

ISSUES IN NIGERIA-RUSSIA RELATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA, 1967-2019.

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the strategic essence of bilateral relations between Nigeria and Russia for state sustainable development. It also posits the significance of diversity in Nigeria's bilateral relations and commodities to maximise strategic benefits associated with and accumulated through state cooperation. Adopting an inter-disciplinary approach and using descriptive and numerical analysis of data collected from books, journals, interviews, archival materials, and administrative sources, the knowledge of strategic prospects to be harnessed, issues to be addressed, cooperation and future opportunities come to bare. Findings reveal the challenges or issues that have constituted Nigeria's low interest or strained relations with Russia as compared to other Western states at both state and non-state levels. The study explores the theories of traditional diplomacy, constructivism, and dependency in explaining the discussions examined. It recommends that Nigeria can maximise the opportunities inherent in Russia's Africa policy objectives, resources and experience, for its sustainable domestic development.

Keywords: Development, Bilateral Relations, Dependency, Diversity, Sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

The two phases of the Russian state were key in determining the way, extent and reactions of Nigeria's policies or relations towards her. Soviet or communist Russia was driven by a different ideology in parallel to the capitalist ideology of Nigeria. At the time of Nigeria's independence in 1960, the world was divided into two blocs; the Soviet Union and her allies and the United States and her allies, simply put, the West and the East divide. Nigeria being a newborn state, colonised by one of the Western allies; Britain, felt obligated to join the West divide, but at independence, Prime Minister Tafewa Balewa, toed the "non-aligned or neutral states bloc" discourse. It has however been argued that Nigeria although non-aligned in policy and statements, was however aligned in actions and socio-economic relations with the Western allies. This is not to divulge that no contact was made with the Eastern counterparts. In 1961, the Soviet Union embassy was established in Nigeria and the Nigerian embassy was established in Moscow in 1962. Although diplomatic relations were established with both the Western and Eastern divides, feasible socio-economic relations swayed more towards the West than the East. Relations with Soviet Russia became for two reasons; to strengthen their bargaining position vis-a-vis their main trading partners of the developed West, and for economic and technical assistance to supplement Western aid. Thus, Nigeria saw Soviet Russia as an alternative market rather than an additional market.

The civil war that engulfed Nigeria shortly after independence changed the lop-sided relations between Nigeria and the Soviet Union in favour of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union became the 'Unsung Heroes 'of Nigeria's unity, with the timely assistance to the federal government at a time when major Western allies had disappointed her. Relations after that began to blossom to their peak in 1975 till its downward slope from the 1990s to 2000. Stanley Orabator holds that Britain and the United States couldn't afford to let Soviet influence in Nigeria and Africa and thus sought ways to undermine Soviet success in Nigeria, especially with the discovery of oil in the late 1970s.

In 2002, the fire was rekindled with a state visit by Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo visit to a now new federal Russian state. A Memorandum on the Principles of Friendly Relations and Partnership was signed between both countries and in 2009; the Russian Prime Minister visited Nigeria. Relations between both states had taken off but rather slowly. Russia, a major power in the world is a strategic partner for Nigeria to harness its benefits of interaction for her development. It is worthy to argue that Russia's-economic and cultural relations would be more beneficial to Nigeria's growth than its relationship with some (Western and European countries). This is not to imply that interactions with the Western and other European countries are less beneficial but more socio-economic development can be harnessed and achieved from cooperative policies between Nigeria and the Russian state because such relations, can facilitate Nigeria's petroleum refinery industry, industrial infrastructures, educational development and economic diversification as well as being devoid of parasitic, manipulative, blatant corruption and exploitative tendencies. The Nigerian petro-dollar confidence has since crashed; thus, Nigeria is in dire need of economic diversification. Thus, the call for a new direction towards Russia's partnership to alleviate Nigeria's economic illness and underdevelopment is a significant factor that has rejuvenated the examination of Nigeria-Russia relations.

However, for such new paths to be forged, certain issues that have forestalled or slowed down relations should be addressed to pave new paths for better cooperation and feasible sustainable development.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts the interdisciplinary approach to data gathering and analysis. It draws from areas such as history, economics and political science. It also depended on published works, open documents, white papers and interviews. The research used the qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis, that is, the descriptive and numerical data analysis, to explicitly understand the problem under study and ensure the reliability of the study. The materials for this work are sourced mainly from interviews and administrative sources which are primarily documents from the relevant departments of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Nigeria such as the European Affairs division, consular and migration division, Economic, Trade and Investment department and the Nigeria-Russia bilateral Relations desk office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia department on African Affairs and the National Institute for International Affairs. Data was also gathered from the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment of Nigeria's Department of Bilateral Cooperation and the Nigerian Embassy in Moscow. The materials of published works from the University of Benin Library, Nigeria National Assembly Library, Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Science, and National Institute of International Affairs in Nigeria, to be supplemented by a few archival materials, interviews and open documents from Russia Embassy in Nigeria, were consulted. All materials were examined and critically analysed.

Contending Issues in Nigeria - Russia Relations

In every interaction that revolves around the facets of life and its survival, there are bound to be frictions and tensions that may mar, restrict, transform and blossom cooperation and interactions. Nigeria-Russia trajectory is not different. Though a state-to-state entity interaction, the state, however, is represented, negotiated and administered by humans within an international system that is termed “anarchic”. Anarchy in international system relations does not connote chaos or destruction but rather the absence of one government or central government overseeing other states. Thus, states must fend for their selves in a manner acceptable to lay down principles and policies of the international system agreed upon.

Nigeria – Russia Relations, which took off from 1961 to the present day, have inbound issues that have slowed down and limited more cooperation than what is hoped for. The ability to transcend these issues will certainly enhance trade and other balances in favour of both sides. In discussing these issues, we must concentrate more on the present-day realities that are relevant to present-day Nigeria-Russia ventures. The issues thus highlighted are the forbearing problems that confront more strategic cooperations between both states. This study explores the tenets of constructivist theory and dependency theory in explaining and understanding the major issues faced in the course of relations between both two states.

Leadership and Administrative Factor

The factor of leadership or administration is sacrosanct to the guidelines, decisions, partnership and achievement of any foreign policy of a state.

The perception of a leader or political elites plays an important role in shaping a state's foreign policies. However, some individuals seem to have a greater impact on foreign policy than others. This variation in influence is caused by the personal characteristics of individuals, their thought processes, and situational factors (Mingst, Karen, Heather McKibben and Ivan Arreguin, 2019, 131).

Political psychologist Margaret Hermann has found several personality characteristics in the political elite's foreign policy behaviours which orient individuals' views of foreign affairs. Two orientations emerge from individuals' personality traits:

One Type of leader with high levels of nationalism, a strong belief in their ability to control events, a strong need for power, low levels of conceptual complexity, and high levels of distrust of others tends to develop an independent orientation to foreign affairs or policy. The other type of leaders with low levels of nationalism, little belief in their ability to control events, a high need for affiliation, high levels of conceptual complexity, and low levels of distrust of others tend to develop a participatory orientation to foreign affairs policies (Mingst et al. 2019, 133-134).

With a sad reality, Nigerian leaders have leaned towards more of a participatory orientation to foreign affairs policies, with high apron strings attachment to past colonial governments and allies' affiliations, and more recently, China attachments. Nigerian leaders' foreign policy and bilateral relations have tended to be more dependent on Western Countries, with about 80 per cent dependency on Britain, the United States and recently China out of about 193 countries of the world. However, this is not to give the notion that Nigeria doesn't have bilateral relations with other countries of the world, but in a comparative analysis, these countries control the bulk of their bilateral relations. With the high influx of Western multinational companies in almost all industries in Nigeria, traits of dependence have eaten so deeply into Nigeria's system, mentality and orientation. Thus ensuring Nigeria's continuous dependence and underdevelopment. This heavy dependency is also attributed to the leadership orientation and mentality.

Foreign policy influences are characterised by various intricacies, and Nigeria's foreign policy has either been influenced by colonial events and ties, religion, availability of large Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), foreign aid, the prevailing terms of the international system, economic abundance, developmental and infrastructural needs and societal conditions. The past and present Nigerian leaders have developed policies and relations favourable to the West (Britain, the United States and its allies) than the East (Russia in focus) since 1960. Although Tafewa Balewa, at independence, declared that Nigeria was, as a matter of foreign policy, non-aligned, Nigeria still tilted behind Britain like a child in government structure, economic relations, treaties, agreements and socio-cultural lifestyles. From the Yakubu Gowon to Obasanjo military regimes, which implemented an inward African policy

known as Afro-centric policy, tailored towards the decolonisation of Africa, their external relations still favoured the West despite the slight inclusiveness of Soviet Russia during and after the civil war (Ehimika Ifidon 2001, 11). Gowon himself had remarked that, "Nigeria preferred to remain in the capitalist camp. Nevertheless, if Nigeria hoped to remain non-aligned, then 'the occasional flirtation with the communist powers was essential', as evidenced by Gowon's state visit to the Soviet Union (Ehimika 2001, 12). The civil war, however, saw the more participatory inclusion of Russia in the Nigerian market sphere. Administrations afterwards to Mohammed Buhari's civilian administration still tailored the designs of past "colonial embroidery". A question of the same cuttings from the same cloth for 62 years has led Nigeria to its ditches and glitches faced in almost all its sectors. This reflects one of the tenets of constructivism, which holds that the history and identity of a leader or country can shape their foreign behaviours and policies. Even with the recent diversification to Asia and China, it feels like Nigeria's development is still low or even worse than it was.

Nigeria's continuum system in the traditional bilateral partnership, even in the face of seemingly low long-run results, is yet to see a necessity to turn or search for better ways and partners to achieve Nigeria's developmental needs. Herein lies the question: Why keep cutting a size that doesn't fit? Even her most recent partnership with China has also led her to more debts than results. For instance, Chinese partnerships to carry out infrastructural developments, such as the building of bridges, railway lines, and roads, have cost the Nigerian government a fortune and most of these infrastructures are done with borrowed money, exorbitant interest rates, and in some instances, toll fees are paid on the completion of these roads to enable the government to repay these loans. The terms of such projects are agreed upon and kept secret from public review. The reality of these constructions lies in the bad materials used, lack of coordination, and lack of notice to the public, gross negligence, low infrastructural endurance, low local content and poor inducement of local content, exorbitant payment of foreign workers, all of which, in comparison, is not what is obtainable in their own home countries. Nigeria has become more of an exploitative beehive to these Chinese companies. The Nigerian administration has failed woefully to actively monitor their activities and hold them accountable; hence, such gross negligence.

The infrastructure development of Nigeria should have been diversified to include other countries like Russia. Russia is regarded as one of the world's best road and railway contractors and is more honest and trustworthy. Nigeria's roads and railway infrastructure development diversification to include Russia will cut off dependency and exploitable avenues for Chinese companies. This will foster a competitive atmosphere, eliminate monopoly, boost local content employment, and improve performance review and analysis of what is obtainable now. The lack of Russia's inclusion in the key sector development of Nigeria is in itself an issue.

Secondly, crude oil, as a natural resource in Nigeria, has become the mainstay of Nigeria's economic revenue. Its oil exploration, exploitation and degradation of oil environs are done by multinational corporations owned by Western countries. The United States and other states buy crude oil at low prices and sell it at higher prices as refined products of the oil. The Nigerian leadership has failed to ensure the technology of building, maintaining and administering operational refineries efficiently to enable Nigeria to have functioning refineries

which would upscale their sales in oil products. Rather, Nigeria exports at a price lower than its imports of refined products, and a trade imbalance is inevitable.

It is perceived that the United States and Britain have an underlying motive that ensures such refinery development in Nigeria is stagnated, and they at all points do not seek to eliminate this dependency on them by ensuring Nigeria and a host of other states depend on them, which is eminent to their interests and survival. Further talks on gas flaring, exploration of oil by their Western Multinational corporations and degradation of oil environs have become a nagging thorn to Nigerians with no action taken (Ehimika and Osaruwense 2015, 10).

How are any of these an issue in Nigeria – Russia Bilateral Relations?. The gross negligence of the Nigerian government in its crude oil technology and partnership shows a lack of understanding of what is obtainable. Russia, as a country, has been an oil-producing state for many years, having its own refinery and oil production technology. Rather than Nigeria depending on the United States and Britain for oil exploration and refined oil for so long, Nigeria should have thought it wise to partner with Russia for its oil technology and infrastructure, while still exporting its crude oil. By now, it is without a doubt that Nigeria would have upscaled its oil sector. Thus, the blind slides of Nigeria's leadership perceptions in navigating realistic and viable foreign policy objectives with suitable partners are seen in their continuous tailing of the same colonial attachments is a fundamental issue in Nigeria-Russia relations, as there is already a leadership or political elites' preference for the West over Russia.

Thirdly, the current Nigerian foreign policy under the civilian rule of Mohammed Buhari is hinged on the fight against corruption, insecurity and economic development. In the fight against corruption, we see the collaboration with Interpol and EFCC to stop and track corrupt practices done within and outside Nigeria. In the fight against insecurity, Nigeria has once again teamed up with Russia for weapons and machinery because its traditional allies have once again refused to sell weapons and ammunition to Nigeria in adherence to their global policy on arms sales, thus Russia had to become an option once again (Omotuyi 2018, 4). This opens up to show that the direction of key foreign objectives partnership is largely exclusive of Russia until her support is unavoidable, while the economic and infrastructural development cooperation sees the traditional allies and China at the forefront. This creates a notion that Russia is a “necessity option” rather than a strategic partner in Nigeria's foreign policy attainment.

Fourth, the lack of a Nigerian-Russian Chamber of Commerce in Nigeria is a significant factor that would have aided in coordinating economic relations between private companies and others. Such a structure can be regarded as an economic embassy or centre, though without any diplomatic functions. It facilitates businesses among both states, and some of such include:

1. Providing the business community with opportunities for the exchange of business information to foster regional and international communication and promote trade and commerce. The chamber maintains close contact with trade associations and Russian commerce chambers all over the world.

2. Playing an active role in promoting external trade and attracting foreign investment. It promotes the interests of their local business, providing access to valuable resources, discounts, and relationships that help businesses save money and market their products.
3. Joining a chamber of commerce can boost sales and significantly improve a local business's visibility and credibility. Nigeria and Russian businesses tend to be missing out on such opportunities provided by the structures of a chamber of commerce. (Nigeria Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Investment 2022, 5)

Another factor in leadership and administration posing an issue in Nigeria-Russia Relations is the lack of ratification of the 2009 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that reassures or protects Russian investments in Nigeria. The Memorandum holds:

- i. Investment promotion and protection agreement.
- ii. Agreement of Cooperation on the field of peaceful use of nuclear energy.
- iii. Memorandum of Understanding in the field of exploration of outer space for peaceful purposes.
- iv. Agreement on the transfer of persons sentenced to imprisonment.
- v. Memorandum and Articles of Association on the joint venture between NNPC and GAZPROM.
- vi. Legal cooperation between the Nigerian and Russian Ministers of Justice.

Item one of the agreements is of great importance to Russian companies and all foreign direct investors to boost investment. Thus, the non-ratification of these agreements made it more paperwork with no legal and political binding (Nigeria Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022, 10). This has forestalled or discouraged certain Russian investors who are not willing to take all the risks associated with foreign investment without the backing of the home government.

Also, the agreement, however needed, had once again lacked fundamental issues Nigeria faced at that time to articulate its domestic interests and further development. Adetokunbo Abiodun held that the agreement was earmarked on prospects rather than present realities (2021). As stated earlier, the Ajaokuta Steel Plant Company should have been at the forefront of such an agreement; a country that can produce its iron and steel can develop more rapidly, aiding in the production of cars, industrial machines, etc. At a time when the petro-dollar was reducing, it would have been a concern to Nigerian leadership to find realistic ways to diversify the economy. The Ajaokuta Steel Plant Company is an integral part of making Nigeria a more developed country in all other areas of its economic life. Iron is essential even in the production of crude farm tools, agricultural mechanised tools, household appliances, electrical materials, etc. Every aspect of Nigeria's economic life will be boosted if we process our iron ore into iron and steel rather than importing (Rufus, 2022).

Other agreements with the Russian government that are either overdue for renewal, redundant, or stagnate are:

- i. Protocol on Cooperation between the Institute for Africa Studies of the Russian Academy of Science (RAS) and the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA); signed on 8 September 1993 (due for renewal).
- ii. Agreement on Nuclear Energy for peaceful purposes between the Russian Federation and the Federal Republic of Nigeria, signed on 24 June 2010 (Stage of Implementation).

- iii. Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and the Articles of Association on Joint Venture between the NNPC and the GAZPROM signed on the 24 of June 2010 (due for renewal).
- iv. Agreement on Investment Promotion and Protection of Agreement (IPPA) signed in June 2010 (due for renewal).
- v. Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in the field of exploration of outer space for peaceful purposes, signed on 24 June 2010 (due for renewal).
- vi. Agreement on transfer of Persons sentenced to imprisonment signed 24th June 2010 (due for renewal).
(Nigeria Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022,10)

Furthermore, the Nigerian leadership has also failed in the image-boosting of Nigeria within the Russian Federation. The Nigerian embassy in Moscow is still leased under a landlord and not a freehold property owned by Nigeria. As simple and little as this is, it has a lot to tell about Nigeria's integrity and capacity. Such is not good for Nigeria's image among Russians. Also, from the period of 2014-2018, Nigeria had no ambassador assigned or sent to Russia. This restricted some negotiations and talks from being held despite embassy staff. There is a limit to a mission staff can negotiate or have talks with the Russian government. The ambassador has more representation, capacity, power and right to negotiate or hold talks than a mission staff. An absence of such officials limits relations and smooth operations, high-level interactions, hoisting of flags, etc. Such a long absence gap of a high representative officer is a huge loss or hindrance to relations between both countries (Nigeria Mission in Moscow, 2021).

On the Russian side, its leaders have, however, failed to show more eagerness and a welcoming embrace to Nigeria. This is evident in the low-political or high-level visits between them. President Dmitry Medvedev is the only Russian President to have visited Nigeria. This downplays the call for better cooperation between the two countries when the leadership seems too far apart. The Russian Business Council chairperson position is currently vacant, making such synergy between both Councils of Business difficult (Nigeria Mission in Moscow 2021).

Incessant embezzlement, budget padding, and misappropriation of funds that have besieged the Nigerian government have deepened their dependency on the United States, Britain and China, who have aided the Nigerian government in such robbery just to protect their exploitative interests. After such budget padding has occurred, the Nigerian government keeps mute on any other discrepancies that most of these multinational companies of the United States, Britain and China would be afflicted with time. Such is evident in the lack of accountability and enforcement of some multinational corporations in carrying out their corporate social responsibility to home communities, climate change and environmental cleanliness. This is one of the reasons why Nigerian leaders' apron strings are too attached to their colonial history at the expense of their public welfare and development.

Finally, in the words of Chinua Achebe, in his book, "The Trouble with Nigeria",

...Nigerians are corrupt because the system under which they live today makes corruption easy and profitable; they will cease to be corrupt if corruption is made difficult and inconvenient...the trouble with Nigeria is squarely and solely the failure of leaders to rise to the responsibility and

challenge of personal example as a hallmark of true leadership...Nigeria can change today if it discovers leaders who have the will, ability and vision (qtd. Maier, 2000).

Unfortunately, focusing on leadership alone would produce half-baked development results, no matter how vital the factor of leadership is in development.

Economic Compatibility or Incompatibility?

In exploring Nigeria- Russia economic compatibility or incompatibility, we explore the tenets of dependency theory in explaining why trade balances between Russia and Nigeria are low and one-sided, in favour of Russia than Nigeria.

The age-old question in bilateral partnership is What can I give to get what I want? Hence, a trade by barter scenario. This is a question that has plagued scholars of the field vis-à-vis Nigerian-Russian relations. What can Nigeria and Russia trade with each other comfortably to ensure maximum international wealth accumulation? Such a question becomes a problem in this relationship because both countries are oil-producing states with about 70- 90 per cent dependency on bilateral trade on oil and gas exports. Ehimika and Osarumwense hold that: "Oil, its exploration, exploitation and export, that had served as a major factor in facilitating the rapid normalisation of political relations with the West, was not an item of trade with the Soviet Union in the 1970s even though the Soviet Union contemplated buying Nigeria's oil." (2015,19). This, with the downturn in non-oil exports from Nigeria, limited the chances of continuous and improved political relations and kept overall relations at a relatively low level. Simply put, the downturn in Nigeria's non-oil export items resulted in a low level of trade relations. Ogunbadejo Oye and Olatunde Ojo hold that;

... the ideological differences between Nigeria and Soviet Russia, as well as Nigeria's preference for capitalism above communism, were a basis for strained and low political and economic relations... until there is some ideological solidarity, Nigeria-Soviet Union relations will remain correct and low-keyed" (1976; 1985).

Akanyemi Bolaji buttresses that the reason for low post-war Soviet Union relations was that the "capitalist nature of Nigeria's economy could not dovetail into the planned nature of the socialist economy." (1979, 151).

However, Ehimika Ifidon and Charles Osarumwense's argument that oil was a defining factor that made both states economically incompatible is questioned on the basis that, even before oil became the mainstay of Nigeria's economy, agricultural produce was her mainstay in the 1960s and yet trade between Nigeria and Russia was relatively low as compared to other Western major traders. Soviet Russia's share of Nigeria's total trade for both 1960 and 1965 was 0.06 per cent (2015, 34); for 1967 and 1969, the total Eastern bloc share was 4.03 and 2.67 per cent (excluding the value of arms and aircraft transactions), respectively (Federal Office of Statistics, 1974; Ehimika, 2001, 8).

In the 1970s, the Soviet Union was still an insignificant trading partner, even with non-oil commodities. The basis of Ehimika and Osarumwense that Nigeria was not economically compatible with Russia because of the presence of common natural resources between them is faulted on the basis that even with non-oil commodities, Nigeria was barely exporting to Soviet Russia nor buying from Soviet Russia (see table 1a and b).

TABLE1a

Percentage Share by the USSR and Major Trading Partners of the Value of Nigeria's Imports, 1971-1979

	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
United Kingdom	32.08	29.68	27.24	23.27	22.97	23.45	21.61	22.18	22.10
United States	14.11	10.43	10.49	12.33	9.94	10.77	11.40	11.03	10.92
West Germany	12.23	13.69	14.91	15.31	14.44	16.23	16.01	15.94	15.83
USSR	1.09	0.35	0.46	0.86	0.42	0.20	0.20	0.22	0.21

Source: Central Bank of Nigeria, Annual Report and Statement of Accounts (1971-1979).

TABLE 1b

Percentage Share by the USSR and Major Trading Partners of Value of Nigeria's Non-Oil Export, 1971-1979

	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
United Kingdom	31.31	33.55	30.73	28.05	28.71	30.39	27.19	28.06	25.21
United States	11.22	7.52	10.37	9.67	12.55	18.07	13.12	11.96	11.21
West Germany	8.13	7.98	5.83	9.32	7.70	10.98	15.55	17.40	16.08
USSR	10.25	7.36	5.96	13.90	20.87	5.31	0.0	0.0	0.0

Source: Central Bank of Nigeria, Annual Report and Statement of Accounts (1971-1979).

From Table 1, Nigeria and Russia's trade balances are relatively low in imports and exports, including non-oil commodities. Nigeria was barely buying from the Soviet Union (imports) and barely selling to the Soviet Union (exports) when compared to other major partners.

Ogunbadejo and Olatunde's explanation hinged on ideological differences and preferences of Nigeria towards the West's capitalism rather than Russia's communism, which had played out more until the collapse of the communist system. Now ideological differences do not play out anymore but yet the level of relations is still at its low ebb despite ideological political compatibility. Thus, even though ideological political differences are no more,

Western or Americanized ideological preferences are rapidly increasing; everything Western or Americanized is the new craze.

Ehimika and Osarumwense's explanation did not consider the overriding impact of Western multinational companies that were not oil-related in Nigeria. Therefore, "Oil" cannot be used as a defining factor to explain the low level of economic relations between Nigeria and Russia in the past and present times. Even though the trade of oil with major Western countries had allowed and aided the normalisation of other relations and helped to expose Nigeria as a viable market, it did not, however, define or dictate that only certain countries could be allowed to take advantage of such market presence, and some could not.

A recent analysis of trade between Russia and Nigeria, as explained in Table 2, shows a negative balance of trade that is not favourable to Nigeria. Why? Is Russia the cause, or is Nigeria to be blamed? (see Table 2).

TABLE 2
Nigeria – Russia Trade Balance, 2011-2020 in million USD (\$)

Year	Exports (US\$)	Imports (US\$)	Volume of Trade	Balance of Trade
2011	2,635,653	190,354,378	192,990,031	-187,718,725
2012	4,187,097	237,027,646	241,214,743	-232,840,549
2013	11,191,037	238,006,933	249,197,970	-226,815,896
2014	1,720,220	416,028,333	417,748,553	-414,308,113
2015	2,078,325	297,390,977	299,469,302	-295,312,652
2016	1,453,581	437,002,159	438,455,740	-435,548,578
2017	15,817,816	683,513,304	699,331,120	-667,695,488
2018	5,815,360	1,016,085,898	1,021,901,258	-1,010,270,538
2019	4,056,260	740,245,520	744,301,780	-736,189,260
2020	2,361,439	1,244,647,732	1,247,009,171	-1,242,286,293

Source: World Integrated Trade Solutions (WITS), Nigeria Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment, Office of Bilateral Cooperation, January 31, 2022.

From Table 2, we see that Russia has a lot more to offer than Nigeria, not because of an economic incompatibility, or due to commonality in natural resources (oil), but because of Nigeria's inability to increase its export base, quantity, quality and services, as well as its leader's Western preferences and dependency.

Top exports of Nigeria are Crude (\$46B), petroleum gas (\$7.78B), scrap vessels (\$2.26B), flexible metal tubing (\$2.1B), and cocoa Beans (\$715M), tin ore, gold, raw cotton, aluminium ore, dried legumes. Nigeria's top imports include refined petroleum, laboratory materials, cars, electronics, telephones, wheat, glassware, household items and packaged medications. The main Nigerian exports to Russia are cocoa beans, coffee, gum, cotton, rubber, hibiscus leaves, sesame seeds, foliage, materials of vegetable origin, books, and spices (except pepper and pimento).

Russia's major imports include machinery, electric machinery, vehicles, pharmaceuticals, plastics, optical, Articles of iron and steel, edible fruits and rubber (Nigeria Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022, 11). Nigeria could tap into the market of iron and steel, edible fruits and nuts, plastics and rubbers if only we can manufacture or produce more than enough for internal consumption and export or even produce Nigeria's iron and steel. Unfortunately, that is not the case. The question lies in how Nigeria can increase its export commodities and services efficiently in order to increase its revenue.

The law in commerce is to identify a need and satisfy or fill the need. Analysing Nigeria's exports to Russia, the export itinerary lacks the quality and quantity diversity that meets Russia's major needs. The failure of Indigenous innovations and development, the lack of promoting Indigenous businesses and products, the failure of the Nigerian wealthy few to invest more in Indigenous companies, the increasing brain drain and a general lack of domestic investment in other non-oil areas have adversely affected export diversity, quantity, quality and services. That is why there are trade imbalances in trade relations with Russia. Therefore, economic foundation or compatibility is found, but Nigeria lacks the production of non-oil commodities, or production in either larger quantities or quality, to have a beneficial exchange with Russia. Nigeria has largely depended on its sales of raw products or materials and buys refined or final products at a higher price than it sells its raw material, thus losing revenue. The international terms of selling raw materials are not favourable to developing countries that Nigeria belongs to; therefore, it's a matter of urgency to not only sell raw materials but also to develop them for internal use and export. This eliminates the purchase of certain exorbitant, refined, finished products. For instance, the Ajaokuta Steel Company, the Aluminium factory and the Refinery projects that have stagnated for years could generate revenue and boost the overall economy of Nigeria. As usual, the politicising of such projects that, unfortunately, Russia and the United States of America are in a tussle over, especially with the Akwa-Ibom Aluminium Company, has continually ensured more dependency on the West. It is not far from the truth if one is to say that such tussles, politics and stagnancy are fuelled by Western powers in collaboration with Nigerian leaders. The influx of Multinational companies (MNCs) in all sectors of Nigeria's economy has given indigenous companies little space to breathe and survive. The high concessions given to MNCs, government protection and societal preferences for foreign goods have further stiffened Nigeria's manufacturing front and export commodities development. We look at the '70s oil boom and how Nigeria could have sought to build refineries in the near future afterwards, refine its petroleum resources and be an exporter of finished petroleum products rather than an exploration and consuming state (importing refined petroleum products). Entering into relations with Russia to study and build petroleum development knowledge in Nigeria during the 90s, we are left to wonder how far Nigeria's development would be today. Russia is one of the world's exporters of petroleum products, and having a wide knowledge and expertise on how to develop the oil industry would have been a perfect tutor, guide, and partner for Nigeria. One could argue that Russia would have been reluctant to grow another oil competitor. Such an argument holds no water as Russia is aware it cannot solely provide the entire world's oil needs, and such a partnership with a great rising nation in Africa is of great value.

We are left to wonder again, what if the Ajaokuta steel completion in the 80s had been done, how far our manufacturing game would have been in the world today? The cocoa processing and exportation, the cement industry, the rubber industry, the palm oil industry, etc., all these investments and developments could have produced much more wealth than was perceived and achieved in the 80s and 90s.

Another issue in economic exchange is the standard and packaging of goods, which are key factors in business. Some Nigerian immigrants observed at an exhibition in Russia, the low packaging standard of Nigeria-made goods, most of high standard but low packaging to attract customers. Also, in terms of the standard quality of goods, Nigeria has unfortunately been blacklisted as one of the countries engaged in substandard product distribution. Russians are intolerant of product standard compromise and have strict regulations on imported products. This led to the disguise of goods bought originally from Nigeria, to be disguised as being imported from another country, to escape such a blacklist. Thus, credit and recognition go to other countries than Nigeria (Rufus 2022).

A lack of direct cargo planes from Russia to Nigeria and vice versa has hindered economic exchanges. Most perishable agricultural foods cannot be preserved for long for export, thus a need for direct cargo flights to transport such commodities and facilitate as well as increase trade. Consequently, the influx of everything Western and Chinese in communication services, products, education services, migration, fashion, cuisine, beverages, machines, infrastructure, household items, language, culture, and health services, clearly depicts an ideological preference for the Western World and China, sweetened with loans and foreign aid, has killed indigenous innovations, promotion and patronage.

Migration Orientation

The basic orientation of Nigerian youths and people is to find any means possible to leave the country. The craze to *Japa* (leave the country), as it is popularly known, is skyrocketing through the Nigerian roof daily, creating human capital and migration revenue for other countries. One of the tenets of constructivists is that the history of a people influences their foreign policy behaviours and directions, and as such, the format of *Japa* is concentrated in most Western countries irrespective of the harsh immigration rules and expenses.

Migration routes in Nigeria are centred on the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Turkey, Italy, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. The number of people desiring to travel to Russia is low when compared to these States. Why not Russia? In an interview with a Nigerian Mission personnel, he stated that migration to Russia is low when compared to other countries, for three major reasons as discovered in the field: Language Barriers, extreme weather conditions, the low exchange rate of Russian currency to Naira than pounds, euros and dollars (2022). An immigrant in Britain, when asked why not migrate to Russia? , he replied, “I migrate for greener pastures, and I don’t think Russia can give me the kind of money I need to make and send back home”, (Arinola 2022). Another aspiring student seeking a visa to travel to Germany held that, “Russians are known to be inhospitable and harsh. The environment is harsh, and also their level of education can’t be compared to the US or UK” (Ighodye 2022). Another Nigerian in diaspora, when asked, held that: “The Russian language is hard ... I doubt

they communicate in English there. Also, their currency is not strong enough in the foreign exchange market. Russia is also an aggressive country that can be thrown into war at any time, disrupting one's education and putting lives in danger (Jerry 2022).

In another interview with a professor of Russian studies, Adetokunbo, held that:

Russia is one of the best places to live; there are lots of opportunities, good health and education services that are more than US and UK standards, with affordable prices, and it is friendly to foreigners. The reason why Nigerians hardly desire to migrate to Russia on their own, aside from scholarships, is because of the Western propaganda that everything from Russia is bad and Western superiority. He further held that living in Russia is cheap and Nigerian parents can comfortably send their children there for the best education, better than the UK or the US, without draining their pockets. He rebuffed that language is not a barrier, as Russians do speak English well, and the Russian language is easy to pick on as one interacts with them (2021).

Mr Omosayin Rufus, a Nigerian Mission personnel in Russia, narrated his experience when he was transferred to work in the Nigerian Embassy in Moscow. He held that:

His colleagues believed he must have offended someone to be sent to Russia. Russia is regarded as an outcast or punishment country among Nigerian diplomatic personnel. His arrival in Russia has completely changed his perspective on Russia, and now his whole family lives in Russia. He further advocates for people to come to Russia and see a country so well organised and peaceful. The people are orderly and well-coordinated, obey laws and regulations and live a secluded life (2022).

Dr Chinedu Ndefo, a lecturer at Volgograd University in Moscow and a medical practitioner, in an interview, speaks so passionately about Russia and the opportunities therein. He describes Russia as a “virgin land of opportunities yet to be explored. He held that there is hardly any African-themed business in Russia or people who provide certain services such as tailors, barbers, hairdressers, bead makers, African fabric prints (Ankara), African restaurants, cheap labourers like electrical repairers, air conditioning services. There are skilled Nigerians who are very good at it, but you hardly find such in Russia. Such businesses can be set up, and there is a large market base. Russians are keen to know more about Africa, so bringing African culture closer to them will encourage their interest and knowledge and in exchange make money out of it.

A Nigerian immigrant in Russia also affirmed this: “that his wife engages in sewing already made outfits in African prints and is well sought after by Russians and other foreigners, he encourages more artisans to come to Russia and dig into these opportunities”. Dr Ndefo further rebuffs that Russian medical and education services are low-cost. He ascertains that most Americans come to Russia for medical services and educational services, getting the same and more services for a cost that is not as exorbitant as those back home. The cost of food items is cheap and affordable for students to survive on without overworking, while having enough to send back

home. When asked about the weakness of Russian currency, Rubble as compared to the dollar, pound sterling and euro, he held that “most businesses run their prices in dollars. Yes, the price rate may be a dollar or two lower when compared, but one can still make good money, spend less and send more back home while still living with ease”. He further stated that the cost of things is not cheaper nor are labour wages cheaper because of the Rubble, but it is so because of the way the government policies have been organised to take care of their citizens’ welfare, and most of these things are produced in Russia, making them easily accessible and affordable (2022). John Rufus held that,

Before the 2018 World Cup, most appliances were thrown out and replaced when spoiled rather than repaired because the cost of repair could equal the cost of new ones. But with the influx of Nigerians into Russia during the World Cup and their refusal to leave, some Nigerians began to take on these repair jobs for lower prices. Thus, to the Russian, he is saving more money, and to the Nigerian, he has made much more money than he would have made back home in Nigeria for such repairs (2022).

To further prove that living, schooling and working in Russia are less expensive and of the same quality as in other Western Countries, a comparative analysis of a student's expected expenditure in schooling and living expenses in Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States is conducted by interviewing students in these countries. This comparative analysis is, however, on a basic or average student expenditure (see Table 3).

TABLE 3a

An Example of a Russian Student's Expenditure

Education Fees 122,500- 300,000 roubles (\$1921.57- 6000) per year, depending on the region, university and discipline. <i>Note: The students who are admitted to state-funded places on a competitive basis or who are awarded a government scholarship (quotas) study free of charge. Those students receive an allowance (the average monthly allowance in 2020 is RUB 1,484/\$ 22, for postgraduate students it is RUB 2,921/ \$ 42).</i>
Healthcare Insurance 4,000 and 12,000 roubles (188.24-147.56 USD). For foreign Citizens: about 20,000 Roubles (\$251. 60). The cost of health care depends on the region, range of services and validity, ranging from 3 months to 1 year.

Dormitory
5,000 roubles (USD 78.43)
Rental Apartments
A bed-sit will cost you around 30-35 thousand roubles (\$470.59-549.02) a month, and a room around 15-20 thousand roubles (\$235.29- \$313.73) a month. These prices are 50% cheaper in other regions further from Moscow.
Food
10,000 roubles (USD 156.86) /per month
Transport
405 roubles (USD 6.35)
Internet, mobile phone
800 roubles (USD 12.55)
Culture, sport, entertainment
4,000 roubles (USD 62.75)

TOTAL: 20,205 roubles (USD 289) excluding tuition fee and health care, which are paid in full bulk or bulk instalments.

Note: Most students won't care for sports and entertainment and might spend less.

TABLE 3b

An Example of Student Expenditure in the United Kingdom and the United States

Education Fees
International undergraduate tuition fees vary considerably, starting at around £10,000 (US\$14,130) and going up to £38,000 (~US\$53,700) or more for medical degrees (792,679.97 - 1,120,056.80R).
United States international undergraduate tuition fees vary considerably, starting around \$3,660-35,830 (230,517.00 - 2,465,251.25R) per year.
Note: Fees depend on the type of college, whether a two-year, four-year college, in-state, private or public and discipline
Dormitory
\$8,660- \$12,680(550,679.50 - 811,932.10 R) per year
£166- £259 per week with a total cost of about £664 -£1,036 per month (53,215.78 - 83,029.43 R).
Food
£150-250 (12,021.64 - 20,036.06 R)
\$150-200 (9604.88 - 12806.50 R)
Transport
\$88-100(5634.86 - 6403.2 R)
£56 (4488.08R)
Entertainment
£102 (8174.71 R)
\$ 243(15,559.90R)
Mobile package and Internet
£10.27(823.08 R)
\$ 47- 69(3,009.53 - 4,418.24 R)
Health insurance
£470 (37,667.79 R) per year

\$1,140 (72,997.05 R) per year

NOTE: An average student's monthly expenditure stands at \$350- \$400 monthly

The exchange rate conversion used as of 4 June 2022 is:

\$1-63.75R

£1- 80R

R- Russian Roublbe

USD/\$- Dollars

£- Pound Sterling

From Table 3, it is, however, glaring that the cost of education alone is relatively higher in the United States and the United Kingdom than in Russia, which still provides equal educational facilities and knowledge capacity. However, it is worth noting that, not until 2019 were international students in Russia were not allowed to work and study at the same time. Such law further discouraged international students' interest in Russian educational partnerships, services or facilities. The review of such a law in 2019 is said to have piqued more interest in studying in Russia; despite this, more influx of Nigerian students is seen in the United States and the United Kingdom, despite its high pocket-breaking cost.

Russia's immigration rules are strict and not friendly. For example, the dependency visa is not done in Russia as in the United States and the United Kingdom, except in rare cases of highly skilled worker immigrants. What this means is, except for those who are migrating based on a highly skilled worker's visa, it is hard to go to Russia with one's dependents or family without a letter of invitation per person being granted. No student can travel on a student visa with their family without applying for a letter of invitation from the enrolled school, which is most times not granted or very tedious to obtain. Such immigration law is not so in countries like the US or UK, which allow students to come along with their dependents, as long far there is evidence of proper welfare care and resources. Also, the extension of a student visa to stay an additional two years after studies enables one to obtain jobs, start a business or further studies is not allowed under Russian migration rules. Some of these migration rules are not friendly to Nigerians who plan on travelling out and not coming back anytime soon. This has contributed to engendering low interest in Russia in Nigeria's migration plans.

Western Propaganda and Narratives

Western propaganda, also regarded as Russophobia, is the fear, prejudice or hatred of Russia and Russians created by distorting information through sources that label Russia a threat or an irrational entity. Such distortions or stereotypical attitudes have been fuelled by Western Countries, especially at the end of the Second World War and the emergence of the Cold War in 1945. However, Russophobia's history dates to the twentieth century when the term "Russophobia" was first coined by Fyodor Tyutchev in 1867 (Glenn Diesen 2022, 1).

Glenn Diesen, in his book “Russophobia”, defines propaganda in international politics as “convincing an audience without appealing to reason”. Propaganda exploits the human desire for simplicity by manipulating the heuristics to hand people easy answers and relying on group psychology rather than winning them over with rational arguments. Unconsciously, the human brain divides people into the in-group of “Us” or the out-group of the “Other”. A threat from the out-group instigates an impulsive need for in-group loyalty and solidarity to enhance security. Political propaganda exploits this proclivity in human nature by developing stereotypes that differentiate the in-group and out-group in order to frame all political questions within a demagogic division of “Us” versus the “Other” (2022, 5).

Propaganda is simply the spreading of ideas, information, or rumours to help or injure an institution, a cause, or a person. Ideas, facts, or allegations are deliberately spread to further one's cause or to damage an opposing cause. Propaganda is used as a tool to continually ensure the dependence of developing countries like Nigeria on the West or their former colonialist, as theorised by dependency theorists.

The development of propaganda in the West as a discipline of sociology, psychology and political science in the twentieth century was to a great extent directed towards Russia. On an even longer scale, Russians for centuries have been depicted as the civilisation “Other” of Western Europe and then the wider West. Russia is the West's perfect out-group, either as an eastern or even Asian power in Europe. The identity assigned to Russia as the “Other” is instrumental to constructing an opposing identity or actor of the West. During the Cold War, ideological dividing lines or the basis of propaganda fell naturally by contrasting capitalism versus communism, democracy versus authoritarianism, and Christianity versus atheism. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, The new East-West binary divide was further extended to include post-modern versus modern, advanced versus backward, free trade versus autarchy, sovereign versus post-sovereign, value-based versus realpolitik, decentralised versus centralised, soft power versus hard power and other simplistic binaries depicting a progressive view of human history that places the West at a higher level of civilisation (Diesen 2022, 3-4). Such a divide depicts Russia as excluded from the “high” civilisation of Europe because of its policies, and such exclusion is caused by Russia and at its expense.

The Cold War era witnessed total media warfare and propaganda against communism, depicting communism as “man's worst enemy” while capitalism and all its factors as the “self-righteous way”. Birthed new countries from the British colony were entrenched into such stereotypical attitudes against Russia that any form of praise, acknowledgement or contact with the Soviet Union and its belligerents was termed “Radical and must be Curtailed” (Diesen 2022, 4). The extent of such prejudice is seen in 1967, when a military assistance agreement was signed between the Nigerian Government and the Soviet Union was disguised under a “Cultural Agreement” rather than what it was, in a bid to not “offend” the West. In one of General Gowon's speeches in 1967, he emphasised that “although the Soviet Union had unlikely assisted Nigeria to defeat its enemy, Nigeria at no point wished to be affiliated with communism”, he pointed out that “the recent purchases from Soviet sources were merely for commercial basis. The Nigerian Government maintains its traditional friendship and foreign policy of non-alignment...” (Ogunbadejo 1988, 17). This clearly shows that the effective use of media, hearsay, and publications to

paint Russia as bad in all spheres across the world was effective in government decisions, policies, homes, markets and individual preferences.

Such attitudes still rage on years after the collapse of communism and the Russian Federation's emergence. Despite the new face of Russia, the attitude and propaganda of the West have not changed; instead, the stereotype of a meddling and intrusive Russia seeking to undermine democracy remains even after alleged claims or accusations, and evidence has collapsed. While the debunking of some of these stereotypes would have given way to a rational debate that reconsiders and recalibrates the threat perception of Russia, the narrative about Russia remains fast-reaching and standing even when they do not appeal to reason (Diesen 2022, 6).

Former US President, Donald Trump, on the advice of Henry Kissinger, sought to adjust to the new international distribution of power by “getting along with Russia” and focusing US resources towards countering the rise of China. Trump, as a result of this, was for several years presented as a Russian agent, a suspicion that lingers on even after the allegations and evidence were proven to be fraudulent (Diesen 2022, 8). When an airline flying from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing on 8 March 2014 suddenly disappeared from the map and probably crashed into the sea, conspiracy theories emerged with Russia as the usual manifestation of evil. Aviation expert and CNN analyst Jeff Wise wrote a book in which he presented a theory that President Putin stole the plane and took it to Kazakhstan as a demonstration of prowess to the West, with the implicit message being: “Don’t sleep too soundly at night, because we can hurt you in ways that you can’t even imagine” (2016, 10).

A British newspaper reported that “half of the Russians in London are spies”. Out of 150,000 Russians living in London, approximately 75,000 of them are Russian spies, according to a report by the Henry Jackson Society, which was then reputed as an “expert report” by various British media outlets (Hope 2018, 18). The British Daily Star reported that experts claim, “Vladimir Putin’s war threats are why aliens haven’t made first contact, as the barbarism and primitive behaviour of Russia reflect poorly on the ability of human beings to join any advanced Galactic Federation (Jameson 2022). The posture of the media in Russia tends to project Russia in a negative light to other countries. In an interview, a student was asked why not attend school in Russia; it’s budget-friendly and still offers quality education. One reply that struck out is that the certificate given by Russian universities is not regarded, mocked or looked down on in some Western universities (Jerry 2022).

When Sovereignty and democracy are theoretically bequeathed or rested on the people, there becomes a need to influence the belief of the people in pursuit of a desired policy; herein lies the use of propaganda negatively or positively. Russophobia accelerated by Western propaganda has created a belief that everything West is good, peaceful, devoid of evil, source of democracy which has become so imbibed in the Nigerian society, to the extent that, until one possesses clothes, books, speech patterns, way of life, accessories, education, speaking pattern, eating pattern and everything the United Kingdom and the USA stands for, only then one could be regarded as “Westernized or civilised”.

Nigeria’s markets have also been proliferated by the UK, the US commodities and more recently, China’s smartphones, smart television, smart homes, smart kitchens, smart technologies and culture.

Even in government policies, the Ajaokuta Steel plant redundancy is also a contribution of Western Propaganda. The Nigerian government, people, and society have been blindsided by the prevailing Russophobia, which has resulted in an over-dependency and a lack of diverse bilateral relations at the expense of maximum wealth and development. Such prejudice is also seen in the lack of a Russian Chamber of Commerce in Nigeria. Also, the use of a rented space that serves as Nigeria's embassy in Moscow after decades of diplomatic contacts, the "one leg in and out" approach towards Russia's proposals and initiatives in investing in Nigeria, Nigerian's market preferences and the blind sight of the Nigerian people, has hindered a deep-rooted relationship with Russia in the development of Nigeria's economy and infrastructure. While the world is edging forward, Nigeria is barely trying to catch up and is still not doing so well. A Protocol officer at the Nigerian Embassy in Moscow queried the:

Nigeria's present railway development is still done with ancient Railway structures. Closer collaboration with Russia and well-meaning political leaders and experts will see our Railway system and development be much better than what is obtainable today. This is because Russia has one of the best modernised railway systems in the world, and China is building on a blueprint of what Russia has. He asks why not meet with Father (Russia) rather than the Child (China). He further emphasised that Energy collaboration with Russia is the best fit to study and generate a stable electric supply, oil refinery building, operations and maintenance in Nigeria. If we can produce our steel and iron and have a steady supply of energy, then Nigeria can kick off other developments (Gabriel Gagba 2022).

Socio-cultural Orientation

The old, rugged Russia is still what people believe it is now, especially with the Western propaganda. This has discouraged Nigerians from interacting, travelling or relating with Russia and Russians. However, Russia has become more accommodating and not as strict as it is believed to be. Its laws are friendly and tolerant to foreigners. Also, Nigeria's image of being a people of "shortcut or fast link" has cautioned Russia's cordial relationship with Nigerians. Most migrants of Nigerian descent go to foreign countries and change their identities totally, change their names, origin and adopt the new country's nationality, marrying a citizen there and forgetting their roots. A Nigerian is quick to abandon their roots, breaking all links to Nigeria.

Another issue is the clause that most Memorandums signed between Russia and Nigeria that allows for opportunities and more relations are not widely known and publicised; this has led to a lack of or limited information to the public on the services, investments and opportunities available for Nigerian-Russian collaboration. A Nigerian Protocol officer in Moscow held that:

Yes, most state agreements are not for public consumption, despite that their effects, whether good or bad, are reflected on the public; however, experts in various fields are employed in such agreements to ensure every clause is well captured and none is disadvantaged before signing. In a negotiation, the party that seeks to benefit more or needs more is at a disadvantage, and as such,

the other party's conditions might be more demanding and damaging in the long run (John Rufus 2022).

Thus, in the case of Nigeria and most developing countries at negotiation tables with other developed states, Nigeria must protect itself from long-term adverse agreements that tend to undermine whatever achievement is made in the present time. The informant further held that now, "the world is a digital global village, and most opportunities therein are available online if one is interested". But it is as a result of the Nigerian society being more interested in the West and, more recently, cheaper products of China, that they find such opportunities more publicised than in other countries. Everyone seems to have a link to China, the United Kingdom and United States of America, Canada, and the like than to Russia (Rufus 2022).

A Nigerian medical student holds that medical students from Nigeria who migrate to other developed countries for studies are met with a rude practical shock. This practical shock comes from the technology, equipment and practical evaluation on the job, which is immensely lacking in most Nigerian medical students and institutions. Thus, when they travel out, they are practically re-taught or asked to work as interns or nurses and go back to school (Dami 2022). This devalues the educational system and health sector of Nigeria in the perceptions of Russian experts, investors or authorities.

Another weighty issue of concern is that an African doctor in a white man's land faces issues of prejudice where a Caucasian could refuse an African man to attend to him at a hospital. This has adversely affected most Nigerian medical practitioners in their hospital experiences and practices in Russia. This creates a perception that Russians are racists, but then racism is a battle fought by the Black man for centuries in various countries, and it hasn't derailed relations with other Caucasian countries.

The majority of Nigerian immigrants who, in one way or another other have found their way to Russia and are involved in illicit behaviours are also contributing to imprint bad perceptions about Nigeria to Russians, thus making them more and more cautioned to interact or relate with the Nigerian society. The high rate of human trafficking and prostitution of Nigerian girls in Russia has contributed to the bad image and lack of respect for Nigerians (Marcus 2022).

Some universities in Russia teach courses and subjects in Russian and make international students take a mandatory Russian language course for one year. As much as this idea is good for advancing the Russian language and culture, it discourages international students who might find the Russian language a bit hard to understand or have no interest or time to learn extra language studies, including Nigerians.

Lack of Reciprocity

Relations between sovereign states are solidly anchored on the principle of reciprocity, but hardly work out in practice. Reciprocity is simply the give-and-take scenarios in a community of interests of various states. The Nigeria-Russia relations lack a "reciprocity" posture in their relationship. Seyi Onafowokan, a Nigerian diplomat personnel wrote:

...a Russian diplomat comes to our embassy and gets a visa promptly, whereas a Nigerian diplomat will have to wait for weeks to obtain a visa and will also be signed out upon arrival in Moscow on the pretence to be checking for information before entry is allowed... it is on record that the Nigerian ambassador in Moscow, during my four years in Russia, was never received in private audience by their foreign minister or by the German Grief, the then Economic minister despite requests...(Onafowokan 2010, 191-192).

The lack of high-level political visits by leaders of both countries shows a lack of reciprocity in their diplomatic posture. Russia has not shown keen interest in courting Nigeria. President Putin's visit to Angola and South Africa clearly shows a deliberate attempt to leave Nigeria out of his agenda. Also, despite bank credit facilities offered to the Russian companies as incentives to increase commercial transactions and investment activities with Africa, they are yet to respond to such collaboration (Osita 2010, 20; Nigeria Foreign Ministry of Affairs 2021, 8).

These issues cut across leadership, socio-cultural, economic and psychological factors, within the framework of tenets of constructivism, dependency and diplomatic theories.

CONCLUSION

The sad situation of the Nigerian economy, bedevilled by massive corruption, has become a matter of national emergency as the failing economy has affected all other areas of development, a poor education sector, a high rate of social vices, a dilapidated health sector, a hike in commodities prices, high cost of living. The inflation seems endless and rises geometrically. The Nigerian situation cannot be changed on its own, as no state is all-sufficient, thus a need for realistic, strategic bilateral relations. However, the fact that states are not self-sufficient, states still have to possess certain viable commodities and development to be able to have what to bring to the red table of state negotiations, hence, what can you give me in exchange for x, y, z supply or agreement. Unfortunately, Nigeria seems to be lacking in that area, with little or insufficient to offer to put her on a disadvantaged, dependent status in state round table negotiations. Nigeria failed to take steps to move from a raw material state to a manufacturing state; rather was comfortable being a consuming state. The state of Nigeria today is a main result of bad or wrong policies, the inability to take up actions that have long-term benefits by leaders, societal preferences for Western lifestyle rather than our indigenous commodities, history or culture, which is the '*wannabe*' syndrome of affiliation with the western countries rather than building realistic structures, all have rather packaged the reality with illusions. All these characteristics of the Nigerian nation have also translated into its diplomatic politics with other states. The Western syndrome has overshadowed Nigeria's bilateral relations since independence and blindsided her from courting optimal relations with other countries at an early stage of statehood. Relations with Russia are a classic example of one of "the blind sides" in Nigeria's bilateral pursuit. We wonder what could have been if Nigeria had been more self-interested in her optimal development than being a "Western pleaser". At independence, the announcement of Nigeria as a non-aligned state seeking to protect, defend and achieve her interests was a milestone to the greatness that was unfortunately not adhered to in practice. Non-alignment was a paper policy rather than an action word in Nigeria's bilateral relations.

Nigeria today would have been a major manufacturing state if actions were put in place to seek long-term sustainable development and interests rather than to promote Western interests in Nigeria and the greed of political elites.

PLATFORMS FOR COOPERATION BETWEEN NIGERIA AND RUSSIA

There are various platforms Nigeria and Russia can maximize in their diplomatic intercourse, such as Electricity generation, petrochemical development and operations, refinery building, infrastructural development, machine building, production of advanced electronics, shipbuilding, agricultural mechanization, medical and scientific development, mineral exploration and machineries: including excavation, pods and tanks, cars for liquid gas, civil aircraft and helicopters, boats, Aluminum industry development, Educational development, Telecommunication and financial services development, Crop production, livestock development, land resources management, fertilizer plant construction, Slots construction and Storage and processing facilities (Nigeria Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022, 11).

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order for these platforms to be maximally harnessed for Nigeria's development, the issues raised should be resolved, to forge new paths or strengthen old ones. The issues discussed can be worked out if both parties are willing, committed and ready to make real efforts towards strengthening relations and building together. On this note, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Nigeria's acquisition of freehold property for the Chancery, Ambassador's residence, and officers' official residential quarters in Moscow is expedient.
- ii. Nigeria should reorganise its foreign policy pursuits and partnerships to maximise results and benefits for its state. Its foreign partnerships should be those that are beneficial to her rather than prestige-based. The reorientation of leadership perception and preference. Strategic partnerships should be sorted and not the traditional status quo continuum.
- iii. Diversify export base commodities of world economic value by promoting indigenous industries.
- iv. Navigate the dynamics of diplomatic politics to maximise profit without giving undue advantage to the other state to exploit and rape state resources. The government should be Russia-friendly, promoting strategic policies between them and granting strategic projects to Russian companies of competence.
- v. Create public awareness of opportunities provided by Russia to Nigerians in education, economic and socio-cultural avenues. Organising the exhibition of Nigerian products in Moscow to create awareness and promote businesses.
- vi. Both countries should enable the environment or grounds for the achievements of agreements signed, and not just organise ceremonial engagements with no legal or government backing to realise them afterwards. Such as the ratification of the 2009 MOU.

- vii. One of the major commodities of exports between Nigeria and Russia is agricultural produce. There is a great need to reinvest in the agriculture sector of Nigeria for local consumption and export purposes. Investment in the farming or raw produce and processing of finished products.
- viii. Nigeria's products should be better packaged, meet standard quality conditions, better mode of preservation with no compromise to commodity quality. A careful approach to such a sector should be adopted, and appropriate authorities of checks and balances should be employed. The Standard Organisation of Nigeria should step up its game to ensure the agricultural sector flourishes and aids the processing or manufacturing industry.
- ix. For Nigeria's agricultural commodities to be exported fresh and seamless, there is an urgent need for air cargo transportation that carries goods and commodities directly to Russia and vice versa. This will make commerce easier and foster better relations between the two countries.
- x. The need to engage more with NIDO, Russia, to know the challenges faced at individual and business levels in Russia and take proactive steps to resolve them.
- xi. The structural set-up of the Nigeria-Russia Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Nigeria, with working structures, will aid in boosting trade and business exchanges.

It is hoped that the recommendations made above will improve strategic relations with Russia for the benefit of Nigeria's sustainable development.

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