



## Phenomena of colonialism and postcolonialism in the context of modern Ukrainian realities

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**Abstract.** When Ukrainian researchers assert that Russia's policy towards Ukraine was colonial, this claim is often questioned by Western scholars. Russian-Ukrainian relations do not neatly fit into such a model. Therefore, the key question of this study was: to what extent is it justified to define Russian Ukrainian relations as colonial, given that Ukraine's current and future development largely depends on the decolonisation of Ukrainian consciousness? This study aimed to define the concept of "colonialism", substantiate the thesis given that Ukraine was colonised by Russia, and develop decolonisation practices. To achieve this, the study employed empirical methods alongside theoretical research methods, including analytical, synthetic, phenomenological, and philosophical reflection. Furthermore, interdisciplinary research methods such as case study, commemorative, philosophical, and historical analysis were utilised. At present, Ukraine is experiencing a postcolonial condition, which results from its historical statelessness, dependence on Russia, and a systemic policy of denationalisation imposed by the metropole. This policy has included the enforcement of an inferiority complex, the suppression of claims to Ukraine's language, culture, and elite, the erosion of national dignity, and assimilation into the dominant imperial identity. While empires collapse under the pressure of objective factors, Russia, as an imperial centre, actively resists these processes – primarily through open military aggression, sabotage, and information warfare, including psychological manipulations. The postcolonial condition of Ukrainian society manifests in a fragmented national self-identification, an unstable value system, disrupted cultural codes, and deep seated psychological crises at the archetypal level of consciousness. This is further reflected in linguistic disputes, religious conflicts, and other socio-cultural tensions. The practical significance of this study lies in its conclusion that overcoming the negative postcolonial consequences is essential for achieving freedom, advancing

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European integration, strengthening national identity, and promoting humanistic values. The study aimed to liberate Ukrainian consciousness from post imperial manipulative practices

**Keywords:** postcolonial practices; ethnocide; linguicide; manipulation of history; sociocultural transformations; historical trauma; national identity

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## Introduction

The topic of decolonisation has gained prominence in modern academic discourse. This development has been driven by globalisation processes, which have blurred the boundaries between colonies and metropolises while expanding decolonial political geography against the backdrop of transnational convergence. Given this, the methodology of postcolonial research is evolving: “Calls for decolonising theory, knowledge, methods, and the university have gained traction in academia” (Kamal & Courtheyn, 2024). The colonial practices of the past were based on explicit racial, geographical, cultural, and economic divisions and were later reinterpreted by the collapse of empires and the decline of the Western-centric model of the world. These postcolonial studies examine fundamental shifts in Western military doctrine, the diversification of cultural and economic relations between former colonisers and the colonised, the transformation of memory politics, the dismantling of white and Eurocentric canons, the promotion of linguistic pluralism, and the universalisation of knowledge. Within post-modern academic discourse, it has been proposed that transcending identity politics – through the fusion of cultures, identities, and styles – constitutes a step towards liberation from classical metanarratives and the establishment of a just international order in the context of globalisation and advancements in communication technologies. Accordingly, researchers C. Yan & M. Benhima (2024) emphasise the importance of legal pluralism, which involves the integration of customary law into formal legislative frameworks. According to the authors, this approach contributes to “pluralism’s importance in fostering inclusive governance, resolving historical grievances,

promoting social cohesion, and embracing diversity..., and the enhancement of local governance structures and community involvement”.

In the current study, typical postcolonial interpretations were applied to Russian-Ukrainian relations through the ontologisation and critical reflection of postcolonial issues. The main argument of the study was that, although Russian-Ukrainian relations do not fully conform to the conventional “metropole-colony” model, they nevertheless exhibit its characteristics. In G. Cigliano’s (2024) study, conducted in the context of the 2014 Russian invasion of Ukraine and aimed at periodising Russia’s return to great-power politics through an analysis of its geopolitical strategies, Russian policy towards Ukraine is characterised as imperial. However, from the perspective of the authors of this article, Russia has never abandoned its pro-imperial narratives. Thus, attempts to periodise its policies fail to reflect the actual situation. This issue constituted the core focus of the current study, as Russian great-power politics ultimately resulted in the colonisation of Ukraine.

The Ukrainian struggle for liberation from colonial dependence culminated in the outbreak of a full-scale war. Expanding on this idea, M Olcese *et al.* (2024) examined Ukrainian refugee communities in Italy. The authors concluded that a collective identity had formed among Ukrainian refugees, serving as a unifying factor in overcoming the traumas and hardships of war. They identify key indicators of identity resilience as faith, spirituality, information communication, leadership ability, and social support. The phenomenon of a resilient Ukrainian collective identity, shaped by complex and socially significant unifying factors, can be defined as “national identity”. In

general, in modern Ukrainian studies, particularly in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the issue of national identity as both a phenomenon of collective belonging and a foundation of national and international security has become a focal point of academic inquiry (Mudrakov *et al.*, 2023). In particular, P. Horinov & R. Drapushko (2022) assert that “an inclusive sense of national identity remains critically important for supporting a successful modern political order” as this presupposes citizens’ political consciousness and a social consensus on addressing the nation’s past, present, and future within the framework of Ukraine’s European aspirations. Researchers O. Marukhovska-Kartunova *et al.* (2025) draw attention to a socio-cultural dichotomy in Ukraine, resulting from the significant influence of Russian culture on national self-identification. They identify war as a catalyst for Ukraine’s decolonisation processes and socio-cultural transformation: “These changes are fostering a more robust national identity, enhancing the societal aspect of this identity, and catalysing a shift from feelings of inferiority to a rise in national pride and patriotism”.

This analysis underscored the relevance of interpreting Russian-Ukrainian relations through the lens of colonialism. Thus, the purpose of this study was to conduct a comparative analysis of colonialism to substantiate the claim that Ukraine was colonised by Russia and to develop decolonisation practices aimed at liberating Ukrainian consciousness and consolidating the nation around shared national identity values.

### Literature Review

Modern dictionaries define postcolonialism as follows: “A line of thinking in philosophy, theology, political science, history, and literature since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that seeks to understand the consequences of colonial rule. As an ideological movement, postcolonialism is concerned with identity, culture, and literature in the sense of cultural conflict between former or current colonies and colonising countries” (Moore, 2001). Historical perspectives on

colonisation processes have undergone significant revision, incorporating the discourse of multiculturalism, the rise of social movements, and the growing emphasis on reconciliation. At the same time, it should be noted that the discourse of decolonisation primarily centres on the opposition between the Global North and the Global South, which is understandable in the context of the collapse of major Western empires. The descendants of colonisers have assumed responsibility for the actions of their predecessors, leading to a sense of guilt and remorse that has prompted efforts to compensate for the negative consequences experienced by (post)colonised peoples (Bruckner, 2012).

E. Thompson (2006) articulated this position at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries: “It is tough for a modern Ukrainian to imagine himself outside the Russian context... This results from a long-term, generation-by-generation, imperial cultural policy”. However, the author’s insights did not gain traction in the early 2000s. It took a quarter of a century and a major war to recognise Ukraine’s colonial condition, critically reassess three hundred years of history, and develop decolonial practices.

Awareness of the colonial nature of the spread of communist ideology and governance in the Russian Empire/USSR is evident in several scholarly research. In particular, V. Velickovic (2012), in examining the wartime experience of the former Yugoslavia, notes the connection between the communist regime and colonial practices in Eastern Europe and considers solutions for overcoming them. Yugoslavia is also depicted as an artificial pro-imperial entity that disintegrated through the liberation struggles of its constituent parts. In analysing postcolonial practices, Polish researcher H. Cervinkova (2012) compares them with the concept of postsocialism, which was proposed to Eastern European countries as a framework for overcoming the consequences of the socialist past. However, the concept is of questionable value, representing an unjustified expansion of the categorical framework with additional notions that lack epistemological utility

in understanding colonialism within the Eastern European model. This hegemonic epistemology of postsocialism distinguishes it significantly from postcolonialism and raises questions about its usefulness as an intellectually empowering tool for scholars in addressing local inequities arising from the effects of global capitalism.

A similar notion, termed “socialist postcolonialism”, is explored by another Polish researcher, A. Sosnowska (2019), who examines it in the context of the “reconsolidation” of memory. The key argument is that the ideology of socialist bloc countries aimed to construct a collective memory among the population centred on the values of “fraternal peoples”, “ideological kinship”, and other constructs intended to unite communities based on ideological markers and artificial notions of class solidarity. The dissolution of the socialist bloc halted such attempts and allowed for the formation of collective memory based on markers of national and ethnic commonality, rather than class or ideological affiliation. The fate of the nations that were part of the USSR, especially the so-called Union Republics, was even more tragic. For example, B. Krzysztan (2022) uses the terms “region of memory” and “interpretation of the neo-imperial ladder” in analysing Russian policy towards subjugated peoples. He introduces concepts such as “region of memory”, “repository of the stairs”, “interpretation of neo-imperial narratives”, “multi-level mnemonic appeals”, and “discourse of ‘liberation’”, which describe attitudes towards the Soviet and imperial past, as well as the significance of their study. The author’s perspective is shaped by his own first-hand experience of colonial Russian policy and the occupation of Georgia. B. Krzysztan (2022) states: “Not only has the abuse and misuse of history been deeply ingrained in Russian politics but, to a significant extent, these might become the basis for the acceptance of imperial genocidal aggression..., despite the extensive research on memory and its use in Russia, the dangers and consequences of a distorted politics of memory at the state level must be still exposed by researchers. There

is no room for the search for neutral narratives”. Therefore, as evidenced by the diverse scholarly perspectives presented, understanding the colonial dimensions of Russian/Soviet influence in Eastern Europe requires critical engagement with postcolonial theory and a rejection of misleading or inadequate concepts such as postsocialism.

### Materials and Methods

This study employed a multifaceted methodological approach, drawing upon a combination of philosophical and scientific methods to investigate the complex nature of Russian-Ukrainian relations and their potential classification as colonial. A dialectical approach provided a framework for understanding the dynamic interplay of historical processes and the evolving nature of the relationship between the two nations. This approach allowed for the examination of contradictions and transformations over time, recognising that historical narratives are not static but subject to continuous reinterpretation and re-evaluation. Analytical methods were utilised to deconstruct the intricate phenomena of social life that have emerged from this relationship, including denationalisation, marginalisation, assimilation, ethnocide, and linguicide. These methods facilitated the identification of causal relationships and the unravelling of complex social dynamics. To ensure a comprehensive understanding, a contextual approach was employed to situate these phenomena within their specific historical and cultural contexts. This contextualisation involved examining the political, economic, social, and cultural factors that have shaped the relationship between Russia and Ukraine over time. Furthermore, the study adopted a commemorative approach, focusing on the social memory of the Ukrainian nation and the identification of potential gaps or distortions within this collective memory. This was crucial for understanding how historical narratives are constructed, maintained, and potentially manipulated.

The research design incorporated both empirical and theoretical methodologies. Empirical

methods were employed to gather factual evidence supporting the thesis of Ukrainian colonisation by Russia. This involved examining historical documents, archival materials, statistical data, and other relevant sources to establish a factual basis for the arguments presented. Theoretical research methods, including analytical, synthetic, and philosophical reflection, were used to interpret and synthesise the collected empirical data. These methods enabled a deeper understanding of the core issues at stake and facilitated the construction of a coherent theoretical framework. A phenomenological approach was adopted to identify and describe the essential characteristics of the phenomena under investigation, focusing on the lived experiences and perceptions of those affected by the historical processes under scrutiny. This approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of the subjective dimensions of colonisation and its lasting impact on Ukrainian society.

Moreover, the study adopted an interdisciplinary approach, drawing upon insights from various fields, including history, philosophy, sociology, political science, and cultural studies. Specific interdisciplinary methods employed included case study analysis, focusing on specific historical events and periods to illustrate broader trends; commemorative studies, examining how historical events are remembered and commemorated; and philosophical-historical analysis, providing a deeper understanding of the ideological and historical underpinnings of the relationship between Russia and Ukraine. This interdisciplinary approach aimed to provide a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the complex historical and contemporary dynamics at play, leading to more robust and nuanced conclusions. This comprehensive methodology ensured a thorough investigation of the research question.

## Results and Discussion

### **Ontologisation and reflection on postcolonial issues in Ukraine**

The centuries-old relations between Ukraine and Russia have been interpreted in a colonial

context, with Russia portrayed as a country with deeply rooted imperial traditions. From a historical perspective, the Russian Empire took shape during the reign of Peter the Great (17<sup>th</sup> – early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries). An atypical feature of this empire, which distinguished it from others, was the colonisation of neighbouring lands, including Ukraine, which was far more developed than the imperial centre. Peter the Great set the task of “cutting a window to Europe” for a country with a poorly educated and uncultured population. This so-called “window” was opened by inviting Ukrainian educators, clergy, and university professors to Muscovy. There was no equal cooperation; the imperial government used various means, ranging from bribery to direct violence, and restructured the army to ensure its dominance and the central government’s monopoly on power. What began as cooperation and mentoring turned into colonial enslavement, accompanied by the appropriation of historical narratives and a reassessment of values. The Cossack Hetman Ivan Mazepa attempted to counteract the imperial policies of Peter the Great by allying with King Charles XII of Sweden. However, Peter the Great gained the military advantage, exacting brutal revenge on the rebellious Ukrainians, notably by burning the Cossack capital, Baturyn, to the ground. “Statistics on the losses of participants in the struggle for the freedom of Ukraine during the campaign of late 1708-1709. Up to 12-14 thousand were killed in Baturyn, and 3,000 in Perevolochna. Russian troops also burned (mostly with Cossacks and residents) Maiachka, Nekhvorooshch, Keleberda, Staryi Kodak, Novyi Kodak, Stari Sanzhary and Novi Sanzhary” (Stanislavsky, 2009).

For centuries, Russia intensified its policy of colonisation in Ukraine, using various methods to subjugate it. These included repression against the intellectual, cultural, and religious Ukrainian elite (including executions, imprisonment, torture, and enforced suicide). An internal migration policy was actively pursued to resettle and assimilate populations, thereby eroding historical and cultural traditions and severing ties with

local communities. As part of systemic oppressive measures, a ban was imposed on the use of the Ukrainian language in education, public culture, book publishing, and academic communication.

In 1622, Tsar Mikhail, at the suggestion of Patriarch Filaret of Moscow, issued an order to burn all copies of the Didactic Gospels by Kyrylo Stavrovetskyi, which had been printed in Ukraine. Repressive decrees and resolutions banning the Ukrainian language, culture, press, education, and church were later introduced by the Russian tsar, the Polish Sejm, Romanian authorities in western Ukrainian territories, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire in Eastern Galicia and Bukovyna. The notion that Ukrainian is merely a distorted form of Russian remains one of the dominant narratives of Russian propaganda. Throughout Ukraine's history as a stateless nation, more than fifty state acts of a repressive nature have been documented. By banning all expressions of national identity, the colonisers sought to maintain power over the subjugated population. Given these historical circumstances, it is remarkable that the Ukrainian language and culture have survived.

The explanation lies in the resilience of folk culture, which was preserved in a deeply embedded form within folk songs, rituals, customs, and crafts, particularly among the peasantry – the most conservative social stratum and the one most closely tied to its native land. “Chronologically, the emphasis on secrecy, preservation of conservative values, focus on the village and the people identified with the peasantry as the only bearers of national identity, on folklore, and kobzars as guardians of historical memory were not least a reaction to imperial pressure and the danger of assimilation” (Aheieva, 2021). During the Soviet era, however, the authorities sought to eliminate this threat as well. Repressive measures shifted from outright prohibition to systematic slander. Ukrainians became associated with the provinces, villages, and the uneducated lower classes. (The 1970 directive mandating that dissertations be defended exclusively in Russian is particularly illustrative in this context.)

Consequently, assimilation processes intensified, fostering a transition to Russian identification under the promise of broader opportunities within the empire, transcending local and national boundaries. State cultural policy prioritised the promotion of Russian cultural products while cultivating a perception of provincialism, inferiority, and shame associated with non-Russian identity. The tragic nature of Ukrainian history is rooted in statelessness and the loss of opportunities for self-determination and unrestricted development. The hardships stemming from Ukraine's prolonged political subjugation to Russia were conceptualised differently by Ukrainian intellectuals of earlier generations: M. Drahomanov (1909) referred to it as “lost time”, while D. Dontsov (1933-1939) characterised it as a “regime of the Mongol horde”. Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine has intensified Ukrainians' efforts to overcome the consequences of their colonial past as a means of resisting the occupiers. This involves aligning the process of liberating Ukrainian territories with the simultaneous emancipation of Ukrainian consciousness from the remnants of colonial thinking, including the inferiority complex, worldview and linguistic stereotypes, as well as deep-seated behavioural and psychological traumas.

### **Strategies of postcolonial practices**

The development of national education, science, and culture is a prerequisite for overcoming the consequences of colonisation. “National culture and national self-consciousness are the main features of a nation, without which it cannot exist and develop as a whole... they will play the role of an indicator of national development” (Morozova *et al.*, 2021). Scholars examining the colonial and postcolonial consequences of Ukrainian-Russian relations have documented systemic practices of prohibition and the denial of national subjectivity. This reflects the systematic and sustained imposition of a colonial mindset, enforced through various means: from prohibiting the use of the native language in the process of nation- and culture-building to the censorship of

Ukrainian-language materials and the denigration of Ukrainian ethnicity, relegating it to a secondary and inferior status. Notably, the repression of the Ukrainian language began immediately after Bohdan Khmelnytskyi signed the treaty establishing an alliance with Muscovy in 1654. In 1693, a ban was imposed on the import of Ukrainian publications to Muscovy, and censorship was introduced for Ukrainian book publishers. In 1709, the censorship of all Ukrainian books in Moscow became mandatory. In 1720, the printing of books in Ukrainian was completely prohibited. In 1784, the teaching of Ukrainian was forbidden at the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. In 1863, the Valuev Circular was issued, banning the printing of primers, textbooks, scientific publications, and periodicals in Ukrainian. This had devastating consequences for Ukrainian primary education, leading to the closure of schools and the erosion of national and cultural identity. In 1876, the Ems Decree was promulgated, further strengthening the prohibition of the Ukrainian language. According to S. Ocheretianko & L. Ryabets (2024), by 1877, not a single book was published in Ukrainian. During the 1880s and 1890s, these restrictions were reinforced, advancing an ideology aimed at eroding national identity: children's books in Ukrainian, historical publications, and literature depicting the life of the intelligentsia were banned. Even certain words became classified as subversive or unacceptable: Ukraine, Zaporozka Sich, Cossack.

Attempts to elevate folk culture to the status of high, classical culture were actively obstructed. For centuries, Ukrainian culture existed primarily in the realms of folk, peasant, and naturalistic traditions. This characteristic was deliberately framed as evidence of the inferiority of Ukrainians, their supposed inability to develop more complex, abstract forms of thought and creativity beyond folklore. In reality, a systemic governmental policy of degradation, suppression, destruction, Russification, and assimilation was implemented. Through manipulative cultural policies serving imperial ideological interests, the notion was instilled at the level of public consciousness

that everything valuable, high-quality, intellectual, modern, advanced, and developed was concentrated in the centre – in the capital.

Everything else was relegated to the periphery, dismissed as a rustic idyll, primitivism, backwardness, stagnation, and irrelevance. The members of the Cyril and Methodius Society characterised the Ukrainian nation as “crucified and tortured” yet always prepared to forgive its oppressors. M. Drahomanov (1894) employed this characterisation in constructing an ethnic portrait of a Ukrainian, stating that “A Ukrainian does not ask for much” and possesses a love “for all Slavs”. Meanwhile, I. Franko described the spokespersons in the Ukrainian intelligentsia of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as possessing a “slave brain and a slave heart” (Dontsov, 1926).

The ongoing policies of assimilation and Russification in the Soviet Union are classified in contemporary scholarship as ethnocide and linguicide – forms of discrimination based on language and ethnicity. These policies were enacted covertly, through “soft” cultural strategies designed to “breaking systemic ties among the people and their main features (ethnic territory, language, culture, identity)” (Naulko & Hryniv, 2009). The emergence of high culture was deliberately suppressed, including through literal physical destruction. Among the numerous examples of this was the persecution of Taras Shevchenko and the repression of an entire generation of Ukrainian artists during the Soviet era – the so-called “Executed Renaissance” of the 1930s, followed by further repressions in the 1940s and 1960s). The Ukrainian writer Ostap Vyshnia documented the mass repressions of 1934 in his camp diary: “And who else? Who sings but Ukrainians? Everywhere now their songs are heard – in the taiga, in the tundra... If only they would not cry, let them sing!” (Kolomiets, 2019).

The intensity of the repressive machine is evidenced by the following: according to official USSR and Russian government statistics, in 1926, there were 7.4 million Ukrainians in Russia; in 1939, there were 3.07 million; in 1959,

2.86 million; in 1970, 2.57 million; in 2002, 2.03 million; and in 2010, 1.4 million. The rapid decline in these statistical figures cannot be explained only solely by the physical elimination of Ukrainians. In addition to repressive measures, the imperial authorities actively promoted and facilitated assimilation by encouraging the abandonment of the Ukrainian language and national identity in favour of Russian (or Soviet, in the USSR) identification. The idea was propagated that belonging to the majority was advantageous – more promising, profitable, and prestigious. In 2016, at the VI World Forum of Ukrainians, Ukraine's Vice Prime V. Kyrylenko, emphasised that the Russian Federation was pursuing a policy of denationalisation against Ukrainians living on its territory: "The issue of supporting Ukrainians in Russia is very relevant. About 10 million Ukrainians are living in Russia. But the last official Russian census showed a figure of 2 million, and the penultimate one had 3 million. A targeted policy is being implemented to denationalise Ukrainians in Russia: The Kremlin wants to make them enemies of their people and forget about their roots" (Veselova, n.d.). Destructive activities aimed at erasing Ukrainian identity were also carried out within Ukraine itself. These included both the direct recruitment and bribery of supporters of the "Russian world" by Russia, as well as more subtle efforts to maintain influence over the Ukrainian population – particularly through religious indoctrination via the Moscow Patriarchate. The practice of borrowing directly from Russian models was widespread across various spheres of Ukrainian political, social, cultural, and scientific life. The dominance of Russian-language communication in independent Ukraine was considered the norm until 24 February 2022. The full-scale war did not lead to the complete rejection of the occupier's language, and linguistic disputes remain contentious.

### **Colonialism as an intergenerational trauma**

One of the methods used to subjugate colonised peoples is the manipulation of history and

culture, distorting both the past and the present for ideological purposes. In the case of Ukraine, there has been a deliberate falsification of Ukrainian-Russian history to serve propaganda, manipulation, and psychological conditioning. Examples of such ideological distortions include narratives about the "brotherly" relationship between Ukrainians and Russians dating back to the times of Kyivan Rus, the supposed superior role of the "elder" Russian nation, shared Slavic roots, linguistic and religious affinity, and so forth. A particularly insidious tactic is the portrayal of Ukrainians as a people without a heroic past. According to this narrative, Ukrainian history is merely a chronicle of defeats, suffering, and yearning, with Ukrainians depicted as helpless people devoid of their own heroes. Success, it is claimed, can only be achieved through unity with so-called "brotherly" nations. In this way, historical examples of Ukrainian resistance to enslavement have been systematically suppressed, and the nation's history has been reduced to a simplistic and primitive narrative, stripping Ukrainians of their right to national heroes, identity, and dignity. As a result, an inferiority complex was instilled in Ukrainians, reinforcing the stability of imperial rule.

The manipulation of history also served as an attempt to legitimise colonial dominance by erasing references to prominent Ukrainian historical figures, national heroes, and the continuous struggle for freedom and sovereignty. Various methods were employed to discredit, defame, demonise, and degrade historical figures such as S. Bandera, S. Petliura, R. Shukhevych, N. Makhno, and others. A common practice involved erasing all documentary evidence of oppositionists and dissidents while charging them with criminal rather than political offences. The Soviet authorities proclaimed to the world that there were no political opponents in the USSR. In this context, one of the forms of resistance of the prisoners was the struggle for recognition as political prisoners and demand for the appropriate legal status (Bazhan, n.d.). The principal methods used to suppress dissent included isolation, public

condemnation, forced recantation, and orchestrated denunciations by representatives of the “progressive public”. The state also employed coercive measures to neutralise disobedient individuals, including forced psychiatric treatment, psychological pressure leading to suicide, death by illness, or staged “accidents”. Another key strategy was the information blockade, aimed at obstructing the heroisation of dissidents. The deliberate suppression of information facilitated mass control by fostering the illusion of unanimous support for the regime. The authorities also classified or destroyed archival records to ensure impunity for those involved in the repressive apparatus. As a result, the identities of many Ukrainian dissidents remain unknown.

The Ukrainian writer and public figure O. Zabużhko (2022) characterised the traumatic experience of Ukrainians throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century as an “intergenerational trauma” of famines, dekulakisation, executions, arrests, exile, deportation to the northern regions or Siberia, resettlement zones, persecution for dissent, denial of rights, public humiliation, and so on. This trauma represents the memory of several generations facing physical danger when publicly recognising their national and cultural identity, economic viability, and so on. The persistent “city-village” opposition became widespread, with the village being endowed with inferior characteristics. Thus, in 1922, the “theory of the struggle in Ukraine between two cultures” – urban (Russian) and peasant (Ukrainian) – was proclaimed, with the former intended to prevail (Kubaichuk, 2004). The fact that the village was not certified until the early 1970s, meaning that peasants were tied to their place of residence, preserving the traditions of serfdom (which had been legally abolished in 1861 but persisted for another century), further intensified this opposition. The trauma was so profound that it was not discussed even within families due to the potentially dangerous consequences. As a result, the Russian language almost completely replaced Ukrainian in the communicative space. Initially, it was used for public

communication, but it later infiltrated the family life of Ukrainians. Mothers began reading bedtime stories to their children in Russian. The effectiveness of this educational and cultural policy must be acknowledged, as the ideology of the superiority of the Russian language and culture was reinforced from childhood. In this way, the blurring of Ukrainian identity was achieved: a complex of national inferiority was formed using “soft pressure”. The widespread establishment of Russian-language schools contributed to the perception that Ukrainian was a fringe language of the lumpenproletariat, which excluded it from educational and scientific discourse. Cultural products containing national features were devalued. On the one hand, this was facilitated by the predominantly folk nature of creativity (which was equated with primitiveness), while on the other, cultural products of Russian origin were given priority in terms of financial and media support and distribution.

Through the media, cinema, television, and literature, the “Russian – non-Russian” opposition was constructed with subtle irony, in which the non-Russian was always depicted as possessing a set of deviations, perversions, or absurd shortcomings, while the Russian embodied all the most idealised characteristics of a successful modern individual. However, after the collapse of the USSR, the successful use of soft cultural influence did not prevent Russia from conducting military operations against various regions of its disintegrating empire. In the 30 years since the USSR’s collapse, Russia’s record of military aggression has included the Russian-Georgian War, two Chechen Wars, and military conflicts in Abkhazia, Transnistria, Ossetia, Tajikistan, and Dagestan, as well as, since 2014, the war against Ukraine. The actions of the Russian occupiers in Ukraine were recognised by the Ukrainian authorities and the governments of several other states (including Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Canada, the Czech Republic, and the United States) as genocide – a crime committed not only physically against the victims but also

against their historical memory and culture (De Waal, 2015). Other victims of Russian aggression, including representatives of the Georgian and Armenian peoples, also call on the democratic world to condemn Russia's actions as genocide. Political and legal analysis of such relations demonstrates their totalitarian and colonial nature (Stezhko *et al.*, 2021; Kultenko *et al.*, 2022).

Researchers describe Ukrainian identity as more open in comparison to the conservatism of cultural identification in the so-called "Old Europe". This openness to the world and willingness to welcome a friendly outsider into one's inner circle is attributed to Ukraine's geopolitical position as a crossroads of different trade routes (from the Varangians to the Greeks), cultural movements, and so forth. Ukraine has traditionally been a bridge between East and West, South and North, and a crossroads for intercultural communication. Therefore, Ukrainians are more open to integration, renewal, and change. It is important to draw the right conclusions about Ukraine's colonial past and to critically examine this issue within global philosophical and political discourse. Specifically, it is necessary to acknowledge the colonial nature of Ukraine's relationship with Russia over the past 350 years, which has shaped the dynamics of these interactions. An objective study of history is required to address historical omissions and to rehabilitate unjustly persecuted and deliberately discredited historical figures. Particular attention should be given to reintegrating into the nation's cultural life the philosophical, literary, artistic, and musical works of repressed Ukrainian figures, thereby promoting and popularising Ukrainian culture, language, creativity, and a respectful attitude towards them. The slogan "Ukraine above all!" is prominent in contemporary Ukrainian discourse.

The presence or absence of several key factors in both the metropole and the colony traditionally defines colonialism. Among these factors are: the presence or absence of political power and control; inter-racial or inter-ethnic tensions regarding the right to establish and interpret

meanings; significant disparities in the political, economic, and socio-cultural conditions of different races or national communities; and laws that discriminate on ethnic or racial grounds within specific borders. Additionally, colonial societies are often characterised by their closed nature, the marginalisation of the colonised population, and the colonisers' privileged authority over semantics, textuality, language, and the definition of processes and phenomena. Postcolonial studies of Ukraine's sociopolitical landscape allow for an expansion of the traditional list of colonisation factors, incorporating such specific elements as the use of culture as a tool of manipulative influence and soft coercion, as well as the widespread application of ideological clichés to further colonial objectives.

## Conclusions

In contemporary Ukrainian society, the conflict between former colonies and colonisers is not merely a cultural or socio-political struggle. Rather, it involves systematic efforts to sever fundamental ties that define a nation – its ethnic territory, language, culture, and national consciousness). The coloniser, in defiance of the natural tendencies of imperial decline, seeks by all means to preserve its spheres of influence and retain control over the political, economic, historical, and socio-cultural domains of the metropole. This drive for preservation, combined with authoritarian traditions of organising social and political life, manifests in distorted historical narratives, the imposition of an inferiority complex upon subjugated peoples, and the systemic implementation of policies of genocide, denationalisation, and assimilation. These strategies serve to sustain influence and control. The deliberate falsification of Ukrainian history, the erasure of heroic national narratives, and the reinforcement of negative stereotypes have contributed to a deep-rooted intergenerational trauma, profoundly affecting Ukrainian identity and self-perception. This trauma, compounded by ongoing military aggression, underscores the

urgency of decolonising Ukrainian consciousness. The path forward necessitates a comprehensive approach. Beyond simply rejecting the remnants of imperial culture, aesthetics, norms, and standards, Ukraine must assert its right to self-representation. The struggle for political independence is intrinsically connected to the liberation of Ukrainian consciousness from the residual effects of colonial ideology.

The prospects for further research lie in moving beyond the rejection of imperial culture categories – its aesthetics, norms, and standards – towards categories of the right to self-expression and the privilege of a free nation to represent itself. After all, Ukrainians are engaged in an armed struggle for their right to political independence and self-governance, for historical truth, and for their voice in global cultural and political discourse. This concerns the opportunity to construct their own textuality, shape national identity, interpret history, and preserve historical memory, along with national heroes and leaders. It also involves ensuring the transmission of cultural traditions, building a distinct culture of everyday life and family values, and developing the

Ukrainian language as a means of safeguarding national interests. These efforts are essential for constructing a postcolonial narrative that allows for the interpretation of meanings, worldviews, values, emotions, and the plurality of creative expression. The normalisation of these processes facilitates the recognition and acceptance of the Other without resorting to demonisation or humiliation. A logical extension of this is the formulation of objectives for Ukrainian cultural diplomacy, which is oriented towards European integration, introducing Europeans to Ukraine's cultural heritage, fostering mutual exchange, and promoting cross-cultural enrichment. After all, Ukraine has unequivocally expressed its political will to join the EU. This choice is guided by the civilisational priorities of Ukrainians, who seek to live and work in an open, democratic, and legally governed society.

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### Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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## Явище колоніалізму та постколоніалізму в контексті сучасних українських реалій

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**Анотація.** Коли українські дослідники стверджують, що політика Росії щодо України була колоніальною, це твердження часто ставиться під сумнів західними вченими. Російсько-українські відносини не зовсім вписуються в таку модель. Тому ключовим питанням цього дослідження було: наскільки виправданим є визначення російсько-українських відносин як колоніальних, зважаючи на те, що теперішній та майбутній розвиток України значною мірою залежить від деколонізації української свідомості? В цьому дослідженні визначено поняття «колоніалізм», обґрунтовано тезу про те, що Україна була колонізована Росією, і розроблено практики деколонізації. Для досягнення цієї мети в дослідженні використовувались емпіричні методи, а також теоретичні методи дослідження, зокрема аналітичний, синтетичний, феноменологічний та філософська рефлексія. Крім того, використано міждисциплінарні методи дослідження, такі як кейс-стаді, комеморативний, філософський та історичний аналіз. Україна переживає постколоніальний стан, який є наслідком її історичної бездержавності, залежності від Росії та системної політики денаціоналізації, нав'язаної метрополією. Ця політика включає нав'язування комплексу меншовартості, придушення претензій на українську мову, культуру та еліту, руйнування національної гідності та асиміляцію з домінуючою імперською ідентичністю. Якщо імперії розпадаються під тиском об'єктивних чинників, то Росія як імперський центр активно протистоїть цим процесам – передусім через відкриту військову агресію, диверсії та інформаційну війну, включно з психологічними маніпуляціями. Постколоніальний стан українського суспільства проявляється у фрагментарній національній самоідентифікації, нестійкій системі цінностей, порушених культурних кодах, глибоких психологічних кризах на архетипному рівні свідомості. Це знаходить своє відображення у мовних суперечках, релігійних конфліктах та інших соціокультурних напруженнях. Практичне значення дослідження полягає у висновку, що подолання негативних постколоніальних наслідків є необхідним для досягнення свободи, просування європейської інтеграції, зміцнення національної ідентичності та утвердження гуманістичних цінностей. Дослідження було спрямоване на звільнення української свідомості від постімперських маніпулятивних практик

**Ключові слова:** постколоніальні практики; етноцид; лінгвоцид; маніпулювання історією; соціокультурні трансформації; історична травма; національна ідентичність