

Politics of Memory, Genealogy and Narrating; Russia's Behavioral and Competitive Pattern with Western Countries in Africa

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explain the nature of Russia's competitive pattern with Western countries in Africa. It seems that Russia has taken advantage of the "Politics of memory strategy" "to expand its influence and to weaken the position of Western countries in Africa. This paper tends to explain why and how the Russian authorities have adopted this behavior to compete with European countries in this continent? The hypothesis is that Russia tries to represent the experience of colonialism to revive the memory of anti-colonialism, through "narratives" using the "genealogy method". By using the qualitative analysis method, the authors try to prove the research hypotheses. This research covers the African continent between 2019 and 2023, although due to the nature of the research, the Cold War period have also been examined.

Keywords: Africa, Genealogy, Russia, Politics of Memory, Western Countries.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, in order to ensure its influence in eastern Mediterranean Sea, and to access to the Red Sea and African natural resources, Russia has paid special attention to establish relations with African countries.

In order to achieve this goal, Russian leaders implement their own narratives of African political history by pointing to the former Soviet Union's support for national liberation movements and highlighting the negative narratives of Western colonial history. They try to strengthen the foundations of their influence in the African continent, and raise doubts about the legitimacy of the presence of former colonial countries i.e. Europeans. Although in this narrative warfare, Russia has also been accused by the western countries to support coup forces, undermine democracy, militarize the continent and concluding vague and fruitless agreements, and its new acting in conflict with the priorities of this continent, i.e. disarming the groups rebellion and the strengthening of civil and democratic organizations.

With Russia's attack on Ukraine on February 24, 2022 and the intensification of food insecurity in Africa, the narrative competition between West and Russia has entered a new phase. European and Western governments identify the main cause of food insecurity as the Russia's attack on Ukraine. Rejecting these accusations, the Russian government considers the sanctions by the European Union and the United States of America as well as the history of colonialism to be the main cause of food insecurity in Africa. However, the current paper focuses on examining Russia's behavioral and competitive pattern in the African continent and tries to analyze its's strategy towards Western countries. Using the conceptual framework of politics of memory and the method of qualitative analysis, this paper tries to study the Russian influence in African continent. In this regard, the authors have used three categories of resources. The first category includes the sources related to the conceptual framework. The authors used resources that focus on historical investigation of politics of memory. The second category of resources focus on the acting process of Russians in the Soviet Union and Russian Federation, as well as the cooperation of the two Russian and African sides in cultural, diplomatic, military and economic fields. The third category, which is related to the nature of the present paper, focus on direct quotations, especially the speeches and articles of Vladimir Putin and Sergey Lavrov. By analyzing these sources, the theory of the current research, which is Russia's use of the

memory policy strategy, and the difference and innovation of the present work with the existing literature are determined. In fact, many books and articles related to the politics of memory have been written, some of them (A Theory of the Politics of Memory by Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubiak 2014 or The Politics of Memory an Introduction by Zehra Azizbeyli 2018) are theoretical, some of them (The politics of Memory in Poland and Ukraine by Tomasz Stryjek and Joanna Konieczana-Salamatin 2022) are related to the politics of Russian memory in the former republics of the Soviet Union, and the third category is related to the politics of Russian memory. And European countries has been written. Such as: Conservatism and Memory Politics in Russia and Eastern Europe by Katalin Miklossy and Markku Kangaspuro 2022 or Russia and Europe in Memory Wars by Alexie Miller 2020. Therefore, it can be said that the subject and findings of the article that related to the African continent are contribution. The organization of the research is such that the theoretical framework of the research is stated at the beginning. Then we will discuss the background of the competition between Western countries and Russia in the African continent to be a precursor to the way Russia applies the memory policy in the African continent.

2. Conceptual Framework, Resources and Research Methods

The term “politics of memory strategy”, was first used in North America after World War II as a social and political necessity. Subsequently, among Latin American countries, this concept was strengthened after the establishment of democratic regimes in the 1980s and 1990s. Considering the high volume of researches related to memory and considering it as the creator of identity and the mediator of experience, some authors have preferred to speak of the "age of memory". This period is identified with the will to highlight the role of memory in the construction of social and political experiences, and due to the nature of the discourse, there is always a need to narrate those memories made collectively in a specific social and political context (Rufer,2012).

Maurice Halbwachs was the first sociologist to borrow the topic of memory in the field of social interactions. Rejecting the idea that memory is the result of the impact of real events on the human mind, he founded this thesis that people connect and create their memories based on the different forms of interaction they have with each other. Therefore, certain memories are constantly repeated in the family, others among the workers of a factory,

and so on, and since these people do not belong to just one unique and special group and are involved in many social relationships, individual differences in each memory represent the results. It is a path that every person experiences during his life. In this sense, individual memory only reveals the complexities of social interactions that each person experiences. In general, Halbwachs examined individual memory in relation to collective memories, arguing that the individual alone has no control over the retrieval of the past. Memory is formed by individuals and by social groups, and individual memories are the result of this process (Nascimento Araújo and Dos Santos, 2009).

By accepting Halbwachs's definition of memory, its role can no longer be limited to retrieve information and to think about surrounding matters. This means that memory does not simply obey reason, but follows the traditions that made our collective identity and we are unable to control it in a way. Since public identity activities have internal and external consequences, such scrutiny can affect not only national security, but also regional and international security (Haghi, Yousefi Jouybari and Shakeri Khoei, 2021). Therefore, deep human emotions such as love, hate, pain, suffering, and humiliation are independent of the will of individuals (Nascimento Araújo and Dos Santos, 2009) and are imposed on us by political and social structures or by power centers. From this point of view, the politics of memory is the institutional and structural way of facing the past (Rufer, 2012) or as defined by Maja Zehfus: it is world's political and macro-historical events that are imposed on a nation and are always in their minds (Devetak 2012). Therefore, the politics of memory cannot be neutral in its essence; Because it may affect the way we write, narrate, or our particular reading of political and social history and determine the way we face the present and the future. In a sense, it is not us who decide what to remember or forget, but it is the political and social construction that imposes it on us in various ways. Therefore, the knowledge and understanding obtained from memory is conditioned by historical and social contexts, and the power institutions try to exploit it for their own goals and interests (Vasegh and Mohamadi, 2019).

Leupold has divided the operational dimensions of memory politics into four parts: narrating, strategic silencing, performing and renaming/mapping. Narrating refers to the creation of a coherent story that makes the poverty of one's nation appear moral and holy (Leupold, 2020). At this stage, the

institution of politics and power tries to review the social history of the past and create and reproduce its own narratives. This section, which has a positive approach to political history and collective memory, is considered as the most important stage in the formation of politics of memory. Contrary to the narrative stage that follows a positive approach, strategic silencing tries to use a negative method to remove or hide the bitter events and historical humiliations that are rooted in the collective memory of a nation. At this stage, those memories associated with national and historical humiliation are removed or left in the shadows by advertising and propaganda systems. However, in order to create harmony in the history, the cut parts are restored and patched using a special method of narration. In performing phase, the power centers try to implement the constructed narratives by setting up advertising devices and using mediators such as radio, television, books and official newspapers. Renaming and mapping is the last stage of the formation of memory politics in Leopold's view and includes all policies that aim to change perception through renaming geographic spaces and creating new maps to describe this geography (Leupold,2020).

Richard Devetak considers genealogy to be a method of memory politics approach. Therefore, although Leupold speaks of four operational dimensions of memory politics, one more methodological dimension can be added to it, and that is genealogy. Genealogy is an intellectual-research method that was used by Michel Foucault to complete the archeological method course. Using this method, Foucault was trying to study the importance of power relations and politics, or in more precise terms, its impact on the awareness and cognition of subjects. According to Michel Foucault, genuine human knowledge and cognition, especially in the social field, is practically devoid of meaning and is always influenced by value relationships, interests and power relations.

Genealogy focuses on the processes through which we construct origins and give meaning to particular representations of the past. Representations that continuously guide our daily life and set clear boundaries in front of political and social options (Devetak,2012).

Although the study of history is inevitable in genealogy, the point of this method is not the study of history for the sake of history, but the study of history in relation to today's interests and phenomes. Therefore, in the framework of the genealogical method, analyzing the issue of power and its

impact on awareness and knowledge, zero degree and sources, discontinuity and discovery of discourses, language, identity and interests are very important. At the end of this section, it is necessary to explain that some governments, in order to protect their history and collective identity, have taken initiatives in the field of politics of memory, including the initiative of the Russian government in setting up a commission called the Falsifications of History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests in 2009 noted that it was tasked with reviving Russia's political history (Koposov 2011). In any case, Medvedev's history commission was dissolved by a new presidential decree on 14 February 2012, a few weeks before the presidential elections that year (Kolsto,2019).

3. Africa, Scene of Narrative Competition between West and Russia

The African continent is one of the geographical spaces that, according to the basic conditions and frameworks such as opportunities and suitable geo-economic components, has special conditions that low-cost actors can have the best exploitation there (Janparvour and Others,2023). The history of the competition between Russia and West led by the United States of America in Africa should be attributed to the post World War II period, especially the early 1960s. After the Second World War and with the revelation of the ideological conflicts between East and West, the relations between former allies turned cold and hostile over the spread of influence in the world. Although this competition was initially limited to Europe, but with the beginning of the decolonization period, the African continent, especially its southern and central parts, became a new stage to fill the power vacuum and strategic competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. As one of the two superpowers, the Soviet Union was determined to increase its dominance and influence throughout the world. During the 1960s and 1990s, Africa was an ideal opportunity for the Soviet Union to expand its influence and power by shaping and changing the political, cultural, and economic systems that had been established by European powers over the past centuries. Considering this, The Soviet Union adopted two types of strategies and policies in relation to African countries: stimulating African countries to regional cooperation or at least adopting a non-aligned orientation, and secondly supporting them in their struggles against European powers, especially the liberation of their territories. Those who were still under colonial rule(Fink,2020:29-30). For the Soviet Union, helping the decolonization process in Africa was defined in line with the

global struggle against capitalism; Because decolonization and capitalism were two sides of the same coin, fighting with one was considered as fighting with the other (Fink,2020:32).

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 temporarily ended Russia's effective role in the African continent. The socialist camp was significantly weakened and 9 embassies and trade missions of the (former) Soviet Union were closed. The strategic void left by this departure was quickly filled by the Western powers and China (Vazin,2019). Since Vladimir Putin took office in 2007, Russia has been rebuilding its lost power and influence on the African continent and has increasingly increased its military, economic and cultural involvement. The main advantage of Russia is to rely on former Soviet policies in Africa. At that time, Moscow supported the anti-colonial independence and liberation movements and provided development assistance and educational and cultural exchange programs with African countries. The imposition of Western sanctions and the expulsion of Russia from the Group of Eight following Russia's attack on Ukraine in 2014 and the simultaneous competition with China and India for access to global markets and natural resources, the desire to expansion of influence in Africa, which after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia ignored, pursued more vigorously (Paczyńska,2020).

In Russia's strategic thinking, Africa is effective on several fronts to advance Russia's political and economic interests; First, African countries with young populations and developing economies provide a good opportunity for the export of Russian goods and energy. Second, the existence of ongoing civil wars in Africa and recently the widespread presence of terrorist groups in the Sahel region, have made this continent suitable for the transfer and sale of Russian weapons. Third, African countries with rich natural resources such as gold, diamonds and uranium can meet Russia's needs for strategic minerals. At the fourth level, Russia can get rid of the sanctions and isolation imposed by the West by using the diplomatic capacities of African countries, which have a total of 54 votes in the UN General Assembly and 3 rotating votes in the UN Security Council.

At the first Russia-Africa meeting known as the Sochi Summit held in 2019, Putin spoke of his government's great interest in close cooperation with African countries and considered this continent to be the most important priority of Russia's foreign policy. The summit was also an opportunity for Putin's government to negotiate with more than 30 African countries in the

field of military and weapons cooperation and prepare the conditions for large investments in security, technology and extractive industries such as oil, gas, gold and other minerals. It should be noted that the volume of exchanges between the two sides after Sochi summit has reached more than 20 billion dollars, of which the share of Russian exports is estimated to be 15 billion dollars. It was expected that this level of cooperation would improve with the holding of the second Russia-Africa meeting in mid-June 2023, and Russia would become a serious competitor for the main partners of African countries, namely China, India and Turkey. Currently, according to Vladimir Putin, the volume of trade between Russia and Africa has increased by approximately 35% despite the presence of international sanctions and the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic (Africanews, 2023).

A major part of Russia's exports to African countries is grain, food and military weapons. In 2022, the country exported 4.7 billion dollars' worth of grains and food to African countries and took over 49% of the total African arms market. Russia has developed its military cooperation with African countries within the framework of the "weapons versus resources" strategy and has become the largest arms exporter to the continent. Fighter planes, helicopters, tanks and air defense systems are among the most important items exported by Russia to African countries. In the field of nuclear energy, Russia has also entered into negotiations with some African countries, including Egypt, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Sudan and Zambia. In this regard, the state company "Russ Atom" has started to build the first nuclear power plant in Egypt with a contract (Seigel, Russia's Strategic Goals in Africa, 2021a).

Russia's cooperation with African countries is not limited to military and economic fields. The former Soviet Union's anti-colonial presence in Africa has provided an opportunity to implement Russian soft power and cultural policies. Cultural activities in Africa, especially in the fields of student exchange, literature, music, film, etc., follow the normalization of Russia's presence and the formation of a positive mentality. Through their branches, Russian cultural centers provide numerous almost free services for attracting youth and full and half-full scholarships for higher studies in Russia every year.

One of Russia's programs is called the World of Africa, which calls for an "African identity awareness" for all Africans and is based on the model established by President Putin on June 21, 2007 as the Russian World

Vision, and the culture of Russian power beyond It is responsible for drawing the current borders and promoting peace and understanding in the world by supporting, strengthening and encouraging the Russian language, heritage and culture.

Promoting the Russian language in African countries, along with the expansion of cultural communication, can also help to strengthen economic relations and weaken the presence of the West (Vazin,2019). At the same time as the level of Russian-African cooperation expands, extensive propaganda has been launched against the interests of this country by Western governments. They accuse Russia of providing false information, militarizing and supporting a mercenary contractor group called Wagner, which has effectively become part of Russia's instrument of influence in Africa. Joseph Siegel, director of African research affiliated with the United States of America, says about this: In every part of Africa where the Wagner group is active, it has acted as a destabilizing force, their security has worsened and human rights violations have increased (Seigel, Using Africa as a Stage at the Russia–Africa Summit 2023b).

With the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the escalation of food insecurity in Africa, the ground was increasingly laid for the destruction of Russia's image. Our intention here is not to deal with the causes and roots of the war between Ukraine and Russia. The fact is that this war has extensive regional and extra-regional consequences. Among its extra-regional consequences, we can mention food insecurity in different regions of the world, especially the African continent; because two countries are responsible for 13% of the world's wheat production and 30% of the export of this product. These two countries are also the largest exporters of corn and agricultural inputs such as potassium, phosphorus and nitrogen fertilizers. Therefore, the war between Russia and Ukraine not only had negative effects on global food security, but also had important consequences for those African countries that were highly dependent on the food resources of these two countries (Rochat,2022). In the framework of the narrative competition that exists between Russia and Western countries in the African continent, Western governments accuse Russia of being the sole culprit of this crisis and of exporting hunger to the world, especially the African continent. According to Western governments, Putin is using famine as a weapon to advance his war machine, just as Stalin used it to kill millions of Ukrainians.

In a July 2021 memo before traveling to four African countries, Egypt, Ethiopia, Uganda, and the Republic of Congo, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov rejected these accusations and called the issue of US and European sanctions the main cause of the global food crisis and added: "The Russian government is seriously implementing its obligations under the treaties that oblige Russia to export food, fertilizer, energy and other vital items." He calls such accusations another attempt by the West to blame someone else and states: "We know very well that during the Corona pandemic, the West collectively blocked the flow of goods and food by using the currency diffusion mechanism and worsened the situation of developing countries dependent on food imports. It was at that time that the dire situation of the food market took shape. Western sanctions against Russia in recent months intensified the negative trend of insecurity. It is imperative that all our African friends understand that Russia adheres to its obligations under international agreements in good faith and will continue to implement them in the future. Food security issues are currently on the international agenda. We are well aware of the importance of supplying important social goods, including Russian food, to many countries. We are fully aware that these resources play an important role in maintaining social stability and also in achieving the criteria of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Moscow will continue to pursue a peaceful foreign policy and play a balancing role in international affairs. We are in favor of extensive intergovernmental cooperation based on the provisions of the United Nations Charter, first of all the principle of equality of sovereignty of states. We will continue to strengthen constructive interaction with foreign partners who, in turn, are willing to cooperate with us" (Lavrov, *Russia And Africa: A Future Bound Partnership* 2022a).

The European leaders refer to this comment by Mr. Lavrov and other Kremlin officials as Russia's new propaganda in Africa and the project of purifying this country from the burden of food insecurity in the world and especially on the African continent. According to these countries, as the Kremlin claims, food insecurity is not caused by the sanctions that the United States and many other European countries have imposed in response to Russia's brutal aggression against Ukraine. Food insecurity existed before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but this war has exacerbated the growing trend of food insecurity. Russia loots Ukrainian grain fields and attacks merchant ships in the Black Sea. By providing this false information to

countries at risk of food insecurity, Russia is trying to avoid the pressure of sanctions that are primarily designed to stop the war in Ukraine.

4. Russia and the Use of Politics of Memory Strategy in Africa

During the last few decades with Neurology Science progress, the idea that memory only has a series of personal functions and is limited to retrieve information about surrounding matters, has been rejected. The social aspect of memory, which plays an essential role in the construction of the political identity of the members of the society, was emphasized.

By examining Russia's behavioral and competitive pattern towards European and Western countries, it is clearly possible to consider the implementation of the above four processes and the memory policy strategy in general in the African continent. Through representing the bitter experience of European colonialism and reviving the memory of its anti-colonial presence, this country is trying to strengthen the foundations of Russia's influence in the African continent and to raise doubts about the legitimacy of the presence of European and former colonial countries. The discourse of colonialism and anti-colonialism is the main genealogical keyword of the Russian authorities not only in relation to African countries, but it has also been used to justify the attack on Ukraine. In a speech before the war, Putin asked whether the Ukrainians understood that their country had been reduced to the level of a Western colony with a puppet government. The colonization/decolonization discourse tends to support narratives of Russia as a power capable of liberating Ukraine and the non-Western world from Western colonial hegemony (Tolz and Hutchings, 2023).

Also, this country, using the vast capacity of new social networks, has put the implementation and execution of constructed narratives on the agenda. The official media, including Sputnik and the RT network, have been strengthened in both English and French in order to influence the public opinion of the African continent and promote Russian policies. The main content of these two media for Africa is to criticize the practices and policies of the former colonial powers, especially France, which they describe as imperialist. In addition, a former employee of Google's public policy team claims that Russia invests in Google AdWords campaigns to provide information to search engines linked to Google and used in Africa. which is published by Russian media such as Sputnik, RT, Tass, etc., rate them. The goal is to maximize the access to this information in the main

traditional and social media of Africa (Kalika,2019) and to direct the public opinion of citizens.

Hiding the crimes of tsarist Russia and the (former) Soviet Union is another important step of Russia in implementing the memory policy strategy. Despite the fact that the Russian authorities do not claim any ideological considerations in establishing relations with African countries and consider themselves free from the black history of colonialism on the African continent, the collective memory of other parts of the world, including Russia's periphery, Eastern Europe and Asia is full of occupation, exploitation and crimes that were left behind by the Russian tsars and the leaders of the Soviet Union. There is no doubt about the fact that the identity of tsarist Russia and especially the (former) Soviet Union is intertwined with war, aggression and violence, especially in the aforementioned areas. But it is an undeniable fact that in the collective memory of African nations, the Russians have left a bright and positive record due to their continuous support for independence movements and national liberation movements.

The Soviet Union supported the FLN during the Algerian War of Independence (1950s) and became the first country to recognize the newly independent Algerian government. In this decade, Jamal Abdel Nasser began to pursue an anti-imperialist policy, which immediately attracted the enthusiastic support of the communist government of the Soviet Union. These are actually part of the support approach of the former Soviet Union during the Cold War. By highlighting this part of African history, the Russian propaganda machine is trying to make the identity and historical assets of the Soviet Union in order to deepen its influence in the African continent and to direct the public opinion of the nations of this region. Part of the Russian government's project is focused on discrediting the West's position in the eyes of African public opinion by addressing the black history of colonialism on the continent. In Russia's narrating, European countries have basically reached their current prosperity by plundering weak nations and caused the actual situation in the African continent. In fact, structural poverty, hunger, food insecurity, health problems and violence are the legacy of the West and the colonial period for African countries. Therefore, if there is permanent war and internal conflict in Africa, it is better to look for its roots in the colonial policies of the West and the artificial drawing of African borders. According to the Russian authorities and Putin himself, this colonial practice between Western and African

countries still exists and manifests itself in different forms and dimensions. He describes the procedure of the Russian government as different from that of Western countries, which try to impose their own values, conditions and policies.

Part of the Russian government's project is focused on discrediting the West's position in the eyes of African public opinion by addressing the black history of colonialism on the continent. In Russia's narration, European countries basically reached their current prosperity and prosperity by looting weak nations, and on the other hand, they caused the situation that we are witnessing now in the African continent. In fact, phenomena such as structural poverty and hunger, food insecurity, health and persistent violence are the legacy of the West and the colonial period for African countries. Therefore, if there is permanent war and internal conflict in Africa, it is better to look for its roots in the colonial policies of the West and the artificial drawing of African borders. But Putin describes the procedure of the Russian government as different from European countries, which does not seek to impose any special conditions and policies in relation to Africa (Guensburg,2022).

According to him, unlike the West, Russia not only seeks to exploit African nations, but also wants to implement a multipolar world order whose lines have already been drawn and the formation of a fairer and more democratic international system. to help There is no doubt that Africa will find its rightful place next to Asia, the Middle East and Latin America and finally get rid of the bitter legacy of colonialism and its new ways... The partnership relations between our country and Africa have strong and deep roots. And it has always been associated with stability, trust and goodwill. We have consistently supported the people of Africa in their struggle to free themselves from colonial oppression, and our respect for the sovereignty of African countries, their traditions and values, their willingness to independently determine their own destiny and freely establish relations with partners remains unchanged (Putin,2023).

Lavrov, taking a similar position, pointed to the brilliant history of Russia in the African continent and said: "We are basically a country that has not been contaminated by the bloody crime of colonialism in the African continent and has always supported them in the struggle to get rid of oppression and colonialism. Today, we agree with the African demands to complete the decolonization process and support relevant initiatives in the framework of

the United Nations. At the same time, I especially emphasize that our country does not impose anything on anyone and does not tell others how to live. We have great respect for the sovereignty of African countries and their inalienable right to determine the path of development. We firmly adhere to the principle of African solutions for African problems. Such an approach to the development of intergovernmental relations is in stark contrast to the lord-serf logic imposed by the former colonial countries and the outdated model of colonialism that is being reproduced now" (Lavrov, *Russia And Africa: A Future Bound Partnership* 2022a).

Duhamel and Devonshire-Ellis add in this regard: "unlike its European neighbors, Russia has no colonial heritage in Africa and can only support the governments' desire to get rid of the remnants of the colonial era". In this way, the presence of Russia in the region does not make Africans feel threatened. Russia is seen as a more transactional and pragmatic partner whose outcomes are clear—certainly more reliable than a former colonial power potentially harboring ulterior motives. Russia's desire to see a world in which there is not one but several centers of power (and that our core institutions and standards should ultimately reflect this) is a shared African vision to the extent that it can have greater influence in charting the course of its goals and objectives. To have a global development tool" (Duhamel and Devonshire-Ellis, 2023). Russia and most African leaders appear to share a common vision of colonialism, modernization, and nation-building, which has been gradually reinforced by Russia's interest in African resources and markets (Kohnert, 2022).

Of course, it should also be noted that Russia's activism in Africa's economic and defense-security structures in recent years has fueled contradictory narrating by some European countries as well as the United States of America. In this narrating, Russia has been accused of providing false information, supporting illegal groups and coup governments, and militarizing the African continent through military contracts and arms exports. As an example, French President Emmanuel Macron addresses the opening session of the New Global Financial Pact summit at the Palais Brongniart in Paris on June 22, 2023 that Russia is a destabilizing force in Africa and he cited Moscow's deployment of mercenary groups there (Aljazeera, Kremlin rejects Macron charges that it is 'destabilising' Africa, 2023). These narrating have become more intense especially after the start of the war in Ukraine and the appearance of Russia as an aggressor in

the eyes of the world public opinion. The vast majority of tweets and speeches by European and American leaders are aimed at accusing Russia of causing global hunger, violating the basic principles of the United Nations Charter, i.e. the principle of sovereignty, as well as crimes against humanity and genocide.

As mentioned, Russian military operations took place from eastern Ukraine (Hafeznia,2023) in February 2022 under the pretext of protecting Russian citizens. Immediately, the European Union and the United States of America imposed sanctions against this country and demanded an end to the war in Ukraine. Since the beginning of the invasion, the United Nations General Assembly has issued five resolutions, in one of which it was decided to suspend Russia's membership in the Human Rights Council. Also, in its first resolution, which was issued on March 2022, the General Assembly reaffirmed the sovereignty of Ukraine with an overwhelming majority and demanded Russia's unconditional withdrawal from this country (Gopaldas,2023).

In one of the investigations supported by the United Nations, Russia has been accused of war crimes in this country in addition to aggression and violation of Ukraine's sovereignty. Investigators say that the forced transfer and deportation of Ukrainian children by Russia within the framework of the filtration or forced separation system can be considered a clear example of a war crime and a crime against humanity. Among possible crimes against humanity, investigators point to repeated Russian attacks targeting Ukrainian infrastructure, which have displaced hundreds of thousands of people in extreme cold without any heating or electricity systems. They also reveal the tortures that took place mainly in the areas occupied by Russia.

Erik Møse, the judge of the Supreme Court of Norway and the European Court of Human Rights, who led the investigation, said: "There were elements of planning and resources available that showed that Russia committed crimes against humanity by resorting to torture." (Aljazeera, UN-backed investigation accuses Russia of war crimes in Ukraine,2023).

In order to counter such negative narrating, the Russian media and official space narrates the nature of the war in Ukraine in a different way and it is the result of the West's unnecessary interference in disrupting Eurasian geopolitics, ignoring the fundamental rights of Russians Donbas region and the violation of the agreement signed in Minsk (2015). Naturally, one of the primary goals of the Eurasian regionalism strategy in Russia is to attract the

republics “near abroad”. Moscow pursues two main goals in this direction. One is to strengthen political, economic, and security relations with near abroad countries and the other is to prevent the influence of world powers around Russia. Russian Eurasianism goals are at odds with the expansion of Western institutions to the East (Veicy,2023). Therefore, according to the Russian officials, what the Western governments refer to as aggression against the territorial integrity of Ukraine, is just a special operation to save the people who are oppressed by the neo-Nazi government of Ukraine. They also respond to the film published in the Ukrainian and Western media about the crime and killing of civilians in Bucha village, calling it a clichéd and outdated strategy to destroy the image of Russia and a pretext for imposing extensive Western sanctions. Lavrov adds in this regard: "Consider the year 1999, the "village of Racak" in the autonomous province of Kosovo, when a group of inspectors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe arrived there to investigate. In their field research, they showed corpses dressed in civilian clothes and used the title of crime against humanity and genocide. NATO member states immediately ordered an attack on Yugoslavia after seeing this scene. Years later, evidence was found that the bodies found were members of the Kosovo Liberation Army, an illegal armed group, dressed only in civilian clothes. But at the time, this staged incident claimed its victims and paved the way for an illegal attack on a key member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. William Walker, head of the Kosovo Fact-Finding Committee, later stated that whatever the outcome of the war in Kosovo was, it was in America's favor to establish its largest military base in the Balkans. Therefore, there is a very simple fact about the fabricated crime of Bucha, and that is the destruction of Russia's image in the public opinion and the imposition of cruel sanctions against a country that has nothing to do with the tragedy of April 2022 (Bucha village)" (Lavrov, Staged incidents as the Western approach to doing politics,2022b).

In the competitive atmosphere created after the Ukraine war, the tweets and comments of both sides have tended to be somewhat more extreme. In order to counter and neutralize the strategy of the West, Putin describes them as economic bandits and states that Russia does not have a history of slavery and colonialism, while Europe does (Blankenship,2022). He calls the people of Western countries "one billion golden people" who tend to impose their rules and norms, which are based on the illusion of

exceptionality, on other nations of the world. He considers the model of Western domination to be completely unfair; because this model divides the people of the world into first and second degree and therefore it is inherently racist and neo-colonial (Tass,2022). Putin also refers to the Corona era, how the West, by absorbing the world's goods and food flows, and by imposing the most severe sanctions against Russia, has created a situation in food-dependent countries such as Africa, which they are now protesting against. However, such comments seem to be more welcome in Africa.

In South Africa, a social media influencer retweets Russian-produced content to his growing audience of 148,000 followers. On the television channel "Africa Media", which is a television channel based in Cameroon and watched by millions of Africans, and recently signed a cooperation agreement with the Russian state channel "RT", he regularly praises Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Peltier and Others,2023).

Regarding the current situation of food security, the Ugandan state radio says: Many ordinary people in Uganda do not associate the global food crisis with the ongoing war in Ukraine, and President Museveni, taking a similar position, considers the ban on the entry of Russian ships to international ports as the only factor of escalation of causing food crisis in Africa. The non-compliance of 26 African countries with the anti-Russian resolution of the UN General Assembly (17 abstentions, 8 abstentions, 1 vote against) and the occurrence of a series of anti-Western coups and recent riots in West Africa in which protesters carried the Russian flag, all confirm activism. The influence of this country on official structures and information spaces in Africa.

In order to infiltrate these information spaces and subsequently provoke public opinion in Africa, the Russians have not been oblivious to the common techniques in the politics of memory and creation. Using mediators such as Tik Tok, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, they try to narrate the political and historical past of Africa in a way that serves the national interests and the expansion of Russia's influence. Russia's narrative in this context is focused on purifying the Soviet imperial image and representing the history of the black continent of Africa by European governments and plundering the resources of the nations of this region. according to a 2020 study, 68 percent of young Africans had a favorable opinion of Russia(Millon,2024). Russia's influence and popularity among African public opinion, which showed itself in the carrying of the country's flags and

anti-French demonstrations in Burkina Faso, has been carried out by the power of Russia's anti-imperialist rhetoric and the country's troll farms. These trolls, which at that time were mostly organized by Yevgeny Prigozhin, the former leader of the Wagner group, introduced the instability in the Sahel region caused by the interventionism and inaction of the Western countries. The information that these networks provided to the public opinion of the Sahel region was that the former colonialists are trying to control the people of African countries once again. For this purpose, the former colonialists filled these areas with terrorists and bandit groups so that they could make this control effective. This propaganda, in turn, led to the formation of anti-French sentiments in Mali and Burkina Faso, and as a result, the withdrawal of these country's troops. "The impact of the Russians' digital influence systems is actually difficult to measure," says Jonathan Guiffard. "Regime changes in West Africa are above all the result of social problems, poverty, violence by jihadist groups and indiscriminate repression by the armed forces. The Russians are 'riding the waves' of protest that already existed. But[these trolls, by producing a large volume of anti-Western messages], created the risk of changing the perception of the people of this region in the long term (Rio,2024).

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to explain the nature of Russia's competitive pattern with western countries in Africa. By examining this competitive model, it was found that Russia has enjoyed the memory policy strategy to Expansion of influence in this continent and compete with Western countries by using the advantage of the Soviet Union's anti-colonial heritage and highlighting the bad history of Western colonialism in Africa. The paper considered the use of " politics of memory " strategy to expand Russia's influence and to weaken the position of European countries in this continent. The findings of the paper, which are the result of qualitative analysis method and evaluation of the collected data, validate our hypotheses. by speeches and tweets, Russian officials bring forward the history of European countries' relations with Africa and by the genealogy of colonialism, insinuate to African citizens that despite the independence of African countries, exploitative relations are clearly in cultural, educational and economic fields are still standing. The failure of France and the European Union in curbing violence in the Sahel region has strengthened this hypothesis even more among African citizens. The first country in the Sahel

region where anti-French sentiments were aroused in the shadow of failed anti-terrorist operations was Mali, which hosted French forces in the form of the Serval operation since 2013. This operation, with the expansion of jihadi forces' activities in the Sahel region, later changed its name to the Barkhane operation, an operation that was formed in cooperation with the forces of the Five Sahel Group in order to establish stability and confront jihadist groups. Then, with the support of France, the European governments sent their special forces in the form of the Takuba operation to fight against radical Islamists in Mali and Sahel region. Although these governments were successful in implementing tactical operations, the expansion of the scope of activities of jihadist groups even after the death of Adnan Abu Walid Sahrawi, the leader of the Islamic State in the Great Sahara and Abdelmalek Droukdel, the leader of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, showed that the forces stationed in the region, despite the claim of the beneficiary governments, could not achieve the strategic goals defined in the framework of the Barkhane and Takuba operations, which was to weaken and finally destroy the radical Muslim groups.

This failure fueled anti-European and anti-French sentiment in the Sahel region, leading to the country's withdrawal from Mali, Burkina Faso and, more recently, Niger. Of course, the direction of the developments in the three mentioned countries also raises another reality, and that is the growing influence of the Russian government, which has brought a large part of the public opinion with it. It is expected that due to the developments related to energy security in Europe, along with the imposition of housing costs for Ukrainian refugees and the reduction of Western development aid, Russia's influence in the security, military and economic structures of Africa will further strengthen.

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