EXPLANATORY POTENTIAL OF THE POSTCOLONIAL APPROACH FOR UNDERSTANDING THE RUSSIA–UKRAINE WAR

Olena Khylko & Maksym Khylko

DOI: https://doi.org/10.61095/815-0047-2024-2-18-41

© Olena Khylko
PhD in Political Science and MA in International Relations, Researcher,
Institute of European Studies and International Relations,
Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences, Comenius University
Mlynské luhy 4, 82105 Bratislava
E-mail: khylko.olena@fses.uniba.sk
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0859-0060

© Maksym Khylko
PhD in Philosophy and MA in International Relations, Associate Professor,
Institute of European Studies and International Relations,
Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences, Comenius University
Mlynské luhy 4, 82105 Bratislava
E-mail: maksym.khylko@fses.uniba.sk
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6365-339X

Abstract. The escalation of the Russia–Ukraine confrontation into a full-scale war in 2022 reinforced questions about the deficiencies of the mainstream IR theoretical paradigms in exploring and explaining the development in Eastern Europe. In this article, we examine the explanatory potential that the postcolonial approach in IR can contribute to elucidating Russia's aggressive behaviour and, no less importantly, Ukraine's desperate resistance to the invasion. This includes examining the coloniser–colonised dichotomy within the historical context of Russia–Ukraine relations, the Russian neocolonial agenda in independent Ukraine, and the

applicability of the concepts of the Other and Subaltern to Russian perceptions of Ukrainians. We offer substantiation of the premise that, although the status of Ukrainians within the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union differed from the experiences of overseas colonies, there are still common features — such as predatory exploitation of human and natural resources, enslavement and forced relocations, and cultural suppression and marginalization of indigenous people — that support the application of a postcolonial approach. The perspective highlighted with the help of the postcolonial lens fills in the gaps inherent in other theoretical approaches, addressing the coloniser's tendency to use power to retain hegemony and revealing how Russian hybrid perception of Ukrainians as the same people to Russians, but subaltern, shaped Ukrainian culture of resistance to oppression.

Keywords: international relations, postcolonialism, neocolonialism, Ukraine, Russia–Ukraine war.

Mainstream IR theories and Russia–Ukraine war

Russia's full-scale military intervention in Ukraine in February 2022 took scholars and politicians across the globe by surprise, even those who had been following developments in the region and were recognised as experts on Russia. And this is natural for people with rational thinking, because, as Valeria Korablyova notes, the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine "questioned a rational explanation, given that a full-blown military assault on its face was not beneficial to Russia's state interests, whether geopolitical or geoeconomic" (Korablyova 2022: 40). At the same time, the inability of the international community to foresee such a dramatic development raised questions about the limitations of the mainstream International Relations theoretical paradigms (Dutkiewicz & Smolenski 2023) in comprehending regional interdependencies and local actors' motivations, as well as in predicting scenarios that go beyond rational explanations.

Decades of dominance of realism and liberalism in International Relations studies fostered the reliance on explaining IR primarily through the lenses of these two paradigms. This subsequently resulted in assertions that IR had become a discipline imbued with "gendered, ethnocentric, and broader socio-political concerns" (Tickner 2013: 628). Yet, for both realists and liberals, Eastern Europe, apart from Russia, "has generally appeared as an object of projecting power and visions of governance rather than a subject in its own right in the field of making, and making sense of, international relations",

as Maria Mälksoo rightly points out (Mälksoo 2021: 871). Realists' preoccupation with the Cold War's great powers' rivalry hampered their insightfulness in analysing specifics of Russia's motivations and objectives in Eastern Europe, while liberalists' overestimation of the potential of interdependence to bring competitors closer led to overlooking the importance of other reasons shaping the development in the region.

Traditionally, the realist paradigm has displayed a penchant for "great power narcissism" (Hagström 2021), the origins of which can be traced back to Thucydides' historical chronicles where the maxim "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must" (Thucydides 1972: 2) is embedded. This inclination leads to the marginalization of the agency of small and medium powers, which in this case reduces Ukraine to the role of a hostage to the circumstances created by the great powers (Mearsheimer 2014). However, such deprivation of Ukraine of its agency is refuted by the fact that it was Ukraine's desperate resistance in the first months of the full-scale Russian invasion that forced Western partners to reconsider their initial positions and begin to actively support Ukraine with arms supplies. Realists also claim the West's responsibility for Russia's aggression (Mearsheimer 2014; Walt 2022) and insist that it was the promise of the NATO membership for Ukraine that provoked Russia (Mearsheimer 2014). However, this stance overlooks the fact that Vladimir Putin's revisionist speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference was delivered before the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit where Ukraine was promised membership (Nye 2022b). Even back in 2000, the renewed Russian Foreign Policy Concept already indicated Moscow's claims that "the formation of new equal, mutually beneficial, partnership relations between Russia and the outside world did not materialise". Among the foreign policy goals, the Concept pointed to strengthening Russia's position as "a great power and as one of the influential centres of the modern world" (Tehèkspert 2000). And Putin was convinced that it was Ukraine that could help Russia gain the "critical mass" for achieving this goal (Trenin 2018).

Neoliberals, on the other hand, argued that economic interdependence, along with intense globalization, made wars too expensive and inexpedient, which should deter states from aggression (Copeland 1996), and that Russia's democratisation would be a precondition for a transformative process that would make conflicts inexpedient (Bouchet 2015; Gat 2005). Since Russia's economic progress strongly depended on Western technologies and trade with the European Union as a major purchaser of its energy resources, the neoliberal logic viewed war as an extremely unreasonable endeavour. However, the full-scale aggression against Ukraine has shown that rational

economic considerations do not always prevail over other motivations and "while economic interdependence can raise the costs of war, it clearly does not prevent it", as Joseph Nye points out (2022a).

An alternative perspective on the motivation of Russia's behaviour could derive from a constructivist standpoint interpreting power politics as a socially constructed reality rather than a naturally predefined mode of interaction between states (Wendt 1992). This logic allows for arguing that Russia's perception of interest and security is interlinked with its "alternative identities", built around the notion of Russia "as a supranational entity or region, understood in cultural civilisationist terms, or in geoeconomic terms — or both at the same time" (Kazharski 2019: 190). Given that rational choice models are insufficient for explaining Russia's behaviour, constructivists study it not as a purely rational actor, but rather as a state driven by cultural factors.

Although constructivists equip the academic discourse with insightful tools to analyse Russia's behaviour as determined by culture and identities, the nature of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, as well as the resoluteness of Ukraine's desperate response, prompt the expansion of theoretical tools and the range of IR paradigms for interpreting these events, their origins and preconditions. In this respect, the ongoing discussions on the need for decolonisation of International Relations (Davis A. et al. 2020; Hassan & Sajjad 2022; Tucker 2018) inspire the renewed attempts to apply a postcolonial lens to the study of social and political dynamics in Russia–Ukraine relations and, more broadly, in Eastern Europe. Timothy Snyder, one of the most respected Western historians specializing in the history of Central and Eastern Europe, boosts this process by naming Russia's war in Ukraine "a colonial war" and Ukraine "a post-colonial country" (Snyder 2022). The imperial nature of Russia's war against Ukraine is also noted by a number of other scholars (Burlyuk & Musliu 2023: 606), thus marking a significant shift in academic discourse, as Ukraine has long been "among the most flagrantly neglected cases of Soviet colonialism due to the allegedly insufficient applicability of the label 'postcolonial' to the former Soviet/Russian imperial space" (Mälksoo 2023: 473). Application of the toolkit of postcolonial studies for interpreting the dynamics in this region can enrich the explanatory potential of IR theories.

It should be noted that in the last decades, academic discourse representing Russia itself as an object of Western colonisation has intensified, echoing the nineteenth century Slavophiles and early-twentieth-century Eurasianists, widely spreading not only in Russia alone, but also among Western left-wing groups and broader non-Western audiences (Tolz & Hutchings 2023). Tamar Koplatadze argues that this tendency is largely rooted in the theoretical discourse on Russia's

internally colonised identity vis-à-vis the West, and within this narrative, the Russian Empire and subsequently the Soviet Union "are regarded as non-colonial powers since the Russian population allegedly suffered more under Russo-Soviet rule than non-Russian nationalities in the annexed territories" (Koplatadze 2022). Andrey Makarychev and Ryhor Nizhnikau highlight that "Russia actively utilizes the Western academic rules for its own benefit", mimicking the major vocabularies and redeploying dominant narratives to support the Kremlin propaganda "through Russia-sympathetic scholars" (Makarychev & Nizhnikau 2023). Vitaly Chernetsky considers the phenomenon of presenting Russia rather as victim of Western colonialist expansion than as a colonialist offender within Russia's practice of post-truth application, including the postcolonial discourse (Chernetsky 2023). In some academic papers, arguments of Russia's decolonisation discourse are even used to portray the invasion of Ukraine as "Eurasian decolonisation, rather than the first step of Russian neo-imperial expansionism" (Kang 2020: 26).

Meanwhile, academic discourse lacks the Ukrainian perspective on the application of postcolonial approaches, which substantiates the argument about the "subaltern and marginalized position of Ukrainian studies vis-a-vis Russian studies in the West" (Chernetsky 2003: 36–37), as well as about "the refusal to recognise the Ukrainian subject as a legitimate knowledge generator and an agent of its own liberation from Russian colonialism" (Kurylo 2023: 686). Maria Sonevytsky notes that such epistemic imperialism leads to the domination of the outsider narratives about what Ukraine is, "often wholly skipping the knowledge produced in Ukraine, by Ukrainians, or by those who study Ukraine specifically" (Sonevytsky 2023: 22). Victoria Donovan claims that the Western decolonial discourses "reproduce the same hierarchies of authority and power" speaking "on behalf of" the marginalized others, including Ukrainians (Donovan 2023: 169). Míla O'Sullivan and Kateřina Krulišová point out that the "Western practices of exclusion of those directly impacted by Russian imperial aggression" and "speaking over Ukraine" contributed to misunderstandings about the imperial nature of the Russian invasion (O'Sullivan & Krulišová 2023). These arguments highlight a broader trend of objectifying the Central and Eastern European countries in the International Relations studies (Davis N. 2022; Dudko 2023) and "Western epistemic practices of marginalization and silencing of the CEE Subaltern/Other" referred to as "Westsplaining" (O'Sullivan & Krulišová 2023). Aliaksei Kazharski notes that the Western discourse on Central and Eastern Europe suffers from "distortions caused by its deep Russo-centrism" and "assumption that powerful players can and should talk to Moscow over the heads of Central and Eastern European countries" (Kazharski 2022).

Against this backdrop, a conference held at the European Humanities University (Vilnius, Lithuania) in September 2023, was a rare opportunity for scholars and practitioners from countries implicated by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine "to delink from hegemonic narratives and structures of power-knowledge imposed from the imperial centre" and "to express perspectives embedded in their local experiences" (Korablyova 2023). However, this event was a fairly rare possibility against the backdrop of a still generally dominant approach of silencing local voices calling for decolonisation of education and research in the newly independent Eastern European states that emerged from the former Soviet Union.

In light of the aforementioned considerations, this paper explores the pertinence of adopting a postcolonial approach to explain Russia's assertive behaviour and, no less importantly, Ukraine's desperate resistance. The authors seek to underscore the added value that postcolonial studies can offer within a broader discourse on the decolonisation of International Relations studies, particularly in the context of the Eastern European region — traditionally not a prominent area of focus for this theoretical approach.

Applying postcolonial lens to Russia–Ukraine relations

While opponents of applying a postcolonial perspective to the Central and Eastern European countries emphasise that "we are not dealing here with classical colonies, which are distant and lie across the seas", the proponents note the relevancy of such research "to understand how the imperial centre of authority aims to subordinate to itself or dominate the territories desired by itself" (Korek 2007). Considering the question of whether one can speak of postcolonialism in regard to the post-Soviet space, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, along with other scholars, notes: "When an alien nation-state establishes itself as ruler, impressing its own laws and systems of education and rearranging the mode of production for its own economic benefit, 'coloniser' and 'colonised' can be used" (Spivak et al. 2006: 828).

It should be noted that there is no consensus among contemporary Ukrainian scholars on the issue of Ukraine's colonial status. Some scholars attribute the imprint of Russia's colonial legacy to Ukraine's asymmetric relations with Russia that affected the development trajectory and identity of Ukraine (Riabchuk 2010; Riabczuk 2013). Others argue that defining Ukraine as a colony negates its creative role within the Russian Empire (Hrytsak 2015). As for public attitudes,

a 2023 opinion poll indicated that a majority of 64% Ukrainians agreed that Ukraine was a colony of the Russian Empire, while 31% disagreed with this definition (Hrushetskyi 2023).

For the purposes of this research, we apply the postcolonial approach that seeks alternative interpretations rooted in justice and the adoption of alternative norms (Wilkens 2017) and challenges rationalist notions of power as a tool constraining self-determination (Bhabha 1994: 20; Fanon 1963: 146), asserting that power often leads to domination and varying degrees of complex hegemony (Said 1979: 5). Postcolonialism delves into the sophisticated connection between memory, historical experiences and politics, offering insights into the motivations behind resistance and patterns of transformation as vehicles for emancipation. It also exposes the legacies of colonial rule and imperial administration that inform contemporary global politics (Küçük 2022: 157).

Postcolonial studies encompass both the examination of colonial practices and neocolonial dynamics. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asserts that "we live in a post-colonial, neocolonised world" (quoted in Griffiths 2014: 144), while Homi K. Bhabha contends that postcoloniality serves as "a salutary reminder of the persistent 'neocolonial' relations within the 'new' world order and the multi-national division of labour" (Bhabha 1994: 6). Criticizing the dominant powers' understanding of power as a tool for acquiring and sustaining hegemony is central to this perspective. The study of colonial practices is essential for understanding how these practices have influenced societal responses to domination and shaped various forms of resistance.

The application of a postcolonial lens to the study of Russia–Ukraine relations involves examining of power projection, representation, identity markers, hybridity, and resistance against the imposition of dominant norms. This necessitates a preliminary exploration of the coloniser–colonised dichotomy within the historical context of Russia–Ukraine relations. Although not a novel discussion (Moore 2001; Szeptycki 2011), this perspective is still insufficiently represented in academic discourse. It incorporates both imperial and colonial patterns in Russia's legacy, including territorial acquisition through the displacement of native populations, assimilation through violence, uprooting locals and rooting settlers, and co-optation of local institutions (Kassymbekova 2022). Cultural denigration is manifested through processes encompassing annihilation, humiliation, and the suppression of indigenous elements, thereby eradicating their highly esteemed connotations.

Among the significant manifestations of Russia's dominance, researchers point out attempts to manipulate and absorb Ukrainian

historical and cultural legacy (Stepanenko 2022; Sukhov 2023; Yurchuk 2013). In tsarist times, Moscow appropriated all available Ukrainian historical manuscripts, including the documents of Kyivan Rus. Some of them were annihilated, while others were rewritten by tsarist scribes and historians in line with the Russian historical narratives, incorporating Ukrainian historical and cultural heritage into Russian context and denying the state-forming agency of Ukraine (Dashkevych 2014; Kostenko & Halupa 2021).

An important factor of Ukraine's colonial status was the absence of its own state centre. As Mykola Riabchuk notes, the mechanisms of governance, rather than being solely performed by Russia-instilled institutions, were imbued with creolization practices, when Russian-speaking local people were appointed to undertake low-profile administrative roles (Riabchuk 2000). This practice continued throughout the existence of the Russian Empire and was later inherited and continued by the Soviet Union, with the small exception of the period of "indigenisation" policy of the early USSR in the 1920s, when the Bolsheviks were trying to win the support of the local population, including in Ukraine. Even the first decades of Ukrainian independence after the collapse of the USSR were marked by the domination of creole elites, who exhibited Soviet/Russian identities, evinced allegiance to Russia and readiness to sustain its influence in Ukraine.

Another important factor is the linguistic and cultural oppression and marginalization of the local population. In the 17th and 19th centuries, several dozen resolutions were issued by Russian administrations to restrict or ban the use of the Ukrainian language (Virchenko 2011). The most notorious examples were the Valuev and Ems decrees of 1863 and 1876 respectively: the former forbade religious and educational publications in Ukrainian except for belles-lettres works; and the latter banned the use of the Ukrainian language in print except for reprinting old documents and forbade the import of Ukrainian publications and the staging of plays or lectures in Ukrainian (Dibrova 2017).

Imposing the use of terms like "Malorossiya" (Lesser Russia) instead of "Ukraine" and encouraging the use of "Khokhols" as a derogatory name for Ukrainians served to erase the national identity traits of Ukrainians and to indicate the superiority of Russians over them (Grabowicz 1995: 678). In order to climb the social ladder and become part of the political and cultural elite, people of Ukrainian descent were forced to renounce their Ukrainian identity in favour of loyalty to the Russian (later Soviet) identity. The "inferior identity of 'little Russians' has been deeply internalised by many Ukrainians", as they had to "hide their Ukrainian identity from an early age", inter alia, by not speaking the Ukrainian language in public (Kurylo 2023: 689).

Ukrainians also experienced a series of violent acts and policies, including the artificial famine of 1932–1933 that brought millions of deaths and a cultural trauma (Klymenko 2016) and is recognized as genocide by parliaments of many countries (Holodomor Museum 2023). In 2022, the European Parliament stated in its resolution, adopted by 507 votes in favour, with only 12 against and 17 abstentions, that it "Recognises the Holodomor, the artificial famine of 1932–1933 in Ukraine caused by a deliberate policy of the Soviet regime, as a genocide against the Ukrainian people, as it was committed with the intent to destroy a group of people" (European Parliament 2022).

There were also mass deportations of Ukrainians to other regions of the USSR in 1944–1951 (UINM 2019) and repressions and executions of the Ukrainian political, intellectual and cultural elite (Shkandrij & Bertelsen 2013), accompanied by economic exploitation and resource appropriation. In the 1930s, the Ukrainian peasants, denied ID documents, were effectively locked in rural ghettos, deprived of freedom of movement. Since the 1950s, natural gas had been extracted with predatory intensity in the territory of Ukraine in the interests of the Soviet Union, thus rapidly and ruthlessly depleting Ukraine's raw material resources (Pavlushko 2018).

The above-mentioned practices, among other things, give reasons to consider Russian and later Soviet domination of Ukraine as colonial and imperialist, since a colonial policy can cover not only overseas territories but also encompasses imperial borderlands and contiguous lands (Shkandrij 2001: XI). In this context, it is worth noting that even the early Soviet historical anti-colonialism scholars of the 1920s and early 1930s, such as Mikhail Pokrovskii and Nikolai Ianchevskii, admitted that the expansion of the Grand Duchy of Moscow and later of the Russian Empire was based on "predatory exploitation of colonies; eradication and enslavement of indigenous people" (quoted in Golubev 2023: 195). They also exposed the practices of Russian imperial history studies to erase the histories of indigenous people whose lands had been colonised (quoted in Golubev 2023: 197).

Is Ukraine the Other and/or Subaltern for Russia?

Russia's strategy includes imposing an approach of a similar identity, considering Ukrainians not as the Other constituent to the Russian identity, but rather as essentially the same people with regional peculiarities. Since the times of the Tsarist Russia, the attitude towards Ukrainians as an ethnically similar group (Kappeler 2014) has

led to the denial of the right to be considered a separate people, and the Ukrainian language, along with Belarusian, was seen merely as a dialect of the "Great Russian language" (Etkind et al. 2012: 14). This tradition is carried on by the current Russian authorities, including President Vladimir Putin, who consistently emphasises the narrative of a "one people" (Putin 2021; Putin 2023).

While in the Tsarist Russia the prohibition model of identity moulding prevailed, in the Soviet era it was a substitution model under which Ukrainian national symbols were gradually replaced by imperial ones through renaming and infusing them with imperial fundamentals or markers (Yurchuk 2013: 153). The substitution model posed a hidden threat causing no opposition to replacement that went on invisibly. The central objective of this substitution was to eliminate any evidence of Otherness. Drawing from Edward Said's insights (Said 1979), the coloniser typically constructs the colonised as the Other marked by significant racial, cultural, and linguistic distinctions. And in this sense, the relations become constitutive. Here the question arises whether Ukraine is the Other for Russia?

Miroslav Shkandrij substantiates that the "oriental" portrayal of Ukraine in Russian literature bears a resemblance to the oriental depictions of colonial territories prevalent in Western literary works (Shkandrij 2001: 30). Ukraine perpetually performs the role of a borderland, existing on the periphery and lagging behind, deprived of intrinsic value or purpose, thereby assuming an exoticized aura. These attributes find resonance in the literary works of Mikhail Lermontov, Vissarion Belinski, Alexander Pushkin and other Russian authors (Shkandrij 2001: 121–122).

Ukraine's image in the Russian consciousness has exhibited an inherent ambivalence. It emerges as both a proximate and distant land, simultaneously possessing fraternal and antagonistic connotations, thereby presenting a paradox between the familiar and the unknown. This does not attribute Otherness to Ukraine that could have been a foundation for constitutive relationships in Said's interpretation (Said 1979: 97). Instead, it assumes the image of Ukraine as of Russia's civilisationally identical part retaining distinctive regional traits.

However, not being the Other did not shield Ukraine from becoming the subaltern — the one who doesn't speak (Spivak 1988), deprived of voice and actions, misappropriated or rendered inoperative (Cox 1983), the one who is excluded from power distribution. Inter alia, this was manifested in the artificial elevation of the Russian language in urban areas and extrusion of Ukrainian to rural ghettoized areas. Russia propagated an image of cultural supremacy, curtailed movement freedoms, and imposed norms that further entrenched the discourse

of supremacy and possession. This process not only produced the phenomenon of the subaltern but also induced an inferiority syndrome.

George Grabowicz notes the deliberate "provincialization" of Ukrainian culture under Russia's rule "in terms of the loss of quality, narrowing of horizons, distortion of intellectual and artistic production" (Grabowicz 1995: 678–679). Ukrainians became unsure of their own cultural affinities and even felt "stigmatized by [their] own language", stresses Vitaly Chernetsky (Chernetsky 2003: 40). According to Frantz Fanon, it is the colonisers who artificially impose the inferiority syndrome on native cultures (Fanon 1963: 53). As a consequence of unequal relations, subordination emerges where the colonised internalizes the possessive discourse of the coloniser, resulting in self-underestimation and even self-hatred (Fanon 1963: 236). This mental subordination leads to the perception of one's own culture as inferior, fostering readiness to discard it in favour of the dominant culture.

The enduring impact of this subalternity-making process is evident in the formation of two models of response to the colonial heritage or postcolonial policies and identity consolidation in Ukraine, each imprinted with differing degrees of colonial memory. The first one is a national-oriented postcolonialism with cultural and language components at the centre, and the second one is a postmodern postcolonialism with the focus on efficient institutions, innovative competitive economy with accelerated modernization where cultural and language issues would be complementary/hidden (Dubrovskiy et al. 2024; Zhurzhenko 2002). This complicated and multi-layered colonial heritage shaped several types of national consciousness (Riabchuk 2015) with a different scale of imprinted colonial memory that complicate and jeopardize the elaboration of comprehensive foreign, security, social, and economic policies. Furthermore, it rendered Ukraine vulnerable to external influences, which Russia has sought to exploit in its neocolonial policies for more than thirty years of Ukraine's independence.

Russia's hybrid perception of Ukrainians as people similar to Russians but Russia's subaltern withal — shaped Ukrainians' identity traits, in particular the culture of protest and resistance to the oppression and subjugation that explains Ukraine's determined response to Russia's aggression. Opinion polls show that, contrary to Putin's claims, only 4% of Ukrainians consider Russians to be a fraternal nation, only 0.5% of respondents attribute themselves to Russian cultural traditions, and 4% attribute themselves to Soviet cultural traditions, while 81% identify themselves with the Ukrainian cultural tradition, and 10% — with the pan-European cultural tradition (Razumkov Centre 2023).

Neocolonial agenda in independent Ukraine

The term "neocolonialism", introduced by Jean Paul Sartre in his work *Colonialism and Neocolonialism* (Sartre 1964), highlighted France's continued influence in Africa and the imperative for colonised nations to break free from their colonisers. Since then, neocolonialism has been understood as a complex set of domination measures, such as penetration and infiltration into financial, economic, political, and security structures. This entails altering identity formation to establish and uphold political control while ensuring cultural subjugation. Neocolonialism deploys control over mass media and religion to disseminate narratives that foster loyalty to the dominant state and culture (Nkrumah 1965; Uzoigwe 2019), often rooted in the presumption that former colonies lack the capacity for autonomous governance (Mbembe 2001).

As soon as Russia recovered from the collapse of the USSR, Moscow intensified the practices aimed at restoring the subordination of Ukraine, which, inter alia, encompassed cultural, religious, and media influences, energy dependence, economic expansion, and penetration into Ukrainian political and security institutions. There is a number of publications that analyse these processes in a fairly comprehensive manner (e.g., see: Gonchar 2016; Horbulin 2017; Hurak & D'Anieri 2022; Kuzio & D'Anieri 2018; Rácz 2015). Therefore, in this article, we will only briefly highlight some aspects that reflect the post-colonial nature of Russia's policy towards Ukraine in the post-Soviet period, culminating in a full-scale invasion in 2022.

Having declared the official goals of promoting the Russian language, heritage and culture, reconnecting the Russian diaspora with its homeland (Russkiy Mir Foundation 2024) and strengthening Russia's humanitarian influence in the world (Rossotrudnichestvo 2024), the Russkiy Mir (Russian world) Foundation established by Vladimir Putin's decree in 2007, and the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Rossotrudnichestvo) founded by Dmitry Medvedev's decree in 2008, played a pivotal role in orchestrating cultural dominance and disseminating Russian narratives in the "near abroad", including Ukraine (Gorham 2019; Koval et al. 2022).

Russian-linked media ownership in Ukraine, through affiliated oligarchs and businessmen, provided a fertile ground for disseminating narratives, fostering propaganda and disinformation, intervening in Ukrainian political processes, and sowing divisions along linguistic, religious, and political lines (Avdeeva 2021; Goloborod'ko 2020;

Savoyska 2009; Vinnichuk 2019). The Ukrainian Orthodox Church subordinated to the Moscow Patriarchate, made a significant contribution to keeping its adherents within the paradigm of the "Russian world" and promoting Russia's geopolitical agenda (Blitt 2011; Krawchuk 2022; Ohle et al. 2021; Zdioruk & Haran 2012).

Having officially defined its fuel and energy complex as "an instrument of domestic and foreign policy" (Meganorm 2003), Russia has been widely using its energy advantage, strategic infrastructure, and energy export to achieve its foreign and security policy goals, including increasing its influence on Ukraine (Balmaceda 2015; Gonchar et al. 2015; Newnham 2011; Sukhodolia 2020). In 2013, not long before the Russian occupation of Crimea and certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, Ukraine was still heavily dependent on Moscow for energy supplies and imported from Russia over 68% of mineral fuels, oil and petroleum products, and 50% of fuel units for Soviet-era nuclear power plants (Lytvynenko & Sinaiko 2021: 52).

By lobbying through the Russian-linked "red directors" of Ukrainian heavy industry enterprises to purchase raw materials and equipment that meet the Customs Union standards rather than those of the EU, Moscow hindered Ukraine's modernization efforts to deter it from accessing the European market. Multiple Russian bids to acquire Ukrainian strategic industrial enterprises, such as Motor-Sich, which produced engines for combat helicopters, underscored Moscow's intent to control Ukrainian strategic infrastructure (Hurska 2019). The active penetration of Russian capital into Ukraine's financial system in 2005–2013, including through the growing presence of Russian state-owned banks, increased the vulnerability of the Ukrainian economy to Moscow's pressure (Danylyshyn 2017; Muslienko & Moyiseienko 2019). Moscow has repeatedly applied economic leverage to exert political pressure on Kyiv, in particular to disrupt the signing of the Association and Free Trade Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union in 2013 (Horbulin 2017: 59–68; Lytvynenko & Sinaiko 2021: 42–60).

Russian influence on Ukraine's political landscape was successful in that it sowed perpetual uncertainty regarding European and Eurasian integration, as well as political and economic modernization, and stagnation (Rácz 2015). Victor Yanukovych, whom Moscow openly supported during the 2010 presidential elections, attempted to impose an authoritarian model of government in Ukraine similar to that in Russia. Just two months after coming to power, Yanukovych signed the Kharkiv Accords, which extended the stay of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Ukrainian Crimea until 2042. A significant manifestation of Russia's influence was the adoption in 2010 of the Law of Ukraine on the Principles of Domestic and Foreign Policy, which enshrined

Ukraine's non-bloc status, effectively precluding its move toward rapprochement with NATO (Verkhovna Rada Ukrayiny 2010). The researchers note such forms of Russian activity as corruption of Ukrainian political elites, interference in elections, utilization of Ukrainian oligarchs as agents of influence, and other penetration tactics aimed at internal destabilization and undermining relations between Ukraine and its Western partners (Watling et al. 2023: 4–12).

By 2013, Moscow's pressure on Kyiv became so intense that even the pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovych complained about it to the German chancellor Angela Merkel in a conversation caught on camera on the margins of the 2013 Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit: "We have huge problems with Moscow. For three and a half years I have been one-on-one with a strong Russia" (Gordon et al. 2022). Under political pressure and harsh trade restrictions from Russia, the Ukrainian government refused to sign the Association and Free Trade Agreement with the European Union, which led to people's massive protests and the change of power in Ukraine to a pro-Western government. The subsequent military interventions of Russia — first in Crimea and in the east of Ukraine, and eventually as a full-scale war — can be interpreted within the logic of the response of the coloniser to the resistance of the colonised (Ashcroft et al. 1989).

At the beginning of the full-scale invasion in 2022, Russian state news agencies did not even consider it necessary to conceal the neocolonial goal of eliminating Ukrainian national identity, openly calling for the "de-Ukrainization" of Ukraine and the prohibition of the very name "Ukraine" (Sergeytsev 2022). As Oksana Dudko points out, such calls were not just empty threats, as they are actually being implemented in the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine (Dudko 2022).

Conclusions

In this article, we have argued that the international community's unpreparedness for the scale and brutality of Russia's military invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the desperation of the Ukrainian resistance, was due to the fact that none of the mainstream IR theoretical paradigms could comprehensively explicate Russian–Ukrainian relations.

While acknowledging the importance of certain realist constructs in explaining the great powers' rivalry in the global arena, it is important to note that insufficient consideration of domestic factors and Russia's strategic culture prevented realists from proper assessment of their importance in shaping Moscow's foreign policy decisions. At the same time, underestimation of Ukraine's capacity as an international

and security actor hindered the anticipation of its determined resistance to Russia's attempts to reassert influence over the country.

Also, despite the constructive nature of the growing interdependence of states and their mutual economic benefits within the neoliberal IR paradigm, post-imperial ressentiment can outweigh rational calculations in cases where autocracies are ready to exploit these sentiments of certain segments of the population in order to maintain and strengthen their own power. Engaging in broad economic cooperation with the West did not diminish Russia's assertiveness, but rather provided resources for its practical implementation. Moreover, the interdependence theory has revealed the vulnerability of those democracies that are asymmetrically dependent on revisionist actors, with reliance on Russian energy supplies serving as a prime example.

Within the realist and liberal paradigms, it was hard to comprehend that the policy of accommodation and benefits from economic cooperation could not prevent an increasingly authoritarian Moscow from reclaiming its lost imperial legacy. The absence of NATO membership could not force the Ukrainian people, who were transitioning from colonial trauma to postcolonial recovery, to face yet another return to the subaltern status with a reincarnation of the Russian empire.

With these gaps in mind, the postcolonial lens offers an alternative perspective, wherein Ukraine views the EU and NATO membership as emancipatory and decolonising measures that enable the country to break free from Russian domination and obtain reliable security guarantees — not only in terms of hard security, but also retaining the freedom to develop as a separate nation with its own vision of future and its own full-fledged culture. Postcolonialism addresses the gaps inherent in mainstream theoretical approaches, considering the coloniser's use of power to acquire and maintain hegemony and impose constraints on the self-determination of those who are subjugated. This approach elucidates how cultural dominance and identity representation drive transformations in colonised nations, shedding light on the pursuit of emancipatory measures. It also clarifies the origins of resistance and the search for transformative patterns.

The arguments presented in the article suggest that although the status of Ukrainians within the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union differed from the practices encountered by the overseas colonies, the presence of such common features as predatory exploitation of human and natural resources, enslavement and forced relocations of indigenous people, cultural and language suppression and marginalization — substantiates the application of a postcolonial lens to the study of Russian–Ukrainian relations, especially in the context of the full-scale war that began in 2022.

The discourse of decolonisation suggests that IR studies should lessen the current overemphasis on great powers by paying more attention to the medium and smaller "silent voices" on the global stage, rethinking the centres of knowledge production beyond the centre (Dudko 2023: 183) and perceiving local academia "as co-thinkers rather than research subjects" (Donovan 2023: 170). In this context, Ukraine stands out as a significant case, serving as an emblematic example of a motivated nation striving to liberate itself from colonial grip and to amplify its voice globally. Amid the ongoing conflict, empowering Ukraine means not only to help it defend its people and territory, but also to rectify past academic oversights in recognizing Ukraine's role as more than just Russia's "backyard" and "sphere of influence" (Zayarnyuk 2022) or "area of limited statehood and contested orders" (Stollenwerka et al., 2021).

Embracing Stephen Walt's assertion that "all theories are simplifications, no single approach to international politics can account for everything that is taking place at any given moment" (Walt 2022), we acknowledge that the application of the postcolonial approach in the discourse on Russian–Ukrainian relations should be balanced and should not be expected to provide comprehensive answers to all questions. The discussion presented in this paper invites the application of a metatheoretical approach and urges not to reject the postcolonial approach merely on the grounds that Ukraine was not an overseas colony and that Ukrainians were oppressed on the basis of identity markers other than race. Viewing Russia as a neocolonial power and perceiving policies of the addressee states of Russia's neocolonial practices as postcolonial responses could enrich mainstream theoretical perspectives and fill the gaps and deal with deficiencies revealed in the wake of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine.

Acknowledgments. The authors are grateful for the support of this research financed by the European Union (NextGenerationEU). The contents of the publication are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

References

Ashcroft, B., Griffiths. G., & Tiffen, H., eds. (1989). *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures*. New York and London: Routledge.

Avdeeva, M. (2021). Ukraine blocks pro-Russian television channels. *Visegrad Insight*, 16 February. https://visegradinsight.eu/ukraine-blocks-pro-russian-television-sanctions (accessed: 12 February 2024).

Balmaceda, M. M. (2015). *Politics of Energy Dependency: Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania between Domestic Oligarchs and Russian Pressure*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.

Blitt, R. C. (2011). Russia's 'Orthodox' foreign policy: the growing influence of the Russian Orthodox Church in shaping Russia's policies abroad. *University of Pennsylvania Journal of International Law* 33 (2): 363–460. https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1725522.

Bouchet, N. (2015). *Democracy Promotion as US Foreign Policy: Bill Clinton and Democratic Enlargement*. London and New York: Routledge.

Burlyuk, O. & Musliu, V. (2023). The responsibility to remain silent? On the politics of knowledge production, expertise and (self-)reflection in Russia's war against Ukraine. *Journal of International Relations and Development* 26: 605–618. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-023-00318-x.

Chernetsky, V. (2003). Postcolonialism, Russia and Ukraine. *Ulbandus Review* 7: 32–62.

Chernetsky, V. (2023). Russia selectively and deceptively manipulates Western discourses. *Forum for Ukrainian Studies*, 6 October. https://ukrainian-studies.ca/2023/10/06/interview-with-vitaly-chernetsky-russia-selectively-and-deceptively-manipulates-western-discourses (accessed: 12 February 2024).

Copeland, D. C. (1996). Economic interdependence and war: a theory of trade expectations. *International Security* 20 (4): 5–41. https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.20.4.5.

Cox, Robert W. (1983). Gramsci, hegemony and international relations: an essay in method. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 12 (2): 162–175. https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298830120020701.

Danylyshyn, B. (2017). Chastka derzhavnykh rosiyskykh bankiv v Ukraïni zmenshylasia z 45 % do 8 %. *Radio Svoboda*, 9 March. https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news/28360427.html (accessed: 12 February 2024). — In Ukr.

[Данилишин, Б. (2017). Частка державних російських банків в Україні зменшилася з 45 % до 8 %. *Радіо Свобода*, 9 березня.]

Dashkevych, Y. (2014). How Moscow hijacked the history of Ukraine-Rus. *Euromaidan Press*, 14 May. https://euromaidanpress.com/2014/05/14/how-moscow-hijacked-the-history-of-kyivan-rus (accessed: 12 February 2024).

Davis, A. E., Thakur, V. & Vale, P. (2020). *The Imperial Discipline: Race and the Founding of International Relations*. London: Pluto Press.

Davis, N. (2022). Decolonizing Eastern European studies: interview with Professor Norman Davies. *Cambridge University Ukrainian Society*, 16 June. https://www.facebook.com/CUUAsoc/videos/decolonizing-eastern-european-studies-interview-with-professor-norman-davies/1560014551062883 (accessed: 12 February 2024).

Dibrova, V. (2017). The Valuev Circular and the end of Little Russian literature, *Kyiv-Mohyla Humanities Journal* 4: 123–138. https://doi.org/10.18523/kmhj106724.2017-4.123-138.

Donovan, V. (2023). Against academic 'resourcification': collaboration as delinking from extractivist 'area studies' paradigms. *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 65 (2): 163–173. https://doi.org/10.1080/00085006.2023.2200669.

Dubrovskiy, V., Mizsei, K. & Ivashchenko-Stadnik, K. (2024). *Eight Years After the Revolution of Dignity. What Has Changed in Ukraine During 2013–2021?* Ibidem Press.

Dudko, O. (2022). A conceptual limbo of genocide: Russian rhetoric, mass atrocities in Ukraine, and the current definition's limits. *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 64 (2–3): 133–145. https://doi.org/10.1080/00085006.2022.2106691.

Dudko, O. (2023). Gate-crashing 'European' and 'Slavic' area studies: can Ukrainian studies transform the fields? *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 65 (2): 174–189. https://doi.org/10.1080/00085006.2023.2202565.

Dutkiewicz, J. & and Smolenski, J. (2023). Epistemic superimposition: the war in Ukraine and the poverty of expertise in international relations theory. *Journal of International Relations and Development* 26: 619–631. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-023-00314-1.

Etkind, A., Uffelman, D. & Kukulin, I. (2012). Russia's internal colonisation: between practice and imagination. In: Etkind, A., Uffelman, D. & Kukulin, I., eds. *There, Inside: Practices of Internal Colonisation in the Cultural History of Russia*. Moscow: Novoye literaturnoye obozrenie: 6–50.

European Parliament (2022). European Parliament resolution of 15 December 2022 on 90 years after the Holodomor: recognising the mass killing through starvation as genocide (2022/3001(RSP)). *European Parliament*, 15 December. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0449_EN.html (accessed: 12 February 2024).

Fanon, F. (1963). *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.

Gat, A. (2005). The democratic peace theory reframed: the impact of modernity. *World Politics* 58 (1): 73–100. https://doi.org/10.1353/wp.2006.0017.

Golubev, A. (2023). No natural colonization: the early Soviet school of historical anti-colonialism. *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 65 (2): 190–204. https://doi.org/10.1080/00085006.2023.2199556.

Gonchar, M. (2016). *Gibressiya Putina. Nevoyennyye aspekty voyn novogo pokoleniya*. Kiyev: Tsentr globalistiki «Strategiya XXI». — In Russ.

[Гончар, М. (2016). *Гибрессия Путина. Невоенные аспекты войн нового поколения*. Киев: Центр глобалистики «Стратегия XXI».]

Gonchar, M., Chubyk, A. & Ishchuk, O. (2015). *Energy Component in New Generation Warfare. Case of Russia's Hybrid Aggression against Ukraine*. Kyiv: Centre for Global Studies "Strategy XXI".

Gordon, M. R., Pancevski, B., Bisserbe, N. & Walker, M. (2022). Vladimir Putin's 20-year march to war in Ukraine — and how the west mishandled it. *The Wall Street Journal*, 1 April. https://www.wsj.com/articles/vladimir-putins-20-year-march-to-war-in-ukraineand-how-the-west-mishandled-it-11648826461 (accessed: 12 February 2024).

Gorham, M. S. (2019). When soft power hardens: the formation and fracturing of Putin's 'Russian world'. In: Kevin, M. & Platt, F., ed. *Global Russian Cultures*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press: 185–206.

Grabowicz, G. (1995). Ukrainian studies: framing the contexts. *Slavic Review* 54 (3): 674–690. https://doi.org/10.2307/2501742.

Griffiths, M., ed. (2014). *International Relations Theory for the Twenty-First Century: An Introduction*. London and New York: Routledge.

Hagström, L. (2021). Great power narcissism and ontological (in)security: the narrative mediation of greatness and weakness in international politics. *International Studies Quarterly* 65 (2): 331–342. https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqab011.

Hassan, S. W. & Sajjad, F. (2022). The decolonial turn: new challenges to international relations traditions. *Journal of Contemporary Studies* 11 (2): 23–41. https://doi.org/10.54690/jcs.v11i2.228.

Holoborodko, Ya. (2020). Kontrol oliharkhiv ta propahanda: komu nalezhat ukrayinski kanaly. *24 Channel*, 12 June. https://24tv.ua/medvedchuk-pinchuk-ahmetov-komu-nalezhat-naysvizhishi-novini_n1359824 (accessed: 12 February 2024). — In Ukr.

[Голобородько, Я. (2020). Контроль олігархів та пропаганда: кому належать українські канали. *24 канал*, 12 червня.]

Holodomor Museum (2023). Worldwide Recognition of the Holodomor as Genocide. *Holodomor Museum*. https://holodomormuseum.org.ua/en/recognition-of-holodomor-as-genocide-in-the-world (accessed: 12 February 2024).

Horbulin, V., ed. (2017). *The World Hybrid War: Ukrainian Forefront: monograph abridged and translated from Ukrainian*. Kharkiv: Folio.

Hrushetskyi, A. (2023). Dynamics of readiness for territorial concessions for the earliest possible end to the war: results of a telephone survey conducted on February 14–22, 2023. *Kyiv International Institute of Sociology*, 23 February. https://kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=1192&page=1 (accessed: 12 February 2024).

Hrytsak, Y. (2015). The postcolonial is not enough. *Slavic Review* 74(4): 732–737. https://doi.org/10.5612/slavicreview.74.4.732.

Hurak, I. & D'Anieri, P. (2022) The evolution of Russian political tactics in Ukraine. *Problems of Post-Communism* 69(2): 121–132. https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2020.1819162.

Hurska, A. (2019). The Motor Sich factory and its covert ties to Russia. *Jamestown Foundation*, 19 September. https://jamestown.org/program/the-motor-sich-factory-and-its-covert-ties-to-russia (accessed: 12 February 2024).

Kappeler, A. (2014). Ukraine and Russia: legacies of the imperial past and competing memories. *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 5(2): 107–115. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euras.2014.05.005.

Kang, B. (2020). Understanding the Ukrainian conflict from the perspective of post-Soviet decolonization. *Region* 9(2): 1–28. https://doi.org/10.1353/reg.2020.0015.

Kassymbekova, B. (2022). Empires and nation-states: the Russian-Ukrainian war and decolonizing of Eastern European studies. *Deutsch-Ukrainische Historische Kommission*, 17 November. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qL26qQXwjS0 (accessed: 12 February 2024).

Kazharski, A. (2019). *Eurasian Integration and the Russian World: Regionalism as an Identitiary Enterprise*. Budapest–New York: CEU Press.

Kazharski, A. (2022). Explaining the 'Westsplainers': can a Western scholar be an authority on Central and Eastern Europe? *Forum for Ukrainian Studies*, 19 July. https://ukrainian-studies.ca/2022/07/19/explaining-the-westsplainers-can-a-western-scholar-be-an-authority-on-central-and-eastern-europe (accessed: 12 February 2024).

Klymenko, L. (2016). The Holodomor law and national trauma construction in Ukraine. *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 58(4): 341–361. https://doi.org/10.1080/00085006.2016.1234588.

Koplatadze, T. (2019). Theorising Russian postcolonial studies. *Postcolonial Studies* 22(4): 469–489. https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2019.1690762.

Korablyova, V. (2022). Russia vs. Ukraine: a subaltern empire against the "populism of hope". *Acta Universitatis Carolinae Studia Territorialia* 22(2): 39–60. https://doi.org/10.14712/23363231.2023.3.

Korablyova, V. (2023). The decolonization of education and research in Belarus and Ukraine: theoretical challenges and practical tasks. *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 65 (3–4): 478–484. https://doi.org/10.1080/00085006.2023.2274194.

Korek, J., ed. (2007). From Sovietology to Postcoloniality: Poland and Ukraine from a Postcolonial Perspective. *Södertörn Academic Studies 32*. Huddinge: Södertörns högskola.

Kostenko, I. & Halupa, I. (2021). Yak Moskoviia stala Rosiieiu? Do 300-littia "vykradennia" nazvy ukrayinskoho narodu. *Radio Svoboda*, 21 October. https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/ukrayina-rus-i-moskoviya/31521000.html (accessed: 12 February 2024). — In Ukr.

[Костенко, І. і Халупа, І. (2021). Як Московія стала Росією? До 300-ліття «викрадення» назви українського народу. *Радіо Свобода*, 21 жовтня.]

Koval, N., Irysova, M., Tytiuk, S. & Tereshchenko, D. (2022). *Rossotrudnichestvo: The Unbearable Harshness of Soft Power*. Kyiv: Ukrainian Institute. https://ui.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/case-study-rossotrudnichestvo-eng.pdf (accessed: 12 February 2024).

Krawchuk, A. (2022). Narrating the war theologically: does Russian Orthodoxy have a future in Ukraine? *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 64 (2–3): 173–189. https://doi.org/10.1080/00085006.2022.2107836.

Küçük, M. N. (2022). Postcolonial Approaches in International Relations. In: Kürşad, Ö.M. & Sune, E., eds. *Critical Approaches to International Relations: Philosophical Foundations and Current Debates*. Leiden: Brill: 157–174.

Kurylo, B. (2023). The Ukrainian subject, hierarchies of knowledge production and the everyday: an autoethnographic narrative. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 26: 685–697. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-023-00310-5.

Kuzio, T. & D'Anieri, P. (2018). *The Sources of Russia's Great Power Politics: Ukraine and the Challenge to the European Order*. Bristol: E-International Relations Publishing.

Kwame, N. (1965). *Neo-Colonialism: The Highest Stage of Imperialism*. London: Heinemann.

Lytvynenko, O. & Sinaiko, O., eds. (2021). *Transformatsiia zovnishnoeko nomichnykh vidnosyn Ukrayiny z Rosiyskoiu Federatsiieiu: 2010–2020 roky*. Kyyiv: NISD. https://niss.gov.ua/sites/default/files/2021-01/ad_zovnish_ru_ukr_2010-2020_sait_new.pdf (accessed: 12 February 2024). — In Ukr.

[Литвиненко, О. і Сінайко, О., ред. (2021). *Трансформація зовнішньоекономічних відносин України з Російською Федерацією: 2010–2020 роки*. Київ: НІСД.]

Makarychev, A. & Nizhnikau, R. (2023). Normalize and rationalize: intellectuals of statecraft and Russia's war in Ukraine. *Journal of International Relations and Development* 26: 632–642. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-023-00299-x.

Mälksoo, M. (2021). Captive minds: the function and agency of Eastern Europe in international security studies. *Journal of International Relations and Development* 24: 866–889. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-021-00230-2.

Mälksoo, M. (2023). The postcolonial moment in Russia's war against Ukraine. *Journal of Genocide Research* 25 (3–4): 471–481. https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2022.2074947.

Mbembe, A. (2001). *On the Postcolony. Series: Studies on the History of Society and Culture*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Mearsheimer, J. (2014). Why the Ukraine crisis is the West's fault. The liberal delusions that provoked Putin. *Foreign Affairs* 93(5): 77–89.

Meganorm (2003). Energeticheskaya strategiya Rossii na period do 2020 goda. Rasporyazheniye Pravitel'stva RF ot 28 avgusta 2003 g. № 1234-p. *Meganorm*, 28 August. https://meganorm.ru/Data2/1/4293852/4293852060.htm (accessed: 12 February 2024). — In Russ.

[Меганорм (2003). Энергетическая стратегия России на период до 2020 года. Распоряжение Правительства РФ от 28 августа 2003 г. № 1234-р. *Меганорм*, 28 августа.]

Moore, D.C. (2001). Is the post- in postcolonial the post- in post-Soviet? Toward a global postcolonial critique. PMLA 116(1): 111-128. https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2001.116.1.111.

Muslienko, S. i Moyiseienko, O. (2019). Yak rosiyskyy biznes "vhryzavsia" v Ukrayinu i shcho zminylos. *Ekonomichna pravda*, 20 August. https://www.epravda.com.ua/publications/2019/08/20/650787 (accessed: 12 February 2024). — In Ukr.

[Муслєнко, С. і Мойсеєнко, О. (2019). Як російський бізнес «вгризався» в Україну і що змінилось. *Економічна правда*, 20 серпня.]

Newnham, R. (2011). Oil, carrots, and sticks: Russia's energy resources as a foreign policy tool. *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 2(2): 134-143. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euras.2011.03.004.

Nye, J. S. (2022a). Eight lessons from the Ukraine war. *Project Syndicate*, 15 June. https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/russia-war-in-ukraine-eight-lessons-by-joseph-s-nye-2022-06 (accessed: 12 February 2024).

Nye, J. S. (2022b). What caused the Ukraine war? *Project Syndicate*, 04 October. https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/what-caused-russia-ukraine-war-by-joseph-s-nye-2022-10 (accessed: 12 February 2024).

O'Sullivan, M. & Krulišová, K. (2023). Central European subalterns speak security (too): towards a truly post-Western feminist security studies. *Journal of International Relations and Development* 26: 660–674.

Ohle, M., Cook, R. J., Jovanović, S. M. & Han, Z. (2022). Russia's architecture of hegemony: Christian Orthodox subordination strategies in Russia's peripheral zone. *Europe-Asia Studies* 74(3): 382–401.

Pavlushko, A. (2018). Yak ukrayinskyy haz zrobyv SRSR enerhetychnoiu superderzhavoiu. *Texty*, 8 June. https://texty.org.ua/articles/85745/Jak_ukrajinskyj_gaz_zrobyv_SRSR_jenergetychnoju_superderzhavoju-85745 (accessed: 12 February 2024). — In Ukr.

[Павлушко, А. (2018). Як український газ зробив СРСР енергетичною супердержавою. *Тексти*, 8 червня.]

Putin, V. (2021). On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians. *President of Russia*, 12 July. http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181 (accessed: 12 February 2024).

Putin, V. (2023). Results of the year with Vladimir Putin. *President of Russia*, 14 December. http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/72994 (accessed: 12 February 2024).

Rácz, A. (2015). *Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine. Breaking the Enemy's Ability to Resist*. Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs. https://www.fiia.fi/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/fiiareport43.pdf (accessed: 12 February 2024).

Razumkov Centre (2023). Identity of Ukrainian citizens: trends of change (May, 2023). *Razumkov Centre*, 21 August. https://razumkov.org.ua/

en/research-areas/surveys/identity-of-ukrainian-citizens-trends-of-change-may-2023 (accessed: 12 February 2024).
Riabchuk, M. (2000). *Vid Malorosiyi do Ukrayiny: paradoksy zapizniloho natsiie tvorennia*. Kyyiv: Krytyka. — In Ukr.
[Рябчук, М. (2000). *Від Малоросії до України: парадокси запізнілого націєтворення*. Київ: Критика.]
Riabchuk, M. (2010). The Ukrainian 'Friday' and the Russian 'Robinson': the uneasy advent of postcoloniality. *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 44 (1): 7–24. https://doi.org/10.1163/221023910X512778.
Riabczuk, M. (2013). Colonialism in another way. On the applicability of postcolonial methodology for the study of postcommunist Europe. *Porównania* 13: 47–59. https://doi.org/10.14746/p.2013.13.10972.
Riabchuk, M. (2015). 'Two Ukraines' reconsidered: the end of Ukrainian ambivalence?' *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 15 (1): 138–156. https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.12120.
Rossotrudnichestvo (2024). About Rossotrudnichestvo. https://rs.gov.ru/en/about-foiv/ (accessed: 12 February 2024).
Russkiy Mir Foundation (2024). About Russkiy Mir Foundation. https://russkymir.ru/en/fund/index.php (accessed: 12 February 2024).
Said, E. W. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.
Sartre, J. P. (1964). *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*. London and New York: Routledge.
Savoyska, S. (2009). Prorosiyyska presa v Ukrayini (na materialakh zasobiv masovoy informatsiyi rosiyskoho natsionalistychnoho rukhu). *Naukovi zapysky Instytutu politychnykh i etnonatsionalnykh doslidzhen im. I. F. Kurasa NAN Ukrayiny* 44: 397–406. — In Ukr.
[Савойська, С. (2009). Проросійська преса в Україні (на матеріалах засобів масової інформації російського націоналістичного руху). *Наукові записки Інституту політичних і етнонаціональних досліджень ім. І. Ф. Кураса НАН України* 44: 397–406.]
Sergeytsev, T. (2022). Chto Rossiya dolzhna sdelat' s Ukrainoy. *RIA Novosti*, 3 April. https://ria.ru/20220403/ukraina-1781469605.html (accessed: 12 February 2024). — In Russ.
[Сергейцев, Т. (2022). Что Россия должна сделать с Украиной. *РИА Новости*, 3 апреля.]
Shkandrij, M. (2001). *Russia and Ukraine. Literature and the Discourse of Empire from Napoleonic to Postcolonial Times*. Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press.
Shkandrij, M. & Bertelsen, O. (2013). The Soviet regime's national operations in Ukraine, 1929–1934. *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 55 (3–4): 417–447. https://doi.org/10.1080/00085006.2013.11092744.
Snyder, T. (2022). The war in Ukraine is a colonial war. *The New Yorker*, 28 April. https://www.newyorker.com/news/essay/the-war-in-ukraine-is-a-colonial-war (accessed: 12 February 2024).
Sonevytsky, M. (2022). What is Ukraine? Notes on epistemic imperialism. *Topos* 2: 21–30. https://doi.org/10.24412/1815-0047-2022-2-21-30.
Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In: Nelson, C., ed. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press: 271–313.
Spivak, G. C., Condee, N., Ram, H. & Chernetsky, V. (2006). Are we postcolonial? Post-Soviet space. *PMLA* 121 (3): 828–836.

Stepanenko, V. (2022). Appropriated by Russia. *Ukraïner*, 30 July. https://ukrainer.net/appropriated-by-russia (accessed: 12 February 2024).
Stollenwerk, E., Börzel, T. A. & Risse, T. (2021). Theorizing resilience-building in the EU's neighbourhood: introduction to the special issue. *Democratization* 28 (7): 1219–1238. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2021.1957839.
Sukhodolia, O. (2020). *Enerhetychna zbroia u heopolitychniy stratehiyi Rosiï: analit. dop*. Kyyiv: NISD. https://niss.gov.ua/sites/default/files/2020-06/suchodolya_e-book-1.pdf (accessed: 12 February 2024). — In Ukr.
[Суходоля, О. (2020). *Енергетична зброя у геополітичній стратегії Росії: аналіт. доп*. Київ: НІСД. .]
Sukhov, O. (2023). How Russia steals and rewrites Ukrainian history to justify its claims in Ukraine. *Kyiv Independent*, 13 June. https://kyivindependent.com/how-russia-steals-and-rewrites-ukrainian-history-to-justify-its-claims-in-ukraine (accessed: 12 February 2024).
Szeptycki, A. (2011). Ukraine as a postcolonial state? *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs* 20 (1): 5–29.
Tehèkspert (2000). Kontseptsiya vneshney politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii. Utverzhdena Ukazom Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot 28 iyunya 2000 g. *Tehèkspert*, 28 June. https://docs.cntd.ru/document/901764263 (accessed: 12 February 2024).
[Техэксперт (2000). Концепция внешней политики Российской Федерации. Утверждена Указом Президента Российской Федерации от 28 июня 2000 г. *Техэксперт*, 28 июня.]
Thucydides (1972). *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Translated by R. Warner, with an Introd. and Notes by M. I. Finley. Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics.
Tickner, A. B. (2013). Core, periphery and (neo)imperialist international relations. *European Journal of International Relations* 19 (3): 627-646. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066113494323.
Tolz, V. & Hutchings, S. (2023). Truth with a Z: disinformation, war in Ukraine, and Russia's contradictory discourse of imperial identity. *Post-Soviet Affairs* 39 (5): 347–365. https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2023.2202581.
Trenin, D. (2018 [2013]). Vladimir Putin's Fourth Vector. *Russia in Global Affairs*, 20 March. https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/vladimir-putins-fourth-vector-2/ (accessed: 12 February 2024).
Tucker, K. (2018). Unraveling coloniality in international relations: knowledge, relationality, and strategies for engagement. *International Political Sociology* 12 (3): 215–232. https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/oly005.
UINM (2019). Pamiataymo pro deportatsiyi 1944–1951 rokiv. *Ukrainian Institute of National Memory*, 2 October. https://uinp.gov.ua/informaciyni-materialy/vchytelyam/metodychni-rekomendaciyi/pamyataymo-pro-deportaciyi-1944-1951-rokiv (accessed: 12 February 2024). — In Ukr.
[УІНП (2019). Пам'ятаймо про депортації 1944–1951 років. *Український інститут національної пам'яті*, 2 жовтня.]
Uzoigwe, G. N. (2019). Neocolonialism is dead: long live neocolonialism. *Journal of Global South Studies* 36 (1): 59–87.
Verkhovna Rada Ukrayiny (2010). Zakon Ukrayiny Pro zasady vnutrishnoyi i zovnishnoyi polityky. *Verkhovna Rada Ukrayiny*. https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2411-17#Text (accessed: 12 February 2024). — In Ukr.
[Верховна Рада України (2010). Закон України Про засади внутрішньої і зовнішньої політики. *Верховна Рада України*.]

Vinnichuk, Yu. (2019). Yak oliharkhy rozdilyly teleefir Ukrayiny. *Business Censor*, 25 June. https://biz.censor.net/r3133637 (accessed: 12 February 2024). — In Ukr.

[Віннічук, Ю. (2019). Як олігархи розділили телеефір України. *Бізнес Цензор*, 25 червня.]

Virchenko, N. (2011). Dokumenty pro zaboronu ukrayinskoї movy (XVII–XX st.). V: Holota, L. i Buket, Ye. (red.). Bez movy — nemaie natsiyi. Kyyiv: Ukrayinskyy priorytet: 4–28. — In Ukr.

[Вірченко, Н. (2011). Документи про заборону української мови (XVII–XX ст.). В: Голота, Л. і Букет, Є. (ред.) *Без мови – немає нації*. Київ: Український пріоритет: 4–28.]

Walt, S. M. (2022). Liberal illusions caused the Ukraine crisis. *Foreign Policy*, 19 January. https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/01/19/ukraine-russia-nato-crisis-liberal-illusions (accessed: 12 February 2024).

Watling, J., Danylyuk, O. & Reynolds, N. (2023). Preliminary lessons from Russia's unconventional operations during the Russo-Ukrainian war, February 2022 — February 2023. *RUSI*, 29 March. https://static.rusi.org/202303-SR-Unconventional-Operations-Russo-Ukrainian-War-web-final.pdf.pdf (accessed: 12 February 2024).

Wendt, A. (1992). Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics, *International Organization* 46(2): 391–425. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300027764.

Wilkens, J. (2017). Postcolonialism in international relations. In: *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*. International Relations Association and Oxford University Press, 20 November. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.101 (accessed: 12 February 2024).

Yurchuk, O. (2013). Some comments concerning Ukrainian postcolonial studies. *Slavia Occidentalis* 70(2): 147–155.

Zayarnyuk, A. (2022). Historians as enablers? Historiography, imperialism, and the legitimization of Russian aggression. *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 9(2): 191–212. https://doi.org/10.21226/ewjus754.

Zdioruk, S. & Haran, O. (2012). The Russian Orthodox Church as an instrument of Russia's foreign policy towards Ukraine. In: Pkhaladze, T., ed. *Religion as the Instrument of Russian Foreign Policy towards Neighboring Countries: Georgia, Latvia, Ukraine*. Tbilisi: Mtatsmindeli Publishing House: 54–100.

Zhurzhenko, T. (2002). Language and nation building. Dilemmas of language politics in contemporary Ukraine. *Transit – Europäische Revue* 21. https://www.iwm.at/transit-online/language-and-nation-building-dilemmas-of-language-politics-in (accessed: 12 February 2024).