

Post-Soviet Colonialism and Postcolonialism: A Controversial Discourse

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DOI: [10.22178/pos.115-7](https://doi.org/10.22178/pos.115-7)

LCC Subject Category: J(1)-981

Received 25.12.2024

Accepted 25.03.2025

Published online 31.03.2025

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Abstract. Postcolonial theory is based on criticizing the unequal relationship between the subject performing imperial expansion and the colonized community. The idea of becoming a dominant power over other states to preserve one's existence and power remains relevant to Russia even today. Examining the present-day practices of empires to the countries they once governed as colonies, they claim to engage in trade and act according to human values. However, considering the outcomes of these events, it becomes clear that they have never abandoned the logic of colonialism. For a long time, colonialism was primarily studied in terms of its economic, political, and military dimensions, i.e. economic exploitation methods, colonial administration strategies, military occupation practices, and national movements for independence were thoroughly examined. With the emergence of postcolonial theory, the cultural and ideological aspects came to the forefront. Russia's colonial policies also have a long history. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the independence of the various states (republics) that were once part of it, this discourse became more relevant and one of the main topics of discussion.

Keywords: Postcolonialism; colony; USSR; post-Soviet; Russia; colonialism; neocolonialism; Caucasus.

INTRODUCTION

The Russian Empire and its successor, the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), was one of the largest states in the world in terms of territory and population for nearly the past three to four centuries, playing a significant role in shaping global politics. Since the era of Tsar Peter I, Russia began to open its doors to Europe, and even though it was at a theoretical level, colonial policies started to manifest themselves. Particularly in the 19th century, Russia, alongside several European empires, sought to expand its borders and conquer new territories, a policy of aggression and invasion that continues today.

"The Tsarism Empire, having surpassed the Soviet Union and modern Russian Federation, extended from Poland, Finland, and the Caucasus to Central Asia, Manchuria, and Alaska. The Russian troops occupied Berlin in 1760 and Paris in 1814. After the victory over Napoleon, Russian diplomats created the Holy Alliance, marking the first attempt at European integration. The empire constantly waged colonial wars over disputed territories in Europe and Asia. These included

influential battles along the Baltic and Black Sea coasts, the Pacific Ocean, and Eurasia's geographic centre, leading to uprisings in Poland, insurrections in the Urals, the Great Game in Central Asia, and ongoing wars in the Caucasus" [1, 13].

Literature review

Russian (Soviet) historian E. Tarlen's in-depth research on colonialism and Western European studies play a significant role in forming postcolonialism theory. The works of postcolonial intellectuals, especially those from postcolonial countries, such as Frantz Fanon [3], Edward Said [11], members of the "Subaltern Studies Group" such as Gayatri Spivak, Ranajit Guha, as well as contemporary Western European and American (U.S.) scholars like Max Horkheimer [5], A. Touraine [13], Michel Foucault [4], Vivek Chibber [6], R. Yang [12], and M. Özdemir [10], are of great importance. Additionally, the works of E. Hobsbawm [14], V. Morozov [8; 9], A. Etkin [15], and several modern Russian theo-

rists are significant. In Azerbaijan, Lala Bayramova [1] conducts research in this field.

Notably, the works of the renowned French philosopher, writer, and intellectual Jean-Paul Sartre regarding imperialism's history and theory are crucial.

In recent years, there have been notable studies regarding postcolonial political systems in the post-Soviet space. One such study is Bayramova's research [16], which highlights how Tsarist Russia's resettlement policies caused ethno-demographic changes in the Caucasus, particularly evident in the early 20th century.

In the article [21], the postcolonial nature of Tajikistan's relations with Russia, rooted in Soviet colonial practices, is discussed.

In Sh. Jafarli's article [17] analyses the geopolitical effects and consequences of the Russia-Ukraine war on the post-Soviet region.

S. Huseynova's research [18] investigates Tsarist resettlement policies, their objectives, and the sequence of resettlements.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Colonialism. The world colonialism policy has undergone significant development over several centuries (from the 16th century to the present), evolving with new forms and content, being refined and polished, and ultimately becoming highly sophisticated. The world colonialism is a multi-faceted, multi-layered political phenomenon. Colonialism, in its essence, is a univocal discourse. Imperialist states expanded their territories, occupied lands, asserted ownership over them uniquely, exploited local populations, and broadened their economic and political influence, among other things. However, world colonialism has not been uniformed. For example, British colonialism in India is not the same as in Australia, and this discourse can be applied to all other colonialism cases across the globe.

The colonialism factor has been debated among world politicians, historians, philosophers, psychologists, writers, and literary critics. More specifically, this intellectual elite has approached world colonialism from a relativistic perspective, offering varied viewpoints. Some prominent and brilliant thinkers have attempted to justify colonialism and defend this political discourse (e.g., Nobel laureate, English writer Rudyard Kipling,

and other politicians and historians of similar views).

Nevertheless, it is a clear truth that colonialism is an exploitative discourse, the expression of an invasion policy. It is unacceptable for a politically, militarily, and economically stronger state (the metropolis) to invade and occupy weaker countries or states, and it is not justifiable in this context.

The varying approaches to colonialism stem from the different nature of colonialism itself. Some colonialism theorists argue that colonialism is justified because the colonized states (African and Asian countries) were economically, politically, militarily, and culturally backward. This discourse aimed to elevate them to developed imperial states (metropolises). Naturally, there is some truth in this argument. Colonized states underwent a specific path of development with the involvement of the metropolises. It is also worth noting that, despite being subjected to aggression and exploitation during the colonial period, many of the world's peoples (nations, even states) experienced some form of positive development due to the intervention by the metropolises.

Throughout history, several large and small colonies existed. There were several colonial empires, and during their existence, they nearly occupied two-thirds of the world, establishing long-lasting colonies in those territories (e.g., Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, Russia, etc.).

Russian Colonialism. Russia's colonial policy also has a rich history. During the Soviet period, it was unthinkable to discuss this topic due to the state's ideological requirements. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the subsequent independence of the republics that were part of the USSR, this discourse became more relevant and one of the central topics of discussion. Today, both the representatives of the peoples (nations, ethnicities) that were once part of Russia (non-Slavic, non-Russian groups) and Russian-born specialists (political scientists, historians, sociologists, etc.) frequently engage in conversations about it. M. Tlostanova writes in her article titled "Postcolonial Fate and Decolonial Choice: Postsocialist Mediation": "For instance, in Soviet and early post-Soviet science, the Russian Empire was presented as a postcolonial federation that supposedly freed the oppressed national provinces from the Tsarist Empire" [22].

Indeed, Russian theorists do not approach Russian colonialism from a single perspective; their views are contradictory, debatable, sometimes objective, and sometimes subjective. Many of these specialists deny that Russia is a colonial state, while others argue that from its very inception, Russia adopted a colonialist stance. Some political theorists (e.g., A. Dolgikh) claim that the many territories forcibly annexed into the Russian Empire were allegedly incorporated into it voluntarily, meaning that Russia did not conquer these territories and was not an aggressor state – this process was purely humanitarian [19]. The author of this article writes: "However, there is much debate among political scientists about Russia's colonial status. Soviet textbooks stated that the vast territories of Siberia and the Far East were voluntarily incorporated into the Moscow Tsardom of the Russian Empire, as small nations willingly wanted to join. Certainly, these annexations rarely happened without bloodshed, but after these territories were integrated into the Russian Empire, their people were not oppressed, enslaved, or destroyed; they became full-fledged citizens" [19]. Naturally, it is impossible to agree with A. Dolgikh's these views.

A. Dolgikh also admits: "...these integrations, though bloody and extremely cruel wars, were ultimately for noble purposes, with Russia bringing civilization to less developed regions in exchange for acquiring land" [19]. It is further stated that "...the mountainous peoples of the North Caucasus resisted more fiercely. Hundreds of thousands of Circassians were forced to leave their lands and sought refuge in the Ottoman Empire. Even the less warlike Kazakhs and Chukchi consistently and stubbornly fought against joining Russia" [19].

As shown, these statements are contradictory and subjective. On the one hand, it is claimed that the Russians fought "bloody, extremely brutal wars" to conquer new lands and that the North Caucasian mountaineers strongly resisted joining Russia, with hundreds of thousands of Circassians being forced to leave. On the other hand, it is said that "the small nations voluntarily" joined this integration.

As illustrated, A. Dolgikh tries to prove by any means that Russia is not a colonialist state. There is an implicit question-and-answer dialogue: "So, did Russia have colonies? According to modern political science terminology – No, it did not" [19]. He even goes further by criticizing the fa-

mous Russian historian V.Klyuchevsky: "The renowned Russian historian Vasily Osipovich Klyuchevsky, in his nine-volume lecture series 'The Course of Russian History', writes that 'Russia colonized Siberia'" [2, 50].

V. Klyuchevsky aims to present Russia's history from an objective standpoint. In his second lecture, he states: "The history of Russia is the history of a colonized country. Its colonial territories expanded along with its state borders. This centuries-old process continues into our day" [2, 50].

V.Klyuchevsky seeks to objectively present the formation of today's Russian Federation's territories. For example, he describes how the population moved from the central governorates in various directions toward Novorossiia, the Caucasus, and beyond to Siberia, the Far East, and the Pacific Ocean shores. By the second half of the 19th century, over 200,000 Russians had settled in Turkestan, including nearly 100,000 peasant settlers and 150 villages were founded [2, 52].

A. Yevstratov, in his article titled "Russian Colonialism: Instruments and Essence", presents a mostly objective stance on modern Russian colonialism (with some exceptions). He is right in writing: "The dissolution of the USSR in 1991 was, to some extent, planned and predicted by the political elite of this state, disintegrating the empire" [2]. However, it is essential to clarify that the reasons behind the collapse of the USSR are also crucial. The unsuccessful reforms initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev (such as perestroika), combined with the rise of nationalist movements in the republics, led to the collapse of the USSR. Despite efforts by the Soviet leadership to preserve the empire, it was too late. The Soviet Union's collapse was marked by bloodshed, with the blood of innocent people split among Russia, Latvia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. After this, the USSR began to disintegrate. Hereby, as the author comprehensively writes, the political elite of this state (USSR) played a great role. Yevstratov touches on an interesting paradigm in his article: "Realizing the impossibility of resisting the economic and technical power of the United States, Moscow took a unique step. On one hand, it abandoned Soviet and communist principles, transforming de jure into a new type of state. On the other hand, it released its national republics to separate, thereby shifting the financial and economic burdens from itself" [20, 1]. This highlights the economic challenges faced by both the centre (metropolis) and the newly independent

republics that emerged after the dissolution of the USSR, emphasizing postcolonial and neocolonial paradigms.

Post-Soviet Postcolonialism. According to A. Yevstratov, this is the first of the neocolonial (postcolonial) paradigms related to economic factors. He writes: "The economic characteristics of some post-Soviet states are such that their economic systems cannot simply exist without severing their old Soviet economic ties" [20,1]. Although this idea is partially correct, it does not fully reflect the truth (e.g., the example of the Baltic states). Furthermore, A. Yevstratov deepens the argument, making an incorrect statement: "As a result, these countries (post-Soviet countries – author) faced economic collapse, and they, making themselves dependent, had to seek economic and financial assistance from Moscow. Here, the economy of advanced Armenia, which was inseparably linked with the Soviet Military-Industrial Complex (MIC) and additionally lived under the conditions of economic isolation from the third republic (referring to Azerbaijan - author), literally died in the first years of independence" [20, 1-2].

Discussion. Two aspects of this approach attract attention. The first is that several post-Soviet states (the majority) were so deeply connected to the metropolitan country (Russia) and its economy that they faced significant difficulties following the unexpected collapse of the empire. This was primarily because the metropolitan centre had intentionally structured the economies of its dependent republics so they could not function independently; the republics were reliant on each other and the centre. (The Baltic states were able to solve this problem more quickly by joining the European Union and integrating into the European family).

The second point is related to Armenia. The author's argument is largely valid, and he is correct. Even today, Armenia, which has not fully defined its future political orientation, lives in a state of conflict with regional countries and is almost entirely economically isolated from the world, facing a deep crisis.

A.Yevstratov's second argument concerns the conflicts, national disputes, and territorial problems existing in post-Soviet countries. This issue is also a direct part of the postcolonial discourse. The author writes: "During the period of independence of the post-Soviet states, conflicts frozen under Soviet conditions immediately thawed

with the weakening of these countries, and they became dependent on Moscow for both military (arms supply, military specialist training) and political support (for some, Russia played the role of 'independent arbitrator' in unresolved conflicts)" [20].

Again, Armenia can be cited as an example – it immediately faced the "Artsakh" conflict, and the country could not defend itself. It was forced to obtain large amounts of Russian weapons and loans from Russia and is still compelled to do so today [2].

It is necessary to comment on the author's approach. First of all, it must be remembered that the decaying Soviet empire was already on the verge of collapse. The collapse of the Soviet Union was inevitable. There are many reasons for its collapse, one of which was the mythical Artsakh (Mountainous Garabagh) issue, which was brought to the fore with the involvement of Armenians both in Russia and abroad (including the Armenian diaspora and its lobby). In the middle of the 1980s, the Armenian elite, influenced by M. S. Gorbachev's policy of preventive reforms, ignited the conflict over Artsakh (Mountainous Garabagh). They sought to separate this territory from Azerbaijan and either annex it to Armenia or create an independent Artsakh state (utopia and dystopia). Naturally, both the Armenian politicians and the political elite of the Soviet Communist Party of that time played a significant role in the creation of this conflict.

In this article, the conflicts of the South Caucasus region, including the problem of Georgia, are also analyzed. The author demonstrates a certain biased position on this matter. It is stated: "A similar situation occurred in Georgia, except that after Georgia lost Abkhazia and South Ossetia and after the Rose Revolution, it changed its foreign policy orientation from pro-Russian to something else" [20, 2]. This issue is also not presented correctly. Like Azerbaijan, Georgia wanted to exit the USSR, gain sovereignty, and create an independent state. (This discourse is also reflected in the USSR's Constitution). Just as Russia created the Mountainous Garabagh conflict in Azerbaijan, it also created the Abkhazia and South Ossetia problems in Georgia. Unlike Azerbaijan, however, Russia forcibly separated these territories from Georgia through military means and annexed them to its territory.

The principle of maintaining control over former colonies using postcolonial tools while retaining

political authority (in a new format) is one of the main strategies used by Russia. The article's author has briefly touched upon this issue and has mostly shown a correct position. The article states: "In the republics that gained independence, there is the Soviet party or Komsomol elite. In some post-Soviet countries, dissident anti-Soviet figures were in power in the early years of their independence. Still, later, they were replaced by former Soviet cadres (Georgia, Armenia, and even Azerbaijan)" [2, 2].

Certainly, there is a certain truth in A. Yevstratov's words. However, a minor correction is needed here. The author's statement that "dissident anti-Soviet figures" came to power in the three South Caucasian countries, especially Georgia, is agreeable. Still, it must not be forgotten that these "dissident anti-Soviet figures" were true heroes of their nations. They fought for the liberation of their countries from colonial rule. They became dissidents in the process, eventually achieving their desired goals and being elected to leadership positions by their people.

Finally, one of the author's biased views is his expression of the ideology of the former ruling state (the metropolis, the colonizer). He writes: "Politicians raised in the Soviet reality, first and foremost, easily find common ground with the Russian Federation, which is governed by the old cadres of the Soviet Communist Party and State Security Committee, without any shame" [20, 1-2].

The author's view here is not accurate today. Even leaders of independent states who were once trained within the Soviet party system now try to distance themselves from direct subordination to Russia.

These paradigms are a small part of the post-colonial political system in modern post-Soviet states. Many such postcolonial principles need thorough investigation.

CONCLUSIONS

Colonialism, one of history's longest-lasting and most multi-dimensional political phenomena, has taken different forms over various periods, continuously evolving in response to changing geopolitical realities. The primary goal of colonial

policies was to maintain and expand economic, political, and military dominance. Colonialism, carried out by powerful empires such as Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Russia, has had diverse impacts on different cultures and societies worldwide.

In particular, Russian colonialism and its continuation during the Soviet Union era remain central topics in contemporary postcolonial research. Historical documents and modern studies indicate that Russia carried out its colonial policies under various ideological frameworks, sometimes masking them under concepts like "brotherhood of nations" and "social development." However, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, national liberation movements, the formation of new states, and Russia's postcolonial influence mechanisms began to be studied in depth by scholars.

Research shows that the relationship with colonialism is not unambiguous. While some theorists view colonialism as a "civilizing" process, most researchers emphasize that the primary goal of colonialism is economic exploitation and political control. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, newly formed states, particularly in the South Caucasus and Central Asia, sought to regulate their relationships with Russia and establish a new political course in the postcolonial context.

At the same time, the Russian Federation has attempted to maintain control over its former colonies through various political and economic levers. In the modern era, Moscow's neocolonial influence in the post-Soviet space is manifested through mechanisms such as economic dependence, management of regional conflicts, and political control. While many post-Soviet countries have tried to redefine their relations with Russia, the geopolitical realities they face still show that postcolonial influence persists.

In general, the connection between colonialism and Postcolonialism should be seen as part of historical evolution. The role of colonialism in the development process of former colonies, its consequences, and ways to overcome these effects remain a central topic of modern political and academic discourse. The impact of Russian colonialism in the post-Soviet space is an issue that requires further, in-depth investigation.

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