

3. Theoretical Framework

This paper applies postcolonial theory to describe the dynamics of colonial Russia with its indigenous constitutions, the ongoing impacts of colonialism, and the power structure of dominance in contemporary Russia, as well as to accentuate the perspectives of ethnic minorities and their experience.

Postcolonialism indicates that colonial power relations have never ended and tend to re-emerge. Despite the prefix post, which alludes to the formal end of control, domination, and imperialism, colonial structures remain present and determine the contemporary politics of power relations. It is an ongoing work of analyzing the colonial legacy for a present, not fully decolonized society (Wilkens, 2017: 2).

Fanon, a prominent postcolonial theorist, insists that power dynamics do not transform after the formal removal of colonial power and domination persists even in liberated countries. He points out that *de jure* independence is neither a solution nor will it eliminate any of the existing problems, as people will keep starving, and the national regime will further constrain people, leaving them even more vulnerable. He further argues that some countries refuse to endure such a situation and seek help from the former colonial power, which in turn proceeds to exploit its position and engage in treaties that only serve to strengthen their domination further. Thus, the former colonies become dependent again on the first-world countries, the former colonial power (Fanon, 1963: 97-98). Therefore, postcolonial studies focus on the legacy of the colonial past, the power and domination of the former colonizers and the colonized, and the reenactment of these hidden processes (Wilkens, 2017: 2).

Fanon dedicated his works to studying and calling for the fight for decolonization in his country, Algeria. In his terminology, decolonization refers to the urgency of challenging the colonial situation and reclaiming power and agency (Fanon, 1963: 36).

Bogaerts and Raben, in their study of empires and decolonization in Africa and Asia, outline decolonization in the same vein as the breakdown of colonial relations. They use it as a synonym for withdrawal and dispossession and as a process of transferring power back to indigenous peoples (2012: 3). Therefore, they presumed that decolonization is a pathway to escape the colonial relations and completely put an end to empires.

The central argument of Fanon's writings and analysis is the necessity for violence. He advocates that to change the status of the colonized as second-class citizens, any means are to be

used, including the phenomenon of violence. Violence has always been present in the colonial world and used to destroy the social forms of the natives and subjugate them, erasing their identity. He insists that colonialism is violence in itself. Therefore, it can only be countered by greater violence (Fanon, 1963: 36, 40, 60).

Bhabha, another pillar of postcolonial theory, disagrees with Fanon and his description of the colonized and the colonizer as two opposing and distinctive identities. Fanon, in his explanation of the process of decolonization, affirms that it can be characterized as “the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature, which in fact owe their originality to that sort of substantification which results from and is nourished by the situation in the colonies” (Fanon, 1963: 35). However, Bhabha rejects the binary division of identities. He claims that identities, especially the colonial, are heterogeneous (Bhabha, 1994: 2). Identities are constructed and reborn in the interaction between the colonizers and the colonized (Wilkins, 2017: 6).

Despite his complex use of language, in his book “The Location of Culture”, he proposes the crucial idea of cultural hybridity for postcolonial theory. Bhabha argues that a new hybrid identity stems from blending elements of two cultures or worlds - colonized and colonizer - which fundamentally questions any essentialist and distinct cultural identity. Hybridity is presented as an opposition to the belief in the unchanging and fixed nature of culture and identity (Fuss, 1991: xi). He believes that cultural identity is not a fixed unit but is constantly in the process of change and transformation.

In his logic, it is essential to understand that the accepted dichotomies of identities reproduce power relations. He emphasizes that colonial discourse is still used in colonized societies, which creates hybrid forms of identity. This hybrid identity shapes social, political, economic, and other spheres of human life (Wilkins, 2017: 5-6). Hybridity, for Bhabha, “is a sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal” (Bhabha, 1994: 112). However, in Bhabha’s understanding, power structure and hierarchy are present in his notion of hybridity. Reproduction and repetition of dominant structures is also a form of control. In this context, the colonized can become agents who challenge colonial structures but cannot leave the hegemonic discourse altogether (Wilkins, 2017: 6). In his explanation of “hybridity”, Bhabha aims to end the stereotypical racial dichotomy of the colonized and the colonizer as to signify the complex nature of this relationship. Postcolonial theory addresses the effects of colonialism,

particularly the experiences of subaltern subjects of colonization, by explaining the cultural, social, and political relations between the historical colonial past and the contemporary colonial narrative. Furthermore, postcolonialism analyses the changes brought by postcolonial subjects' cultural, social, and political consciousness to make sense of the identity of the so-called self and their worldview beyond the dichotomy of colonizer and colonized (Burney, 2012: 44-45).

The term “subaltern” was first introduced by the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci. In his interpretation, subalterns are understood as lower-class people or groups of people subjected to the hegemonic domination of the ruling elite class. They are deprived of basic rights to participate in decision-making mechanisms, unlike members of the ruling class (Louai: 5). Evidently, the subalterns are perceived to be the opposite of the ruling class, being completely under its influence and having no political agency. However, they do not remain inactive but rather initiate actions against the dominant class to fight for their rights (Gramsci, 1971: xxxvii). Gramsci, at the time, labeled workers and peasants as subalterns because they were under the oppression of the fascist party. He was interested in exploring the consciousness and culture of the subaltern classes to make their voices heard, as historical narratives were controlled and shaped by the ruling class. He firmly believed that the subordinate classes, as compared to the ruling class, had an equally complex history. However, only one was officially recognized. According to Gramsci, the reason is that the history of the subalterns lacks unity, is episodic, and remains influenced by hegemonic narratives even after quitting the system. All this has an impact on the inability of the subalterns to represent themselves adequately (Louai, 2012: 5). The only possible solution, for Gramsci, to obtain the ownership of representation, fundamental rights, and inclusion in decision-making is a process of “permanent” victory, which means breaking down the master-slave relationship and mentality. It has to happen by liberating the consciousness of subordinated subaltern groups from the dominant class's cultural and historical hegemonic domination (Gramsci, 1971: 55; Louai, 2012: 5).

Spivak, another notable postcolonial theorist, expands on Gramsci's concept of the subaltern in her paper “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. She begins her essay by arguing, “Some of the most radical criticisms coming out of the West today is the result of an interested desire to conserve the subject of the West, or the West as Subject”. Spivak's central line of reasoning is that the construction of knowledge is Eurocentric and subjective, with intellectuals ultimately preserving the subject of the West in their literature and constructing it as universal and

normative despite the voices coming from global peripheries (Spivak, 1994: 66). For the West, the course for the global South consisted of following “universal” Western histories and cultural values disregarding local narratives, indigenous knowledge and other socio-economic features of their societies (Nabudere, 1997: 209).

Spivak, interestingly, draws her key arguments on interviews given by Foucault and Deleuze, two French philosophers, and their discussion of the irrelevance of their further representation of oppressed by the intellectuals as they are able to speak for themselves (Spivak, 1994: 66-67). Disagreeing with their manner of thinking, she asserts that subalterns cannot speak for themselves and that intellectuals must continue to represent the colonial Other to avoid trapping them in the shadow of the Self, the West, and denying their Subject-ivity and other politics (ibid: 75, 83).

Donna Landry and Gerald McLean, in their introduction to “The Spivak Reader” collection, explain that in claiming that subalterns cannot speak, she does not refer to the physical act of speaking, but rather that the voices of subalterns cannot be heard by the dominant and privileged power. They point out that if a subaltern gains the ability to “speak”, she becomes a spokesperson for the community and thereby no longer a subaltern herself, which is the ultimate goal Spivak describes in which the oppressed cease to exist (1996a: 5-6).

This is where the tension of “speaking” and “being heard” emerges, and as postcolonial scholars suggest, hybridity offers a possible solution in which the division between “self” and “other” transcends (Maggio, 2007: 431).

Additionally, in answering a question about the responses to the work and the main question, “Can the Subaltern speak?”, Landry and McLean emphasize that by the word “speak,” Spivak meant “the transaction between the speaker and the listener” and the inability of making a speech (1996b: 289-290). Therefore, Spivak and other theorists indicate that “translation” and the role of the translator are more appropriate for subalterns than representation in terms of capturing originality and its further conveying (Maggio, 2007: 438).

4. Methodology

The overall aim of this Master’s thesis is to understand and describe the thoughts and views of indigenous peoples, particularly the Sakha and Buryats, on the process of decolonization of Russia and the importance and necessity of this process for their republics and