

PUTIN: Russian intellectuals and their abusive relationship with the West.

By O A Ladimeji

Institute of African and Diaspora Studies

University of Lagos¹

President Xi: “Right now there are changes – the likes of which we haven’t seen for 100 years “

This paper will look closely at two papers from the Valdai Club. One presents a standard view of Russia by N Kapoor, a Valdai Club member,² and the other from Ivan Timofeev, Programme Director of Valdai Club.³

Kapoor is still embedded within the model of Western world primacy. While she recognises that there is a changing world order, she sees the changes as mere consequences of economic changes that have already happened. ‘In the meantime, the rise of the Indo-Pacific, regional concerns regarding an aggressive China, intensifying US-China rivalry and the formation of Quad and AUKUS have together accelerated the evolution of the regional balance of power. Even though Russia recognises the shift of global geo-politics and geo-economics to the East that will essentially determine the future of the world order, its military and diplomatic focus remains on the West, and the consequences of the invasion of Ukraine could potentially deeply constrain Russia’s ability to carry out its policy goals in the East.’

Kapoor talks about ‘long term shifts’ rather than great historical waves of change. If we return to the early world of the internet, many of us recognised at the time - ‘this changes everything’. It was not a matter of shifts in technology; this was a seismic change, a move in tectonics whose consequences would be unpredictable but overwhelming.

In her opinion: ‘The expectations of Chinese FDI too have not materialised, ‘ and most of the investment in the area was from Western sources. She adds: ‘Regarding the goal of diversification of economic ties with Asia-Pacific, much of the increase in trade with the region can be attributed to the growing trade ties with China, instead of a broader diversification with the region, as seen in Table 1 below. Already, Russia’s trade patterns have developed in ways that were highly skewed towards China in East Asia and the Pacific, as revealed by the following graphs. The imbalance further continues as China’s share of Russia’s trade turnover stands at 18%, with the latter only accounting for 2% of the former’s trade. ‘ There is a fundamental

incoherence here as she bases her projections on the immediate past rather than any particular understanding of the dynamics of future economic growth. Anyone whose livelihood depended on future market growth would dismiss this sort of analysis out of hand.

If an item was in decreasing supply while there was evidence of growing demand, a market professional would discount any short-term fall in prices. For Kapoor, the value of specific data in relation to a project is directly proportionate to its easy availability.

Kapoor also sees the increasing role of China as some form of dependency. 'As the largest regional trade partner, this makes China's attitude towards Western sanctions critical for Russia, but it will also have a political cost for Russia amid ongoing economic isolation. It will see its leverage with China deteriorate, while being unable to diversify its ties with other states, which might be cautious about defying Western sanctions based on their own interests.' Kapoor repeats the Western dogma, which has almost racist overtones; 'If Russia does end up being closer to China, with lesser independence than before.' How does a mutually beneficial relationship imply loss of independence? In the light of subsequent events, we can see NATO as a form of lack of autonomy or independence for Europe.

The fundamental failure here is not to see the critical role of mutual benefit. If the US is planning on more comprehensive sanctions on China after it defeats Russia, the relationship becomes one of mutual succour rather than one-sided dependence. She also strangely sees an increasing dependence of India on the West. She talks of India diversifying its arms sources, but this is applying portfolio investment theory to military strategy, and it makes no sense in a world where one hegemon can cancel by sanction all arm supplies from the West, despite any apparent diversification. In portfolio theory diversifying risk is separating one set of risks from another, but if the US can unilateral sanction all and any supply from France, Germany, Italy etc, supplies from those countries do not represent any diversification.

What we see in Kapoor's analysis, is a view that only 'power projection' can generate influence. But this is taking the US power model and sanctifying it. 'These details together reveal the key shortcoming in Russian engagement with the East: that its traditional levers of influence and geographic presence are not enough to make it a powerful regional power.' In fact, it is Russia's potential role in the development of the future that gives it great influence. By creating a world of sanctions and military confrontation, the US has made Russia's reserves of raw materials and military resources and technology a strategic asset for China.

Kapoor concludes that 'it would be much better if diplomacy prevails at the earliest,' otherwise there would only be negative consequences for Russia. Kapoor is a student of Indian and

Russian elite institutions and so reveals the depth of the intellectual and cultural subordination subsisting within the Europhile tendencies in both countries.

Let us turn to a more senior commentator. Ivan Timofeev, Programme Director of Valdai Club, notes 'the current crisis in relations between Russia and the West, for all its appearances, is irreversible, and has driven an increase in the number and quality of ties with countries which are outside the control of the US. Prior to the Ukraine crisis, he notes 'officials and experts here were enthusiastically voicing ideas about developing ties with the rest of the world. At the administrative level, such a course began to take shape as early as the 1990s, starting from the views of former Foreign Minister Evgeny Primakov. Subsequently, it also received practical development within the framework of a multi-vector foreign policy.'

At this time, the manner of speech was still 'voluntaristic'. An outcome was the result of an individual actor's decisions and actions. Ironically for ex-Soviet scholars, the ideas of long waves of history returned to bite them hard! Russian intellectuals could not see that the collapse of the Soviet Union was like the Restoration that happened after the English and French Revolutions. An ancien regime returns having 'learnt nothing, forgotten nothing'. They behave in such a manner, viz. endless wars, rising poverty, growing inequality, depleted pensions, that the population is reminded why there was a revolution in the first place.

Timofeev seeks to accommodate to this by stating that despite the waves of history, many great issues remain to be addressed - rather than have returned. History does not act by itself. This new conjuncture '... exemplifies the very possibility of challenging the political West on fundamental issues. Not everyone is ready to follow the same path, but the very fact of its presence is an event which has a global dimension.'

For Timofeev, this is a matter of utmost importance: 'the suppression of the 'Russian rebellion' is a matter of principle for the West. The victory of Moscow - in any form - will mean the consolidation of the precedent, which means that the fight against the West will become uncompromising. The stakes are extremely high.'

He also sees a return to an issue that troubled Russia for centuries: the role of Westernisation within modernisation. He sees the issue thus: 'The second task is to create reliable opportunities for modernisation through interaction with the non-Western world. Here, success is far from guaranteed. The 'world majority' is closely embedded in Western-centric globalisation '.

Timofeev sees the West using a full spectrum of powers: 'Politicisation is taking place on a broad front, from global finance and supply chains, to the media and universities.' It is the view of

many that culture and politics are more powerful than arms, and the US has unleashed a huge barrage of warfare against the rest of world, which does not recognise itself as under cultural attack.

There is a witticism in philosophy that a materialist is someone who thinks heavy things are more real than light things. A person who comes from a nation that has witnessed 27 million dead under the most horrendous situation can be forgiven for thinking hard things are the truly real things. In the modern world, culture, media and universities are more important than armies, not that armies are not important. Timofeev writes: 'If Russia manages to build a workable economic model that is not fundamentally connected to Western financial institutions or supply chains, the precedent will be very serious. 'The physical survival of society is a precondition to culture and media wars, but Timofeev does not see Russia's greatest threat to the West being in the world of culture. This is not 'culture' as conceived by contemporary Western educational institutions. It is in the world of culture that the West will fall apart long before it does so in any military field. This is not a one or the other situation. To borrow a phrase from the army, what is required is 'combined arms warfare'.

Timofeev struggles to come to terms with the emerging world:

'To remain human even in the face of confrontation, to maintain cultural, humanitarian, and, ultimately, family ties amid hostility, hatred, and political confrontation, is a much more difficult, but nonetheless very important task'. There is subtle confusion here. When the sanctions war broke out Western institutions began 'cancelling' Russians even against their own constitutions. I witnessed the shock on Russian faces when hands of friendship were extended from across the globe. No family ties, just common humanity. I recall the astonishment on their faces when persons from the Global South said 'you helped us in our hour of need, you supported our liberation movements, we will stand by you'. Russians would say 'but that was the Soviet Union! We have changed!' as if human beings put labels on gratitude, humanity and solidarity.

Timofeev writes: 'In our relations with the 'world majority', there is no similar cultural commonality'. Here he is still hostage to the myth of the Western family. He writes: 'there is no similar cultural commonality' without thinking. Pushkin was also African and identified as such which is a strong connection. Of great importance to Russia and Russians is the Russian Orthodox Church, but there are closer connections between the Russian Orthodox and the African Coptic Orthodox Church founded in AD 42 by the Apostle Mark than say the Protestant Churches of Western Europe. There is a long African connection in Russian noble families. Russia suffered from the slave trade of their people to Ottomans longer than Africa did with the transatlantic slave trade. Russia's identity has been refabricated by the Europhiles to excise non-Western sources so as to present an acceptable face to Europe. This was a

misunderstanding. If Kant⁴ were alive he would put the matter bluntly: You are not European and cannot be European as you do not wish to wipe out all non-whites. In fact, you live happily with your non-white population!

Timofeev writes: 'the countries of the world majority which are friendly to us have their own national interests. They are unlikely to sacrifice them simply for the sake of friendship with Russia.' This is astonishingly untrue. Many of the countries of the Global South have borne the full wrath of the US but have supported Russia even if it meant abstaining or otherwise missing appointments. None of these countries is asking Russia to sacrifice its national interest to help them, why should the reverse be true? It is a certain kind of Russian who regrets the breakup with the West and who cannot see the outlines of a new relationship, who cannot fully escape from an abusive relationship.

Timofeev cannot see that many countries are faced with the same dilemmas as Russia, with a significant population of intellectuals in hock to the Western institutions where they studied and received scholarships and acclaim. When he sees this ambiguity, he is in fact looking in a mirror.

Timofeev concludes: 'We may have to listen more than we talk and learn more than teach.' This is entirely unacceptable. No one in the Global South wants Russia to be humiliated rather than to fully engage with mutual respect in the creation of a new world. This sentiment arises from Western arrogance that infects Timofeev. If Russia cannot play the teacher it must play the novice student. Howabout an equal participant?

Western views of Russian Conservatism

Paul Robinson⁵ sees Russia through a particular prism as he sees European history as universal history and Russian history as part of European history. This view has a one-way model of cultural transmission. Russian conservatism has no influence on European conservatism but is a mere sidestream. 'Russian conservatism owes a lot to European conservatism more generally'.

Three issues emerge with stark nakedness: modernisation, Westernisation and national identity. In the Western eye, the intent is to hold out the possibility of acceptance into the world of Europe as bait. This is like nothing so much as a dance of the seven veils. Modernisation and Westernisation are blurred into one. While for hundreds of years, Russia saw the West as leading the field in terms of modernisation, today that may no longer be true. This blur or ambiguity is now exposed. There was a belief that there existed a tight connection between modernisation and Westernisation. On the other hand, there were those Russians who wanted modernisation without losing their Russian soul. Assimilation for them was a poison chalice. For many Western

critics there would be little difference between assimilation and colonising of Russia. Old slave trading habits die hard.

There is a deeper elision and this relates to the direction of history. There is a view of history emerging from Kant and deep in Western culture that universal history is the history of the West, and that at the end of this history only 'white' people will remain⁶. Not surprisingly, the effect of this doctrine on some Russians was profound. There would be those Russians who saw themselves as 'white' who would wish to be included in the European boat when general genocide broke out. This Kantian view is deep in Western culture. Robinson quotes Lavrov praising Nevsky's accommodation with the Golden Horde and that the East never wished to annihilate Russian culture. Faced with the genocidal ambition of the Nazis against the Slavs, Russian Europhiles attributed this to a dark strain in Europe, like a virus that needed to be dealt with. Then came the Wolfowitz doctrine that endorsed the dismemberment of Russia at the time Gorbachov was espousing a 'common European home'. How much longer would it take for Russian eyes to open?

Silent questions:

There is a part of Europe's relationship with Russia that Westerners prefer to pass by- the huge scale of slave trading of Slavs to Ottomans. Nell Painter⁷ has stated: 'Vikings raided northern Europe and Russia hundreds of times in the fifth to the eleventh century, plundering as they went and scooping up human chattel by the thousands. To sell the enslaved, a system of permanent markets evolved around settlements like Novgorod (where Vikings warehoused and distributed the people they captured or purchased along the rivers Don, Volga, and Dnieper)...'

Many members of Europe's cultural elite hate Russia and Africa in equal measures⁸. To Josep Borrell's gardener, both Russia and Africa are in the jungle and to be kept there.

Crisis for Russia's Europhiles

Many Russians cannot accept or understand the attitude of the West to them or its joy in cancelling them. I have witnessed Russians burst into tears in front of Americans and Europeans, pleading and not understanding. Over and over, they will say words to the effect 'we are doing everything we can to be like you, why do you hate us?' Dmitri Bondarenko,⁹ a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, writes the most appalling racist commentary on Africans and African-Americans, playing to every prejudice of white Americans to prove himself 'acceptable' to the Western academic establishment. He attempts to use opinion polls among ill-informed people asking questions that are not tested to be understood but which to a well-informed reader could present the subject in a ridiculous light. This is a desperate abandonment of basic academic protocols to affirm dominant Western prejudices. Yet Russians are still cancelled!

Putin & Valdai

It is an important issue that the Soviet/Russian political rulers had a better grasp of the geo-political environment than the Europhile Russian intellectual elite who dreamt of acceptance among the Western institutions. Putin proposed a common European home but in a different way to Gorbachov. Just as with Ukraine, Putin's actions were directed at his Russian audience. In order to move with alacrity to the East, Putin had to show that the alternative had been exhausted. Gorbachov believed. Putin did not. Just as with Ukraine Putin needed to show that every attempt had been made to explore the alternative.

In 2014 Putin referred to:

‘changes in the world order – and what we are seeing today are events on this scale – have usually been accompanied by if not global war and conflict, then by chains of intensive local-level conflicts. Second, global politics is above all about economic leadership, issues of war and peace, and the humanitarian dimension, including human rights.’¹⁰

He added: ‘In a situation where you had domination by one country and its allies, or its satellites rather, the search for global solutions often turned into an attempt to impose their own universal recipes. This group’s ambitions grew so big that they started presenting the policies they put together in their corridors of power as the view of the entire international community. But this is not the case.’

He saw the challenges facing the world: ‘The measures taken against those who refuse to submit are well-known and have been tried and tested many times. They include use of force, economic and propaganda pressure, meddling in domestic affairs, and appeals to a kind of ‘supra-legal’ legitimacy when they need to justify illegal intervention in this or that conflict or toppling inconvenient regimes. Of late, we have increasing evidence too that outright blackmail has been used with regard to a number of leaders. It is not for nothing that ‘big brother’ is spending billions of dollars on keeping the whole world, including its own closest allies, under surveillance.’

In 2022 Putin stated:

‘Genuine democracy and civil society cannot be “imported.” I have said so many times. They cannot be a product of the activities of foreign “well-wishers,” even if they “want the best for us.” In theory, this is probably possible. But, frankly, I have not yet seen such a thing and do not believe much in it. We see how such imported democracy models function. They are nothing

more than a shell or a front with nothing behind them, even a semblance of sovereignty. People in the countries where such schemes have been implemented were never asked for their opinion, and their respective leaders are mere vassals.²¹

When Putin said this most listeners would have been thinking of Third World countries. After the Nordstream bombing, the veil has been lifted and we can see Western European politicians as the mere puppets of the US. Macron's visit to China (April 23) where he continued a line of questions despite Xi's previous response was like nothing more than a ventriloquist dummy for President Biden. Though Xi had asked Macron to only come if he had some sovereign autonomy, Xi did not realise Macron did not have even enough sovereignty NOT to come if Biden told him to.

Unlike Timofeev, Putin had not lost sight of the importance of values, what might another place be called spiritual values:

'It is interesting that humanity has reached a very high level of technological and socioeconomic development, while at the same time facing the loss or erosion of moral values and reference points, a sense that existence no longer has meaning and, if you will, that the mission of humankind on planet Earth has been lost.'

Putin then adds:

'everyone must begin at home, every individual, community and state,'... these words could have come from any of so many different sacred texts.

Unlike Timofeev, Putin understands the importance of media and universities and has announced that the state will engage in this area to ensure that foreign-directed influences are curtailed. Years of Western media inducements and academic seduction will take a while to overcome. However, the West's response with 'cancel culture' greatly assists. Many Russian Europhiles are caught in an abusive relationship with the West, the more they are abused the more they seek love. Putin knows that steps need to be taken to free them and prevent the reproduction of this illness.

In a time of crisis for Britain Margaret Thatcher appeared. In a time of crisis for Russia Putin appeared. And for Africa

1. 9 April 2023 - Series 2: issue 1
2. (Kapoor, 2022)
3. (Timofeev, 2023)
4. (O. A. Ladimeji, 2019)
5. (Robinson, 2019)
6. (O. A. Ladimeji, 2019)
7. (Painter, 2010, Chapter 1. 'White slavery')
8. (D. Ladimeji, 2018)
9. (Bondarenko, 2016)
10. (Putin, 2014)
11. (Putin, 2022)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bondarenko, D. M. (2016). Pre-slave trade and pre-colonial Africa in the historical consciousness of African-Americans and African migrants in the USA. *Africa Review*, 9(1), 82.
- Kapoor, N. (2022, March 21). *Russia's Pivot to Asia—A 10-year policy review*. Valdai Club.
<https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/russia-s-pivot-to-asia-a-decadal-policy-review/>
- Ladimeji, D. (2018). Review of Gannibal: The Moor of Petersburg; by Hugh Barnes. *African Century Journal*.
https://www.academia.edu/35773247/Review_of_Gannibal_The_Moor_of_Petersburg_by_Hugh_Barnes
- Ladimeji, O. A. (2019). Charles Mills and Kant -part 2. *African Century Journal*.
www.african-century.org
- Painter, N. I. (2010). *History Of White People*. Norton.
- Putin, V. (2014, October 25). *Vladimir Putin 2014 Meets with Members of the Valdai International Discussion Club. Transcript of the Final Plenary Session* [Valdaiclub.com]. [Http://Valdaiclub.Com/Valdai_club/73300.Html](http://Valdaiclub.Com/Valdai_club/73300.Html).
https://web.archive.org/web/20141025230537/http://valdaiclub.com/valdai_club/73300.html
- Putin, V. (2022, October 22). *Vladimir Putin 2022 Meets with Members of the Valdai Discussion Club. Transcript of the Plenary Session of the 17th Annual Meeting*. Valdai Club.
<https://valdaiclub.com/events/posts/articles/vladimir-putin-meets-with-members-of-the-valdai-club-transcript-17th-annual-meeting/>

Robinson, P. (2019). *Russian Conservatism by Paul Robinson*. Northern Illinois University Press.

Timofeev, I. (2023, April 5). *Can Russia really break away from the West?* [News].

Www.Rt.Com. <https://www.rt.com/russia/574207-can-russia-really-break-away/>