

"The Theft and Appropriation of History" as a Problem of the Philosophy of History in the Context of War and Challenges to Humanitarian Security

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The article explores the phenomenon of the "theft and appropriation of history" in the context of Russian aggression against Ukraine through an analysis of the destruction of cultural heritage and the recoding of cultural meanings. The author proposes a classification of historical appropriation based on intensity levels: "theft without appropriation", "appropriation without theft" and total "theft and appropriation". The latter level characterizes the Russian policy of constructing and disseminating historical "imperial knowledge." Traditional postcolonial critique successfully deconstructs Eurocentric epistemic models and the reduction of the non-Western world to the status of a passive "Other." However, these models prove insufficient for describing the phenomenon of total "appropriation." For instance, J. Goody argues that Eurocentrism "stole" world history by imposing a linear, teleological periodization (Antiquity – Feudalism – Capitalism) and monopolizing universal concepts such as democracy. At the same time, this approach stigmatizes any Western adoption of historical innovations as total plunder. Using the "relay" model of intercivilizational contacts, the article demonstrates that classical cultural expansion relied on adaptive borrowing; innovations were assimilated without liquidating the subjectivity and original authorship of the donor culture. In contrast, the Russian imperial trajectory does not merely borrow; it executes a total structural usurpation of the history of colonized peoples, which is most acutely expressed in the appropriation of the heritage of Kyivan Rus. By looting physical artifacts (particularly in the temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories of the Azov and Black Sea regions) and combining this with epistemological violence, the Russian state apparatus encroaches upon Ukrainian historical subjectivity. Unlike Eurocentric models that constructed an "exotic Other," the Russian colonial model seeks to completely destroy the myth of the Other, absorbing the subjectivity of subjugated peoples into a homogeneous imperial body. Examining the problem of colonialism without accounting for the features of the Russian imperial trajectory has generated an "epistemological blindness" in Western academia. Since Russian imperial identity relies exclusively on stolen fragments of other peoples' pasts, reclaiming the subjectivity of the "robbed" nations poses an existential threat to it. Consequently, a systematic dismantling of the traps of "epistemological blindness" constitutes a crucial strategy for humanitarian security.

KEYWORDS

philosophy of history, humanitarian security, postcolonial studies, philosophy of the twenty-first century, war, "the theft and appropriation of history".

Introduction

According to UNESCO estimates, the damage inflicted on Ukraine's cultural heritage by Russian aggression since 2014 amounts to approximately \$3 billion. The looting of Ukrainian museums is the largest-scale such destruction since the Second World War. According to the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, as of March 2026, Russia had destroyed or damaged 1,707 cultural heritage sites and 2,503 cultural infrastructure facilities, including concert venues and galleries. More than 2.1 million museum objects remain in territories occupied by Russia, and their fate is unknown. Approximately 23,000 artifacts were stolen from the Kherson Regional Museum of Local History alone. These exhibits include late-paleontological and Eneolithic objects, unique artifacts from the Early Metal

Age, examples of Trypillian culture, and objects associated with the Cimmerians.

The occupiers looted museums in Kakhovka and Melitopol, where Scythian gold was stolen; Kamyana Mohyla, from which ancient household objects were removed; the Popov Estate in Vasylivka; the local history museum in the village of Balky, Vasylivka District; and many others. Looting continues in annexed Crimea as well. According to the Main Directorate of Intelligence, the Russians removed at least 164 archaeological valuables from the peninsula, including artifacts discovered during excavations of the ancient cities of Nymphaion and Panticapaeum.

The plunder of cultural heritage by Russian occupiers in temporarily seized Ukrainian territories, particularly the Azov and Black Sea regions, constitutes one of the ele-

ments of “the theft of history”— a process involving the appropriation of another people’s history, its rewriting, and its adaptation to the needs of one’s own politics of historical memory. Russia encourages looting at the level of state policy. During the full-scale invasion, this acquired all the characteristics of cultural genocide (*Bakalchuk, 2022: 74*).

The concept of “the theft of history” has traditionally been an object of postcolonial research. It is characterized not only by the plunder of cultural artifacts but also by the substitution of the historical memory of colonized peoples with artificial meanings, images, and symbols. This study proposes broadening the understanding of this concept by classifying manifestations of “the theft of history” according to the intensity of its “appropriation.”

Let us illustrate this with the metaphor of the mummy. Many museums in former colonizing states house artifacts stolen from Egypt; however, their function is primarily visual, and, at best, educational. They no longer convey the meanings they possessed in Ancient Egypt or even in later periods. Cinema has produced several fantasy films about mummies coming to life (“The Mummy,” 1999 and 2017; “The Mummy Returns,” 2001; “The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor,” 2008; “The Mummy Resurrected,” 2019, and others), attributing to mummies thoughts and actions invented by screenwriters and directors. Thus, an “appropriated” artifact of another culture becomes an empty simulacrum that can be filled with any content.

The “appropriation” of history can occur without the “theft” of artifacts. Here, another metaphor is applicable — Mowgli. Cases in which children were “raised” by animals have existed throughout history, but owing to the stories of the English writer R. Kipling in his collection “The Jungle Book,” an image of an Indian boy who grew up among wolves became established in the public consciousness. This “appropriation” does not alter the historical memory of the people of India, but the phenomenon described entered Western culture and scholarship. In psychology, the term “Mowgli children” is used for children who have lived without human parental care.

The third type of “the theft of history” is its total “appropriation.” It has been implemented and continues to be implemented by Russia. Here, the metaphor of the matryoshka may be used. The wooden doll originated in Japan, where it is called daruma and has a different, religious meaning. It was copied in a Moscow toy workshop at the end of the nineteenth century and subsequently “appropriated” as a souvenir. By analogy, Russia’s “appropriation” of an “abducted” history takes place in a similar manner.

Research Methods

The methodology of the study is based on an interdisciplinary combination of philosophical-historical, historical, and hermeneutic approaches, with the historical-comparative method serving as the key method. Additional methods include deconstruction, which is applied to identify the artificiality, contradictions, and political motivations of imperial myths; the postcolonial approach, which makes it possible to interpret Russia’s activities as a deliberate rewriting of the historical memory of colonized peoples; and the approach of “epistemic violence,” which enables analysis of the stages and elements involved in depriving colonized peoples of the right to articulate themselves within their own systems of meaning.

Results and Discussion

In 2006, the book “The Theft of History” by the British cultural anthropologist, Africanist, and historian J. Goody

was published. In it, the author criticized the Occidentalist model of the philosophy of history. The central argument of the book is that Eurocentrism not only constructed its own vision of the historical process but also imposed it upon the world. J. Goody’s argument is characteristic of representatives of world-systems analysis (S. Amin, A. G. Frank, et al.), scholars of organic and inorganic modernization (L. Harrison, D. Acemoglu, J. Robinson), and postcolonial studies. It can also be found in the well-known work “Orientalism” by the American social philosopher and literary critic E. W. Said, who accused proponents of Eurocentrism of constructing the East as their Other, characterized by non-Western and therefore negative attributes.

Analyzing Western academic Orientalism, E. W. Said formulated the problem as follows:

From its earliest history to the present, Orientalism as a form of thought has generally displayed the unfortunate tendency of any knowledge based upon such clear distinctions as ‘East’ and ‘West’: to direct thought toward the Western or Eastern side. Since this tendency lies at the very center of Orientalist theory, practice, and values in the West, the sense of Western power over the East is taken for granted, as something possessing the status of scientific truth (*Said, 1979: 46*).

In turn, Dipesh Chakrabarty, one of the leaders of the *Subaltern Studies research group*, observed that Indian, Chinese, and African histories become variations of the metanarrative “the history of Europe,” which is ranked higher; consequently, the position of the lower-ranked subject is articulated through a higher-ranked history. In his concept of “provincializing Europe,” he proposes that Western Europe and its history be regarded as equal to other cultures and histories, that is, as merely one region among many (*Chakrabarty, 2008*).

J. Goody’s contribution lies not only in posing the problem of the “theft” of history but also in identifying its “appropriation” (in his approach, by the Western world), which generated an attitude toward non-European peoples as static and incapable of agency without external impetus from Europeans. In the third and final part of his work, J. Goody analyzes the process of the “theft” of values. He formulates the problem as follows: “It concerns the claims of many Europeans, both scholars and ordinary citizens, that they are the guardians of certain valuable institutions, such as a particular version of the city, the university, and democracy itself, as well as values such as individualism and certain emotions such as love (or romantic love)” (*Goody, 2006: 9*).

Using the Renaissance as an example, J. Goody demonstrates that the East possessed a higher level of science, medicine, and astronomy at that time and did not require a “rebirth,” since it had not experienced the decline that occurred in Europe. Thus, the idea of the Renaissance as an exclusively European phenomenon in world history is a purely Eurocentric narrative. For J. Goody, the problem of the “theft of history” is that the social sciences and humanities have a limited field of activity because they are reduced to working with European sources, while cultures based on oral transmission are disregarded (*Goody, 2006: 305*). This also explains the difficulty of linear, progressive, teleological periodization: Antiquity – medieval feudalism – the modern era and capitalism. It fails to account for other temporal trajectories, as though “stealing” historical time.

J. Goody’s methodology is effective for criticizing Eurocentrism, but it leaves outside its scope the total “theft and appropriation of history.” Let us turn to the metaphor of gunpowder. It is widely known that gunpowder was invented in China approximately in the ninth–tenth centuries, where it was initially used in alchemy and medicine (according to

legend, in the search for the elixir of immortality), and later in warfare. From there, it reached the Middle East and, by approximately the thirteenth century, Europe. Europeans used this explosive mixture for military purposes; that is, the "appropriated" gunpowder lost the original function it had in China, but Europe did not claim authorship of the invention. Thus, there was an "appropriation" of gunpowder as an artifact without the "theft" of the history of its creation and, even more so, of the religious component associated with the substance in China.

Thus, J. Goody postulates several important propositions. First, whoever controls the writing of history instills in a subjected people a sense of inferiority. Second, a colonizer or empire not only conquers territory but also steals the past of that territory in order to justify its right to its future. At the same time, in our view, J. Goody does not distinguish between "theft and appropriation" and "appropriation without theft," attributing only "theft and appropriation" to the Occidental model of history. The latter concept characterizes totality – the appropriation of the history and cultural achievements of other peoples. We do not agree with J. Goody that the history of Western Europe is built upon the total "theft" of other histories; rather, the issue concerns a Eurocentric focus on the historical process and the comparison of European history with other histories to Europe's advantage.

The contradictions in the critique of the Occidental model of history are addressed by the concept of contacts between peoples as a driver of historical change, sometimes referred to in the philosophy of history as the "relay" model. According to this concept, centers of civilization, by demonstrating their attractive innovations, became a kind of stimulus for other peoples, resulting in the adoption of these innovations, which amounted to access to civilization. There was an "appropriation" of another people's history through the incorporation of the achievements of an advanced civilization. This was often accompanied by the same processes of "theft" of values described by J. Goody. This is not an invention of Eurocentrism; the difference lies in technological capabilities in premodern and modern times.

Let us turn to the philosopher of history W. McNeill (*Filosofia istorii...*, 2023: 287–288). He identifies the following historical periods: cultural dominance of the Middle East (until 500 BCE); Eurasian cultural equilibrium (500 BCE – 1500 CE); and the age of Western dominance (from 1500 to the present). W. McNeill emphasizes the unique innovations of each civilization that dominated during particular historical periods. This uniqueness created grounds for cultural expansion; on the other hand, when innovations of an advanced civilization were "appropriated," its history was not "stolen," and its value system was often adopted together with indigenous interpretations. Rome adopted the Greek pantheon of gods, but the Romans did not thereby become a copy of the Greeks of the ancient world, nor did the Roman Republic become a copy of Athenian democracy. The adoption of Christianity in Kyivan Rus did not turn Kyiv into a copy of Constantinople or Ukrainians into Byzantine Greeks. The "appropriation" of innovations from more advanced civilizations led to historical transformations, as a result of which new indigenous innovations emerged and were subsequently adopted by later civilizations.

What, then, constitutes the totality of the "theft of history"? To explain this, we propose a classification of the "thefts" of history. The first class is "appropriation without theft" (the mummy metaphor). It leads to the "appropriation" of artifacts, exhibits, documents, instruments, and so forth,

but does not alter the historical QR code of the plundered people.

The large-scale looting of Ukrainian cultural heritage by Russians in occupied territories is not unique behavior; it accompanies wars of conquest and colonial wars. In the case of Russia, however, it has a particular feature — the repetition of a behavioral pattern. O. Fyl and L. Khoynatska draw attention to this similarity, drawing parallels with the uncontrolled looting carried out by the Red Army in Germany, where not only equipment and machinery belonging to entire industrial sectors were stolen, but also private property. In other words, this was plunder and robbery legitimized at the state level — a "looter's code" among Russians (Fyl, Khoynatska, 2022: 131). Precisely the same pattern was repeated during the temporary occupation of the Kyiv region and other Ukrainian regions.

O. Cheremisin and H. Mykhailenko cite Ukrainians' recollections of the occupiers' behavior in Kherson:

They wanted to see what people had at home and what could be looted. They took everything they saw, everything they could take from the house. One elderly woman had a packet containing several hundred hryvnias that she had saved for a funeral, and they took even that small amount of money. Thus, they took absolutely everything. Obviously, they liked vehicles and grabbed everything they could — cars or boats. They did not simply take everything they could; they smashed and broke things. They wrecked and destroyed everything. There was something abnormal about their psyche. To spoil everything, to empty everything. And these were inhuman impulses. They had pathological anger and hatred (Cheremisin O., Mykhailenko H., 2025: 59).

The difference between Europe's "appropriation" of gunpowder invented in China and the Russians' looting of Ukrainian valuables lies in the form of "appropriation": the Russians "recode" the meaning of what they steal. This is particularly evident in the example of Scythian gold. Modern Russia has no connection to the Scythians, whose culture flourished in the Northern Black Sea region of present-day Ukraine and in Ukrainian Crimea, yet it "appropriates" artifacts of this culture, presenting them as Russian.

An illustrative case was the photo exhibition at the Russian Embassy in the United States entitled "Crimean Gold: 'Civilized' Europe Loots Russian Treasures," which opened in August 2026. It has a propagandistic purpose and is used to manipulate public perceptions concerning the allegedly "illegal" 2023 decision of the Supreme Court of the Netherlands to transfer to Ukraine Scythian gold from Crimean museums that had been exhibited at the Allard Pierson Museum in Amsterdam.

In September 2023, the current head of the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, historian O. Alfiorov, delivered a lecture entitled "Stolen History," in which he emphasized a point important to our study. The scholar cited the example of the pianist and composer F. Liszt, who was born in Austria, died in Germany, was given the German name Franz rather than the Hungarian Ferenc, and spoke Hungarian poorly, yet Hungary considers him a great Hungarian composer. He returned home after many years abroad; however, Austria and Germany do not "appropriate" F. Liszt, nor is he "stolen" in Hungary, because in Europe people know "who belongs to whom" (Alfiorov, 2023).

There are many such examples. The Italian G. Marconi, inventor of radio communication, realized his engineering talents in Great Britain, but the British do not claim priority for the invention that generated substantial profits for companies established there. Philosophers D. Hume, A. Ferguson, A. Smith, T. Reid, W. Hamilton, T. Carlyle, and writers

W. Scott and R. L. Stevenson wrote in English; on this formal basis they are often classified as part of British philosophy and literature and thereby “appropriated,” but their Scottish origins are not “stolen.” These figures are regarded as Scottish philosophers and writers rather than English ones, although they worked within the British Empire.

Hybrid forms of “appropriation” of history without “theft” are also known. Examples include Sarmatism, as a concept of the exceptional status of the nobility of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, or the “Khazar theory,” according to which the Cossacks originated from the ancient Turkic Khazar population that inhabited the Ukrainian steppes in the early medieval period. Since the creators of these theories did not know the histories of the Sarmatians and Khazars, they replaced them with an “appropriated” understanding in which ancient peoples were attributed characteristics that the proponents of the theories wished to possess. In other words, this was a form of historical totemism.

In the case of the total “theft and appropriation” of history, several processes occur simultaneously. The first is the “appropriation” of everyone who lived within the empire, regardless of ethnic origin. The second is the substitution of genuine history with an artificially constructed imperial history. This phenomenon was described as early as by M. Hrushevs'kyi. In his 1903 article “The Conventional Scheme of ‘Russian’ History and the Problem of a Rational Organization of the History of the Eastern Slavs,” the historian exposed the flaws in the traditional presentation of history within the Russian Empire, in which there was

a very irrational combination of the ancient history of the southern tribes and the Kyivan state, with its socio-political structure, law and culture, with the Vladimir-Moscow principality of the thirteenth–fourteenth centuries, as though the latter were its continuation” (*Hrushevskyi, 2014: 203*).

As a result of “attaching” the Kyivan state to the origins of the state and cultural life of the Russian people, the latter was “left, in fact, without a beginning”; that is, ancient history was replaced with the fiction of a “common Russian history.” “Ultimately,” Hrushevs'kyi wrote, “the history of the Ukrainian-Rus’ nationality remains not only without a beginning, but also in the form of certain fragments, disiecta membra, not organically connected with one another and separated by gaps” (*Hrushevskyi, 2014: 205*). Thus, the concept of the history of the “Russian people” (in the sense of the Rus’ and East Slavic peoples) was replaced by the concept of the history of the Great Russian people (*Hrushevskyi, 2014: 207*).

Subsequently, historians and philosophers repeatedly returned to the phenomenon of this “substitution,” elaborating upon it. Thus, Ya. Dashkevych, in his article “How Muscovy Appropriated the History of Kyivan Rus’,” focuses on the stages through which Muscovy appropriated another people’s past in order to create the official mythology of the Russian Empire: the falsification, rewriting, or destruction of historical materials; and the writing of new “all-Russian chronicles supposedly dated to the eleventh, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries, all of which propagated the ‘all-Russian idea’.” Thus, the medieval history of other peoples was “stolen” (*Dashkevych, 2011*).

The objects of total “theft and appropriation” and substitution included not only the history of Kyivan Rus’, but also the Black Sea and Azov steppe, beginning with the “appropriation” of nomadic peoples and artifacts of their culture; continuing with the replacement of the Cossack Nomos of the steppe as a space of freedom with a space of imperial expansion; and extending to the invention of myths about “Novorossiya” and “Russian Crimea” in order to “sever

these territories from the broader Ukrainian context and assimilate peoples who have long inhabited them. The full-scale invasion became a continuation of this total theft of history.

E. Thompson, in “Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism” (2000), traces how Russia pursued a policy of glorifying the empire while simultaneously humiliating and marginalizing subjugated peoples, stealing their achievements, and depriving them of identity. The researcher reveals the principal elements of “imperial knowledge,” which “constitutes a bizarre mixture of historical myths and manipulative facts” (*Riabchuk, 2024: 23*): an invented historical continuity between medieval Kyiv and early modern Moscow, as well as the crude identification of twelfth-century Rus’ with eighteenth-century “Russia”. In France or Britain, where nations preceded empires, “imperial knowledge” was created about themselves and their colonies (through a Eurocentric lens, as J. Goody writes), whereas in Russia there exists only “imperial knowledge” that sustains imperial identity. Therefore, revising the “imperial knowledge” formed through the total “theft and appropriation of history” in Russia is regarded as an “existential threat.”

As E. Thompson emphasizes, no prominent Russian writer questioned the moral ambiguity of colonial violence, unlike their counterparts in Western European countries; “neither Russian writers nor Russian intellectuals ever articulated the reality of imperial policy in conquered territories” (*Thompson, 2000: 33*). The researcher concludes that the refusal of the Russian intelligentsia to discuss colonialism indicates an absence of a capacity for tolerance within the Russian tradition (*Thompson, 2000: 37*).

Another characteristic feature of Russia’s total “theft and appropriation of history” is the denial of the ontological existence of the peoples whose history Moscow has stolen. As A. Sumarokov notes, “the aim of Russian imperialism was never domination over the distant, exotic Other; it was to absorb the ‘self’ into a larger, homogenized imperial ‘self’” (*Sumarokov, 2026*). Therefore, neither J. Goody’s ideas nor E. Said’s Orientalist approach can be straightforwardly applied to Russia’s imperial structure of “the theft and appropriation of history.”

Edward Said’s concept presupposes a fundamental difference that justifies domination. The Russian imperial structure presupposes a fundamental sameness that justifies rule. The colonizer in Said’s model must create a myth of the Other. The Russian colonizer must destroy the myth of the Other. (*Sumarokov, 2026*).

Thus, Ukrainian distinctiveness and national self-identification, as well as those of peoples of the Russian Federation subjected to Moscow’s rule, constitute a threat to imperial ontology. Whereas European colonizers emphasized an essentialist East–West dichotomy, Russian colonialism denies any differences between colonizers and colonized on the premise that the latter must renounce their identity and accept Russia as a universal norm (*Kotliuk, 2023*).

The German scholar U. Hofmeister, comparing the mechanisms of Russian colonization of Turkic peoples and Ukraine, concludes that the policy of the tsarist regime toward Central Asia corresponded much more closely to colonial practices than its policy toward Ukraine. In his view, Ukraine was “appropriated” as part of the Russian nation; that is, what occurred was not colonial subjugation but nationalist usurpation (*Hofmeister, 2025: 746*). Hofmeister notes that

it was precisely the non-recognition of Ukraine as an independent nation with its own language, political tradition, and identity

— not its status as a colony — that became the basis for the full-scale war of aggression that Russia has been waging since 2022 (*Hofmeister, 2025: 765*).

Thus, the proposed analysis of Russia's total "theft and appropriation of history" provides grounds for several conclusions. First, the Russian Empire and its successors, the USSR and the Russian Federation, did not construct a national Russian history; rather, they assembled an imperial history from stolen fragments, "preparing" it for the formation of the empire and subsequently for its self-reproduction. The national histories of subjugated peoples constitute an ontological threat to the fabricated "imperial knowledge."

The second conclusion is that proponents of the traditional paradigm that "each nation has its own history," when confronted with Russia's uniqueness as a total "abductor of history," may become trapped in "epistemic blindness." According to U. Dandavate, this is a cognitive limitation that can arise at both the individual and collective levels and manifests itself as a lack of critical reflection on one's own beliefs or on generally accepted views (*Dandavate, 2025*). Russia has constructed its own "imperial knowledge" and disseminated its narratives through propaganda within the academic environment, as a result of which researchers fall into the trap of "epistemic blindness." The Russian case differs in that its "imperial knowledge" did not invent an "Other" Ukraine; rather, its "appropriated" Ukraine together with its territories, history, and church. Therefore, the conventional methodology of postcolonial studies is mistakenly applied to this case of historical plunder.

In 2020, J. J. Binsbergen's study "Prince of the Borderland: The Figure of Saint Volodymyr in Russian-Ukrainian Political Discourses" (the Netherlands) was published. The author analyzes the use of the image of Saint Volodymyr in Ukrainian and Russian political discourse. In our view, the most interesting part of the study concerns Russia's "annexation of Volodymyr" as a means of legitimizing the annexation of Crimea. However, the author treats the debate as competing political interpretations of the prince's role in an allegedly once-common history from which Russia cannot exclude Ukraine by appropriating the myth of Volodymyr, while Ukraine cannot exclude Russia, whose lands were part of Kyivan Rus' (*Van Binsbergen, 2020: 36*). Thus, despite the evident scholarly novelty of the study, the author remains trapped within the Russian narrative of a "shared history."

Applying the theoretical developments of global postcolonial thought to the specific features of the Eastern European space made it possible to reconstruct mechanisms through which humanitarian security strategies can be developed (*Arribas et al., 2023*): the formation of anticipatory counter-narratives; relabeling the nationality of Ukrainian artists, historical figures, and artifacts in museums abroad; cooperation with educational authorities and institutions to remove incorrect cartographic names and concepts used in Russian interpretations; decolonization of terminology; and the creation of open international 3D archives, blockchain registries, digital museums, and so forth.

In Ukraine, projects implementing these and other mechanisms are operating successfully, including practices for documenting cultural losses (HeMo, the Crimean Institute for Strategic Studies), which form an interconnected network for knowledge production, legal legitimization, and ethical engagement with communities (*Tarasiuk, Ablialimova-Chyihoz, 2025: 92*).

Other notable examples involve rebranding and relabeling initiatives. In 2023, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York updated the attributions of three prominent artists

— Ilya Repin, Ivan Aivazovsky and Arkhip Kuindzhi — explicitly identifying them as Ukrainian. Concurrently, the museum retitled Edgar Degas's painting Russian Dancers to Dancers in Ukrainian Dress. In 2024, Ateneum, the National Gallery of Finland, amended the nationality label for Ilya Repin from Russian to Ukrainian. This trend continued in 2025 when the Brooklyn Museum altered the descriptive label for a painting by Ilya Repin, replacing "Russia" with "Ukraine," given that the canvas depicts the landscape of the Ukrainian city of Chuhuiv. Most recently, in September 2026, the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London revised the object labels for artifacts from the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra. These items, previously described as "produced in the Russian Empire" and categorized as "gifts from Empress Catherine II," were re-attributed to reflect their true provenance. Such cases serve as prominent examples of successful counter-measures against the misappropriation and cultural appropriation of artistic heritage.

Domestically, National Military History Museum of Ukraine has launched an initiative this year to establish a digital archive of contemporary wartime heritage. The project aims to preserve fifty artifacts from the Russo-Ukrainian war using 3D-modeling technology. These digital assets will be accessible via QR codes directly within the museum premises or online from any location worldwide. Regrettably, at the onset of the full-scale invasion, the vast majority of Ukrainian museums lacked digitized collections, a deficit that significantly hinders the tracking and recovery of cultural property plundered by Russia. Despite these challenges, the identification of stolen artifacts remains ongoing; notably, staff members of the Kherson Art Museum have successfully identified several looted paintings currently being exhibited at the so-called Central Museum of Taurida in occupied Crimea. Consequently, the systematically compiled catalogs of stolen artwork and their dissemination to international museums remain highly critical measures to prevent Ukraine's plundered cultural heritage from being exhibited under the guise of "Russian art".

At the same time, new challenges to Ukraine's humanitarian security are becoming increasingly evident, including political debates in certain neighboring European states concerning complex issues of historical memory, which are becoming targets of Russian hybrid attacks. Therefore, security strategies must be implemented through broad cooperation among civil society, government authorities, and diplomats.

One element of such a strategy should be the exposure and dismantling of "epistemic blindness", whereby even scholars become trapped in the mechanisms of Russian historical revisionism.

Conclusions

By employing an interdisciplinary approach — specifically integrating the historical-comparative, deconstructive, and hermeneutic methods — this scholarly study demonstrates that the Russian colonial model necessitates a refinement of the established paradigms within postcolonial theory. Unlike Eurocentric trajectories, which constructed a national history and an exotic "Other" to justify their dominance, Russia's imperial strategy relies on the total "theft and appropriation of history." This mechanism is designed to absorb the historical subjectivity, cultural heritage, and identity of subjugated peoples into a homogenized imperial body.

Through state-sanctioned cultural plunder, epistemological violence, and the fabrication of historical continuity — most notably the usurpation of the legacy of Kyivan Rus —

Russia has constructed an "imperial knowledge" out of stolen fragments of other nations' pasts. Consequently, Western academia frequently falls into the trap of "epistemological blindness," mistakenly interpreting this total historical marauding through the prism of a "shared history".

Accounting for these specific features of the Russian imperial trajectory is crucial for ensuring contemporary humanitarian security. Neutralizing this threat requires a systematic dismantling of imperial narratives within a framework of broad institutional cooperation. The primary defensive strategies must include the formation of preemptive counter-narratives, the decolonization of terminology, the systematic re-labeling of Ukrainian cultural artifacts abroad, the digital documentation of cultural losses, and the overcoming of "epistemological blindness".

AI Usage Declaration

The author declares the use of generative AI (GAI) in the research and manuscript preparation process. According to the GAIdeT taxonomy (2025), the following tasks were delegated to GAI tools under full human supervision:

- Text summarization
- Translation

GAI tool used: ChatGPT-5. Full responsibility for the final manuscript lies entirely with the author. GAI tools are not listed as authors and do not bear responsibility for the final outcomes.

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"Викрадення і привласнення історії" як проблема філософії історії в контексті війни і викликів гуманітарній безпеці

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У статті досліджується феномен «викрадення і привласнення історії» в контексті російської агресії проти України через аналіз руйнування культурної спадщини та перекодування культурних сенсів. Запропоновано авторську класифікацію привласнення історії за рівнями інтенсивності: «викрадення без привласнення», «привласнення без викрадення» й тотальне «викрадення і привласнення». Останній рівень характеризує російську політику формування та поширення історичних «імперських знань». Показано, що традиційна постколоніальна критика успішно деконструє європоцентричні епістемічні моделі та зведення незахідного світу до статусу пасивного «Іншого». Проте, на думку автора, ці моделі виявляються недостатніми для опису феномену тотального «привласнення». Так, Дж. Гуді стверджує, що європоцентризм «украє» світову історію, нав'язавши лінійну, телеологічну періодизацію (Античність — Феодалізм — Капіталізм) та монополізувавши універсальні поняття, такі як демократія. Разом із тим, такий підхід стигматизує будь-яке західне освоєння історичних новацій як тотальний грабунок. На прикладі «естафетної» моделі міжцивілізаційних контактів, показано, що класична експансія культур спиралася на адаптивне запозичення, інновації освоювалися без ліквідації суб'єктності та первинного авторства культури-донора. І російська імперська траєкторія з цієї позиції не просто запозичує, а здійснює тотальну структурну узурпацію історії колонізованих народів, що найгостріше виражено в привласненні спадщини Київської Русі. Грабуючи фізичні артефакти (зокрема, на тимчасово окупованих українських територіях Приазов'я та Причорномор'я) та поєднуючи це з епістемологічним насильством, російська державна машина зазіхає на українську історичну суб'єктність. На відміну від європоцентричних моделей, які конструювали «екзотичного Іншого», російська колоніальна модель прагне повністю знищити міф про Іншого, поглинаючи суб'єктність підкорених народів у гомогенне імперське тіло. Розгляд проблеми колоніалізму без урахування рис російської імперської траєкторії сформував «епістемологічну сліпоту» у західній науці. Російська імперська ідентичність тримається виключно на вкрадених фрагментах минулого інших народів, тому повернення суб'єктності «обікрадених» народів є для неї екзистенційною загрозою. З огляду на це важливою стратегією гуманітарної безпеки є системне розвінчування пасток «епістемологічної сліпоти».

Ключові слова: філософія історії, гуманітарна безпека, постколоніальні студії, філософія XXI століття, війна, «викрадення і привласнення історії».

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