

Anticolonial, postcolonial, decolonial

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The notions of anticolonial, postcolonial and decolonial have been used in political and economic history to refer to processes that occurred in enslaved societies in the overseas territories of European empires, where aboriginal nations, racially distinct from the inhabitants of the metropolis, were subject to exploitation. In recent decades, in literary and cultural studies, these terms have been used to analyse psychological barriers and complexes, formed by imperial politics, as well as to analyse the struggle for mental and cultural emancipation.

The term anticolonial refers to the rejection of imperial tropes, expressed in resistance to degrading stereotypes; anticolonial behaviour calls into question the arguments of the imperial narrative ^[1].

The term postcolonial is interpreted as a departure from the dependence on binary oppositions the likes of centre-periphery, empire-colony, high culture-folk culture. In literature and art, the postcolonial approach can be conveyed with irony, parody, and playfulness. The postcolonial approach often manifests itself in deconstructing the imperial, ridiculing the form of its expression, and transferring these forms to a broader comparative context. It makes it possible to level out the tropes of imperial thinking, but simultaneously does not provide for the militant resistance typical of anticolonialism. The postcolonial approach starts movement away from binary opposition to the creation of an independent centre of consciousness ^[2].

The term decolonial refers to the process of forming and establishing the emancipated consciousness of a nation that had been enslaved in the past. The starting point is one's own history, culture, language. At this stage, one's own identity is actively investigated and constructed. Freed from the limitations imposed by imperial rule, this identity now develops new innovative cultural codes that can be disorienting and incomprehensible to the old imperial mentality ^[3].

The stages of evolution of societies embodied in the terms anticolonial, postcolonial and decolonial, can be considered as separate historical periods. In the Ukrainian context, anticolonial has been expressed in political texts and cultural products for many generations ^[4]. Postcolonial has been described as a stage that began after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, when Ukraine regained its independence. *Recreations* (1991) and *Moscoviada* (1993) by Yuri Andrukhovych became texts that testified to the onset of the postcolonial moment in Ukrainian literature ^[5]. The decolonial turn can be seen as a powerful reaction to Russia's full-scale invasion on February 24th, 2022, when Ukrainian intellectuals and artists started an active dialogue about decolonisation and their cultural identity. Many writers such as, for instance, Volodymyr Rafeienko, have switched fully to the Ukrainian language in their writing, and the public has switched to reading in Ukrainian, a trend that is confirmed by the growing number of bookstores and published works. What is more, since 2022, the translation of Ukrainian texts into other languages has rapidly gained momentum, fueled by the world's interest in everything Ukrainian. Ukraine's contribution to world culture has received the attention of the world community. This indicates a tectonic shift in the perception of Ukraine in the imperial context.

The terms anticolonial, postcolonial and decolonial can define processes that occur simultaneously as three different modes of thinking. We can use the works of the representatives of the dissident movement, formed in the 1960s as an example.

One of the most important anticolonial texts was *Internationalism or Russification?* by Ivan Dziuba (1965; first published in 1968 in the UK)^[6]. The author openly challenged Soviet policy and practice on the national question in Ukraine, quoting Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders who in the 1920s called for a fight against Russian great-power chauvinism. Public figures and writers Viacheslav Chornovil, Ivan Svitlychny, Valentyn Moroz, Yevhen Sverstyuk, and Leonid Plyushch were imprisoned for considering Soviet politics in Ukraine as a form of imperial rule, politically and culturally. Their criticism was based on the condemnation of repressions and false statements by the authorities.

At the same time the representatives of the dissident movement included authors and artists who demonstrated postcolonial behaviour by ridiculing imperial narratives. An example is the 1964 celebration of the so-called 70th birthday of Ivan Svitlychny and Alla Horska, who were both 35, and whose birthdays were close together (September 18 and 20). The entire event was a parody of inflexible Soviet practices and ridiculed the pompous officialdom of party meetings^[7]. Such a humorous attitude to repressive norms can be interpreted as a form of postcoloniality.

Examples of decolonial thinking can also be found in the life attitudes and works of dissidents. Let's turn to the corpus of works by Vasyl Stus for example. The poet's ideological legacy is attractive because in his poetry he ignores (or at least seems to ignore) Soviet life, Russian chauvinism and even his own persecution, focusing on inner freedom and self-affirmation instead^[8]. The poet uses words such as "self-insight", and "recognition of the boundaries that once separated us from ourselves", to convey the construction of a personal space that is invulnerable to colonial pressure. He mentions authors who influenced him – Rylsky, Verhaeren, Bazhan, Goethe, Svidzins'kyi, Rilke, Ungaretti, Quasimodo, Hemingway, Stefanyk, Proust, Camus and Faulkner. The only Russian name that he gives in his list is Tolstoy^[9]. Thus, Stus's decolonial thinking can be seen as an independent process, which he was already practising in the 1960s–80s. This is supported by Svitlana Biedarieva, who believes that postcolonial and decolonial reflect two different stages of trying to get out of the imperial net. The postcolonial redefines the consequences of colonialism, while the decolonial completes the process of dismantling the colonial narrative^[10]. In 1980 Stus wrote an essay on decolonization as the only guarantee of world peace. In it, the poet called for a referendum on the independence of Ukraine, with the participation of UN observers^[11]. Thus, Stus's poetry itself points to the fact that for two decades he consciously nurtured his own deep sense of personal independence.



"Invitation to the celebration of the 70th birthday of Alla Gorska and Ivan Svitlychny", author: Alla Gorska

Endnotes

01. See Kassymbekova, B. and Chokobaeva, A. (2023), "Expropriation, assimilation, elimination: Understanding Soviet Settler Colonialism." In *South/South Dialogues, Beyond the colonial vortex of the "West"*; [Subverting non-western imperialisms before and after 24 February 2022](#); Sonevytsky, M. (2022), "What is Ukraine? Notes on Epistemic Imperialism." *Topos 2*: 21–30.; Thompson, Ewa M. (2000), *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism*. Westport CT and London: Greenwood; Shkandrij, M. (2001), *Russia and Ukraine: Literature and the Discourse of Empire from Napoleonic to Postcolonial Times*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press.

02. See Andrukhovych, Y. (2018), *My Final Territory: Selected Essays*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press; Pavlyshyn, M. (1992), "Post-Colonial Features in Contemporary Ukrainian Culture." *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies* 6.2 : 41-55.; Riabchuk, M. (2011), *Postkolonialnyi syndrome: Sposterezhennia*. Kyiv: K.I.S., p. 39, 79; Chernetsky, V. (2007), *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures: Russia and Ukraine in the Context of Globalization*. Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

03. See Бєдарєва (2022), Дєнісова та ін. (2022), Biedarieva, S. (2022). [Decolonization and Disentanglement in Ukrainian Art. MoMa Post Notes on Art in the Global Context](#), 2 June, (відвідано 20.02.2024); Denysova, Katia et al. (2022), "[Decolonisation, De-Communisation and De-Russification of the Ukrainian Cultural Space](#)," The Courtauld

Immediations Online 19, відвідано 10.02.2024)

For instance, M. Riabchuk recalls Olexsandr Irvanets' poem, *Ode to the Hryvnia*, which was interpreted by a Russian literary critic Lada Fedorovska in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* as a serious patriotic ode. The researcher was unable to see irony in this text, since her only focus was an imperial stereotype about Ukrainians as nationalists. See. Riabchuk, M. (2011), *Postkolonialnyi syndrome: Sposterezhennia*. Kyiv: K.I.S., p. 39, 79. Ryabchuk goes on to talk about many Ukrainians suffering from the long-term consequences of imperial rule, whose "creolized" mentality was created like Michurin's experiments on artificial circumcision, grafting and a transplant. See *Ibid.* p. 198.

04. See Finnin, R. (2011), "Nationalism and the Lyric, Or How Taras Shevchenko Speaks to Compatriots Dead, Living, and Unborn," *Slavonic and East European Review* 89.1: 29–55.; Shkandrij, M. (2001), *Russia and Ukraine: Literature and the Discourse of Empire from Napoleonic to Postcolonial Times*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.

05. Pavlyshyn, M. (1992), "Post-Colonial Features in Contemporary Ukrainian Culture." *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies* 6.2 : 41–55.

06. Dzyuba, Ivan. (1970). *Internationalism or Russification? A Study in the Soviet Nationalities Problem*, 60–113. 2d ed. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

07. To celebrate two birthdays, the Central Jubilee Committee (TSUK) was created as a parody of party meetings. For the celebration, Alla Horska drew an illustrated 'Invitation' in the form of a caricature depicting anniversaries, in which the artist "almost mocks the features of faces, turning the 'heroes' of the event into almost banal representatives of the party asset". See. Ключко, Д. (2023), *Автопортрети тринадцяти українок*. Київ: Комубук, с. 62–63. Nadiia Svitlychna also recalls the event. See. Світличний І., Світлична Н. (2008), *З живучого племені Дон Кіхотів / Упорядкув. М. Х. Коцюбинської та О. І. Неживого. Передм. та прим. М. Х. Коцюбинської*. К.: Грамота. с. 556. [See the image of the caricature.](#)

08. In his 1964 poem, "The Gray Sky has spilled like a Horizon", Stus speaks about self-fulfillment, which looks "like a gateway from which water never flows". See. В. Стус (1970), «Зимові дерева: перша збірка поезії» Лондон: Література і мистецтво, с. 16.

09. *Ibid.*, p. 9–10

10. Biedarieva, S. (2022). [Decolonization and Disentanglement in Ukrainian Art. MoMA Post Notes on Art in the Global Context](#), 2 June, (відвідано 20.02.2024)

11. Стус, Василь (2023). *Нема кайданів, щоб дух Твій здушити*. Упорядн. Дмитро Стус. Київ: Дух і Літера, с. 223.

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