



DOI:10.29013/EJEMS-26-1-35-37



## POSTCOLONIAL POLITICS IN POST-SOVIET COUNTRIES. (CENTRAL ASIA AND KAZAKHSTAN)

*Nargiz Nagiyeva*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Baku State University, PhD in Political Science, Associate Professor

---

**Cite:** Nagiyeva N. (2026). *Postcolonial politics in post-Soviet countries. (Central Asia and Kazakhstan). European Journal of Economics and Management Sciences 2026, No 1.* <https://doi.org/10.29013/EJEMS-26-1-35-37>

---

### Abstract

Despite formal decolonization, the logic of colonialism continues to influence not only major geopolitical processes but also various aspects of daily life. Empires have not only colonized territories and populations physically but have also dominated intellectual spaces. The colonial impact of the Russian/Soviet Empire has long remained understudied, causing the voices from this region to be marginalized within global postcolonial discourse. This article examines the specific features of postcolonial politics in the post-Soviet space, with a particular focus on Central Asia and Kazakhstan. The study analyzes the colonial legacy, the use of ethnic conflicts as an imperial tool, identity crises following the collapse of the USSR, and the forms of postcolonial dependency that persist today.

### Methods

This research employs postcolonial analytical methodology. Conceptual analysis clarifies key terms such as “postcolonialism,” “post-Soviet space,” and “colonial legacy.” Historical-political analysis evaluates the influence of Russian/Soviet imperialism on the political and cultural structures of the region. Discursive analysis explores how colonial and postcolonial narratives shape identity and collective memory in these societies.

**Keywords:** *post-Soviet, postcolonialism, colony, Central Asia, Soviet Union, Russia*

### Introduction

Although former Soviet republics formally gained independence, traces of colonial thinking remain embedded within their political, economic, and cultural structures. Western postcolonial theory has traditionally overlooked the Russian/Soviet imperial experience, resulting in limited representation of the vast post-Soviet region within glob-

al academic discussions. Yet, despite their internal diversity, most post-Soviet states share a common historical experience: Russian/Soviet colonial domination.

### Case of study

The formation and expansion of the Russian Empire between the 16th and 18th centuries significantly shaped the colonization

of Central Asia. Countries such as Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan attracted imperial interest due to their strategic position and rich natural resources. The conquest of Central Asia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was characterized by military campaigns, violence, and forced subjugation.

During the Soviet period, these regions were incorporated into a new imperial structure under the ideological slogans of “brotherhood” and “equality,” which masked ongoing political, economic, and cultural subordination. The Soviet economic model intentionally kept the republics dependent on the center, hindering their ability to develop independent technological and industrial systems.

Following the dissolution of the USSR, the region faced challenges related to national identity, language politics, migration, and systemic economic dependency – core components of the postcolonial condition.

### Literature review

Existing research highlights key aspects of the region’s colonial and postcolonial trajectory:

- The colonization of Central Asia has been largely overlooked in mainstream academic discourse;
- Soviet ideology obscured colonial power structures through the rhetoric of “friendship of peoples.”
- Many ethnic conflicts in the region have structural roots dating back to the Soviet era.
- Cultural colonialism – manifested through language dominance, education, and academic dependency – continues to shape the region.
- Russian language remains a major vehicle for socio-economic mobility, echoing Homi Bhabha’s concept of “colonial mimicry.”

### Analysis

The postcolonial condition in Central Asia and Kazakhstan manifests through a complex and interwoven set of political, economic, cultural, and geopolitical dynamics that stem from the region’s long-standing incorporation into the Russian and subsequently Soviet imperial systems. Rather than

functioning as isolated dimensions, colonial legacy, economic dependency, cultural influence, and geopolitical pressures form a unified structure of continued postcolonial entanglement.

Historically, the Russian Empire’s expansion into Central Asia relied on a deliberate strategy of manipulating ethnic, tribal, and regional divisions to consolidate control. These divisions were not merely incidental but were actively shaped, institutionalized, and reproduced through administrative borders, demographic engineering, and preferential policies. Although the Soviet regime publicly promoted principles of “internationalism” and “friendship of peoples,” it simultaneously embedded ethnic hierarchies within political institutions, censuses, territorial arrangements, and resource distribution. Such contradictions produced a controlled inter-ethnic environment in which tensions were suppressed rather than resolved, resurfacing almost immediately after the collapse of the USSR as unresolved historical grievances reappeared in the form of border disputes, identity conflicts, and competition over political authority.

Economically, the Soviet planned system reinforced asymmetric dependencies intended to bind the republics to Moscow. Industrial production, energy networks, transportation corridors, and agricultural specialization were deliberately fragmented and interconnected in ways that made independent economic functioning nearly impossible. In the contemporary era, these structural linkages remain deeply entrenched. Russia continues to exert influence through energy pipelines, labor migration channels, currency flows, and access to regional markets. Many Central Asian economies still rely on remittances from migrant workers in Russia, while Moscow’s dominance in regional infrastructure and trade routes constrains the ability of states to diversify their geopolitical partnerships.

Cultural colonialism further strengthens this postcolonial structure. The Russian language retains a privileged status in education, government administration, scientific publishing, media, and urban public life, often overshadowing indigenous languages. This linguistic hierarchy not only shapes social mobility and elite formation but also ties local

academic and intellectual production to Russian epistemic frameworks. The persistence of Russian cultural influence – literature, media consumption, intellectual traditions, and identity markers – illustrates Homi Bhabha's notion of "colonial mimicry," wherein the colonized subject internalizes and reproduces the cultural forms of the metropole while remaining structurally subordinated.

In addition, global geopolitical dynamics place Central Asia at the crossroads of competing powers. As highlighted by Zbigniew Brzezinski, the region is of exceptional strategic importance due to its vast natural resources, geographic proximity to Russia, China, and the Middle East, and its role as a transport corridor between Europe and Asia. This geopolitical significance renders the region a site of intensifying interest from Russia, China, the United States, Turkey, and other actors. The resulting multipolar competition complicates state-building efforts, as newly independent countries must navigate overlapping spheres of influence, manage cross-border security threats, and balance

aspirations for sovereignty with the geopolitical realities of their location.

Taken together, these intersecting dimensions form a cohesive postcolonial system in which political fragmentation, economic dependence, cultural hegemony, and geopolitical pressure reinforce one another. Understanding the region's contemporary challenges requires recognizing how these elements operate simultaneously to shape identity, governance, and international alignment in the post-Soviet space.

### Conclusion

It is premature to claim that postcolonial dynamics in the post-Soviet space have been fully overcome. Historical ties, economic dependency, cultural influence, and deeply rooted structural problems continue to shape the region. Although Central Asian states, including Kazakhstan, pursue regional cooperation and global integration to strengthen sovereignty, the social, political, and cultural effects of their colonial past will persist for a long time.

### References

- Abashin, S. (2023). *Colonization and decolonization: The experience of Central Asian countries*.
- Bisenova, A., & Medeuova, K. (2016). Pressure of metropolises and silent nationalism in academic practices. *Ab Imperio*, – (4). – P. 207–255.
- Brzezinski, Z. (1998). *The grand chessboard: American primacy and its geostrategic imperatives*. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. – Routledge.
- Klyuchevsky, V. O. (1987). *Course of Russian history* (Vol. 1). – Moscow: Mysl.

submitted 28.11.2025;  
accepted for publication 12.12.2025;  
published 31.01.2026  
© Nagiyeva N.  
Contact: nargiz\_nagiyeva@mail.ru