

Nonetheless, they all expressed a lack of confidence in the possible changes in the attitude of the current authorities towards indigenous peoples and positive developments in the republics. The activists equally share the primary goal of decolonization, which is to transform society into a less xenophobic towards minorities and eradicate such tendencies in the future. Furthermore, the emphasis is on improving lives in the republics, ensuring freedom of speech and choice, and preserving traditional life and indigenous identities.

6. Conclusion

This thesis attempts to shed light on the views and opinions of activists from the indigenous republics of Buryatia and Sakha on Russia's colonial legacy, including possible approaches to overcoming this historical burden. Emphasis is placed on exploring the internal views of indigenous communities on the topic of decolonization, particularly considering the fact that their voices often remain marginalized in both domestic and general discussions about Russia's future.

Moreover, the thesis aims to decentralize discourse and research on the future of Russia and to focus on indigenous voices on this issue, particularly those from the Buryatia and Sakha republics in North Asia. It is crucial to stress that the aim is not to give indigenous peoples a voice but to offer an academic platform that promotes the expression of their voices. Indigenous communities have a proven track record of expressing their voices, and it is essential to recognize and respect their agency. The goal of this paper is to encourage a more inclusive dialogue by providing a space for the expression of indigenous perspectives and views on decolonization and the future of the Russian Federation.

The section summarises the main findings of the analytical part, explains the connection to the theory, and provides an answer to the main research question. By using a deductive approach of qualitative content analysis based on the systematic literature review presented in the state-of-the-art and the theoretical part, five categories were identified: indigenous identity, Russian colonialism and its legacy, decolonization, activist experiences, and further implications.

The central findings from the first category on indigenous identity are the non-acceptance and emphasized discriminatory nature of the definition of indigenous peoples in Russian law. The Buryats and Sakha have a population of over 50,000, yet they consider themselves indigenous to North Asia because their people lived in this territory long before Russian

colonization and occupation. Under the influence of external factors in the wake of colonization, such as the forced Russification of indigenous peoples, the displacement of substantial parts of the population, and internal migration in search of better living conditions, hybrid identities have emerged.

The second category outlines the essence and nature of the conquest of the indigenous territories of Siberia, claiming that it was never a voluntary incorporation into the Russian Empire but a violent and forcible colonization by Tsarist Russia. Despite the political, economic, and social transformation of the Russian Empire into the Soviet Union, the nature of Moscow's relationship with the indigenous republics remained the same, which persists in the modern Russian Federation. The living conditions and rights of the indigenous peoples of Buryatia and Sakha are severely underdeveloped and neglected.

The following category is the indigenous activists' interpretation of the term "decolonization" and its relevance and importance for Russia. The activists provide different definitions of the concept but along the same lines of "democratization" and "restoration of historical identity". The focus is on the need for the process to be non-violent to avoid bloodshed and hatred.

The "Activist Experiences" category describes how indigenous activists survive in contemporary Russia, fighting injustice, encouraging decolonization, and ensuring their voices are recognized. Five of the six activists interviewed for this thesis were forced to leave Russia, except for Mariya, as it was no longer safe to remain in Russia and continue to engage in activism and advocate for their rights.

The last category, on further implications, presents indigenous activists' views on the possible and preferred consequences of the decolonization process in Russia in the future. There are different answers from the activists interviewed. The activists from Buryatia favor "federalism" in its true meaning, while the ultimate goal of activists from Sakha is the self-determination of Yakutia's region. Nevertheless, all activists note the incompetence of the current government to bring about positive developments for indigenous peoples and their lack of trust in Putin and his regime.

The following paragraphs of the conclusion outline the connections between the theory and the analysis of the interview responses. The theoretical approach used for this topic and the thesis is postcolonialism, as explained in Chapter 3. This theory focuses on the legacy of the

colonial past, the power and dominance of former colonizers on the colonized, and the continuation of the very processes and nature of colonialism even after its so-called termination (Wilkens, 2017: 2). Based on the interviewees' responses, the Kremlin's current approach to the indigenous republics is indeed colonial. It has continued since their very annexation in the seventeenth century, despite Moscow's attempts to present this as a voluntary accession and call itself a federation. The activists' answers point to the harsh living conditions of the republics, even though they are rich in natural resources, because the center determines where the money is allocated, and the republics live on subsidies from it. The President appoints the heads of the republics, and the residents of those republics have no right to vote. The colonial mentality is deeply rooted in indigenous communities, owing to the way history is taught in schools, the neglect of national and ethnic languages, and the official rhetoric of the current government. The interviewees are aware of the colonial past and its legacy in contemporary Russia, so they stress the need to decolonize Russia, not only the center but all the republics within it - to decolonize society. A long process of education and enlightenment about its history, identity, and real affairs. Fanon's argument, as mentioned in the theoretical part, that decolonization must necessarily be violent is refuted by activists. They focus on soft power because reiterating violence does not distinguish them from what the Kremlin is doing currently and causes more suffering, especially to indigenous communities.

The majority of activists also affirm their indigenous identities by making a clear distinction between colonizer and colonized and between us and them, perpetuating the colonial division of power hierarchy and narrative. Nevertheless, the two activists (Anna and Alexandra) possess more than one identity and do not identify as solely one, confirming Bhabha's assertion that identities are heterogeneous (1994: 2). Identities and cultures are changeable and fluid in nature (Fuss, 1991: xi). Anna and Alexandra thus have hybrid identities and view the relationships beyond the dichotomy of "Self" and "Other". Hybrid identities bridge the gap smaller and bring two opposing existences closer to one another, enabling an interaction between them. They are what Spivak calls "translators" or community spokespersons who are able to transfer the voices of the subaltern to the privileged powers, whereby they are no longer considered subaltern, which may eventually lead to an end where the oppressed cease to exist (Landry & McLean, 1996a: 6). However, in the case of Russia, according to the activists' responses, the privileged power is the liberal opposition, as the current government, which is the

dominant power, does not allow the voices of indigenous activists to be broadcast and represented to the broader population and does not hear them itself. The subalterns, or in this case, indigenous activists, have a voice and an opinion on any issue concerning the present and future of their republics and Russia but are not heard by the Kremlin and Putin.

Nevertheless, this thesis explores activists' views and answers the research question, "How do indigenous communities, such as the Buryats and Sakha, perceive the issue of decolonization in Russia?". The activists perceive decolonization as a process of liberation from colonial thinking and revision of one's own history to understand and embrace one's own identity. It is a long process of education and outreach to the entire population of Russia, including indigenous peoples, aimed at decolonizing consciousness and embracing one's self. The activists do not envisage ways to cooperate with the current government in decolonization work; however, the population is the primary force behind this process. It is the people of the Russian Federation who have to decide the future of the country and their republics. Russia is not just Moscow and other Russian cities; it is the largest country with many indigenous republics whose voices need to be considered and represented in every discussion and debate on the Russian Federation. Thus, first and foremost, decolonization for indigenous activists is a shift in mindset from colonial and imperial to democratic and liberated. Physical separation, "flag independence", or secession are consequences of decolonization, as is federalization, which can only be decided after a population has decolonized itself to determine its own path freely. To secede or to remain is for the people of their republics to decide.

6.1 Limitations and Further Research

As with any research, this thesis acknowledges some limitations that should be noted. In particular, the study is limited by the relatively small sampling of experts interviewed, which is explained in the methodology section. Furthermore, the study encounters difficulties in accessing activists who remain in Russia due to political constraints and limited access to META social media platforms, which the government controls. The inability to interview these activist groups in Russia may bring certain potential bias, as any perspective is shaped by the specific socio-political context, and the ones in Russia remain unexplored. Nevertheless, the findings from the six interviewed activists provide invaluable insights into the issue and its analysis. It is

essential to keep these limitations in mind and recognize that the research findings may not reflect all the views of indigenous activists on this issue.

For future research, a geographical expansion of the scope beyond the current focus on the North Asian republics and the inclusion of other regions of Russia would significantly increase the validity and depth of the study. It would provide a more comprehensive view of variations in regional perspectives on decolonization among indigenous peoples.

Moreover, the topic of decolonization of Central Asian states as well as the South Caucasus would be interesting to explore, as these regions are still under the political and economic domination of Moscow, despite sovereignty and more than 30 years of independence. Politicians in all these countries still maintain the Soviet system and listen to the Kremlin. At the same time, the older generation of people has never gone through the process of decolonization of consciousness.

In addition, it is worth noting the different views within the indigenous movement and communities regarding the conflict between Israel and Palestine, which is an interesting perspective for further research. An in-depth study could shed light on the divergent positions of indigenous activists on issues such as land rights and resource allocation, depending on geographic location. Exploring these nuances would make a valuable contribution to the evolving discourse on indigenous perspectives and decolonization in different regions of Russia and globally.