



## THEMATIC DOSSIER: Postcolonialism and Anti-colonial Struggle

## ТЕМАТИЧЕСКОЕ ДОСЬЕ: Постколониализм и антиколониальная борьба


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### Challenge of “Decolonisation” and Need for a Comprehensive Redefinition of Neocolonialism

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**Abstract.** The need for “decolonisation” of the Second world and semi-periphery countries (in the terminology of world-systems analysis) is increasingly raised in practical policy as well as in academic publications. However, the very question of decolonisation as applied to countries that were the targets of European colonial expansion is fraught with both negative consequences in political practice and theoretical confusion. On the one hand, the discourse of “decolonisation” encourages separatist tendencies and leads to new conflicts. On the other hand, the notion of “colonialism” is becoming less rigorous: in this perspective, any territorial expansion by any state at any time in history can be described as colonialism. The notion of “colonialism” loses its specific historical meaning and hence turns from a scientific term into a propaganda cliché. Thus, the possibility to correctly comprehend the phenomenon of European colonialism as a concrete historical reality that determined the fate of the peoples of both Europe itself and other parts of the world in Modern times, the only “colonialism” that the peoples of the world have really faced for the last 500 years, disappears. Theoretical and practical, scientific and political aspects of the problem are closely linked. Within an expansive interpretation of “colonialism”, former colonial powers, moreover, states still possessing unequal dependencies, such as the USA, are able to accuse their geopolitical opponents of “colonialism” as they are multi-ethnic powers, formed as a result of long historical processes, where various practices of ethnic interaction have taken place. The very possibility of interpreting the practices of non-European powers (Russia, China, Iran, Ethiopia) as colonial is linked to the popular paradigm of “internal colonialism.” It has emerged as part of the post-colonial theory of international relations in European and American academic centres and by its very nature is an example of a deliberately biased approach that focuses on the most marginalised groups of “subalterns” but ignores major civilisational entities. The author points out the biases and shortcomings of this approach with concrete examples, reveals its philosophical premises and suggests using the findings of fundamental geopolitics, world-systems theory, philosophy of space and philosophy of culture to clarify the concept of “colonialism.”

**Key words:** colonialism, internal colonialism, empire, postcolonial studies, world-system analysis, function and substance of capitalism, geopolitics, land and sea

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## Вызов «деколонизации» и необходимость комплексного переопределения неокOLONИализма

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**Аннотация.** В практической политике, равно как и в научных публикациях, все чаще поднимаются вопросы о необходимости «деколонизации» стран «второго мира» и полупериферии (в терминологии мир-системного анализа). Однако сама постановка вопроса о деколонизации применительно к странам, которые были объектами европейской колониальной экспансии, чревата как негативными последствиями в политической практике, так и теоретической путаницей. С одной стороны, дискурс «деколонизации» подстегивает сепаратистские тенденции и ведет к возникновению новых конфликтов. С другой — понятие «колониализм» становится все менее строгим: в этой оптике колониализмом можно назвать любую территориальную экспансию любого государства в любой исторический период. Понятие «колониализм» теряет свою конкретно-историческую нагрузку, а значит, превращается из научного термина в пропагандистское клише. Таким образом, исчезает возможность корректно осмыслить феномен европейского колониализма как конкретной исторической реальности, определившей судьбы народов как самой Европы, так и других частей света в Новое время, единственного «колониализма», с которым реально сталкивались народы Земли в течение последних 500 лет. Теоретический и практический, научный и политический аспекты проблемы тесно связаны между собой. Бывшие колониальные державы, более того, государства, до сих пор имеющие неравноправные зависимые территории, как, например, США, в рамках расширительного толкования понятия «колониализм» получают возможность обвинять в «колониализме» своих геополитических противников, коль скоро они представляют собой полиэтничные державы, сложившиеся в результате долгих исторических процессов, где имели место различные практики взаимодействия этносов. Сама возможность интерпретировать практики неевропейских держав (России, Китая, Ирана, Эфиопии) как колониальные связана с популярной парадигмой «внутреннего колониализма». Она возникла в рамках постколониальной теории международных отношений в европейских и американских научных центрах и по самому своему характеру является примером сознательно ангажированного подхода, где в центре внимания находятся наиболее маргинализированные группы — «субалтерны», но игнорируются крупные цивилизационные общности. Автор на конкретных примерах отмечает предвзятость и недостатки этого подхода, раскрывает его философские предпосылки и предлагает использовать наработки фундаментальной геополитики, мир-системной теории, философии пространства и философии культуры для уточнения понятия «колониализм».

**Ключевые слова:** колониализм, внутренний колониализм, империя, постколониальные исследования, мир-системный анализ, функция и субстанция капитализма, геополитика, земля и море

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### Introduction

“Colonialism” as a theoretical concept and a practical problem, despite the collapse of colonial empires in the mid-twentieth century, is still relevant. On the one hand, it, or “coloniality,” is seen as almost the cause of all contemporary problems faced by developing

countries. On the other hand, within a similar rhetoric, the thesis of decolonisation as a necessary vector of development is beginning to be applied to areas that were previously themselves considered victims of colonial policies, or at least did not consider themselves as colonial powers. First and foremost, we are

referring to the conventional Second World (Russia, post-Soviet countries, China) as well as the major Third World countries.

### **The “Decolonisation” of Russia: The Practice of Discourse and the Origins of the Idea**

On June 23, 2022, the US Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) organised an event in the US Congress entitled “Decolonising Russia: A Moral and Strategic Imperative.”<sup>1</sup> The CSCE itself is a U.S. government agency created and controlled by Congress. Its co-chairman, Congressman Steve Cohen, opened the session by saying that the Russians “have in essence colonized their own country.”<sup>2</sup> The conference announcement noted that “serious and controversial discussions are now underway about reckoning with Russia’s fundamental imperialism and the need to “decolonize” Russia for it to become a viable stakeholder in European security and stability.”<sup>3</sup>

On March 17, 2022, the U.S. Institute of Peace, funded by the U.S. government, issued recommendations on the coverage of Russia’s Special Military Operation in Ukraine for African audiences. It suggested that “vivid” parallels should be drawn between the African struggle for freedom from “colonial” control” and the Ukrainian Armed Forces’ resistance to Russian actions.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See: To Receive a Briefing on Decolonising Russia // Congress.gov. June 23, 2022. URL: <https://www.congress.gov/event/117th-congress/joint-event/332780?s=1&r=11> (accessed: 14.10.2022); Decolonizing Russia: A Moral and Strategic Imperative // YouTube. June 23, 2022. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-iGtFXs9gvo> (accessed: 14.10.2022).

<sup>2</sup> Bosnic D. US Government Openly Advocates Destroying Russia // BRICS Information Portal. June 27, 2022. URL: <https://infobrics.org/post/36034/> (accessed: 14.10.2022).

<sup>3</sup> Decolonisation of Russia To Be Discussed at Upcoming Helsinki Commission Briefing // Justice for North Caucasus. June 22, 2022. URL: <https://justicefornorthcaucasus.info/?p=1251683963> (accessed: 14.10.2022).

<sup>4</sup> Ashby H., Sany J. On Ukraine, Africa Needs a Clearer U.S. Message // United States Institute of Peace.

Accusations of colonialism and imperialism against Russia are not new. As far back as 1959, a U.S. congressional resolution on “Captive Nations Week,” which had already become law, contained invectives against Russian and Soviet “imperialism” and pledges of support for “captive nations.”<sup>5</sup> A few years earlier, in Foreign Affairs, published by the respected Council on Foreign Relations, the assertion of Russia as a “colonial empire” was justified (Schwarz, 1952) by former Menshevik Solomon Schwarz, who cooperated with the US government (Liebich, 1995, p. 264).

Another American Sovietologist, Walter Kolartz, at the beginning of the Cold War published his book “Russia and her colonies,” in which he listed all “ethnically non-Russian territories of the USSR” as “colonies” (Kolartz, 1953, pp. v—vi). Unlike Kolartz, Alexander Bennigsen, a French Orientalist and Sovietologist, considered only Asian territories and the Caucasus as colonies of Russia (Bennigsen, 1969), Bennigsen writes of a “colonial atmosphere” of superiority towards foreigners, settlement by Russians (agricultural colonization), the special nature of governance and even the preservation of special rights and customs of the peoples of the Empire as signs of “coloniality” (Bennigsen, 1969, p. 145). Zb. Brzezinski, in “The Grand Chessboard”, refers to the Russians in Central Asia as representatives of the “former ruling colonial class,” discussing the “colonial” and “post-colonial” status of the region (Brzezinski, 1997, pp. 93, 129—130). In the works of the American historian Mikhail Khodarkovsky in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Khodarkovsky, 1999; 2002), the idea of the colonial nature of Russia’s continental

May 17, 2022. URL: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/05/ukraine-africa-needs-clearer-us-message> (accessed: 15.10.2022).

<sup>5</sup> Eisenhower D. Proclamation 3303 — Captive Nations Week // UC Santa Barbara. The American Presidency Project. Documents. July 17, 1959. URL: <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/proclamation-3303-captive-nations-week-1959> (accessed: 15.10.2022).

expansion was actively promoted. Receiving fair objections that the Russian experience does not fit into what is called colonialism, referring to the relationship between the West and the Third World (LeDonne, 2002, p. 765), Western and Russian scholars, however, have not abandoned the use of the concepts of “colonies” and “colonialism.” Attempts to squeeze the Russian experience into the Procrustean bed of “colonialism” have resulted in the concepts of “underarticulated colonialism” (Khodarkovsky, 2011, p. 168), “hybrid empire,”<sup>6</sup> “self-colonisation” (Kagarlitsky, 2009; Etkind, 2013).

A common problem with all of these and many other works on Russian “colonies” and “colonialism” is that they do not explain how a “colony” differs from any other foreign ethnic, conquered, or peacefully annexed territory.

### **Internal Colonialism: A Problematic Concept**

In particular, this shortcoming is inherent in Alexander Etkind’s now-classic work, “Internal Colonization: Russia’s Imperial Experience.” Etkind’s definition of colonialism is highly controversial: an “ideological system” of colonisation, where colonisation is understood as “a process of domination in which settlers migrate from the colonising group to the colonised territory” (Etkind, 2013, p. 17). The Cambridge University professor takes out of context a quote by the Russian historian V.O. Kliuchevskii that “the history of Russia is the history of a country that is being colonised” (in the source — exclusively in the sense of settling the Russian people<sup>7</sup>), and

<sup>6</sup> Sinness M. *Empire of the Steppe: Russia’s Colonial Experience on the Eurasian Frontier* // UCLA International Institute. May 5, 2014. URL: <https://www.international.ucla.edu/apc/centralasia/article/139315> (accessed: 15.10.2022).

<sup>7</sup> Kliuchevsky V. O. *A Course in Russian History. Lecture II* // Federal State-Financed Institution of Science State Public Science and Technology Library of Siberian Branch of Russian Academy of Sciences [Ключевский В.О. Курс русской истории. Лекция II //

brings this “colonisation” closer to European colonialism. From “peasant colonisation” — the settlement of Siberian territory by Russians and representatives of other peoples of Russia, the problematic thesis of “Siberia as a colony” by the Siberian separatist N. Yadrintsev, and the misadventures of Kovalev, a government official who returned from the Caucasus — the main character in Gogol’s novel “Nose” — the thesis of Russian culture being colonial and the presence of “colonialism” in Russia is drawn. This problematic “colonialism” (why, then, is the settlement of Bantu peoples in Africa not colonialism?) is incorrectly equated with the traditionally understood “colonialism” of the specific policies of Western countries aimed at the unequal exploitation of overseas countries and peoples.<sup>8</sup> The practical result is the discourse of “decolonisation of Russia.”

This sloppy handling of the terms “colonialism” and “colony” leads to the conclusion that “the Russian history of colonialism... begins in the 11th century.”<sup>9</sup> This is what the prominent Russian scholar V. Inozemtsev argues. In such a context, it is not surprising that the accession of the Ryazan Principality to the unified Russian state also becomes part of Moscow’s “colonial” policy.

However, the very fact — that the debate about whether the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union were colonial entities goes on throughout the second half of the twentieth century and continues to this day — demonstrates the lack of arguments that would

Федеральное государственное бюджетное учреждение науки Государственная публичная научно-техническая библиотека Сибирского отделения Российской академии наук]. (In Russian). URL: <http://www.spsl.nsc.ru/history/kluch/kluch02.htm> (accessed: 15.10.2022).

<sup>8</sup> Webster R. *Western Colonialism* // Britannica. URL: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Western-colonialism> (accessed: 15.10.2022).

<sup>9</sup> Inozemtsev V. *Russia, the Last Colonial Empire* // The American Interest. June 29, 2017. URL: <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2017/06/29/russia-last-colonial-empire/> (accessed: 15.10.2022).

support Russia's colonial character. In all cases, Russian historical experience is tried to fit categories of coloniality based on Western experience. And predictably a lot of exceptions are drawn. The question arises: should the experience of the continental empire be fitted into the Western categories of "colonies" and "colonialism"?

However, in contemporary post-colonial studies there is a theoretical framework that allows applying the term "colonialism" to almost any country in the world. This is the concept of "internal colonialism," actively applied in the works of the already mentioned B.Y. Kagarlitsky (2009), A. Etkind (2013) and V. Morozov (2015).

The genesis of the concept of "internal colonialism" is traced back to Lenin's "The Development of Capitalism in Russia," where the Bolshevik theorist compares forest clearing in Ufa province with the practices of German colonialism in Africa and writes about the colonisation of Russia's steppe spaces in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Lenin, 1950, p. 212). In the first case, however, the classicist allowed himself rather an emotional statement, while in the second one he is talking about peasant colonisation, the settlement of free land, which does not equal colonialism as a system of exploitation, similar to the "colonialism" of the overseas colonies of England, France or Germany.

Another source of inspiration for proponents of the "internal colonialism" theory is Antonio Gramsci. In his 1926 work "Some Aspects of the Southern Question" (Gramsci, 2005), Gramsci, referring to the skewed development of the country's regions, slipped in that "the Northern bourgeoisie has subjugated the South of Italy and the Islands, and reduced them to exploitable colonies." However, the continuation of this phrase raises doubts that this was more than a propaganda metaphor. "Decolonisation" was thought of as a model proletarian revolution: "By emancipating itself from capitalist slavery, the Northern proletariat will emancipate the Southern peasant masses

enslaved to the banks and the parasitic industry of the North" (Gramsci, 2005, p. 28).

The concept of "internal colonialism" was finalised in the 1960s and 1970s, first by the Mexican Pablo González Casanova (1965) and then by the British historian Michael Hechter. The latter's study of the unequal relationship between Wales and England (Hechter, 1999) led to a major debate about the application of the concept to countries and regions that were never formally colonies.

The concept of "internal colonialism," for all its ambiguity, eventually contributed to works on "internal colonialism in China" (Gladney, 1998), "colonial governance" (Hassaniyan & Sohrabi, 2022) in "Iranian Kurdistan," "internal colonial other" in Iran (Soleimani & Mohammadpour, 2019). As a result, academic journals and respected magazines were filled with materials not only about Russian colonialism, but also about Iranian<sup>10</sup> or even Ethiopian<sup>11</sup> or "Abyssinian" colonialism (Birru, 1981).

The example of Ethiopia is illustrative in that accusations of "colonialism" were actively used by Eritrean separatists (while Eritrea itself — as a separate country from Ethiopia — can also be described as a product of Italian and British colonialism) (Negash, 1997, p. 144), separatist groups in the Ogaden and Oromo national movement activists (Holcomb & Ibssa, 1990). Politically, this discourse justified the fragmentation of the only sub-Saharan African country whose borders were shaped by Africans themselves, not colonisers. From a theoretical perspective, accusations of colonialism against traditional Ethiopia were based on a simplistic and politicised approach. Traditional power structures in a multi-ethnic

<sup>10</sup> Caschetta A. J. Why Are Academics Ignoring Iran's Colonialism? // *National Review*. December 27, 2019. URL: <https://www.nationalreview.com/2019/12/academics-ignore-iranian-colonialism/> (accessed: 15.05.2022).

<sup>11</sup> Mergo T. Ethiopia's Problems Stem From Internal Colonialism // *Foreign Policy*. July 22, 2021. URL: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/07/22/ethiopias-problems-stem-from-internal-colonialism/> (accessed: 15.05.2022).

empire, where ethnic, tribal, class and religious identities were intertwined, were viewed solely from the perspective of the nascent nationalisms of some of Ethiopia's peoples, who constructed their national identities in opposition to the imperial past and present (Záhořík, 2014).

Since the advent of the concept of “internal colonialism,” anyone could be accused of colonialism, including South Africa, Thailand, Sudan and Bangladesh (Gladney, 1998). Responsibility for colonialism, which had previously rested only on the Western part of humanity, was equally shared with members of other civilisations in the context of post-colonial studies. Following theoretical discussions of non-Western colonialism, it is not surprising to hear French President Emmanuel Macron speak of “Russian colonialism” during his visit to Benin,<sup>12</sup> or that Ottoman rule in Algeria was a “colonisation” comparable to the colonisation of Algeria by the French.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, the West could demand “decolonisation” from opposing state systems, turning “Postcolonialism” into an instrument of its foreign policy. It is no coincidence that a conference on the “decolonisation of Russia” in the US Congress said that the Russians had “colonised their own country.” This is a direct reference to Etkind's “self-colonisation” and ultimately to the concept of “internal colonialism.”

### **Postcolonialism as an Engaged Theoretical Paradigm**

In order to understand the reasons that led to the use of the concept of internal colonialism

<sup>12</sup> Macron Calls Russia ‘One of the Last Imperial Colonial Powers’ on Africa Visit // France24. July 28, 2022. URL: <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20220728-marcon-calls-russia-one-of-last-imperial-colonial-powers-in-benin-visit> (accessed: 15.10.2022).

<sup>13</sup> Turkey Slams Macron for Describing Ottoman Rule in Algeria as Colonialism // Duvar.English. October 08, 2021. URL: <https://www.duvarenglish.com/turkey-slams-macron-for-describing-ottoman-rule-in-algeria-as-colonialism-news-59123> (accessed: 15.10.2022).

against non-Western powers, including the victims of colonial expansion, we need to look at the genesis of postcolonial studies, within which this concept emerged.

Postcolonial studies go back to the writings of authors influenced by neo-Marxist social philosophy. All post-positivist approaches in international relations, which include post-colonialism, are characterised by a rejection of “neutrality”: The “engagement” of the researcher is seen not as a disadvantage but as an inevitable component of any theorisation.

This engagement can be directly traced back to concepts characteristic of the leftist milieu of the 1960s. In particular M. Foucault and his idea of the political function of the intellectual as a person involved in the “production” of knowledge and “truth” (Foucault, 1977), which in turn are inseparable from power and politics. Genealogically, this engagement goes back to the concepts of hegemony, the “historical bloc” and A. Gramsci's “organic intellectual” (Gramsci, 1991, pp. 325—467) as representative of the interests of the oppressed (Cox & Sinclair, 1999).

The Gramscian concept of the “subaltern” as representative of marginalised sections of society, deprived of a political voice and representation, has become a key concept for postcolonialists. In particular, Gayatri Spivak, an Indian-American researcher who is counted among the representatives of this approach, in her work “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (Spivak, 1988) classified Indian women during the British colonial rule of India as subalterns. On the one hand they were marginalised by the colonial administration and on the other by the supposedly patriarchal social structures of Indian traditional society. Despite the criticism of colonialism, this approach is derived from the value system generated by Western Modern society and its notion of a universal vector of human development — towards greater emancipation and equality.

Whereas in the 1990s scholars might have questioned the need for a convergence of

International Relations Theory and Postcolonialism (Darby & Paolini, 1994), by the 2010s Postcolonialism had become one of the accepted areas of international relations research in the academic community (Grovogui, 2010). This reflected, among other things, a certain shift in public consciousness in Western academia, where previously considered radical theories were becoming mainstream.

### **Instrumentalisation of Postcolonialism: Theoretical Background**

The subsequent development of postcolonial studies has highlighted another problem with this approach. Postcolonial studies claims to liberate itself from “cultural imperialism,” to express the will of the “South” as opposed to the “North,” to speak of the relationship between knowledge and power. Like other postpositivist theories, Postcolonialism claims to deconstruct power discourses. However, they do not deconstruct themselves, their basic axioms. Since, however, the ideological and philosophical basis of Postcolonialism is the Western (leftist) theories generated by the Western culture of the Modernity, by the specificity of the historical path of the West, its intellectual evolution, its logical and philosophical systems, they themselves can be seen as instruments of power and the global hegemony of the West. This suspicion is reinforced by the fact that this kind of research is carried out in Western mainstream institutions at the expense of (Western) public and private investors.

As a result, we see postcolonialist discourse converging with mainstream Western-centric philosophical thought: feminism, cosmopolitanism, relativism, criticism of onto-theo-phallo-logocentrism. For example, the contemporary British Indian-born postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha proposes the crucial postcolonialist idea of “hybridity” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 38), opposed to a clear articulation of identity. Postcolonialists do not insist on a return to pre-colonial identities, nor do they

insist on the authenticity of cultures (Grovogui, 2010, pp. 244—245) liberated from the influence of former colonial powers, but consider these cultures as temporary amalgams that are constructed and deconstructed through the interaction of different ethnic and social groups. The world is presented as an “archipelago” (Spivak, 2021, p. 29) of such groups, which brings Postcolonialism closer to the modern ideology of multiculturalism and the principle of “diversity” as an allegedly crucial and necessary component of a modern democratic liberal society. In general, this corresponds to Zygmunt Bauman’s concept of “liquid modernity,” where “strangers meet strangers” (Bauman, 2000, p. 94).

As the Philippino-American researcher Epifanio San Juan Jr. notes, this exaltation of “multiplicity, difference and syncretism” “occurs within the field of a pluralist global market”<sup>14</sup> “where the liberating impulse of anti-colonial struggle degenerates into an “eclectic cosmopolitanism of postcoloniality” (San Juan Jr., 1995, p. 92).

In her turn, the American-Israeli researcher, professor at New York University, Ella Shohat earlier emphasized that “postcolonial can easily become a universalizing category that neutralizes significant geopolitical differences between France and Algeria, Britain and Iraq or the US and Brazil” (Shohat, 1992, p. 103). More importantly, both former colonisers as well as colonised peoples are supposedly facing the same challenges of postcolonial, hybrid, mixed societies of the global world.

A movement close to Postcolonialism in American academia — “critical race theory” — has become the de facto ideology of the left wing of the ruling Democratic Party in the US. As contemporary American political philosopher Paul Gottfried notes, in today’s United States this ideology is “an instrument of

<sup>14</sup> San Juan Jr. The Limits of Postcolonial Criticism: The Discourse of Edward Said // Marxist Internet Archive. November-December, 1998. URL: <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/atc/1781.html> (accessed: 15.10.2022).

repression brandished by those in power against those whom it is feared might resist them.”<sup>15</sup> By acting on behalf of the “oppressed” and minority, “subalterns” — in postcolonialist terminology — they gain the moral right to confront the conservative majority.

Similarly, in practical geopolitics, protection of minorities and support of separatist and radical movements becomes an instrument of Western countries in their struggle against their geopolitical opponents — large non-Western states of the Second World or “semi-periphery”: support of separatism in Chechnya, Kurdish Marxist radicals in Syria, separatists in Iran. The latter, or rather the supposedly oppressed minorities on whose behalf they try to speak, are also granted subaltern status (Gladney, 2004; Matin, 2022).

### **“Colonialism”: An Attempt at Clarification**

In 1960, when the UN General Assembly, at the instigation of the Soviet Union, adopted the “Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples,” it was clear to everyone involved in international processes what territories were being referred to. Namely, the lands of Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Pacific islands, subjugated and exploited by the Europeans and Americans. These were overseas territories, usually of foreign ethnic origin, not previously linked to the metropolises, which were exploited as markets or sources of raw materials needed by the metropolis.

Now, at the instigation of Western scholars, including within postcolonial discourse, the understanding of colonialism is being unnecessarily broadened. If colonialism is defined as “conquest and control of other people’s land and good” (Loomba, 1998, p. 3),

then it is logical to conclude that “colonialism” was any episode of human history when state entities of any size were created. “Once stretched to encompass the whole world, the concept becomes meaningless,” notes contemporary American specialist in Russian history John LeDonne (2002, p. 765).

In that case, either any scholarly discussion of colonialism must stop (which is impossible, and the term itself will not disappear from the political and public spheres). Or we can narrow down the concept of colonialism as much as possible and try to make it more precise. Obviously, the postcolonial discourse as it has now emerged is heading in exactly the opposite direction.

In order to make the understanding of “colonialism” more meaningful, it is necessary, first, to start from the concrete historical reality of exactly what “colonialism” was. Second, to clarify what historical processes “colonialism” was part of, why it happened, what were its economic, political, legal and philosophical (worldview) preconditions, and what processes are now driven by the same factors that are the continuation of “colonialism.” Third, to understand what the place of the Second World is, the “semi-periphery” and the large, historically imperial states of the periphery in “colonialism” — are they colonialists, or victims of colonialism?

Colonialism, as understood in the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, is a Modern phenomenon. It is doubtful whether it can be applied to the Middle Ages or Antiquity, or to state systems developed outside the *Jus Publicum Europaeum*. This aspect is described in detail by C. Schmitt in “The Nomos of the Earth” (Schmitt, 2008, p. 616). What is associated with colonialism: racism, ideas of superiority, consideration of the territory of foreign cultures as a free field of expansion of European powers, is inextricably linked to the specificity of the European understanding of space in Modern times, starting with the Age of Discovery.

<sup>15</sup> Gottfried P. Critical Race Theory Is Worse Than Marxism // The Chronicles. May 26, 2021. URL: <https://chroniclesmagazine.org/web/critical-race-theory-is-worse-than-marxism/> (accessed: 15.10.2022).



Westphalian international law and sovereignty only applied to Europeans themselves (Schmitt, 2008, pp. 150, 236—264). The colonies were considered to lie normatively outside the order that defined life in the metropolises. Moreover, their very existence ensured this normative order in Europe — the rules of war to be observed in Europe did not apply to the colonies. Certain equilibrium in Europe was maintained by displacing European powers' struggles for free lands into lands free for colonial expansion (Schmitt, 2008, p. 199).

A similar understanding of “colonialism,” but in the context of pushing the contradictions of capitalism from the centre to the periphery, was proposed in the late 1950s by French philosopher of Russian origin Alexander Kojève. He defined “colonialism” as a modern form of Marx’s 19th century “capitalism” — a system where “surplus value, as in capitalism, is invested by individuals rather than the state, but it is withdrawn not within the same country, but outside it” (Kojève, 2006, p. 394). In a different direction, but a similar idea was developed earlier by a number of Marxist authors, who interpreted capitalism as an extensional system based on the exploitation of the colonies (Luxemburg, 1934, pp. 177—181). This approach influenced the theories of world-system analysis and dependent development.

Historically, then, the phenomenon that has come to be called “colonialism” is the expansion of the Western world-system in the form of a world-economy based on unequal exploitation to a global scale in the era that followed the Age of Discovery. There was a transition from a multitude of world-economies and world-empires to one global world-Economy of Modernity through the economic, civilizational and cultural expansion of the West. Colonialism is a form of conquest of other cultures by the West and their integration (“incorporation”) into its world-system. I. Wallerstein rightly noted: “Incorporation into the capitalist world-economy was never at the initiative of those being incorporated. The

process derived rather from the need of the world-economy to expand its boundaries, a need which was itself the outcome of pressures internal to the world-economy” (Wallerstein, 2016, p. 159).

Tellingly, the Indian subcontinent, the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Empire and West Africa were equally candidates for “incorporation” at the beginning of the “long 16th century” (Wallerstein, 2016, p. 159). Each of these regions faced the same challenge from a “world-economy” led by its hegemon that sought to make them dependent, but each responded differently.

Part of the non-Western countries became colonies under pressure. Another part had to adapt, partly westernising, in order to survive and oppose the West itself. These include Russia, the Ottoman Empire, Persia, Japan, Abyssinia in Africa and partly China. As a rule, these countries, in the best case, were able to establish themselves on the semi-periphery of the global Western world-system, without being integrated into the core. The exception is Japan after World War II, but the price was the renunciation of sovereignty. According to Wallerstein (2016, p. 231), in the 18th century Russia, having joined the world-system, went in a different direction — it sacrificed the possibility of closer economic integration into its core for the sake of imperial power. This is the choice of the semi-periphery: either power and sovereignty, or a (possible) higher place in the economic system at the price of desovereignization.

It makes no sense to use the term “colonialism” in relation to the imperial semi-peripheral and peripheral countries of which the Second World (Russia, the post-Soviet space and China) is a part, if we understand colonialism as a policy to incorporate non-Western countries into the world-system of the West in subordinate roles. The system called “subaltern empire” (Morozov, 2015), which is supposedly both an object of colonialism for Europe and a subject of colonialism for its subjects, can also be described in terms of the

Russian representative of world-system theory A.I. Fursov (1996) through the contradiction between substantive (capitalist bourgeois civil society) component of capitalism and the functional (modern state, bureaucracy, financial system) component of capitalism. The semi-periphery power is forced to adopt the latter in order to preserve its independence. Any semi-peripheral power, if it aspires to preserve its political independence, is doomed to be a “subaltern empire,” adapting the functional component of capitalism and the institutions of the modern state to its needs, and now adapting itself to the specificities of the Postmodernity. However, should this form of escape from direct colonial subjugation be called “colonialism” or should one argue that such an “empire of the periphery” is merely a “colonial state” (Kagarlitsky, 2009, p. 247), where Europeanised upper classes exploit the lower classes? Or as the Russian publicist E.S. Kholmogorov writes, it makes sense to consider this experience of semi-periphery as “entering the capitalist world-economy, but not as a periphery changing its division of labour, economic structure, etc. at will, but as a consolidated beneficiary, quite resistant (primarily militarily and politically) to the European expansion.”<sup>16</sup> And wouldn't such resistance be not an example of colonialism, but something just the opposite?

Colonialism is Western, European and American globalism in its early stage, as long as the modern global system is still the same European world-system of Modernity and not some other one. It is hard to disagree with the statement that “colonisation was the main way to remake the new world along European lines” (Lieven, 2007, p. 500). From this point of view, the developments of the postcolonial approach and the concepts of “internal colonialism” are

<sup>16</sup> Kholmogorov E. S. *Essays of the Time of Troubles. Essay two. Two Worlds — Two Systems // Russian Folk Line [Очерки Смутного Времени. Очерк второй. Два мира — две системы // Русская народная линия]*. October 18, 2007. (In Russian). URL: <https://rusk.ru/st.php?idar=24000> (accessed: 15.10.2022).

adequate, but only when trying to criticise the mechanisms of Westernisation and modernisation, which were accompanied by the destruction of alternative “non-Western systems of coordinates and ways of being” (Fituni & Abramova, 2020, p. 32).

From a cultural perspective, colonialism can be understood as a sub-product of modern Western civilisation which, as the contemporary Italian historian Franco Cardini notes, is consumed by ideas of constant transgression, the abolition of all borders, constant expansion, embodied both in the idea of history as infinite progress and in territorial, economic and cultural expansion.<sup>17</sup>

Colonialism is Modernity, its socio-cultural system. More precisely, one of the forms of imposing Western Modernity, as an inevitable fate, on others. Colonialism is unthinkable without the Western “Faustian spirit,” Spengler’s “predatory man,” his technical superiority.<sup>18</sup>

Colonialism was also inseparable from notions of a civilising mission. One of the most important characteristics of *Jus Publicum Europeum* was the notion that an “uncivilised” people could not become a member of this international legal community (Schmitt, 2008, p. 616). European and American perceptions of world politics during the colonial period were based on a hierarchy of peoples and regions of the world (Hobson, 2012, pp. 8—9), the formal expression of which was American Lewis Morgan’s trichotomy (“savagery — barbarism — civilisation”). At the highest level were European “white” “civilized” nations, below — Asian “barbaric” “despotisms,” still below — “black” “savages.” Russia, if seen as a “white” civilised country, is still lower in the

<sup>17</sup> Nieri D. *Le esercitazioni NATO nel Baltico sono una minaccia per la Russia. Intervista di Umberto De Giovannangeli // Il blog di Franco Cardini*. June 12, 2022. URL: <https://www.francocardini.it/minima-cardiniana-382-2/> (accessed: 15.10.2022).

<sup>18</sup> Spengler O. *Man and technology // Humanitarian Portal [Шпенглер О. Человек и техника // Гуманитар-*

hierarchy than, for example, Great Britain. Turkey is lower than Russia, etc. It is not difficult to notice the coincidence of the “barbarians” with what in the future became the “periphery” of the world-system theory, partly the Second World.

From the point of view of the Western colonialists, the enlightened and civilised had the right to interfere in the affairs of “savages” and “barbarians.” But isn’t this the same thing we are back to now? “Civilisation” is now called “democracy.” “Meddling” in the affairs of “democracies” is inexcusable, whereas Western countries themselves have the right to humanitarian intervention or impose sanctions for the sake of democracy and a “rule-based world order” accepted by a narrow circle of “civilized” and “democratic countries.” Moreover, the very concept of “humanitarian intervention” has historically evolved in Europe and the US from racist and colonialist ideas about the justification of interference in the affairs of “uncivilised” countries (Heraclides & Dialla, 2015, pp. 33—56).

Finally, surprisingly little attention is paid to the most obvious geopolitical side of colonialism. Colonies are always overseas possessions. In postcolonial studies, this point is relegated to the background, to the point of describing the provinces of land empires (or parts of metropolises) as colonies. In works of Edward Said, however, one can find an intuition that “The idea of overseas rule-jumping beyond adjacent territories to very distant lands” is specific to the cultures of France, Britain and the United States. This distinguishes them from the Russian and Ottoman Empires (Said, 2012, pp. 27, 52). For Dominique Lieven, the main difference between Russia and the maritime colonial empires is “continentality.” Continentality means development within a single “ecological system,” a similar space, not comparable to the discovery of truly new overseas worlds. It is expansion in a “world that

was not truly new,” and hence the differences that separated the inhabitants of overseas colonies from the metropolis, in the continental empire, did not exist or were less pronounced (Lieven, 2007, p. 365).

The founder of British geopolitics, Halford John Mackinder, introduced two concepts in “Democratic Ideals and Reality”: “Seaman’s point of view” and “Landman’s point of view” (Mackinder, 1996, p. 38). “Seaman” sees the mainland as a chain of coasts which he seeks to develop and control from the outside. This is how the European colonisation of other continents took place. The “Landman” sees the continent from within as a vast continental mass to which he himself belongs. In geopolitical terms, colonialism can be understood as part of the maritime powers’ policy of controlling the land, including controlling and opposing continental empires. “The view from the Sea, external to the mainland, sees coastal territories as potential colonies, as strips of land that can be torn away from the rest of the continental mass, turned into a base, a strategic space,” notes Russian geopolitician Alexander Dugin (2000, p. 15).

In this context, decolonisation can be seen as a strengthening of continental formations, integration at the continental level allowing to overcome political, economic and military pressure of maritime powers. This can also explain the interest in continental integration among supporters of anti-colonial movements and bring their ideas closer to Second World integration projects (The Belt and Road Initiative, EAEU, pan-Africanist projects).

## Conclusion

Postcolonial studies provide food for thought by uncovering the epistemological mechanisms of colonialism, Western hegemony and domination after the formal declaration of independence of former colonies. One cannot but admit that they raise sharp questions about the combination of modernisation and colonialism, modernisation as a form of

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colonisation, the “wrong side of modernity” (Vasiliev, Degterev & Shaw, 2021, p. 11). The most painful challenge is the attempts to interpret the policies of semi-peripheral countries towards their own suburbs as “colonial.” The answer to this challenge should be a more thorough examination of colonialism and neocolonialism from the perspective of political economy (world-systems theory), philosophy, geopolitics, international law studies, history and cultural studies. The countries of the Second World need to construct their own counter-hegemonic post-colonial theory. The question to be answered is to what extent the Second World experience is unique and related to geopolitical and historical factors,

the continentality of Russia and China (Fursov, 2001), and the specificity of power systems in both countries, and to what extent it is universal as a response to pressures from the colonial West and hence of interest to the Third World.

Anti-colonial discourse can be fully scientific if it is free of this disease of leftism — the postcolonial perception of any complex solidarity systems as repressive, of any expansion and violence (inevitable in the course of history) as “colonialism.” Colonialism has a distinct genealogy and aspects of its formation and transformation into the modern international order, whose potential for study has not been exhausted.

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