

## Comparative analysis of postcolonial literature: Ukrainian, European, and American contexts

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**Abstract.** *The thesis analyzes Ukrainian postcolonial literature (the prose of Oksana Zabuzhko, Serhiy Zhadan, and Taras Prokhasko) in comparison with the works of Chinua Achebe, Jean Rhys, and Toni Morrison. Space, language, the body, memory, and myth emerge as shared key instruments of resistance against colonial and imperial violence. The Ukrainian experience of Soviet and post-Soviet colonization is interpreted through local narratives, which brings it closer to the global postcolonial discourse.*

**Keywords:** *Postcolonialism, Ukrainian literature, comparativism, language, identity, trauma.*

Postcolonialism as an intellectual and artistic movement emerged as a result of the decolonization of Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and other regions that had experienced colonial domination [5]. However, its scope has gradually expanded to include peoples subjected to imperial or internal colonial oppression. Ukraine, with its complex history within the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, falls within the field of postcolonial discourse, though with somewhat different emphases than those of classical colonies [2, p. 48 – 49; 12, p. 566 – 567].

The process of liberation from the colonial pressure of the Russian Federation, as well as the mental overcoming by Ukrainians of the ideological stigma of being a “lesser” state entity – accompanied by full-scale war – is vividly reflected in contemporary Ukrainian literature, including drama [6 – 7; 11]. Postcolonial studies in the context of modern Ukrainian literature offer new approaches to analyzing history, culture, and national identity, allowing a reevaluation of colonial influence and opening pathways toward restoring national dignity, memory, and uniqueness. These theses present a comparative analysis of Ukrainian postcolonial literature alongside works of postcolonial discourse in Europe and America.

Ukraine’s history is marked by a long colonial experience – both political and cultural. The dominance of the Russian Empire, and later the USSR, led to the marginalization of the Ukrainian language, the destruction of traditional culture, and repressions against the intelligentsia. This experience is reflected in the literature of independent Ukraine, where writers explore both individual and collective trauma rooted in the colonial past. Several examples illustrate this point.

Oksana Zabuzhko’s novel *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* (1996) became emblematic of post-Soviet Ukrainian literature [9]. The author examines the experience of a woman

intellectual attempting to find herself in conditions of cultural marginalization. Language is one of the central images of the book: Ukrainian represents a wounded yet resilient identity. The protagonist faces the impossibility of self-realization in a space dominated by an imperial (Soviet) narrative – including norms of sexuality, intellect, and expression.

The post-Soviet landscape, as a space that has lost imperial control but has not yet gained its own identity, is captured in Serhiy Zhadan's novel *Voroshilovgrad* (2010) [8]. The protagonist returns to his hometown in the Donbas, where layers of cultural, linguistic, historical, and economic marginalization are revealed. This work exemplifies postcolonial realism – devoid of exoticism or folklorization of the peripheral space.

In Taras Prokhasko's prose, particularly in *The UnSimple* [10], we encounter a postcolonial mythopoetic approach. The history of Halychyna, a borderland region repeatedly transferred between empires, is presented through symbolism, archetypes, and magical realism. The author constructs an alternative version of history in which local narratives become a form of resistance to imperial discourse.

In countries with classical colonial pasts (such as the British, French, and Spanish Empires), postcolonial discourse primarily focuses on racial, religious, and cultural otherness of colonized peoples. Their national literatures serve as a means of restoring the voices of the colonized.

Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) [1] depicts the colonization of Nigeria and the collapse of traditional African society under the pressure of European culture. Resistance is articulated through the voice of the colonized, shaped by his mentality, beliefs, and tragedies. Achebe seeks to show that African culture has its own logic and depth, devalued by the colonizers. Through the character of Okonkwo, Achebe explores the internal conflict of a man trying to uphold traditional Igbo values in a world that is rapidly changing due to colonial intrusion. The novel critiques not only the violent imposition of British rule and Christianity, but also the deep cultural misunderstandings that lead to the disintegration of indigenous society.

A key aspect of the postcolonial dimension in *Things Fall Apart* is the way Achebe subverts the colonial narrative. By writing in English while infusing the text with Igbo proverbs, idioms, and concepts, he reclaims linguistic agency and disrupts the idea of European linguistic and cultural superiority. Language becomes both a site of loss and resistance. Achebe's narrative restores the subjectivity of the colonized, rejecting the Eurocentric portrayal of Africans as voiceless or primitive. Instead, he presents a vibrant, complex society with its own systems of governance, spirituality, and morality.

Furthermore, the novel illustrates the psychological violence of colonization, showing how it fractures identities, destabilizes community structures, and produces intergenerational trauma. Okonkwo's personal downfall mirrors the larger disintegration of Igbo culture, highlighting the destructive impact of cultural imperialism. In this sense, *Things Fall Apart* is not only a historical account of

colonization, but also a postcolonial intervention – a literary act of remembering and reasserting African identity against centuries of erasure and marginalization.

Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) [4] is a prequel to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. It tells the story of Mr. Rochester's first wife – Antoinette Cosway (known in *Jane Eyre* as Bertha Mason), a white Creole heiress. The novel portrays the girl's youth in the Caribbean, her unhappy marriage, and her relocation to foggy England. Trapped in a patriarchal society, belonging neither to white Europeans nor to Black Caribbeans, Antoinette slowly transforms into the madwoman in the attic at Thornfield Hall. Like many works of postcolonial literature, the novel addresses themes of racial inequality and the brutal realities of assimilation. Rhys gives voice to a colonial woman from the Caribbean – Mr. Rochester's former wife. Her madness is depicted as a consequence of both colonial and gender-based violence. The novel represents postcolonial feminism, where the woman's identity is subordinated not only to the male gaze but also to colonial hierarchies.

The theme of slavery, post-traumatic memory, and bodily identity permeates Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) [3]. The American author reconstructs the voice of an enslaved woman who tries to liberate herself from the ghosts of the past. Her language is poetic, fragmented, emotional – a form of resistance to both patriarchal and colonial discourse.

Despite differences in historical experience, we can trace shared themes, narratives, and intentions that unite Ukrainian, European, and American postcolonial literature.

Criterion	Ukrainian Literature	European/American Postcolonial Literature
<i>Type of Colonization</i>	Imperial (Soviet, Russian / modern Russian Federation)	Classical colonization: British, French, Spanish
<i>Language</i>	Linguistic oppression, Russification	Suppression of native language, imposition of the colonial one
<i>Identity</i>	Striving to return to authenticity	Rediscovery or hybridization of personal/cultural identity
<i>Trauma</i>	Memory of repression, Holodomor, wars	Slavery, genocide, displacement, sexual violence
<i>Resistance</i>	Through language, region, body, history	Through retelling their version of history, deconstructing colonial myths
<i>Myth/Magic</i>	Hutsul/Carpathian myth (Prokhasko)	African/Caribbean magical rituals, magical realism

In the works of Oksana Zabuzhko, as in those of Chinua Achebe and Toni Morrison, language emerges not merely as a tool of communication but as a space of struggle, an embodiment of culture and the power of identity – since colonial authority

has always sought to impose its own language as the norm. Similar to the writings of Toni Morrison and Jean Rhys, in Zabuzhko's work the female body becomes a site of colonial violence – both physical and symbolic – representing deeply rooted systems of domination. The marginalized spaces portrayed by Serhiy Zhadan in his depictions of the Donbas resemble the Caribbean landscapes in Jean Rhys's prose: territories excluded from the official narrative, devalued by structures of power, yet vibrant, polyphonic, and complex.

At the center of Toni Morrison's attention – as in the works of many Ukrainian authors – is post-traumatic memory, encompassing both individual and collective dimensions. The trauma of colonization is depicted as an experience transmitted across generations. In different contexts—Africa, Ukraine, the Latin American diaspora – protagonists seek their identities at the intersection of cultures, languages, and narratives, striving to rediscover themselves in a fragmented yet living historical space.

Thus, we may conclude that postcolonial literature serves as a powerful instrument of decolonization – not only territorial but also mental. Despite its specific colonial experience, Ukrainian literature shares much with the classical examples of postcolonial writing. Through language, the body, memory, myth, and locality, Ukrainian authors restore the wholeness of a culture that has been under pressure for decades. Comparisons with American and European writers make it possible to identify shared mechanisms of resistance and creativity in response to colonial violence. This is not merely literature about the past – it is literature of the future, in which colonized voices become subjects of history.

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