



Decolonizations: Theories, Practices and Discourses in East-Central Europe and Beyond. Editorial

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This journal issue was initially planned as a volume of articles based on papers presented at the international conference *Languages and Cultures in Times of War: (Im)possible, (Re)imagined, (Un)manageable*, held at University College London's School of Slavonic and East European Studies (UCL SSEES) and Institute of Advanced Studies (IAS) on 2–3 May 2024. Nevertheless, the thematic scope of the event encouraged us to go further and to open the volume to a broader discussion on the various faces of decolonization processes in East-Central Europe and the surrounding

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constellations. We were pleased to welcome authors whose work resonates with and expands these debates, enriching the volume beyond its initial framework.

Since the full-scale Russian invasion in Ukraine, the word “decolonization”, as Botanova and Palko note, became “a buzzword and an umbrella term to encompass numerous uneven grievances (economic, political or epistemic) of communities which to a different extent happened to belong to the Russian sphere of interest or were claimed as such by the Russian leadership” (Botanova & Palko, 2024, p. 374). Therefore, we can observe that the word migrated from overseas countries, which were the primary object of postcolonial critique, and where the processes of decolonization of power led to substantial changes (Quijano, 2000). Hence, one may say that this marked a decolonial turn in Central and Eastern Europe, reassessing and challenging colonial heritage in the region. In this part of the world, decolonization means getting rid of Russian imperial imprint. Although this phenomenon may be referred to as post-dependence, it does not change the core of decolonization in Central and Eastern Europe, which, for the countries in question, is to delink from the enduring effects of Russian colonialism and to position themselves within Europe as a historically integral part of it (Kurnyshova, 2024). Especially in the Ukrainian context, the word decolonization is often used together with decommunization and derussification (Betlii, 2022), positioning them as the elements of one process of transformations.

Nowadays, it is beyond doubt that post-socialist parts of Central and Eastern Europe could be regarded in terms of postcolonial studies (e.g. Annus, 2012, 2016, 2025; Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006; Moore, 2001, 2024; Tlostanova, 2008, 2009, 2012, 2015, 2019). Also, after February 2022, the discussion on decolonization fostered the interventions and appeals to decolonize Slavic Studies in the West, which were dominated by Russian epistemic tradition (e.g. Demchuk & Levchenko, 2024; Getka, 2024; Kushnir, 2024; Shchytsova & Korablyova, 2024).

The current issue includes articles concerning ideas about epistemic decolonization and decolonization of the sphere of knowledge and the means of its production and dissemination, including language, universities, academic circles, and media, public and political discourses.

In this light, Myroslav Shkadrij writes about the influence of the Russo-Ukrainian war on Western academic culture, considering the entire spectrum of problems and epistemic obstacles to change caused by deeply rooted influence of Russian imperial tradition (Shkadrij, 2025).

Olena Synchak, in her analysis of language change on the example of military-related feminine terms, demonstrates clear decolonial implications of breaking with Russian linguistic dominance and Soviet language policy toward standardization of Ukrainian. She argues that the traditionally masculinized and Russified military sector is undergoing significant feminization in Ukrainian media discourse, reflecting efforts toward derussification and the promotion of gender parity and inclusivity in language (Synchak, 2025).

Alex Krouglov examines language policy and planning (LPP) by outlining the historical development of language ideologies in Europe and investigating how they are currently reshaped by contemporary events. Using Ukraine as a case study, he shows how language

ideologies evolve in a war-torn society; he also identifies the dominant ideologies expressed in European LPP and the roles of English and other European languages within the EU and the wider European context. Krouglov sees decolonization not only in promoting the Ukrainian language but also in cultivating linguistic diversity through the revitalization of indigenous and minority languages, as well as in reconsidering the role of English and applying multilingual strategies in LPP (Krouglov, 2025).

Oleksandra Iwaniuk analyzes Ukrainian political elites' perceptions of Russia as a geopolitical threat, tracing changes since the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the full-scale invasion in 2022 using Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice. Integrating a postcolonial perspective, she argues that these perceptions emerge from internal struggles within the political field and the enduring legacy of Russian imperialism, and explains how symbolic hierarchies influence national identity, memory politics, and political authority in post-Soviet Ukraine (Iwaniuk, 2025).

In turn, Olha Tkachenko proposes an analysis of Ukrainian mass media, focusing specifically on YouTube, from a decolonial perspective. She examines how discursive strategies and narrative patterns are used to dismantle Russian colonial influence once shaped by and rooted in the media and mass culture. This approach highlights the ways in which digital media platforms serve as sites for contesting colonial narratives and promoting decolonial agendas (Tkachenko, 2025).

In this volume, the reader will also find an article by Orest Semotiuk, where he analyzes the role of political satire, including memes and cartoons, in shaping public perceptions and attitudes during the Russo-Ukrainian war, highlighting how humor serves as a tool for both sides to mock each other and influence political narratives (Semotiuk, 2025).

In this issue, as in every volume of the journal, we deliberately construct constellations that go beyond traditionally understood borders of Central and Eastern Europe. We do so out of the conviction that Europe is shaped through ongoing dialogue, and that related cultural, historical, and aesthetic practices acquire distinct forms in different parts of the continent. Within this framework, we turn to the Balkans and their specific historical experience of war and its lasting traumatic consequences. Enrico Davanzo analyzes the short story collection *Tajna džema od malina* [The Secret of Raspberry Jam] (1997) by the Bosnian author Karim Zaimović, written during the siege of Sarajevo. Davanzo examines how Zaimović represents the reality of war by inserting genre fiction clichés into an otherwise documentary-like depiction of everyday life in the besieged city. While the processes of decolonization take on a markedly different form in this context, their distant echoes remain audible, revealing unexpected affinities and tensions that enrich our understanding of Europe as a common, though heterogeneous, cultural space (Davanzo, 2025).

In a similar constellatory gesture, this issue also brings together articles that resonate across different historical and cultural contexts through shared practices of memory and narrative-making. Ewa Szperlik's (2025) article on the literature of the so-called

“silent republic” examines Croatian *jeans prose* as a field of encoded resistance, where literary form becomes a strategy of negotiating censorship, repression, and imposed historical silence. Analyzing the works of Alojz Majetić and Antun Šoljan, she traces how narrative ambiguity, metaphor, irony, and allusion function as epistemic tools that enable the articulation of dissent under conditions of ideological constraint. These literary practices reveal distant yet recognizable echoes of broader European experiences of domination, silencing, and deferred decolonization, understood here not as a completed process but as an ongoing reconfiguration of knowledge, memory, and voice. Szperlik’s contribution highlights how alternative narrative strategies emerge at the intersection of generational conflict, suppressed histories, and everyday life, offering insight into the ways in which European cultures continue to seek new epistemic frameworks for engaging with the past and its unresolved legacies.

In each issue, we revisit an article originally published in our journal during the interwar period. In the present issue, in the section “Retrospectives”, Iryna Polets-Gerus analyzes M. Kovalevsky’s article “Rosyjskie kierunki polityczne wobec zagadnienia ukraińskiego” [Russian Political Directions Toward the Ukrainian Question], published in *Sprawy Narodowościowe* in 1927, where he writes how Ukrainian identity was denied by the Soviet regime, how Ukrainian culture was marginalized or used as a weapon to destabilize the region, and how the country’s resources were exploited by the totalitarian state. The paper traces unsurprising parallels with contemporary Russian rhetoric and actions, showing how historical narratives are weaponized to justify the ongoing aggression (Polets-Gerus, 2025).

The “Reviews” section in this issue presents two important books about how public memory is or was created and what kind of memory it shapes in public space. Elżbieta Kwiecińska reviews the book *Monuments and Territory: War Memorials in Russian-Occupied Ukraine* by Mischa Gabowitsch and Mykola Homanyuk, who show the influence of war on the sites of memory (Kwiecińska, 2025). In turn, Mateusz Adamczyk and Kacper Rosner-Leszczyński write about Kenneth E. Foote and Anett Árvay’s *Contested Places, Contested Pasts: Sites of Memory and Commemoration in the Hungarian Landscape* (Adamczyk & Rosner-Leszczyński, 2025).

In our volume, we do not seek to provide the only right definition of decolonization or postcolonialism in Central and Eastern Europe. Instead, we conceive it as an open forum for discussion, the exchange of perspectives, and the emergence of new insights that remain sensitive to historical specificity, local epistemologies, and asymmetries of power. The contributions gathered here approach decolonization not as a fixed theoretical framework to be applied retroactively, but as a dynamic and contested process that unfolds differently across regions, disciplines, and cultural practices. Such an understanding foregrounds dialogue over closure and plurality over conceptual rigidity, acknowledging that the vocabularies of postcolonial critique continue to be negotiated within and beyond the region.

We would like to conclude these introductory remarks by returning to a question posed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in a discussion held two decades ago, a question that remains strikingly relevant today: “Are we postcolonial?”:

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, “colonizer” and “colonized” can be used. (Spivak et al., 2006, p. 828)

In light of the above quotation from Spivak, this issue of the journal, which we warmly invite you to read, presents a rationale for why it remains necessary to engage with older terms, tools, and contexts. We demonstrate that although the world changes, historical conceptual frameworks and modes of thinking remain essential for understanding social, cultural, and political processes, and for reflecting on contemporary challenges.

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