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### POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AND ITS APPLICATION TO THE POST-SOVIET STATES<sup>1</sup>

*This paper aims to reveal the constraints of traditional postcolonial theory, particularly in its application in the post-Soviet space, and to argue the need to study the post-Soviet space through the prism of this theory, considering the colonial nature of the Soviet Union. It focuses on analyzing the limitations of postcolonial theory concerning the so-called «Second World» and singling out distinctive attributes of the Russian imperial regime and its enduring aftermath. The authors have studied constraints within the postcolonial theory, in particular, the centrality of racist-related experience and narratives re-*

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*garding «Second World». These limitations pave the way for a broader understanding of post-Soviet states' complex historical narratives. We analyze the expansionist ambitions of the Russian Empire (as well as its successor, the Soviet Union) both Eastward and Westward and its colonial practices imposed upon indigenous populations in newly acquired territories. This analysis showcases how Russian colonialism endured even after the collapse of the empire, finding a new life in Bolshevik ideology. In particular, the article provides data that testify USSR's economic colonialism toward Ukraine. It is shown that due to their autonomous development after Bolshevik revolution, the Baltic states managed to implement robust institutional and economic reforms before the Soviet Union re-annexed their territories. In stark contrast, other territories, including Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, were swiftly absorbed by the Bolshevik regime following the demise of the imperial government. This dichotomy sheds light on the intricate process of decolonization, demonstrating that true independence for some former Russian colonies only materialized after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The authors suggest that adopting a quasi-colonial lens to view the Soviet Regime provides profound insights into the challenges impeding the development of post-Soviet states. This paper offers a comprehensive understanding of the postcolonial dynamics in the post-Soviet states. It sheds light on not just the historical intricacies but also the contemporary challenges these nations face, thus contributing to a richer scholarly discourse on post colonialism and its evolving relevance in the modern world.*

**Keywords:** *postcolonial theory, post colonialism, postcolonial studies, economic history, East European studies, Post-Soviet studies.*

**Теленько О., Курбет О.**

### ПОСТКОЛОНІАЛЬНА ТЕОРІЯ ТА ЇЇ ЗАСТОСУВАННЯ ДО ПОСТРАДЯНСЬКИХ ДЕРЖАВ

*Мета цієї статті полягає у виявленні обмежень традиційної постколоніальної теорії, зокрема стосовно її застосування на пострадянському просторі, та аргументації необхідності дослідження пострадянського простору крізь призму цієї теорії, з огляду на колонізаторську природу Радянського Союзу. Стаття фокусується на аналізі обмежень постколоніальної*

теорії щодо так званого «Другого світу» та виділенні відмінних атрибутів російського імперського режиму та його довготривалих наслідків. Авторки дослідили обмеження в рамках постколоніальної теорії, зокрема, центральну роль досвіду пов'язаного з расизмом та наративів щодо «Другого світу». Ці обмеження прокладають шлях до ширшого розуміння складних історичних наративів пострадянських держав. Аналіз експансіоністських амбіцій Російської імперії (та її наступника Радянського Союзу) як на схід, так і на захід, а також її колоніальні практики, нав'язані корінному населенню на новопрیدбаних територіях демонструє як російський колоніалізм вистояв навіть після розпаду імперії, знайшовши нове життя в більшовицькій ідеології. Зокрема, у статті наводяться дані, що свідчать також про економічну складову політики колоніалізму з боку СРСР стосовно України. Показано, що завдяки автономному розвитку балтійських держав після більшовицької революції їм вдалося здійснити потужні інституційні та економічні реформи до того, як Радянський Союз повторно анексував їхні території. Навпаки, інші території, включаючи Білорусь, Україну, Грузію, Вірменію та Азербайджан, були швидко поглинені більшовицьким режимом після падіння імперського уряду. Ця дихотомія проливає світло на заплутаний процес деколонізації, демонструючи, що справжня незалежність деяких колишніх російських колоній матеріалізувалась лише після розпаду Радянського Союзу. Авторки припускають, що розгляд радянського режиму під квазіколоніальною лінзою дає змогу глибоко зрозуміти виклики, які перешкоджають розвитку пострадянських держав. Ця стаття пропонує комплексне розуміння постколоніальної динаміки в пострадянських державах. Вона проливає світло не лише на історичні заплутаності, але й на сучасні виклики, з якими стикаються ці нації, таким чином сприяючи багатшому науковому дискурсу про постколоніалізм та його актуальність у сучасному світі.

**Ключові слова:** постколоніальна теорія, постколоніалізм, постколоніальні дослідження, економічна історія, східноєвропейські дослідження, пострадянські дослідження.

*«Ukraine was a laboratory of communist colonialism,  
covered by sophisticated ideological speculation»  
Stepan Zlupko*

**Statement of the problem.** The postcolonial theory has significantly impacted various academic fields. Postcolonialism delves into the enduring effects of imperialism and colonialism on social, political, economic, and legal structures. By highlighting the ramifications of colonialism on contemporary postcolonial nations, the postcolonial theory has not only challenged the perception of these nations as «backward» or «underdeveloped», but also provided a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges they face these days. This was only possible with stepping back from scientific knowledge that was traditionally based on Western perception of the rest of the world and inclusion of representatives of postcolonial states and nations to the global knowledge production. The post-Soviet space that maintains the in-between position between the West and the Global South has been persistently omitted in Western postcolonial studies despite the Russo-Soviet control of the local populations that lasted from 50 to 200 years and still exists in certain areas. Furthermore, much like the West's attempt to control the narratives of its former colonies during early decolonisation, the oppressed populations of the post-Soviet space are still predominantly represented in global academic discourse by the very individuals who oppressed them. We strive to reconsider the current constraints to the application of postcolonial theory to promote an inclusive examination of marginalised societies worldwide.

**Analysis of recent researches and publications.** Over the last 40 years, no consensus has been reached regarding the scope of postcolonial studies. As every group or community, regardless of their indigenous status, has migrated from elsewhere to these lands [13], the postcolonial theory, which was originally focused on the West's conquest of the «Third World», has naturally broadened over time, and produced a better understanding of the variety of colonisation processes their impact on societies worldwide. The comparative analysis of postcolonial experiences has largely contributed to developing the concept of settler colonialism as one of the forms of colonialism [31]. The primary feature that distinguishes the settler form of colonialism from the «classical» British-India model is that the former is primarily aimed at replacement of natives on their lands while the latter mainly depends on extracting the local resources, including the native labor. Still, within a certain society, different forms of colonial relations may take place simultaneously, as in the US, where the indigenous population was moved out from their lands instead of being

put to work on it while the forced labor was imposed on enslaved Black people [14]. While this broad approach in postcolonial studies raises concerns about the potential «inflation of the postcolonial theory» and risk of losing the analytic strength, it does not imply an equalisation of experiences among all marginalised groups [13]. Instead, it allows a more comprehensive analysis of the colonisation past and its effect on the present in different parts of the world, without excluding or diminishing the colonial experience of others.

Nevertheless, while the term «postcolonial» has increasingly been applied to different parts of the world, including America and Australia [14], the complex history of the vast region spanning from Eastern Europe to Central Asia has seldom been examined from a postcolonial perspective [13]. The limited group of postcolonial scholars examining the post-Soviet space recognises the presence of colonial practices in certain regions within this area. However, they also acknowledge the distinct characteristics of both the Russian Imperial and Soviet regimes, setting them apart from Western colonialism, which occupies a central place in academic literature. Our perspective asserts that the focal point on Western colonialism in postcolonial studies, neglecting other societies that played peripheral roles in Western states' development, stems from Western colonisation. This inclination mirrors the imposition of Western standards on «non-Western others».

So, the goal of this paper is to reveal the constraints of traditional postcolonial theory, in particular in its application in the post-Soviet space, and to argue the need to study the post-Soviet space through the prism of this theory, considering the colonial nature of the Soviet Union. It seeks to provoke continued research and exploration of postcolonial theory in this context, emphasising the importance of understanding the experiences of local nations, independent of Western or former coloniser perspectives.

### **Logic of Colonisation and Debates about «Second World»**

Certain paradigms in postcolonial studies have long held unquestionable centrality, and any attempts to deviate from them face significant criticism. One such paradigm revolves around racist-related experiences, which understandably occupy a central position in postcolonialism. While many colonised societies were indeed diverse, the key challenge lies in examining the underlying logic of colonisation. It is essential to differentiate between the true intentions of

the colonisers and the mere «justifications» used to perpetuate conquest and colonisation.

The origins of the international law regarding the colonisation of non-Christian world, that is known today as the Doctrine of Discovery, come from the Medieval Europe. It was based on XV century papal bulls that justified the Christian European exclusive rights on «discovered» lands and started with the concept of «terra nullius», or «uninhabited area», but then was expanded to «uninhabited by civilised people area». Portugal and Spain were the first that started to apply this legal regime of colonialism, while later it spread among other European states. Afterwards, in 1884–1885, the Doctrine of Discovery was codified into European International Law at the Berlin Conference, also known as Congo Conference, that regulated the European colonisation in Africa and justified the superior rights of Europeans over African nations [19]. However, since the emergence of the Doctrine of Discovery, there has been considerable uncertainty surrounding its rationale. One view was that the non-Christians had no right for dominium since it is based upon belief in the true God and may be only granted by the Church. On the other hand, the proponents of natural law claimed that the dominium if based on the use of reason and, therefore, may be exercised by the infidels as well [14]. Clearly, already in medieval ages the justification for the right of discovery, that the Church officially justified, was highly debatable from the theological point of view.

However, such a legal framework is more than straightforward if it is examined from the perspective of international relations and geopolitics. As Patrick Wolfe fairly noted, the «discovery» discourse was primarily designed to regulate the relations between European sovereigns regarding their conflicting claims over colonial territory, rather than relations with natives [14, p. 105]. In other words, «religious» or «racial» question was rather the justification for the exclusion of indigenous population from the discourse. In his considerations regarding settler colonialism in America, Wolfe pointed out: «So far as indigenous people are concerned, where they are is who they are, and not by their reckoning alone» [14, p. 112]. This point plays a crucial role in understanding the colonial practice worldwide. The indigenous populations were primarily targeted for being an integral part of «discovered» lands, while in order to legitimate this, the colonisers widely imposed their criteria for having rights to these lands, that within time became acceptable for everyone, including indige-

nous people. Consequently, race was made to be targeted by having imposed the perception that it tended to mark those who had no right for dominium. This logic implies that if it concerned the indigenous population, it could be seen as inferior on the basis of any possible characteristic that could mark their belongingness to natives.

Certainly, the long-term colonisation of the African continent had an enormous impact on the lives of local people and produced or at least hugely contributed to the birth of racism, that even now in XXI century remains one of the main challenges to overcome. Still, the racist-related experience should not be seen as a fundamental characteristic of colonial project. Mykola Ryabchuk proposes the following scheme: «If we imagine some axes where the quantified scope and strengths of colonial subjugation can be located, the racist colonialism would certainly represent its absolute, undeniable crux» [18]. This portrayal does not disregard other instances of colonialism, as described by Riabchuk as «intermediate» and «more distant», and at the same time, it does not diminish the significance of the racial dimension in the context of postcolonialism.

Notwithstanding, many scholars remain particularly skeptical apropos of application of postcolonial theory to the so-called «Second World». Moore [13] suggests that there are two salient silences with respect to the former Soviet states on the postcolonial side and on the side of post-Soviet space. Concerning the *silence on post-Soviet side*, Moore proposed two possible reasons for the unwillingness of most scholars in the post-Soviet space to apply postcolonial approach. Initially, he posited the existence of a clear discursive boundary between the «East» and the «West» within the USSR. This led the «European» post-Soviet individuals to believe that there was a distinct and even racial distinction separating them from the postcolonial Filipinos and Ghanaians who might otherwise relate to their circumstances.

The second factor was the fear of Eastern Europeans that admitting or even considering their colonial status could undermine their «European identity». Indeed, Eastern European countries of the former Soviet Union demonstrate the strong will to emphasise their belongingness to the European community and detach themselves from anything that could cast doubt on their status in the eyes of the Western Europeans. This might be explained by the compensatory behavior, as many scholars including Davide Moore, suggest. The mutually accepted perception of the postcolonial world as that, which

lies outside Europe implies that Eastern European states may be considered as either a part of postcolonial world or a part of Europe. Individuals whose national identity has been forcefully manipulated for many years face an evident choice. In their aspiration to re-establish ties with Europe, a desire Eastern Europeans have consistently harboured, they tend to disregard their colonial past. From our perspective, embracing a more expansive interpretation of postcolonial theory, one that transcends geographical and racial limitations, would alleviate the limitations imposed by this decision.

Regarding the *silence on the postcolonial side*, according to Moore, it implies the inability of postcolonial critiques to detach themselves from the «Three-worlds» model (Figure 1) as well as their Marxist views. In «Three-worlds» model, the unique position of the former Soviet republics, marked by a sense of «in-betweenness», hinders postcolonial scholars from considering Soviet Union being similar to the West, but also clearly distinguish them from Global South, predominantly formed by former colonies of the Western Empire. In today's context, the impact of postcolonial theory has prompted a reexamination of the legacies and progress in both the «First» and «Third» world. Regrettably, the diverse histories and experiences of former Soviet states have been neglected in this discourse.

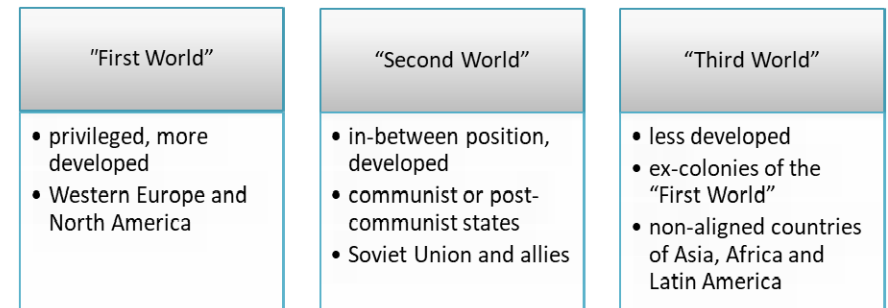


Figure 1. «Three-worlds» model

Source: Own preparation based on [13].

The second Moore's point concerns the widespread Marxist views among postcolonial scholars, which tend to prevent them from considering Soviet Union from postcolonial perspective. Indeed, both Marxists and communists have always supported the right of oppressed nationalities to self-determination, and the USSR strongly



supported the decolonisation movement and international human rights after 1945. This fact has been instrumental in shaping the prevailing perspective that the Soviet Union cannot be equated with Western imperial powers.

With the victory in WW2, the USSR managed to create an image of itself as a «liberator» of those oppressed, whether it concerned the «Third World», oppressed by the West or the European states «liberated» from the Nazi German occupation despite the repressions and terror that took place in the territories under Soviet control. The USSR combined the socialist rule and elements of centralised empire, that claimed to liberate those oppressed by capitalism. However, it not only retained all the territories of the Russian Empire but also significantly expanded them. While proclaiming regional equality among Soviet republics, the USSR was highly centralised, with Moscow as the central metropolis.

The collapse of the Soviet Union entailed the fall of the Iron Curtain. This implied that the previously classified by Bolsheviks information regarding the military annexation of foreign lands with their further transformation into the integral parts of the Soviet Union, russification, forced deportations of the indigenous population and even genocides (Ukraine 1932–1933) became available to a broad audience. Nonetheless, these facts, that were supposed to grab the attention of modern academics, mainly remained out of the scope of postcolonial studies. This gives the impression that the replacement of «world model hierarchy» with less derogatory approach did not manage to transform the general perception of the world in the academic field. The former Soviet states with their diverse cultures, historical background and unique experiences keep being overlooked somewhere in-between the former colonisers and former colonies.

### **Imperialism vs Colonialism, and Historical Negation of Russian Colonial Expansion**

To examine the distinct position of post-Soviet states within the three-worlds model, it is crucial to commence by differentiating between colonialism and imperialism, regarding which there is no unified position. Postcolonial critic Edward Said [21, p. 8] suggests that: «imperialism' means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory; «colonialism», which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory». Namely, both imperial-

ism and colonialism involve conquest and exploitation, but they are different in nature. Therefore, imperialism as phenomenon outlived the end of colonial era and exist nowadays in different forms.

Alternatively, German historian Jürgen Osterhammel [17, pp. 21–22] sees imperialism as a broader concept that goes beyond the scope of colonialism and presumes the determination of imperial centre to pursue its imperial national interests, whereas colonialism «might appear to be one special manifestation of «imperialism»». Osterhammel suggests that imperialism and colonialism may exist separately and considers two historical cases, by the way of illustration. Netherlands in the XIX–XX centuries that was one of the largest colonial powers but had no imperialistic ambitions serves as an example of colonialism without imperialism, while the US is an example of imperialism not including colonialist behaviour.

However, both examples are not convincing enough. In XIX century, the Netherlands took part in the partition of Africa, and the activities of the Dutch in the Southern Asia could raise doubts regarding lack of their imperialistic ambitions. Maarten Kuitenbrouwer connects the activities of the Dutch in the Indonesian archipelago with modern imperialism [9, pp. 8–9]. Still, whether this phenomenon constitutes modern imperialism, or «old-imperialism-in-the-new-bottle» is still an open question. For the latter case, indeed, in the second half of XX century it became clear that the expectations for the end of imperialism failed. The former colonial powers and other developed states, in particular the US, extended their influence to keep control over less developed countries through economic means rather than military force. While this phenomenon is also often seen as neo-imperialism or imperialism without colonies the representatives of the oppressed or marginalised groups choose to use the term «neo-colonialism». Kwame Nkrumah [15], the first president of Ghana, used the term «neo-colonialism» in his book to describe the exploitation of the formally independent states by former imperial powers or other developed influential countries.

We tend to agree with the opinion of Professor Archibald Thornton [25], who in his article «Colonialism» suggested that «Colonialism is imperialism seen from below». He sees colonialism as the view of those who are controlled and dominated on the position, they find themselves. Certainly, while imperialism as phenomenon has been studied for many decades, the postcolonial studies gained prominence when those oppressed and marginalised were given the

voice. Decolonisation, human rights movements, and following expansion of the concept of the human rights, global migration and educational expansion prompted the democratic governments of the former European imperial states to reconsider their history, and to begin to call the things by their right names. Unfortunately, this process is not flowless and universal, and regarding modern Russia, it seems that it has not been even set in motion.

Despite spanning eleven time zones and ruling over more than a hundred ethnic and national groups, Russia has consistently rejected the idea of defining its expansion policy as colonial in comparison to European states. The majority of Russian scholars justify Russian colonialism by utilising the concepts of self-colonisation or internal colonisation. This theory suggests that the country, starting from Peter the Great's reforms, developed as a self-colonising state. The argument is based on the idea that Russia was inoculated against real colonisation by the West by subjecting itself to a cruel form of self-colonisation. The roots of this argument can be traced back to the early 19th-century philosopher Petr Chaadaev, but its contemporary rediscovery is credited to a 1990 essay by Boris Groys.

This theory, however, has been heavily criticised by many Ukrainian scholars for its disregard of the subjugation and even the mere existence of the native populations within the regions that were acquired by the Russian Empire. For instance, Vitaly Chernetsky [1] contends that the theory of self-colonisation upholds certain aspects of Russian colonialist ideology that ought to be denounced in today's world instead of celebrated. This is apparent from the ironic influence of events and phenomena that occurred in Ukraine and Belarus on the theoretical framework, which in turn further marginalises and subjugates these populations. It is important to acknowledge that this approach completely overlooks the harsh history of colonial repression experienced by diverse indigenous cultures within the territories of the former Russian Empire, thereby perpetuating aspects of Russian colonialist ideology. Additionally, scholars have employed the concept of internal colonisation to comprehend the coercive collectivisation of the peasantry during Stalinism, underscoring the problematic nature of this theory.

The institutional perspective of the expansion of the Russian Empire exhibited many peculiarities. Instead of establishing traditional colonial offices like those seen in European colonial empires, the

Empire opted for «prikaz», which were offices or departments that governed the region temporarily until it could be fully integrated into imperial structures. According to Willard Sunderland's work «The Ministry of Asiatic Russia: The Colonial Office That Never Was but Might Have Been» [24] some of the administration approaches applied by European colonial states were not applicable in Russia due to its peculiar history and geography. While overseas expansion was a difficult undertaking for the Russian Empire due to its geopolitical struggles to secure warm water ports, the land-based expansion was seen as the best alternative that could fulfil the empire's geopolitical ambitions. To maintain control over the conquered territories, imperial administrations were tasked with creating a homogeneous state by blurring territorial and cultural distinctions. This was achieved by restricting the use of minority languages in schools and the press (Turkic) or denying the existence of the local language (Ukraine), controlling legal minority religions (Catholic and Armenian churches), outlawing some religions entirely (Old Belief, Uniatism), and treating expressions of minority identity as political crimes. However, it is worth noting that the Russian colonial project took slightly different paths on its Eastern and Western borders to achieve this objective.

#### **Russian Colonial Expansion Eastward and Westward**

The initial colonial endeavours arose from the *eastward expansion of Muscovy* (later Russia) in the 16th century, driven by motives similar to those of European empires, namely the pursuit of profit, particularly through the fur trade. Muscovy sought to monopolise the fur trade, which was in high demand throughout Europe by imposing Yasak (tribute) upon indigenous population in Siberia. For several decades the state's policy was not aggressive towards natives as long as they paid tribute. However, those who failed to pay tribute were killed or exiled convicts from the Russian penal system.

Maintaining fur tribute was considered by Muscovian elites to be the most profitable until fur-bearing species became over-hunted and extinct. This coincided with the new state policy associated with the Western European Enlightenment pursued by Peter the Great, founder of the Russian Empire [23]. Inspired by its Western peers, Russia began to regard indigenous population of Siberia as inferior class, who were not able to properly use the land they possessed, in the same way as Europeans justified their superior rights in Africa over natives.

Tsarist government considered Moscow as a «New Jerusalem» that was supposed to expand and reign over conquered lands under true Christian Orthodoxy [7, p. 107]. The Russian «holy mission» was executed through forced conversions of indigenous populations, and suppression of local customs and languages. During this period, a large number of Russian peasants began to settle in Siberian arable lands motivated by the state policy, which provided them with land grants and tax deductions. In the eyes of Russian elites, the cultural assimilation of unenlightened indigenous people was mutually beneficial process that made a key difference between Russian and European colonialism.

Russia's expansion was viewed as a natural progression of the nation-state, leading to a more homogeneous population [14, pp. 343–371]. However, this homogeneity came at cost of local minorities, who were still deemed inferior and backward in comparison to Slavic people. The smaller indigenous groups such as Ket and Itelmens were slowly eradicated through the assimilation of Russian culture, a process called Russification. Conversely, larger groups like the Circassians, a Muslim group who refused to conform to foreign Christian authority, fell under Russian control through a military invasion that resulted in the Circassian genocide. Nearly 85% of the indigenous population was killed or forced out to the Ottoman Empire.

It is noteworthy that, even today, the Circassian genocide is officially recognised only by Georgia. The Tsarist government achieved a relatively homogeneous society along its eastern borders by the time the Russian Empire collapsed. The Siberian territories were predominantly inhabited by Russian settlers and assimilated indigenous peoples who were granted equal legal status to ethnic Russians and harboured concerns about potentially losing their rights. Despite attempts at liberation, the Bolshevik regime that took power in Moscow suppressed such efforts. As a result, unlike many European colonies, Siberia has never been decolonised, and native people have gradually come to identify as Russians. The lack of recognition and discussion surrounding the colonial experiences of Siberians has contributed to the historical negation of Russian colonialism as a whole, which in turn affects the efforts of other ex-colonies of Russia to assert their own colonial experiences.

In recent times, certain scholars in Europe and the United States have begun to categorise Russia's territorial expansion into the Caucasus, the steppe frontier, and Turkestan/Central Asia as

«colonial» in nature. However, they have been less inclined to use this terminology to describe the association between Russia and its western borderlands, which encompass Ukraine, Poland, and the Baltic nations. While it may seem that the relationship between the Russian Empire and its western borderlands followed different paths due to cultural and historical reasons, we assume that cultural ties and a common historical legacy were mainly used as justifications for the Russian colonial practices that were applied in these areas.

Within the context of *Russian expansion westward*, Ukraine presents one of the most intriguing and debated cases. This controversy stems from the widespread Western perception that Ukraine and Russia share deep cultural and political bonds, believed to have originated during the historical period of the Kyivan Rus, a powerful state that dissolved in the eleventh century. However, it is essential to acknowledge that Ukrainian scholars heavily criticize this interpretation of Ukraine's history.

After the decline of the Kyivan Rus, its territories came under control of the two competing forces, the Golden Horde and the Lithuanian and Polish ally. In fifteenth century, the Muscovy state broke away from the Golden Horde and gradually became dominant in the region for various reasons, including its expansion to the east. Meanwhile much of the territory that comprises present-days Ukraine and Belarus became part of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. During this period, Ruthenians, descendants of the ancient Kyivan Rus fought for independence from Lithuania and Poland and eventually formed the semi-independent state of Hetmanate in the seventeenth century, which is regarded as a predecessor to the modern independent state of Ukraine. Hetmanate searched for allies to preserve its independence, which led to its annexation by Muscovy, one of its military ally, in the eighteenth century. By this time, Ukraine and Russia had become distinct nations with different historical paths and cultural influences. This historical context is important for understanding of the subsequent events and the logic of Russian colonisation of Ukraine.

In 1721, the decisive victory over Sweden, supported by Hetmanate striving for independence from Moscow, opened the so-called «window to Europe» for Muscovian state and made it one of the European superpowers. Peter the Great took the title of All-Russian Emperor and renamed the Tsardom of Muscovia the Russian Empire, underlining its European roots. Later on, Catherine the

Great followed a similar policy of Westernization of Russians, which had a significant impact on the position of Ruthenians (Ukrainians) in the Russian Empire and for the first time posed «Ukrainian question». While Kyiv represented an essential centre of historical heritage for Russia's image as a European Empire, rebellious Ukrainians continued to seek autonomy from the metropolis. Bohdan Krawchenko [8, pp. 21–49] highlighted political absorption as a key factor in Russia's control over Ukraine. When Catherine II dissolved the Hetmanate in 1762, the state was transformed into one of Russian gubernia (province), directly governed from St. Petersburg. Nevertheless, although the elimination of Ukrainian political institutions contributed to Russia's dominance, it constituted only one element of a larger process of systematic erosion of political, economic, and cultural rights during the course of colonisation.

Russian expansion westward was seen as a nation-state development, similar to its eastern colonisation project, but with the distinction that it was presented in a form of reunion of the populations considered to be the same nation. To emphasise their shared historical and cultural heritage, the territory of modern Ukraine was designated as «Little Russia» and its native inhabitants as «Little Russians». However, despite the formal recognition of Ukrainians and Russians as a single nation, two populations had different cultures, traditions and languages, that presented a challenge for the imperial government. The solution was to impose a policy of forced cultural assimilation on Ukrainians through a process known as Russification. In the XVIII–XIX centuries, the imperial government issued numerous decrees aimed at eroding Ukrainian (Ruthenian) culture, such as closing Ukrainian-teaching schools, reorganising education in Ukraine, banning the use of Ukrainian language in official institutions, and prohibiting the Ukrainian press.

Furthermore, Ukraine gradually became a resource appendage to the Russian Empire since its establishment. In addition to being known as the «breadbasket», the region produced a significant portion of the Empire's natural resources. By the eve of World War I, Ukraine produced 78 percent of the Empire's coal, 75 percent of iron ore, 69 percent of cast iron, 67 percent of sponge iron, 56 percent of steel, and 58 percent of rolled steel [5]. This led to the modernisation of Ukrainian industry but with infrastructure designed in favour of the metropolis due to Ukraine's colonial status. Notably, Mykhailo Volobuyev, a renowned Ukrainian economist of the 1930s, argued that

from 1893 to 1910, Russia received nearly 3.3 billion rubles from Ukraine while only spending 2.6 billion rubles on Ukraine's needs during the same period [5]. However, the absence of formal colonial institutions and the perception of Russia as a state rather than an empire create uncertainty in considering the regime of the Russian Empire as colonial.

Stephen Velychenko references the views of Petro Maltsiv, who believed that Ukraine's unfavorable position of Ukraine within Russian Empire was a result of extreme centralisation rather than colonialism, despite his own investigation on the economic relationship between Ukrainian provinces and the central imperial government, which showed the discriminating imperial tariffs and financial policies adopted in Ukraine to the benefit of central Russia [26, pp. 39–40]. While the supremacy of the imperial centre or any urban centre over the periphery is a widespread phenomenon, it is important to note that in Ukraine, unlike in Great Russia, ethnicity played a role in determining one's social status. According to Stephen Velychenko, Russian migrants who settled in Ukrainian urban centers did not have to assimilate into the host community, as the administration, education, print media and the high culture in Ukraine were all in Russian [26, pp. 86–97]. In contrast, Ukrainians became the minority in their own land, and had to reject their identity, generally seen as rural, backward and inferior to the cultural standards imposed by the metropolis. Despite attempting to distance themselves from their perceived inferiority by even changing their surnames to sound more «Russian», Ukrainians were not guaranteed equal opportunities compared to Great Russians [26, pp. 20–25].

Building on the previous points, it can be asserted that the Russian imperial regime exhibited numerous parallels to Western colonialism, such as economic exploitation, imposition of foreign culture, and perpetuation of inferiority complex among the colonised. However, certain differences existed in the manner in which these were implemented and rationalised. The proximity of Russian colonies allowed for assimilation programs to be more efficient, and the absence of colonial offices allowed for a cost-effective use of military forces. While these circumstances gave rise to a portrayal of state development as «natural and advantageous for all», a perspective widely embraced by Russian elites, it was a customary strategy employed by empires during that era to rationalise their colonial endeavours with altruistic motives. The crucial difference between



Western and Russian colonial history was that after the collapse of Empires that followed WW1, the socialist movements in the West went in line with anti-colonial struggle of oppressed populations and ultimately contributed to the decolonisation and change in the world order, while the Russian Bolsheviks silenced the anti-colonial resistance of former Russian colonies for decades.

It is remarkable that all the states that once were under control of Russian Empire and declared their independence after the fall of Tsarists regime were eventually included in the Soviet Union. Some of the states, such as Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Finland, had been autonomous until World War II. However, the Baltic states eventually were occupied by the Soviet army for around five decades [6] and Finland managed to preserve its independence although it cost tens of thousands of casualties, the ceding of 11% of its territory, a share of industry and the role of a satellite of the Soviet Union until its collapse [10]. Other states, including Ukraine, Belarus, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, attempted to achieve independence but were invaded by the Red Army in the early 1920s and did not even start the decolonisation process. Mark von Hagen described the short-lived sovereignty of these states and the subsequent renewal of Russian domination as a «failed decolonisation» [28].

### Failed Decolonisation

The Russian Revolution in 1917 was presumably conceived as anti-colonial in its essence. Many scholars view seminal works of Lenin, such as *The Right of Nations to Self-determination* (1914) and *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916) as valuable sources of postcolonialism. He developed Marx's ideas of national and colonial issues, having taken into consideration the specific historical contexts. As a matter of fact, in his work «The right of Nations to Self-Determination» Lenin disagreed with the widely shared among Western communists' view that support of the right of nations to secession implicates support of bourgeois nationalism. In contrast, he stated that as long as the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation fights the oppressor «we are always, in every case, and more strongly than anyone else, in favour», while when the bourgeoisie stands for its own bourgeois nationalism, «we stand against» [11]. Still, he underlined that the right for self-determination of nations has no other meanings than political self-determination, that is driven by strong economic factors in those states, where the bourgeois-democratic

reforms have not been completed yet, including Russia [11]. Furthermore, he continued, the national question in Russia is also conditioned by the fact that «subject people» in this nation state mainly inhabit the border regions, experience considerably stronger oppression that in neighbouring states, and in some cases such nationalities have compatriots across the border, who enjoy greater national independence. He concluded that these factors among others make the recognition of the right of nations to self-determination in Russia a critical issue [11].

It is important to note, *Lenin referred to Russia as to the multinational state with a ruling metropolitan and peripheral oppressed minorities, but never as to colonial empire*. Although he acknowledged the marginalised position of «oppressed nations» on the borders of «Great Russia», he did not include them among world's colonised peoples. While Lenin supported the self-determination of such nations in a political sense, he still regarded their indigenous territories as integral part of Russia. This made the striking difference between Russian Bolshevik anti-imperial thought and anti-colonial struggles in the periphery of the Russian Empire, where Marxism was considered as a way to mobilise people against Russian colonial rule. Stephen Velychenko suggests that the failure of most Russian Bolsheviks to recognise the nationalism of the ruling Russian nationality was the main cause of the emergence of the restoration of empire under communist rule [26, pp. 93–96].

The first federal Constitution in the Soviet Union was adopted on July 6, 1923 and ratified on January 31, 1924. It aimed to formally establish the links between Moscow and other republics: Ukrainian, Belarussian, and the Transcaucasian, which included Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia. The Supreme authority was granted to the Soviet Congress, which consisted of representatives from the cities' Soviets and provincial Soviets. The Union's Central Executive Committee had two chambers. One was the Council of the Union, comprising 371 members selected by the Congress from among the representatives of the republics in proportion to each republic's population. The other chamber was the Council of Nationalities, consisting of 131 representatives – five from each union republic or autonomous republic, and one from each autonomous region. These representatives were elected by the executive committee of the respective republic or region. The Council of People's Commissars continued to

be the body in charge of the implementation and administration of policies, responsible to the Central Executive Committee.

However, Rett. R. Ludwikowski made an interesting observation that the Constitution of the USSR and all related official documents refrained from using the terms «federal» and «federation». Instead, the state was strictly considered to be unitary, with several partially autonomous subordinate units included [12, p. 132]. Indeed, the new Constitution that was expected to divide the powers in the newly established union did not substantially deviate much from the Soviet (Russian) Constitution of 1918 that, as Rett. R. Ludwikowski pointed out, rather described than prescribed the organisation of power [12, p. 131]. He refers to W. Chamberlin, who remarked on the Soviet Constitution that its numerous provisions were merely theoretical as they were not put into practice. The actual power was held by the Communist Party, and the Constitution's provisions regarding election methods and the frequency of Soviet Congresses were disregarded or breached [12].

The theoretical nature of Soviet constitution may be best exemplified by Articles 14–15, which ensured freedom of speech, opinion and assembly. These provisions were later included in Article 125 of Stalin's Constitution of the USSR adopted in 1936, the period of the greatest terror in the Soviet Union. Notably, the following Article 126 in Stalin's Constitution for the first time mentioned the role of Bolshevik party, which was «represented the leading core of all organisations of the working people, both public and private» [2, Art. 126]. This provision was used for justification of the prohibition of all other political parties from operating within the Soviet Union and the legitimisation of a single-party state. Whereas in practice, the USSR was ruled by a one-party system from the outset of the Bolsheviks' seizure of power in Russia and it was firmly linked with nationalism that the Bolsheviks claimed to oppose.

The term «nationalism» was extensively applied to other communist parties, but it was never used regarding Bolsheviks, as they represented the golden standard of Soviet Man («homo sovieticus»), an average person, without nationality, strictly committed to Bolshevik ideology. However, a closer examination reveals that this standard, imposed on everyone under Bolshevik rule, was tightly linked to Russian national identity. To illustrate this point, Stephen Velychenko refers to CPU (Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine, which was founded in Moscow with less than 7% of Ukrainian members, and

came to power through the Red Army's occupation of Ukraine. The primary argument put forth by the CPU to legitimise the renewed subjugation of Ukraine under centralised Russian control was the alleged peril of a counterrevolution that could transform Ukraine into a colony of international imperialism [26, pp. 93–96].

Ukrainian socialists and Marxists who blamed Bolsheviks for reinforcing the old imperial structures of domination through puppet governments were quickly accused in complicity to bourgeoisie. The notorious right of nations for self-determination was called a tool of bourgeois counter-revolution against Soviet Russia, while the military invasion of Ukraine was named «liberation» [26, pp. 61–63]. It was a Communist Party of Ukraine, a part of a single centralised Russian Communist Party, overwhelmingly non-Ukrainian in membership and the only permitted party in Soviet Ukraine, that, in one month after gaining the power, declared all the decrees of the Ukrainian government regarding economics, finance, labor and communications superseded by Russian decrees, and declared its second most important task to provide resources to workers of another country, Russia [26, pp. 20–53]. Consequently, in the period of 1927 to 1928, the majority of Ukrainian products, such as wheat, were exported to Russian regions, comprising approximately 89% of all exports [5]. All the policy tools engineered by Bolshevik regime to suppress the revolt, starting with the so-called «indigenisation» (the short-term relief on cultural and linguistic matters) in 1920s and ending with the Holodomor (man-made famine that killed millions of Ukrainians and was recognised as an act of genocide by 19 countries and Ukraine [32]) in 1930s, were applied by the republican soviet government, that supposed to be independent.

Postulating that the USSR is nothing more than a «hierarchy of nations in which one nation grows and develops economically at the expense of other nations» [4, p. 112], Vsevolod Golubnychyi supported this statement with data from the balance of revenues and expenditures of the USSR state budget in Ukraine. According to it, in 1940, Moscow did not return to Ukraine 2,051 billion rubles in revenues. To compare, England's annual income from India around 1940 was equal to 2,99 billion rubles, and the income of the imperialists in China between 1931–1937 was equal to about 349,59 million rubles annually [4, p. 115]. Disproportions in the resources distribution are also evidenced by the data on the specific weight of Ukraine in the USSR by some indicators (Figure 2) and a comparison of Ukrainian

and the rest of the USSR's indices of national income and capital investments per capita (Figure 3).

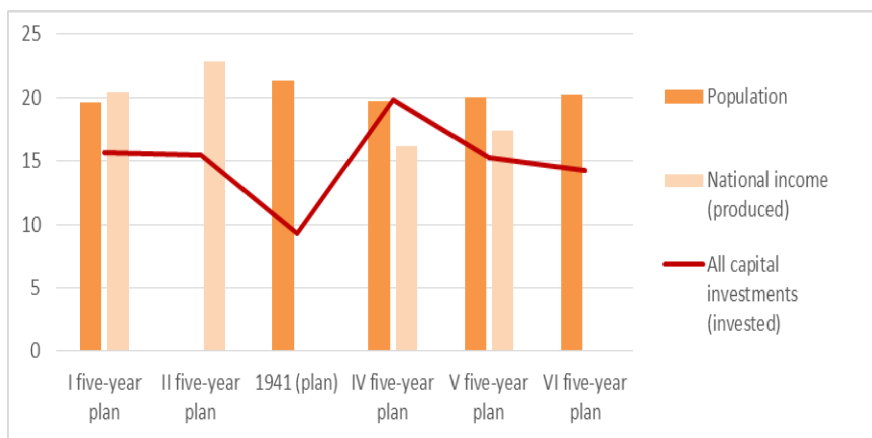


Figure 2. Specific weight of Ukraine in the USSR, %

Source: Own preparation based on [4, p. 117].

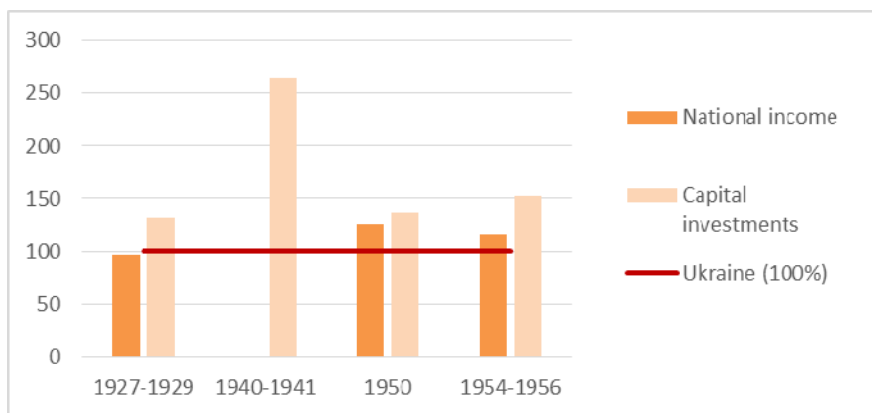


Figure 3. National income and capital investment of the USSR per unit of population compared to Ukraine, %

Source: Own preparation based on [4, p. 119].

Thus, in particular, Figure 3 illustrates that even when the national income of the rest of the USSR was higher than in Ukraine, they received even more capital investments. It means that resources were drained from Ukraine and it was deliberately impover-

ished. Another aspect was that after all the economic destruction and looting during WWII, losses of the national economy amounted to 40% of all-Union losses only 19% of all capital investments were allocated to Ukraine [33, pp. 324–326].

Along with this, continuing the imperial traditions, the colonialist demographic policy was launched. It tied peasants to the village or forced them to go to the North of Russia to Siberia and Kazakhstan. The prohibition on issuing passports to peasants except for actual serfdom and depriving Ukrainian industry of labor also deprived cities of an influx of Ukrainian ethnic elements [33, p. 333]. At the same time, there was a draining of human resources. According to Golubnychyi, Ukrainian universities graduated 550 000 specialists in the period from 1925 to 1955. As of 1955, there were only 414 000 of them in Ukraine. Thus, taking into account other factors, during these years, Ukraine lost about 21% of its specialists [4, p. 122]. Bohdan Vynar stressed an issue with «the saturation of the Ukrainian industry's administrative management apparatus with Russian management and service personnel, which does not correspond to the overall percentage of the Russian minority in Ukraine» as proof of economic colonialism and its national features in Ukraine [29, p. 101]. These data testify colonial expansion of Ukraine by the USSR in different contexts, including economic and demographic.

Imperial views regarding the indigenous populations of former colonies of Imperial Russia did not contradict, but rather reinforced the Marxists' ideas of nationalism and nationality, which posited that nationalism was regressive while small national states were archaic. Stephen Velychenko suggested that Bolsheviks «nationalised their communism» much like other Marxist movements in their respective countries while Lenin's principle of «the right of self-determination» was used as a pretext for the «imperial reunion» under the guise of improved conditions. He argues that most Bolsheviks, who had been educated in lines with the values and beliefs of the Russian Empire, did not consider Ukrainians foreign, but rather as a non-Russian minority, that had settled in Russian lands [26, p. 95]. Consequently, ethnic Ukrainians were officially permitted to join the Communist Party of Ukraine, work in Soviet institutions or hold high positions in the factories. However, they had to conform to the «Soviet Man» standard, which required complete adherence to Soviet (Russian Bolshevik) ideology and rejection of any aspect of national identity deemed undesirable or inferior by the Party. This unwritten rule was not ex-

clusive to Ukraine but was also applied in other «Soviet republics», such as Georgia and Kazakhstan. Consequently, in the Soviet Republics, it was possible for individuals of different ethnic backgrounds, including Ukrainians, Kazakhs, and Georgians, to hold influential positions alongside ethnic Russians. In fact, due to their non-Russian nationality, they often had stronger incentives to remain loyal to the Central Government in order to avoid being labelled as «enemies» of the people.

Similarly, Mark von Hagen argues that the Soviet political order did not resolve the colonial question or «national question», as it was called in the Russian Empire, but rather transformed it in a way that could satisfy the needs of the new political organisation in Russia [28, p. 159]. Von Hagen also notes in another article, «From Imperial Russia to Colonial Ukraine», that when the Bolshevik regime came to power, they criticised Wilson's program as a mere mask for continued imperialism and colonial slavery [27, p. 182]. However, similarly to the Entente leaders who chose not to apply the infamous Fourteen Points to their own colonies, the Bolsheviks retained complete political and economic control over non-Russian imperial lands, which were called «republics».

Despite this, many scholars who acknowledge the restoration of the Russian empire under Bolshevik rule tend to omit the continuity of colonial practices in Russia, that leads to misinterpretation of colonialism and its consequences in the post-Soviet space. For example, Paul Robinson suggests that the mechanism of revival of Russian empire under Soviet rule was a gradual divergence from international tensions and external threats [20, pp. 244–247]. According to Robinson, early Soviet ideology was strongly against Russian nationalism and had an internationalist flavour. However, later on, the emphasis gradually shifted towards building a nation within the Soviet Union, that involved a return to «narrative history» that glorified figures from Russia's imperial past. This shift was brought about by political tensions in Europe in the 1930s, and was further intensified by the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. Russian nationalism, thus, became the basis for rallying population against the external threat, as it was seen as a safer option compared to the nationalism of minorities who could potentially be viewed as fifth columns during the war.

While recognising the potential influence of external threats and tensions on the expansionist policies of the Soviet Union, we hold a

differing view that these factors alone can account for the regime's imperialistic actions. As previously discussed, the Bolsheviks' ideology inherently viewed Russia as a multinational state and the indigenous populations of its former colonies as minorities within that state. This suggests that colonial impulses were present from the outset of Soviet rule and persisted even after Stalin's death, which marked the end of the era of «Great Terror».

Following the death of Stalin in 1953, the Soviet Union underwent significant transformations both domestically and internationally, referred to as the «thaw» period in literature. This era was marked by a relaxation of propaganda, censorship, and ideology, as well as a desire for peaceful coexistence with other nations. Moreover, the USSR surprisingly became a vocal proponent of human rights on the international arena, particularly in regards to decolonisation, self-determination, and social rights, playing a crucial role in the establishment of the post-1945 human rights system. The Soviet government vigorously advocated for the inclusion of decolonisation, national liberation, and self-determination in the founding documents of the UN, while liberal Western powers held to the notion that only «mature» populations had the capability to exercise self-determination. In 1957, when Ghana joined the UN, Soviet leadership viewed it as their own achievement and presented the Soviet Union as a model for the rest of the world. Similar to the Soviet policies implemented since 1917, Khrushchev claimed that the nationalities who had endured oppression and poverty during the tsarist era were now experiencing freedom within the Soviet Union. He argued that through the principles of communist self-determination, these nationalities had the opportunity to cultivate their distinct cultures and make substantial advancements in their living standards [30, pp. 247–259].

Nonetheless, in reality, despite the Soviet Union's sincere endorsement of oppressed nations globally, it did not make any effort to grant autonomy to its own dependent populations. Instead, it used its image as a leader of the global socialist and anticolonial movement to justify military invasions of independent states such as the Baltic States, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Afghanistan. These double standards raise legitimate doubts about the genuine motives of the Soviet authorities when it comes to promoting human rights on the international stage. Indeed, after World War II, the so-called «Third



World» became the battlefield in the Cold War between the USSR and the Western Block.

The internal changes that took place in the Soviet Union after the Stalin's death followed the similar pattern. Khrushchev initiated the constitution-making, which was intended to signal a new era in the USSR. However, despite the new constitution's emphasis on the democratic foundations of the Soviet system and a significantly extended chapter on citizens' basic rights, it did not bring any significant changes to Soviet law. As Christopher Osakwe commented, in spite of the official declarations, the new constitution did not introduce any innovative ideas to Soviet law. Furthermore, it does not generate any significant hopes among the general public, and fails to establish a new developmental policy for Soviet society [16].

Certainly, most of the Soviet citizens, especially the marginalised minorities, could not expect any significant changes from the soviet law. As Krawchenko pointed out, the official stance of the Soviet Union on national relationships was no different from Marx and Engels' perspective that ideology serves to hide the interests of dominant socio-political groups [8, pp. 175–182]. Although the relative easing of censorship allowed for the emergence of a strong dissident movement in the Soviet republics, the Russian Bolshevik regime used a range of repressive tactics, including bureaucratic harassment, psychiatric abuse, forced exile, and judicial persecution, to suppress the dissidents [22]. It is worth to note that some Russian dissidents were also subjected to repression, however they did not encounter the specific issue of the «national question» that was carried over from the Russian Empire to the Soviet regime. The social prejudice against indigenous nationalities and the russification policy persisted under the guise of the «merge» project (Russian – «sliianie»), which aimed to further assimilate these groups into Russian culture. Krawchenko contends that the notion of Georgians, with their Ibero-Caucasian language, joining forces with the Finno-Ugric Estonians or the Turkic Uzbeks to create a unified nation with a common language was illogical. Instead, the practical application of «sliianie» aimed to assimilate these distinct groups entirely into Russian culture [8, pp. 175–182].

The new Fundamental Law of the USSR provided a more detailed outline of power distribution between the Union and Soviet Republics, but it did not alter the legal and institutional framework of the Soviet Union. For example, while Article 72 of the Constitution grant-

ed Union Republics the right to secede from the USSR [3, Art. 72], the absence of any legal procedures to exercise this right meant that it was effectively meaningless. This was evident when the Baltic states attempted to gain independence through parliamentary votes and referendums, only to be met with a response from the Supreme Soviet claiming that their actions were invalid due to discrepancies with Articles 74 and 75 of the constitution. These articles asserted the supremacy of USSR law and the sovereignty of the USSR over its territory, creating a legal gap that many lawyers refer to as a «lacuna». The Soviet Union's overwhelming military power combined with the dependence of the judiciary from the Party effectively ensured that the right to secede was never truly granted.

Concerning the economic component of Soviet colonial policy, it is worth considering the main macroeconomic indicators in Ukraine. Figure 4 demonstrates the actual constant decrease in most of them, which is a sign of ineffective economic policy and exhausting extensive economic development. Stepan Zlupko emphasized an essential factor that is not to be omitted when talking about the dynamics and efficiency of the national economy in the 1960s–1980s. All the economic decisions, starting from setting prices, distributing capital investments, directing production, approving transport tariffs, taxes and so on, were made based on imperial, not Ukrainian interests [33, p. 342].

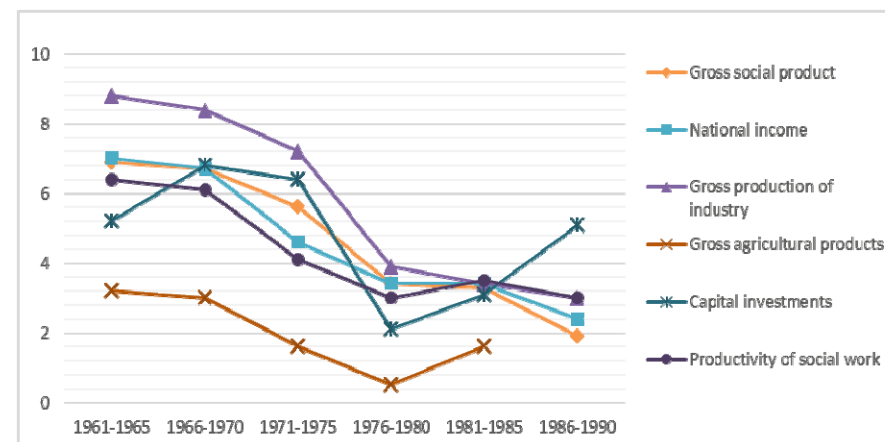


Figure 4. Average annual rates of growth of the main macroeconomic indicators in Ukraine (1961–1990), %  
 Source: Own preparation based on [33, p. 337].

Another side of the coin was that Ukraine had limited capacity to provide itself with the final product. The integration of Ukrainian industry in the final product production amounted to 15–20%, while more than 70% in Russia [33, p. 361].

In general, evidence about Soviet colonialism covers a wide range of issues and spheres of life. In particular, such an issue as Soviet ecocide when almost a third of the ecological dirt of the empire was concentrated on 3% of the USSR's territory, i.e. Ukraine [33, p. 353]. Or the state of Ukrainian science and language as well. To demonstrate a colonial-periphery position of Ukrainian economic science, for instance, Zlupko noted, that «during the entire period of existence of the Ukrainian SSR, not a single work of the world economic classics was published in the Ukrainian language, if we do not count «Capital» and other works of Marx. All other classics were supposed to be replaced by the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Brezhnev, etc. But the Ukrainian-speaking reader does not have Aristotle, Plato, Petty, Smith, Keene, Ricardo, Keynes, Samuelson, etc., etc.» which is important to keep pace with the achievement of the civilized world [34, p. 70].

Building upon the previous points, *the Western perception of the Soviet regime as both anti-imperialistic and anticolonial was shaped by the role of socialist movements in the Western World and the USSR's involvement in the global decolonisation movement*. However, this view fails to account for the domination-oriented attitude towards former colonies, ingrained in the Bolsheviks' ideology inherited from the Russian Empire, which persisted throughout the Soviet Union's existence until its dissolution. Many postcolonial scholars find it contradictory to believe that a country that championed the rights of the most underprivileged and subjugated peoples would also take a diametrically opposed stance towards other nations. Consequently, most of the atrocities committed by Russian Bolsheviks are often solely attributed to Stalin's «great terror», thereby overlooking the continuous oppression of nations within the USSR by the Bolshevik regime, which was carried out through quasi-colonial institutions that operated within the mainly declaratory in nature legal system. This continuity of colonialism experienced had a lasting impact on the development of ex-dependant states after the collapse of the USSR, exacerbated by the reluctance of the ex-colonial metropole, the present-day Russian Federation, to embrace its colonial past.

It is crucial to point out that not all former colonies of Russian Empire perfectly fit into the category of what Mark von Hagen referred to as «failed decolonization». Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia were able to maintain their sovereignty for several decades before the Soviet invasion. As Andres Kasekamp points out, the newly autonomous states encountered numerous obstacles in constructing their government and establishing their national identity [6]. Nevertheless, they experienced a process of state-building, formed the required institutions, and fundamentally reorganised their economies, becoming notable exporters of food to Western Europe by the late 1930s. So, despite the interruption of the decolonisation process by the new invasion, the years of independence provided significant advantages to the Baltic States in restoring their independence in 1991. This sets them apart from former colonies of Russian empire, where the Bolshevik regime quickly replaced the old imperial regime.

**Conclusion.** Throughout this article, we focused on the applicability of postcolonial theory to the post-Soviet states and the untapped potential within this context. By scrutinising the intersections of theory and reality, we have sought to shed light on the unexplored avenues within the realm of postcolonial studies in this specific geopolitical landscape.

Analysis of the limitations of traditional postcolonial theory highlighted how it often overlooks the complex dynamics of the so-called «Second World». It was evident that the exploitation of indigenous populations was rationalised through their perceived «backwardness», creating a sense of inferiority based on any distinguishing characteristic. Colonialism's impact extended beyond mere racial or geographical boundaries. Drawing from this understanding, we delved into the colonial practices of both the Russian imperial and Bolshevik regimes. Despite variations in implementation, these practices exhibited striking similarities with Western colonialism, including economic exploitation, cultural imposition, and the perpetuation of an inferiority complex among the colonised.

Our analysis unveiled that exclusion of former colonies of Russian Empire from postcolonial studies primarily stemmed from a misperception of Bolshevik ideology, often considered anti-imperialist and anti-colonial. Our research revealed that the Bolsheviks monopolised the anti-imperialist communist movement, denying colonies the chance for independence. We also underscored the persistence of colonial practices, such as genocide and forced deporta-

tions, which have often been overlooked due to the Soviet Union's anti-colonial stance and the underrepresentation of post-Soviet states in global knowledge production.

Enriching our comprehension of global colonialism's multifaceted nature, this article underscores the urgent need to view the post-imperial post-Soviet space through a postcolonial lens. By doing so, it advocates for a more inclusive examination of marginalised societies. Our approach supplements the prevailing discourse on Western colonialism, offering fresh perspectives and deepening our understanding of global colonial legacies. After all, a context-specific approach is indispensable to grasp the intricate trajectories of post-Soviet states. Such an approach informs enlightened policy decisions and transformative reforms, ensuring that these nations evolve in ways that resonate with their unique historical contexts. Furthermore, adopting a postcolonial framework facilitates the participation of scholars from diverse backgrounds in global knowledge production. This inclusive approach guarantees representation for various post-Soviet states, fostering a more comprehensive analysis of the colonial legacy and its global ramifications.

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