division and sharing of Africa between Westerners, the colonization of Africa, in the exploitation of African free hard work, in the Atlantic Slave trade, the colonization and neo-colonization of Africa, and, last but not least, in the fight against Africa's people auto-determination and African States sovereignty. Black Russians who settled in Russia are part of "the African Heritage" whether considered as part of the migration from Africa to Russia or from United States and Europe to Russia due to the lack of consideration in those countries for a black African as a human being.

Many of those Black Russian or African-Metis Russian are often viewed through the lens of Major General Abram Petrovitch Gannibal (or Hannibal) (1696–1781), a Black Russian who became through its intelligence and hard work in a civil and military capacities, a "General and a Nobleman" in the past Russian Empire²⁰.

A. P. Gannibal was "kidnapped as a child by Ottoman forces in Logon, (now Cameroon), sold to Russian ambassador Fedor Golovin in 1704 and given to Tsar Peter the Great, who set him free and adopted him". He came to Russia as



part of colonial Ottoman forces involved in the slavery trade. This was a "forced" migration. A. P. Gannibal during his life claimed that his noble status was linked to his father being an African chief. "*I am of African origin, of an illustrious local nobility*²¹." A. P. Gannibal from the Russian perspective is one of the great personalities, probably the first among Black Russians. Abraham P. Gannibal is yet considered as "*the most famous "Arap" of the Russian Empire*²²." Alexander Pushkin, through his mother, is his great-grandson.

Ivan Abramovich Gannibal (1735–1801), the son of Abram Gannibal, was a distinguished high-level military officer. During the Russian-Turkish War of 1768-74 and with the rank of brigadier of naval artillery, he commanded a 2.5 thousand landing force on the ships of the squadron of Admiral G.A. Spiridov. I. A. Gannibal was the chief of artillery of the united Russian squadron in 1770. Later in 1773, he became a member of the Admiralty Board by the Highest Decree. In 1778, he went to the south to build the city of Kherson with a fortress. In 1784, he retired with the rank of general-in-chief²³. According to Dieudonné Gnamankou, Ibrahim completed military and engineering courses, studied in France, and worked as the Emperor's secretary. Gannibal contributed to the development of Russian-French relations when visiting Paris along with his sovereign²⁴. More globally, the African-Russian helped to establish diplomatic, scientific, and cultural relations between the two great European countries²⁵.

Hannibal also had his share of hardships. After Peter the Great died in 1725, his African favorite fell out of grace with Russia's new ruler and was exiled to Siberia. When Peter's daughter, Elizabeth, ascended the throne, Hannibal returned to his estate and led a long life, having 11 children. Among them was Pushkin's grandfather, Osip Hannibal, and so the poet always remembered his African heritage.

Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin (1799-1837) was an Afro-Russian poet²⁶, playwright, and novelist of the Romantic era. He was 75 % Russian, with one eighth of his ancestry being Cameroonian African, and the rest being German, with more distant Norwegian and Danish roots²⁷. Born and raised in Russia as a Russian national, Pushkin was a Metis Russian due to his mixed heritage²⁸.

Considered by many to be the greatest Russian poet and the founder of modern Russian literature, Pushkin produced narrative poems, drama, short stories, novels, fairy tales in verse, and work as critics in local newspapers between 1815 and 1841, some of them published after his death in 1837. It is important to remember Pushkin as a free man, publishing his first poem at the age of 15, his controversial poem "*Ode to Liberty*", one of several that led to his exile by Emperor Alexander I, known as Alexander Pavlovich Romanov. A. S. Pushkin was regularly under strict surveillance by the Emperor's political police and often a disguised censorship. Some of his publications were published, sometimes serialized over seven (7) years such as his novel in verse Eugene Onegin between 1825 and 1832, or remained unpublished during his life

Pushkin's "public image," "reputed as a libertine with unrepentant aristocratic tendencies" clashed with that of the ideal Soviet. None should forget that Pushkin was summoned to Moscow after the first poem "*Ode to Liberty*" was found among the belongings of the rebels from the Decembrist Uprising in 1825, following the sudden death of Emperor Alexander I.

It explains why he was subject to a repressive "official" reinterpretation or revisionism of his publications. Pushkin's African heritage and his connection to his great-grandfather A. P. Gannibal had impacted his identity and literary work, making him a significant figure in the context of Russian-African relations. The undermining-recognition of his "*status*" as a descendant of African nobility by the Russian Empire's officials, a recognition which he attributed more to his wife's noble origin, led to the perception of a platonic thirst for Africa. This can be read in this part of his most famous work, *Eugène Onegin*²⁹, alluding to Russia's turbulent history with a leg on each side of East and West: "*It's time to drop astern the shape of the dull shores of my disfavour, and there, beneath your noonday sky, my Africa, where waves break high, to mourn for Russia's gloomy savour, land where I learned to love and weep, land where my heart is buried deep.*" Given the ambient "*political revisionism*", it is possible that the allusions to Russia's turbulent history with one leg on each side of East and West, was more referring to Pushkin's own dual culture and genealogy split between Russia and the



Africa³⁰. His personal “freedom” was quite delinked from the Russian empire sovereignty, although he never compromised with his self-worth and rights³¹.

After the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, the COMINTERN, known as the Third International, was founded in 1919 as an international organization. It was controlled by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and promoted world communism. The victory of the Russian Communist Party in the Revolution of November 1917 opened an avenue worldwide for alternative path to power to parliamentary politics. The revolutionary sentiments were wide spreading as Western Europe was moving closer to its economic and political collapse related to the World War I and later to the 1929 Economic and financial depression. It is in those revolutionary circumstances of major changes for Black people to retrieve their dignity lost because of the Western dilemma between humanities and slavery, as black people were considered as tradable objects that can be marketed at will and not as humans. It is in this general context that selected African-American “great personalities” came with their expertise to the Soviet Union. Some of them remained in Russia, where their descendants still live in Russia.

It is worth mentioning the following cases of great, of known and unknown, personalities such as Oliver John Golden, Langston Hugues, Jean Gregoire Sagbo, etc.

“Oliver John Golden (1892-1940), an agricultural expert and his wife Bertha Bialek, a Polish emigrant, brought a group of 16 Afro-American cotton experts³²” and helped improving the Soviet Union on Cotton farming and transformation. Based in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, the group of scientists worked on after their initial contracts ended and many of them stayed in Uzbekistan. Their daughter, Lily Golden, became a famous Soviet and Russian historian and advocate of the black people’s rights.

Langston Hughes, a well-known African-American poet, who brought a group of 22 filmmakers with him, namely Paul Robeson and his family. They contributed to the shaping of Russian filmmaking industries. The latter has either starred, narrated, or been featured in more than 20 movies and documentaries between 1925 and 1999³³.

Between 1950 and 1990, as part of the Soviet Union’s support to the decolonization process in Africa, more than 400 000 African Students were offered a scholarship. Many of them have returned to Africa and do have a productive relation with Russia. Some of them stayed in Russia, occupying various posts in support to the relations with Africa.

In 2010, the number of “Afro-Russians” was estimated at 40 000. Many were students. But, many of them were victims of gradually increasing racially motivated violence. A church initiative against racism counted 49 cases in Moscow alone in 2009. It is in that context that the case of the Black-Russian personality named Jean Gregoire Sagbo must be known as reported by a Swiss Journal *Tagesanzeiger.ch*³⁴. Jean Grégoire Sagbo came to the Soviet Union in 1982 and studied economics in Moscow. There he met his future wife and in 1989 moved with her to her hometown of Novosawidovo, close to her relatives. He is the father of two children and works in the real estate sector for a Moscow company. He worked as a city councilor on a voluntary basis. “Afro-Russians” suffer from racism. But J. G. Sagbo said “*he does not feel any racism in the city. I am one of them. I am at home here.*” Later, the following story was related on his experience : “He found out about this in the first year after moving here, when his four-year-old son Maxim came home crying because a big boy had spit on him.” Angry, Sagbo ran outside and confronted the spitter – “*... and the women who were sitting there also gave the perpetrator his due. Finally, the whole street started cursing at him.*”

Sagbo has already had some success as a city councilor. He mobilized residents to raise money and transform neglected vacant lots into colorful playgrounds with new swings and painted fences. When he walks through his neighborhood, everyone greets him. The boys to whom he promised a soccer field wave to him. Irina Danilenko sits on the new playground with her little son. The 31-year-old said that this was the first progress she had experienced in her five years in the city. She does not let anything get to Sagbo. “*We don’t care about his race,*” she says. “*For us, he is one of us.*” Considered “once an exotic creature, Jean Sagbo is



now a beacon of hope for a small town north of Moscow". This is how constructive interdependencies can shape positive interdependencies between Russia-Africa.

4. RECENT KNOWN AND UNKNOWN PERSONALITIES SHAPING RUSSIA-AFRICA INTERDEPENDENCIES

It is crucial to highlight what selected individuals who support on one side, Russia in Africa, and on the other side, who support Africa in Russia, have in common.

Over the last 5-10 years, Russia has intensified its political and military influence in Africa, both official and informal because of Western countries inefficiency in fighting terrorism in Africa. The secret provision of security to governments in selected African countries, in the form of training, intelligence and equipment, as well as involvement of Russian private army in local conflicts is an essential part of the support directed to African leaders. Following countries could be mentioned. Mali, Burkina-Faso, Niger, Central African Republic, etc. Several African personalities who have opted for a win-win strategic partnership with Russia. The presidents and their government members are clearly known personalities. Following examples could be highlighted as "*known*" personalities in the recent history of Russian-African Relations: Colonel Assimi Goïta, President of Mali, Captain Ibrahima Traoré, President of the Burkina-Faso, General Abdourahamane Tchiani, President of Niger and the president of the National Council for the Protection of the Fatherland, and Faustin-Archange Touadéra, President of the Central African Republic.

In the case of Angola with a long experience of civil war, it is important to recall that the President João Lourenço was trained in the Russian military academy during the Soviet Republic and played an important role during the Cold War. Besides, the large diversity of payment resources such as diamond, oil, gold, and mineral resources linked to a clear interest in preferring a non-aligned approach as compared to direct past Western countries interferences put Russia in a position of a counter-power to balance the West-East power balance which facilitates the Angola's decision-makers ability to diversify their alliances and partnerships as a sovereign state.

Selected personalities who are fighting for the sovereignty of their countries in a context of civil war have been receiving support from Russia as strategic partner: Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the Chairman of the Sovereignty Council of Sudan and the Commander Khalifa Haftar, a Libyan military officer and the commander of the Tobruk-based Libyan National Army (LNA).

These political personalities have been key figures in their respective countries and have had significant interactions with Russia. They have also contributed meaningfully to Russian-African relations.

From the Russian side, the President Vladimir Putin who clearly mentioned at a 2019 summit in Sochi, which was attended by delegates from more than 50 African countries, including 43 heads of State³⁵ that "*Africa is one of Russia's foreign policy priorities and has spoken about offering political and diplomatic support, defense and security help, economic assistance, and disease-control advice*³⁶". Part of the influence of Russia in Africa is related to the late Yevgeny Prigozhin, previous lead of the operations of the Wagner Group, a private military company³⁷.

Endowed with important resources, both natural and human, Africa is not only an attraction for the powerful global powers, but it is becoming the place for economic wars between influential States. Russia may build its win-win cooperation with African states and personalities on his long-standing support for the protection of Africa's political and territorial sovereignty. It should contribute to attain regional peace and stability, and accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations.

It is important to highlight selected post-Soviet Union personalities in Russia-Africa Landscape such as Professor Alexey Mikhailovich Vasilyev³⁸. As a former director of the Institute for African Studies (IAS) during Yeltsin's political administration (1992 until 2016), he was appointed by the President Vladimir Putin as the



first Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation for contacts with the leaders of African states (2006-2011) and served as a member of the Foreign Policy Council of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His influence is based on the rejection of "tradable interests" of both Russia and Africa. The question dated 2010 back of an International Africanist Conference is still relevant today: *'Does Africa Need Russia or Russia Needs Africa' ?* Professor Vasilyev's answer was that between Russia and Africa, *"this new stage and this new quality of relations should be based on common values. It is based on long-standing traditions of friendship and solidarity created when the Soviet Union supported the struggle of the peoples of Africa against colonialism, racism, and apartheid, protected their independence and sovereignty, and helped establish statehood."* Professor Vasilyev's Influence on Africa's future development is definitively related to the determination and willingness of African leaders to cope with ethic.

Professor Alexey Vasilyev, the President's Special Representative for African Affairs has series of breakthrough practical achievements and that has made an appreciable impact on Russia-African relations often launched with conceptual documents and ideas supported by African personalities. The approach of *"African Solutions to African Problems,"* embedded within the framework of the African Union Agenda 2063 and the UN Development Goals 2030 structured the overall Russian strategic policies toward Africa and the Russia's foreign policy goals and objectives, which are based on three (3) key areas:

- a) Ensuring national security, integrity, and political sovereignty. In the African context, this means primarily the struggle for a second decolonization, military and economically. Russia always stands against any negative impact on its national security and does support African leaders requesting Russia's partnership in this endeavor. Competition with other centers of power, destabilization through terrorism, structural unequal trading arrangement with States with weak influential power and unfair privatization processes are some of the key areas for a leakage in sovereignty.
- b) Ensuring social and economic development of Africa. Upon request, Russia's cooperation with Africa, considered as a promising market, should focus on building of infrastructure for connection and improved logistics, diversifying trading partners, transforming locally while improving the level of the local technology content in support to the industrialization process, promoting the digitalization, and modernization of the continent's economy. The implemented should be at national and regional levels.
- c) Strengthening the position of the Russian Federation as one of the influential centers in African world. Nonetheless, the political dialogues with individual African countries, regional organizations and the African Union are clearly exclusive. The dialogue must become inclusive with the participation of representations of civil society organizations (CSOs) and the African Diaspora and between Russian CSOs and African CSOs.

5. STRATEGIC SHIFT TOWARDS A CLOSER PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN RUSSIA AND AFRICA

The influence of Russia in Africa is increasing as the Western countries were not interested to change their wrong-doing and destabilizing way of doing business in Africa with Africa's leaders for decades. The difference is that the deployment of soldiers, public or private, the information war, the role in election interference, support to fair election process, the compensation deals of arms for resources deals is focused on efficiency. The so-called ruled based order of the Global North and Western decision-makers who do not see their responsibility in more than 60 years of presence in the African countries which are classified as part of the poorest countries in the world is becoming a real problem for credibility.

The so-called different world order based on western democratic political systems appears to several leaders in Africa as window-dressing system which is inefficient to leverage African people out of poverty. Russia's interventions in Africa are focused on supporting African sovereignty. It changes drastically the perception of western forms of democracy as a priority for wealth creation and development. Besides, the



lack of effectiveness of western military support to Africa resulted in the understanding that Global North has no interest in Africa's sovereignty. The direct implications are that Governance norms and security on the continent are more and more linked to the ability to support the second process of military and economical decolonization of Africa, known nowadays as the struggle for African sovereignty.

This strategic shift towards closer interdependencies between Russia and Africa is related to:

- A long-standing frustration of African People and decision-makers with the failures of Western inefficient intervention in Africa, which maintain too many of them in a dependency postcolonial system at the advantage of the Global North ;
- A clear interest to promote Panafricanism and a non-alignment approach in the International arena where, up to now, Western Countries are rejecting, since 1945, that Africa is represented with a veto power in the United Nations Security council, with a structural lack of decisional representation of Africa in almost all international and financial international organizations;

African people and their decision-makers, whether well or badly elected, have a deep but muted resentment over major Western decision-makers powers. It is one of the main reasons for their search for alternative solution for the building and protection of their sovereignty. Russia appears as a non-colonial country which never claimed any territory in Africa, since the Conference of Berlin in 1884-85. This strategic unsolicited backing of Africa is appreciated and Africa's personalities who understand it, are taking advantage of their role in increasing their bargaining power in the international arena of influential States and their international companies.

6. DEEPENING MUTUAL CONSENSUS AND PUSHING FOR INCLUSIVE PEOPLE'S PARTNERSHIPS

The personalities who support Russia in Africa and Africa in Russia often share at least the following five common features:

- a) Shared historical anti-colonial Sentiment: The struggles for national liberation from selected Western historical or military superpower generated a history of common goals interests for productive and efficient interactions and cooperation between Russia and Africa. The fact that Russia has no colonial history with Africa and did not take advantage of the 1884-85 Conference on the division of Africa is key to the historical ties and trust between the decision-makers sharing anti-colonial, anti-recolonization, and anti-destabilization sentiments.
- b) Dissatisfaction with Western Powers' double standard positions: Numerous African personalities who partnership with Russia do so because of a clear, sometimes, not directly outspoken, dissatisfaction and frustration with Western powers. The perception of unsolicited Western intervention in African affairs is simply unfair. Weak influential military and economic States in Africa turn to Russia and the BRICS for a credible alternative for the building of a more balanced bargaining power. Similarly, Russian figures who support Africa are supporting this process as part of a broader strategy to counter Western influence and long-lasting destabilization process in countries which are not 'aligned' on putting Western interests before all other interests.
- c) Political and Economic Interests and shared sovereignty priorities: Both African and Russian figures often have political and economic interests that align with each other. Russian support for selected African leaders in their political agendas for a renewed sovereignty could be rewarded on win-win basis, especially, with Africa's natural resources or markets.
- d) Security Cooperation and territorial sovereignty: Partnership for improved Security and territorial sovereignty is another common trait. Russia has been known to provide effective and secure military support to selected African countries whose leaders have welcomed this support.



- e) Desire for Multipolar decision-making process: Both African and Russian figures often express a desire for a multipolar world order, in which no single power dominates. There is real mutual interest for supporting each other as a way of balancing against other major destabilizing powers.

The deepening of all historical and recent points of consensus should generate common operational projects to be implemented by the peoples of Russia and Africa, as part of a disruptive inclusive people's partnership. The decision-process should gradually be decentralized and become inclusive. Great personalities of African and Russia could help promoting this positive and constructive strategies.

7. CONCLUSION: SHIFTING WESTERN INFLUENCE WITH ALTERNATIVE ETHIC MINDED PERSONNALITIES

With the innovative Communist rule in 1917 and anti-racist and anti-colonial propaganda campaigns, the new Soviet Union was perceived as a society relatively free of racial bias with an opportunity for a multiethnic pacific coexistence. Several Black people, from America and the Caribbean and from Europe decided to move to this country especially during 1917-1937. Supporting the new ideology, a large majority of those migrants were simply searching for a place of racial equality, free of Western racism. Many of the first Black personalities arriving in the Soviet Union were usually warmly welcomed and *"granted the opportunities for professional and personal fulfillment that were manifestly absent in their countries of origin³⁹."* But with the second wave of black migration to the Soviet Union in the context of a new geopolitical reality of the Cold War between 1945 and today, the opportunity for decent jobs, good salaries and racial bias are less obvious, including for those who decided to stay in Russia.

Nonetheless, the history of Afro-Russians is a demonstration of the resilience and diversity of the human experience in living together in harmony. From the enslaved Africans or segregated Black civilizations to the prosperous communities of today, Afro-Russians and African Diaspora have influenced both Russia's and Africa's history, culture, and decision-making processes. The complexities of identity, multiculturalism and the ongoing struggle for sovereignty cannot be delinked from the Russian decision-makers and Russian population's attitudes toward racism in Russia from the Tsarist period, through the Soviet Union era, up to the contemporary Russian Federation era.

Russia has been aggressively pursuing its strategic objectives in Africa in shifting Western influence, putting an end to Western unilateralism, and promoting alternatives within the framework of a multipolar world decision process. Selected African personalities are welcoming this approach. But not all of them may be able to share this changing approach officially and clearly in support to a renewed interest for sovereignty and African youth's interest for finding alternative solutions to the inefficient long-lasting enforced and unsolicited cooperation with western powerful States.

Nonetheless, the future of Russia-Africa relations and partnerships should evolve and cannot be exclusively State or elite-based⁴⁰. A renewed partnership between personalities of the civil society including the private sector supporting both Russia and Africa's sovereignty is at stake.

The global governance system, established by the Western influential States in 1944, is exclusive of Africa's interests and becomes less and less equitable and representative of African people. Africa's major international partners should recognize that Africa does not share their worldview of the international order. Greater attention should be paid to specific points of convergence and divergence to inform their strategic policymaking toward the continent.

Western powers need to acknowledge that the current international order has not delivered the economic or developmental dividends needed for African countries to improve on their present marginal place in the international system. African leaders should revisit their appreciation of the level of corruption and the betrayal of the interests of the African peoples, while favoring the interest of Western States and large transnational companies.



The uncompromising assessment must lead to making strategic choices to strengthen cooperation and partnerships with the blocs of countries which are committed to supporting, as a priority, the sovereignty and self-determination of peoples to decide for their future, without unsolicited interference.

African states are naturally poised as revisionist actors, pushing them closer to the political orbit of countries such as China and Russia. More meaningful compromises are needed by Western powers to address the continent's marginal place in the international system. The shifting of western influence with alternative ethnic minded personalities is at that cost.

Africa is becoming a major geopolitical rivalry with geoeconomic focused wars⁴¹. As the continent's crises and conflicts will be exacerbated, Russia-Africa's interdependencies are likely to deepen necessitating a goodwill and a coherent and more focus approach of African decision-makers. Leveraging on Russian and African collective weight may require joint Russian-African institutions, starting with a common Russia-Africa Broadcasting Media.

This is critical because of the increasing loss of influence of Western countries in Africa. It is due to the perceived structural inefficiency and repetitive dishonesty for decades on the effective benefits of the so-called Western "free" assistance in Africa. In fact, disinterested aid is systematically linked aid with a full non written return on investment agenda. It is important not to let disinformation, fake news, propaganda or the absence of information and data govern the evolving relation of trust building between Russia and Africa. Africa and Russia must consider taking advantage of African Diaspora⁴², with special focus on Russia-Africa Diaspora, whether they are living in Africa, in Russia or elsewhere in the World. Constructive and positive influence require the inclusive participation of both great personalities from the Russian and the African Civil Societies, not exclusively from the Government institutions. YEA.

20 May 2024

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