

# MARKERS OF COLONIAL DISCOURSE IN THE BUSINESS COMMUNICATION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION IN THE TEMPORARILY OCCUPIED TERRITORIES OF ZAPORIZHZHIA OBLAST

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**Abstract.** The present study investigates the colonial and occupational discourse embedded in the business communication of the Russian Federation within the temporarily occupied territories (TOT) of Zaporizhzhia Oblast. The research draws upon postcolonial theory, critical discourse analysis and contemporary studies on neo-imperialism to explore how linguistic, visual and institutional-economic markers function to legitimise the occupation and integrate the seized territories into the Russian political and economic framework. The analysis is based on empirical materials drawn from the propaganda media ecosystem of the Autonomous Nonprofit Organisation (ANO) *Za!Media*, including *Za!Inform*, *Za!TV*, and *Zaporozhskij Vestnik*, which operate as central instruments of ideological control and economic propaganda. The findings reveal that Russian business communication in the TOT reproduces a classical colonial logic in which economic exploitation is masked by the rhetoric of "care", "development", and "reunification." The imposition of Russian currency, legislation, and administrative control can be regarded as a systemic attempt to erase Ukrainian sovereignty and reconstitute the local economy as a dependent appendage of the metropole. The study identifies four core groups of colonial markers: linguistic (narratives of unity, stability, and prosperity under Russian rule); visual (militarised symbols and the branding prefix *Za!*); event-based (public rituals, patriotic campaigns, and state-organised PR events); and institutional-economic (forced re-registration of businesses, nationalisation of assets, and creation of special economic zones). Collectively, these mechanisms construct an illusion of "integration" that conceals the coercive and extractive nature of occupation. The research interprets Russian economic communication as a performative act of imperial governance, as seen through the lens of postcolonial theory. The appropriation of Ukrainian industrial and natural resources, including grain and minerals, is linguistically legitimised through bureaucratic euphemisms such as "inventorying real estate" and "abandoned property". Advertising and public relations (PR) activities have become instruments of ideological persuasion, promoting loyalty to the occupying regime. The systematic suppression of Ukrainian linguistic and symbolic identifiers, in conjunction with the absence of independent commercial advertising, has emerged as a pivotal discursive marker of colonial domination. The study concludes that the business and media communication practices of the Russian occupation administration form an integrated neo-colonial strategy aimed at permanent economic and cultural subjugation. Russia's occupation discourse transforms business communication into a tool of symbolic annexation by combining coercive control, ideological assimilation, and pseudo-economic development. These findings highlight the importance of analysing communicative practices as key evidence of economic aggression and colonial intent in modern hybrid warfare.

**Keywords:** colonial discourse, neo-imperialism, business communication, Russian occupation, Zaporizhzhia Oblast, postcolonial theory, propaganda, economic integration, discourse analysis, information control.

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## 1. Introduction

The military occupation and subsequent illegal annexation of parts of Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia Oblast by the Russian Federation (RF) from February 2022 onwards led to the immediate establishment of an extensive administrative and economic communications network. This paper aims to analyse the linguistic and rhetorical markers that indicate a colonial and occupational narrative, as expressed through military-civilian administrations and federal Russian agencies.

Prior to the full-scale invasion in 2022, Ukraine (including Zaporizhzhia Oblast) was actively pursuing economic integration with the European Union. This was underpinned by the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) (Intereconomics, 2022). The focus of Ukrainian economic policy communications was on local entrepreneurship, the development of business infrastructure, and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (Zaporizhzhia City Council).

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the Zaporizhzhia region began to be gradually occupied. According to Ivan Fedorov, the head of the Zaporizhzhia Regional Military Administration, more than 70% of the region's territory had fallen under Russian control by October 2024. Although Russian forces failed to establish full administrative control over the oblast, local authorities and businesses in the occupied areas were subordinated to a so-called "military-civil administration", comprising local collaborators and Russian officials appointed from Moscow. On September 30, 2022, the Russian Federation declared the entire Zaporizhzhia region, including territories it had not yet seized, a "new region" of the Russian Federation. The city of Melitopol was designated the administrative centre of the occupied area (Petrov, 2024). The immediate imposition of centralised Russian regulatory control and economic frameworks represents an attempt to dismantle Ukraine's sovereign status and replace it with a structure designed for resource extraction and political subjugation.

The system of governance in the Russian-occupied part of the Zaporizhzhia region exhibits distinctive features of both military occupation and colonial control. To ensure total subjugation, martial law has been imposed, establishing a regime based on force rather than law. To enforce this regime, the occupiers established a comprehensive system of repression to suppress resistance and force the local population to accept Russian culture and passports (Petrov, 2024). Research by Polish scholars from the Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW) confirms that the Kremlin treats these territories as alien, subjugated lands. The Kremlin

relies on violence and repression rather than integration. Unlike annexed Crimea in 2014, the newly occupied areas remain external war zones, governed by fear and coercion (Domańska et al., 2023). These practices highlight the transient and colonial character of the occupation regime, which is sustained solely by force and lacks legitimacy among the local population.

Alongside this system of political control, the occupied part of the Zaporizhzhia region is undergoing a process of gradual hybrid economic integration and transformation of the business landscape, which also bears clear colonial features. Russia has introduced the rouble as the sole currency and extended its legal system to the occupied territories. Local enterprises must re-register under Russian law or risk being prohibited from operating and having their assets potentially nationalised (Domańska et al., 2023). Key industrial facilities and natural resources in the region have fallen into the hands of Russian companies or Kremlin-linked individuals, often following violent seizures. According to analysts, the new 'owners' are primarily interested in making quick profits and extracting resources rather than developing the local economy. There have been documented instances of factory equipment being dismantled and scrap metal, grain and other supplies being transported to Russia (Domańska et al., 2023).

This system of economic exploitation mirrors the traditional colonial model of resource extraction, whereby occupiers exploit territories for their value while investing almost nothing in restoration. Meanwhile, the Russian authorities have publicly announced "development programmes" for the TOT. A special free economic zone offering ten years of tax benefits was announced in 2023, alongside a 'comprehensive socio-economic development plan' for the occupied regions until 2025. Both are intended to symbolise their integration into the Russian Federation (Petrov, 2024). In practice, however, these territories are almost entirely dependent on subsidies from the Russian federal budget. In 2022, transfers from Moscow covered over 88% of the consolidated budget expenditures of the occupied Ukrainian regions. In the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions, the level of fiscal dependency was around 92%, which was higher than in Russia's poorest regions. These financial 'infusions', intended to cover salaries, pensions and infrastructure spending, enable the Kremlin to secure the loyalty of the population (Kuzubov & Raag, 2025).

This strategy mirrors the patterns of Soviet and Russian imperial "colonial development", in which the centre offered subsidies, privileges for administrative elites and benefits for loyal populations ("the carrot"), while also enforcing forced resource mobilisation for the benefit of the metropolis ("the stick").

With regard to the communicative practices of the occupation authorities in the Zaporizhzhia region, these are designed to legitimise radical transformations through the discourse of "reunification" and "economic stability". The Russian government's propaganda campaign portrays the annexation and occupation of Crimea as a "historical reunification" or a "return to the native harbour," disseminating narratives that emphasise the promise of "peaceful life" and a "business revival" under Russian administration. Further to this, the Kremlin's media outlets emphasise the supposed unanimous support of the local population for the new regime and the alleged rapid recovery of the regional economy. They do this by spreading false reports about the opening of new enterprises, increased salary payments in rubles, and infrastructure repairs (Domańska et al., 2023).

Thus, in the TOT of the Zaporizhzhia region, the occupation authorities have initiated processes of linguistic, visual, and institutional-economic transformation through the dissemination of discursive frames such as "reunification", "liberation", "security", "care", and "development", all aimed at normalising and imposing the perception of occupation. In practical terms, these processes can be traced through four basic markers:

1. Linguistic markers (narrative markers): lexical units, framing narratives, and slogans.

2. Visual markers (branding/visual markers): symbolic coding, color schemes, visual identity, and toponymic changes.

3. Event-based markers (PR-events markers): openings and launches, job fairs, "patriotic" and social campaigns, educational and recruitment events.

4. Institutional-economic markers (institutional/economic markers): introduction of the Russian ruble, re-registration of businesses under Russian or quasi-Russian law, and transformation of the taxation system.

Business communication, including public relations activities, corporate social responsibility initiatives and the rebranding of commercial networks, serves as the primary channel through which these markers materialise in everyday life. Such communication enables the occupation authorities to create the illusion of "symbolic integration" with the Russian Federation, as well as a false sense of economic and political "stability".

This analysis is based on an understanding of colonial discourse, in which the denial of sovereignty is inextricably linked to the justification of economic appropriation. Russian strategic narratives often operate under the premise that Ukraine, having been "entirely created by Russia", is not a legitimate state to occupy; rather, it is a piece of land—*terra nullius*—requiring proper Russian management (WHO). Consequently, business communication is no longer regarded as

a purely regulatory act; rather, it is understood to be a performative aspect of imperial governance that aims to normalise the illegal appropriation of resources. The adoption of Russian federal procedures, administrative seals and legal terminology, in the context of the ongoing conflict, has been accompanied by a systematic disregard of Ukraine's pre-war business and legal structures. This has resulted in a communication gap that can be interpreted as an ongoing denial of Ukrainian sovereignty, thereby establishing a colonial default setting.

## 2. Literature Overview

This historiographical overview reflects the key achievements of postcolonial theory, critical discourse studies and power studies, as well as research on the Russian imperial project and its neo-colonial practices, in relation to the problem of colonial discourse in business communication in the temporarily occupied territories (TOT) of the Zaporizhzhia region from 2014 to 2025. This study uses colonialism as a discursive framework to examine how language, knowledge and cultural representations construct and normalise hierarchies.

In one of his most important works, Edward Said argues that Orientalism is not just a body of knowledge about the East, but also a mechanism that legitimises colonial domination by perpetuating the idea of Western superiority through cultural narratives. He illustrates how the coloniser creates a narrative that portrays the colonised as the "Other"—as being irrational, backward, or in need of a "civilising mission" (Said, 1978). These kinds of oppositions are usually used to justify domination and affirm the superiority of the coloniser/occupier. In a similar manner, the binary oppositions "us"—"them," "East"—"West" are reproduced by the occupying authorities in the TOT. This phenomenon is particularly evident in strategic narratives such as "Ukraine as a failed state" and "one nation", which delegitimise Ukrainian sovereignty and normalise Russian occupation (Polegkyi, 2023).

While Said explains how Orientalism creates the object of colonial governance, Professor Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her essay "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*", illustrates the violent nature of such processes through the example of the British colonial prohibition of the sati ritual. Introducing the concept of "epistemic violence", she argues that such interventions into the cultural traditions of the colonized were presented as a humanitarian mission of "white men saving brown women from brown men", but in reality deprived the Indian woman of subjectivity—a point she summarizes in her conclusion: "The subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with 'woman' as a pious item. Representation has not withered away" (Spivak, 1988, p. 308). Another prominent scholar,

Homi Bhabha, enriched postcolonial theory with the concepts of mimicry, hybridity, and the "Third Space of enunciation", which describe the ambivalence of colonial power and the potential for its internal subversion (Bhabha, 1984; Bhabha, 1994).

While these theories were initially developed to study and describe the logic of Western colonialism, they have also proved productive for the analysis of the Russian imperial and neo-imperial project. The ongoing discourse within the academic community concerning the applicability and productivity of postcolonial approaches to the post-Soviet space remains a subject of considerable interest. However, even at this stage, scholars are increasingly recognising the post-Soviet experience as part of the global history of empires and decolonisation, rather than as an exception (Moore, 2001). The Ukrainian historian Serhii Plokhy explicitly refers to the Soviet Union as "The Last Empire" (Plokhy, 2014), whose traditions and practices have been inherited by modern Russia. The policies of the multiethnic empire and the Soviet practices of "affirmative action" (Martin, 2001) shape the neo-imperial nature of the Russian Federation, and the concept of "internal colonisation" can help explain the simultaneous exploitation of both "external" and "internal" peripheries. The Russian Empire, in its endeavours to expand its territorial reach, also engaged in the colonisation of its own population, treating it as a subjugated object of exploitation (Etkind, 2011).

This paradigm persists in contemporary Russian policy, whose ideological driving force, as American historian Timothy Snyder argues in *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America* (Snyder, 2018), is the "politics of eternity"—the ideological foundation used to justify the initiation of war against Ukraine. In contradistinction to the Western conception of linear progress, the "politics of eternity" immerses society in a mythic cycle of historical images, wherein the nation is depicted as an eternal victim and the government offers no future, manipulating public emotions and engendering a perpetual sense of crisis (Snyder, 2018, p. 8).

In order to ensure a comprehensive analysis of colonial discourse in business communication, this study employs a theoretical and methodological framework that spans from theories of imperialism to methods of critical discourse analysis, providing a robust foundation for the research.

The synthesis of these approaches enables one to explain the motivations behind geopolitical expansion, the ideological narratives of "civilizational superiority", and to apply a broad diagnostic toolkit for identifying their manifestations in communicative forms and business practices. According to classical theories of imperialism, the driving force of territorial

expansion and resource extraction was defined as the merger of financial capital and state power (Stathakis, 2008, p. 100). Lenin, in particular, advanced the argument that imperialism represented "the highest stage of capitalism", a concept defined by the preeminence of monopolies and the export of capital (Stathakis, 2008, pp. 113–114). Contemporary theories of neo-imperialism adopt this framework, emphasising that power is exercised not only through direct colonial rule, but also through economic dependence, control over global value chains and geopolitical manipulation (Stathakis, 2008, pp. 114–116, 122). Some scholars argue that the goal of neo-imperialism is the unrestricted exploitation of the human and natural resources of former colonies, albeit in new forms (Anah, Ezenwa & Njoku, 2023). In this regard, Russia's actions in Ukraine can be seen as an expression of neo-imperial ambitions, "reproducing the expansionist patterns" of its historical "greatness" (Kushnir, 2022).

The Russian Federation seeks to realise its "soft empire" project by attempting to reintegrate former Soviet republics through a hybrid strategy that combines media manipulation, cyberattacks, military force ("little green men"), religious indoctrination, and the cultural-linguistic construct of the *Russkii Mir*, all of which are presented as "restoring the natural order of things" (Kushnir, 2022). In this context, it should be noted that the *Russkii Mir* emerges not only as a cultural construct but also as a political-technological product whose features "change according to consumer attitudes", and whose institutionalisation is consolidated at the state level (Iakubova, 2018, p. 11).

The present study is informed by the tradition of critical discourse studies, which involves the synthesis of several leading approaches for the purpose of analysing language as an instrument of power. The foundational principle of this study is Fairclough's three-dimensional model, which conceptualises discourse as a social practice and facilitates a systematic linkage between textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice (Fairclough, 1989). This approach is complemented by Van Dijk's socio-cognitive theory, which explains how discourse "controls the mind" by shaping group mental models that normalise power asymmetries (Van Dijk, 2008). The empirical analysis is conducted through the utilisation of the discourse-historical approach, as conceptualised by Reisigl and Wodak. The operationalisation of the research is facilitated by five discursive strategies: nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation, and intensification/mitigation (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

Utilising this comprehensive model, the present study analyses the business communication of the occupying authorities in the TOT of the Zaporizhzhia region as a technology of neo-colonial governance. In this context, topoi of legitimacy, care, security,

modernisation, and inevitability are discursively employed to legitimise and normalise the occupation.

### 3. The Theoretical Nexus: Imperial Precursors, Occupation Law, and the Economic Justification

#### 3.1 Legal Framework: Violation of IHL Governing Occupation

The operationalisation of the Russian economic framework in occupied Zaporizhzhia Oblast is not merely an administrative shift but a deliberate violation of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), rooted in longstanding imperial ideology. International Humanitarian Law (IHL), and more specifically the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC), strictly prohibits an occupying power from making far-reaching changes to the existing legal order or from confiscating private property (Schmitt & Hernandez, 2025). However, the Russian Federation has systematically implemented its own legal and judicial apparatus to regulate business activities and property rights (OHCHR).

The pivotal legal milestone in Russia's territorial expansion was marked by the declaration in September 2023 of the "operationalisation of the Russian court system" within occupied regions, including Zaporizhzhia. This development culminated in the appointment of 436 judges, the majority of whom were directly sourced from the Russian Federation (OHCHR). This act was pivotal in establishing "complete Russian judicial control" and was instrumental in formalising economic changes. The establishment of these courts, in conjunction with the application of Russian law, resulted in the creation of a legal environment conducive to the prosecution of residents for activities that were deemed lawful under Ukrainian law. This effectively transformed standard business operations into criminal acts, punishable by the occupying power (OHCHR). The priority given to this rapid construction of a functional economic bureaucracy—including federal service offices such as the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications (IMI)—demonstrates that the *performance of statehood* is vital. This performance is necessary to facilitate legitimate-looking business communication (licences, permits, court rulings), which serves to mask the illegal resource appropriation, making the communicative act a foundational weapon of judicial and economic conquest.

#### 3.2 Discursive Colonial Precursors: The Myth of *Novorossiya*

The economic narratives of the occupation are justified by historical revisionism. The Russian state has repeatedly employed the rhetorical deployment of the

term "Novorossiya" (New Russia), with the intention of evoking a restored Russian empire and to frame the seizure of resources as a rectification of a historical "wrong" whereby Russian lands were assigned to Ukraine (University of Cambridge).

This colonial framing bestows upon the occupying power the perceived moral and historical right to seize Zaporizhzhia's highly valuable assets, such as prime farmland controlled by large Ukrainian companies like HarvEast and Nibulon (Lewis, 2023), and vast mineral wealth (SIPRI, 2025). This narrative is reinforced by the imperialist ideology of the "Russian world", which often orientalises Ukrainians as passive or backward, thereby justifying Russian economic projects of "management" and "development" as necessary interventions for the prosperity of the region (WHO). This rhetorical approach portrays the Russian state as the legitimate civilising and economic authority, turning theft into a necessary form of stewardship.

### 4. Materials

This study examined the markers of colonial discourse within Russian business communication in the temporarily occupied territories of Zaporizhzhia Oblast, analysing the communicative practices employed by Russian Federation institutions and their subordinate "administrations" operating in these areas. The analysis is based on the theoretical framework of postcolonial communication in international business. This framework distinguishes between discursive instruments that promote national identity and cultural heritage in a progressive way, and instruments that function as regressive mechanisms of colonial domination and exploitation (Veremchuk & Vasylchuk, 2024).

The empirical material for this study comprises propaganda media outlets managed by the Autonomous Nonprofit Organisation (ANO) *Za!Media*—specifically, the online publication *Za!Inform* (2025) and the newspaper *Zaporozhskij Vestnik* (2025), the photos of which were sent by the Ukrainian residents from temporary occupied territory to the authors. These pseudo-media platforms operate in the temporarily occupied areas of the Zaporizhzhia Oblast, including the cities of Melitopol, Berdiansk and Enerhodar. They serve as the main channels through which occupation narratives are disseminated.

The media holding *Za!Media* functions as a key instrument of the Russian Federation's centralised effort to impose and maintain a colonial narrative in the occupied territories. Registered within the Russian legal framework, the ANO *Za!Media* operates as a unified mechanism of information control, designed to establish a consistent ideological discourse aligned with the occupation authorities' objectives.

The holding's structure, as presented on its official website, reveals a comprehensive network of media formats, including print publications (*Zaporozhskij Vestnik*, *Zaporozhskaya Pravda*), online media (*Za!Inform*), a television channel (*Za!TV*), and several radio stations (*Za!Radio*, *Yug Molodoy*, *Yuzhny Prostor*) (*Za!Media*, 2025). The monopolisation of the communications sector ensures that all information, including business and economic reporting, aligns with the occupying administration's ideological imperatives. The result is a closed communicative environment designed to subjugate the local population and delegitimise Ukrainian sovereignty.

The semiotic dimension of this structure is equally significant. The militarised prefix *Za!* ("For!"), recurrent in titles such as *Za!TV* and *Za!Inform*, as well as the names of radio stations (*Young South*, *Southern Expanse*), indicates an intentional effort to construct a new regional identity that appears geographically local yet remains linguistically and ideologically subordinated to the federal centre. This configuration effectively suppresses any possibility of autonomous cultural or commercial discourse transcending the boundaries imposed by the coloniser's ideological system.

## 5. Findings and Discussions

The results of the discourse analysis suggest that a regressive colonial communication strategy is dominant. This strategy is evident in the systematic replacement of independent commercial and entrepreneurial discourse with a centralised, militarised and ideologically saturated narrative.

In the temporarily occupied territories of the Zaporizhzhia Oblast, the traditional representation of independent commercial communication through branding, marketing and advertising of goods and services has been almost entirely eradicated. Although *Za!Media* formally provides options for advertising placement in accordance with Russian legislation (ANO *Za!Media*, 2025), the content disseminated through its media platforms, including sections on "Economy" and "Society", contains virtually no examples of local private advertising or branding. Instead, the focus of communication is shifted towards news items and reports promoting the "economic integration" of the region into the Russian Federation, the distribution of social benefits, the reconstruction of infrastructure, and the functioning of state institutions.

Mentions of commercial enterprises are consistently framed to highlight their dependence on Russian federal support—for example, references to the Melitopol dairy plant or the company *Melitopol Cherry*, both described as participants in a "Free Economic Zone" or as recipients of state-guaranteed loans from Russian banks (*Za!Inform*, 2025). In this context,

local businesses are portrayed as mere beneficiaries of Russian state patronage, stripped of agency.

This discursive framing shows that local economic autonomy has become a direct target of colonisation. The Russian Federation's occupation policies in the Zaporizhzhia region eliminate any possibility of independent economic activity. The absence of traditional commercial advertising is therefore a powerful symbol of colonial control, representing both the displacement of private enterprise and its "nationalisation". Many local businesses have been forcibly integrated into Russian state structures, such as the state unitary enterprise *Tavriya-Energo* (*Za!Inform*, 2025).

In this context, business communication becomes an extension of the colonial project. Rather than functioning as a platform for economic exchange, it serves as a symbolic medium for asserting the occupier's presence and legitimising their dominance. Essentially, the coloniser only communicates about itself, creating a closed circuit of discourse in which the occupying power is the only active subject.

### 5.1 Colonial Branding and the Politics of Identity Construction

Branding is the process of creating meaning for an organisation or service by shaping its identity strategically (Veremchuk & Vasylichuk, 2024). The occupying authorities in the temporarily occupied territories of the Zaporizhzhia region use it to solidify their supposed political and legal affiliation with the Russian Federation. This is a key manifestation of a regressive strategy that does not aim to conceal colonial influence, but rather to impose it as the new norm.

In contrast to the progressive branding strategy, which involves a departure from colonial connotations and an emphasis on national identity, Russian branding in the temporarily occupied territories utilises a strategy of intrusive naming. This strategy involves the militarisation of communication and the symbolic capture of media space. The semantic analysis of media names within the ANO "*Za!Media*" media holding ("*Za!Media*") indicates the use of the militarised suffix "*Za!*" ("For!") (*Za!TV*, *Za!Inform* / *For!TV*, *For!Inform*), which covertly denotes constant mobilisation and military control. Furthermore, one can assume that the suffix "*Za!*" may also be associated with the letter Z, which is a symbol of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. UNIAN reported that: "*The official page of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation on Instagram offers its own explanation of the symbols Z and V. They say that these letters mean: "Za pobedu" (For the victory) and "Sila V pravde" (Strength in truth) and "Zadacha budet vypolnena" (The task will be completed)*" (UNIAN, 2022). Thus, the branding of this pseudo-media contains a military component.

In the social and administrative sphere, there is a direct branding of products through ideological concepts. For example, in the Zaporizhzhia region, as well as in other temporarily occupied regions of Ukraine, satellite kits called "*Russkiy Mir*" (Russian World) were installed, which is a clear act of colonialist labelling, an indication of belonging imposed by the hegemon. The so-called head of the Zaporizhzhia region, Yevhen Balytskyi (a representative of the occupying authorities), publicly emphasised that the installation of such kits is "a result of a conscious choice in favour of *legal and high-quality television*" (Za!Inform 2025). The aforementioned news item further emphasised that applications for exchange are to be submitted exclusively through local self-government bodies or official contacts of the satellite operator. This message also demonstrates the formation of dependence on the coloniser.

These branding efforts, which are intended to reshape urban spaces, reflect what postcolonial theory identifies as "settler moves to innocence"—a strategy that aims to erase the traces of colonisation by presenting occupation as an act of development and restoration. Through the intensive branding of infrastructure associated with the occupation (e.g., the construction of the *Park of Special Military Operation Participants* in Melitopol or the planting of the *Alley of Reunification with Russia*), the coloniser seeks to "rebrand" the territory itself. These symbolic acts establish military success and annexation as both accomplished and legitimate, replacing historical memories of Ukrainian identity and fulfilling a key regressive communicative function.

The Zaporizhzhia TOT's colonial branding focuses less on commercial goods and more on institutional and administrative processes, emphasising the subordination of local structures to the federal authority.

- **Branding legal compliance.** Public communications (e.g., in *Za!Inform*) instructing local legal entities to amend their founding documents in accordance with Russian legislation function as performative acts of subjugation. The very process of registering enterprises in the Russian Unified State Register of Legal Entities (*EGRUL*) is branded as an inevitable and beneficial step toward "legitimacy" and "economic inclusion" within the RF's jurisdiction.

- **Branding state corporations.** Projects of federal monopolies, such as the introduction of *Atom Classes* by the state corporation *Rosatom* in Melitopol schools, represent a direct projection of the hegemon's brand into educational and cultural spaces. This practice is a symbolic affirmation of Russia's technological and institutional superiority.

- **Economic branding through special economic zones (SEZs).** Mentions of local enterprises, such as the *Vakula Trading House* (meat production) or the *Melitopol Dairy Plant*, which received federal

support or were incorporated into the SEZ framework, serve as publicity tools branding subordination and integration as the only viable paths to economic success. This discursive technique masks exploitation and monopolisation by simulating "development" and "investment".

## 5.2 Markers of Colonial Advertising

In the context of Zaporizhzhia Oblast, advertising has undergone a significant transformation, deviating from its conventional role in stimulating commercial demand. Instead, it has become an instrument of state propaganda, with the primary objective of fostering loyalty to the prevailing occupation regime.

A content analysis of economic and social sections in occupation media reveals that the principal "advertising product" is the promotion of integration into the Russian Federation. Reports on salary indexation, pension increases, compensation for electricity costs, and business subsidies serve as overt promotional messages that publicly highlight stability and improved quality of life.

However, from a postcolonial perspective, their underlying function is the perpetuation of colonial ideology. It is evident that the realm of commercial advertising has become a political arena, with the Russian Federation and its administrative system serving as the primary objects of marketing. This signifies a transition from the traditional "4 Ps" of marketing (product, price, place, promotion) to the "4 Cs" model (customer needs, cost, convenience, communication). In this paradigm, the "communication" aspect is exclusively monopolised by the state to ensure ideological compliance.

In order to legitimise the occupation, the Russian communication strategy employs the narrative of a "civilising mission". This is a classical regressive strategy that frames colonisation as benevolent modernisation. The focus of colonial advertising is on the intensive restoration of infrastructure under Russian patronage. Key markers of this narrative include: 1) infrastructure focus (extensive media coverage of "major reconstruction projects" such as road repairs, restoration of water supply in Berdiansk, modernisation of the Melitopol water utility and expansion of port capacities in Mariupol and Berdiansk to 5.9 million tonnes); and 2) patronage assistance (continuous emphasis on "aid" provided by Russian "sister regions" (Tver, Tomsk, Chechnya, Arkhangelsk, etc.) in rebuilding social facilities and infrastructure).

This emphasis on ostensible enhancements functions as a regressive concealment strategy, diverting attention from systemic economic subordination and the extraction of local resources, particularly agricultural products. The occupation regime self-identifies as a "rescuer" and "investor", employing claims of superior

efficiency in comparison to the preceding Ukrainian governance to legitimise its presence.

A significant indicator of the colonial nature of communication is the near-total absence of independent, non-coopted commercial advertising. The effective functioning of advertising is only possible under conditions of a free market and competition. The fact that *ANO Za!Media* platforms are filled almost exclusively with administrative, propagandistic and militarised content indicates the profound suppression of private entrepreneurship.

The economic sphere is either monopolised by Russian companies or deprived of the agency necessary for autonomous communication. This phenomenon can be interpreted as a reflection of the eradication of free business discourse and the transformation of commercial success into a direct function of political loyalty.

### 5.3 PR and Advertising in Conditions of Occupation

The public relations (PR) and publicity mechanisms in the Zaporizhzhia Oblast's temporarily occupied territory (TOT) serve to construct coercive consensus – the illusion of popular support and legitimacy for the occupation regime – by engaging loyal actors, controlling social initiatives and strictly regulating the linguistic field.

In postcolonial public relations (PR) theory, the involvement of local cultural representatives usually serves to emphasise autonomy and equality. In the TOT, however, this mechanism is inverted. The occupation authorities employ only pro-Russian local figures (collaborators), such as so-called regional head Yevgeny Balitsky or the local secretary of *United Russia*, Sergey Zolotaryov, to endorse administrative decisions and social campaigns.

The PR activities of United Russia are presented as socially beneficial. These activities include providing assistance to veterans and families of soldiers participating in the "Special Military Operation", as well as implementing initiatives such as "My Career with United Russia" and "Urban Environment". These narratives present the hegemon as effective, benevolent and socially responsible. This strategy replaces the voices of the subaltern with those of loyal intermediaries, enforcing the principle of "nothing about us without those we have appointed". Publicity also serves as a mechanism of intimidation. Reports on criminal convictions, such as the nine-year prison sentence imposed on a local woman for financing the Armed Forces of Ukraine, exemplify coercive publicity. They delineate the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and reinforce the perception of total control.

Publicity strategies are employed to further deepen ideological assimilation through social and cultural

narratives. The two main strategies are the glorification of war and social division, and cultural assimilation. Projects such as *Zaporizhzhia Heroes* and reports on social assistance (e.g., school kits for first-graders, household appliances for soldiers' families) construct a militarised civic consensus where social benefits are linked to loyalty toward the occupying power. Pseudo-patriotic and historical events, such as *Candle of Memory* and celebrations aligned with the Russian ideological calendar, serve to replace Ukrainian national narratives. The arrival of the mobile historical exhibition "*Russia – My History*" in Berdiansk exemplifies cultural publicity aimed at historical assimilation and delegitimisation of Ukrainian heritage.

By presenting social aid and infrastructure restoration as public relations successes, the occupying administration indirectly conveys the supposed inefficiency of previous Ukrainian governance, thereby promoting Russian rule as more effective and legitimate. However, in their public communications, the occupiers downplay war-related damage as the main cause of infrastructure issues in newly occupied regions.

Discourse analysis confirms that business communications disseminated by Russian administrative and media structures in the Zaporizhzhia Oblast temporarily occupied territory (TOT) represent a coherent implementation of a regressive colonial strategy. Rather than contributing to the revival of a national idea – the progressive function of communication – it uses branding, advertising and public relations tools to achieve three main goals.

**1. Substitution:** the replacement of independent media and commercial spaces with centralised, militarised, and state-controlled content (*Za!TV*, *Park of special military operation participants*).

**2. Legitimation:** the creation of an illusion of "development", "investment" and "social stability" under Russian control through the "civilising mission" narrative that conceals economic exploitation.

**3. Assimilation:** the imposition of new political, cultural and legal identities that fully subordinate the region to the informational and institutional space of the Russian Federation.

### 5.4 Colonial and Occupational Discourse Markers

The communications issued by the occupying authorities use specific legal and bureaucratic terminology to formalise the theft of Ukrainian state and private assets, effectively disguising the illegal seizure of property as a legitimate administrative process.

Linguistic expression in the occupied territories constitutes a crucial marker of colonial discourse. Whereas decolonial communication theory advocates the use of non-possessive, equality-oriented language (avoiding constructions such as "*Canada's Indigenous*

Peoples”), Russian discourse deliberately employs possessive and subordinating language to reinforce domination. This is evident in:

– **Language of possession.** Consistent use of terms denoting jurisdictional change, such as *Zaporizhskaya Oblast* (in accordance with RF administrative division), *reunification with Russia*, and *Novorossiya*, which linguistically entrench the colonial status of the region.

– **Language of integration and subordination.** Frequent references to a “transitional integration period” and the alignment of utilities (e.g., *Tavriya-Energo*) with Russian state standards highlight the subordinate role of the region as an object of “reform” under metropolitan control.

– **Headlines and leads:** “*Achievements of the first year: how life has changed after the region joined Russia.*”; “One country” – header line above articles; Frequent repetition of “*we are together*” (*Zaporozhskij Vestnik*, 2025).

This narrative normalises occupation by presenting it as integration rather than annexation. The use of the terms “integration” and “reunion” mirrors imperial restoration discourse, implying a natural and rightful return rather than a violent takeover. It denies Ukrainian sovereignty and erases the country’s previous administrative identity, which is a typical example of framing that perpetuates imperial continuity.

This phenomenon ultimately leads to the legalisation of looting and the seizure of strategic economic assets, a topic that will be discussed in a separate section.

The legalisation of looting is also evident in the analysed sample. “Abandoned Property” and “Inventorying Real Estate” are central mechanism of economic subjugation, which consists of the formalisation of property seizure based on the displacement caused by the conflict. According to official reports, Russia is “inventorying real estate” in occupied Ukraine with the explicit aim of seizing property from Ukrainian residents. This is likely intended to facilitate the transfer of Russian citizens into the occupied territories (World Nuclear Association, 2022).

Legislative communications regarding “abandoned property” provide a direct colonial mechanism for stripping ownership. Ukrainian owners who have fled the occupation must prove their land ownership or risk having their property confiscated and transferred to local occupation authority councils (OHCHR, 2024). This administrative requirement sets a deadline for compliance, enforced by the occupying power. It cynically transforms the logistical act of fleeing wartime danger into a legal pretext for state-sanctioned looting and expropriation.

There is documented evidence of the seizure of strategic economic assets in newly occupied regions, specifically agriculture and minerals. It is evident that colonial communication markers are most explicit in

the context of strategic resources, where the objective is not merely short-term gain, but rather permanent integration into the RF economy. In the agricultural sector, the immediate establishment of the Russian-controlled “State Grain Company” in Zaporizhzhia (Lewis, 2023) is a clear organisational marker. This newly formed entity has been reported to be responsible for the acquisition of the region’s harvest, which is then exported illegally through Crimea and Mariupol. This course of action effectively undermines the legitimacy of long-established Ukrainian agribusinesses by subsuming their operations and output under a newly established state entity specifically designed for extraction.

For industrial resources, the most revealing marker is found in Russia’s federal planning. The “2024 Minerals Development Strategy” explicitly calls for the completion of the “integration of the mineral-resource complexes of the... Zaporizhzhia Oblast... into the Russian economy” (SIPRI, 2025). This terminology formalises the incorporation of Zaporizhzhia’s strategic mineral deposits, including coal, iron ore, manganese ore, rare metals and construction minerals, into Russia’s national supply chains in order to serve its own import substitution and export objectives (SIPRI, 2025). This strategic focus marks a shift from sporadic, localised seizure to systematic, federally documented appropriation, demonstrating that the economic plan is integral to the annexation process and signalling growing colonial confidence.

In the present study’s sample, the discourse of a “civilising mission” and “improvement” rhetoric was evident. Repeated emphasis on expressions such as “*achievements*”, “*improvement of living standards*”, “*income growth*”, and “*payments to veterans*” forms a coherent rhetorical pattern across the occupation-controlled media. Quantitative formulations such as “*a decent standard of living*” reinforce this strategy through the simulation of measurable social progress.

Moreover, numerous reports describe the restoration of industrial and social infrastructure, for example, “*the plant became the first enterprise of the renewed region*” alongside narratives of the revival of education and healthcare (“*restoration of medicine, schools*”), and the propagation of “*healthy society*” rhetoric “*Health above all*” (*Zaporozhskij Vestnik*, 2025).

This discourse presents a narrative of paternal progress, portraying the occupation as a benevolent form of modernisation. The Russian Federation presents itself as a caretaker state, ensuring the local population’s welfare, stability and prosperity. Such rhetoric operates as a contemporary manifestation of the classical colonial trope of the “*civilising mission*”, where material improvement and administrative order are presented as moral justifications for political domination. Within this narrative framework, the provision of economic or social benefits by the occupier functions not as genuine development, but

as an ideological instrument that normalises colonial subordination and legitimises the loss of sovereignty.

A series of reports presents Russian economic regulation in the occupied region as an act of benevolent state care. Articles under headlines such as “*Taxes can wait*” and “*The social price*” frame economic decisions not as coercive control but as expressions of paternal concern. The news that “*The Santekhdetal plant became the first enterprise of the renewed region*” (Zaporozhskij Vestnik, 2022) symbolically marks the inclusion of local industry into the Russian economic space.

These narratives serve as instruments of economic assimilation. They legitimise the integration of occupied territories into the Russian administrative and corporate systems while concealing the expropriation and monopolisation that occurs. The rhetoric of ‘delayed taxes’ reframes dependency as generosity, perpetuating the colonial trope of the metropole’s paternal gift. Through this lens, economic incorporation appears as an act of care rather than coercion, which is a defining feature of colonial economic discourse.

In this sample, militarisation describes a mechanism of order and protection. The visual materials that accompany the news include photographs of uniformed personnel inspecting local businesses and taking part in civic events. Reports highlight the reconstruction of *Victory Square* and the celebration of *May 9 (Victory Day)*, embedding military symbolism into everyday life. Textual formulations such as “*Health and safety of citizens are under control*” and “*Ensuring stability*” (Zaporozhskij Vestnik, 2024) reinforce the notion of the army as a guarantor of peace.

Such imagery and verbal framing merge militarisation with security, normalising the presence of occupying forces through what may be termed “*securitisation as benevolence*”. This narrative redefines military control as a form of public service, offering protection, order and welfare, and transforming coercion into moral legitimacy. It echoes colonial logic, in which the army embodies governance and guardianship.

The glorification of collaborators and the creation of new local elites can also be seen in local propaganda materials. Reports celebrating the appointment of local figures, such as “*Yevgeny Balitsky elected as head of the region*” are framed in the language of personal pride and communal unity. Quotations like “*I am proud of my people, my region, and of you*” or “*We all felt a united impulse*” construct a discourse of emotional belonging and shared purpose (Zaporozhskaya Pravda, 2025).

This rhetorical strategy lends legitimacy to collaboration by rebranding the occupational administration as indigenous leadership. This process, which can be described as “*discursive indigenisation*”, involves making external authority appear native through local faces and voices. The heroisation of collaborators in this way reproduces a classic imperial

mechanism, transforming subordination into voluntary loyalty and erasing the distinction between occupier and occupied.

The cultural and ideological reprogramming is also noticeable through discourse analysis. For example, education-related materials announce that “*The Ministry of Education has opened 122 educational institutions*” and that “*literature is now taught according to Russian standards*” (Zaporozhskaya Pravda, 2025). These messages emphasise the cultural mission of the occupying state by appealing to “moral values” and “patriotic upbringing”.

These initiatives represent a systematic process of linguistic and ideological assimilation. By imposing the Russian curriculum, symbolic codes and moral hierarchies, the occupation is transforming education into a tool for redefining identities. The aim is not only administrative control, but also the reconfiguration of collective consciousness, a process central to colonial governance where domination is sustained through cultural internalisation.

The propaganda of “Unity” is evident in this sample. Headings such as “*We are together*” and “*One country*” recur across multiple media outlets, often accompanied by human-interest stories showing smiling citizens, families, and productive workplaces. Testimonials like “*Everyone felt a united impulse*” (Zaporozhskij Vestnik, 2023) reinforce the affective tone of reunion and shared destiny.

This discourse shifts the register from political to emotional, transforming occupation into “reunion”. By invoking unity and kinship, it replaces the language of annexation with that of belonging. This emotional integration neutralises conflict and transforms coercion into harmony – a discursive strategy that aligns with imperial narratives of familial empires and “common destiny”.

As an important part of colonisation discourse, discursive silencing and erasure are also evident. A striking structural feature of occupied media is the total absence of Ukrainian linguistic and symbolic identifiers. There are no references to the Ukrainian flag, administrative names or examples of resistance. The discursive landscape is strictly monological: Russia speaks while the occupied territory listens.

This deliberate erasure is a fundamental aspect of colonialism: the silencing of the colonised subject. By removing Ukrainian identity markers, the possibility of alternative narratives is eliminated, reducing the communicative field to a single authoritative voice. In this monological order, occupied land becomes an object of transformation rather than a participant in discourse, thus fulfilling the colonial principle of epistemic domination.

Colonialism in propaganda materials is also visible through stylistic devices. Across the analysed materials, the frequent use of passive constructions – “*it is noted*”,

“is being restored”, “is being carried out” – obscures agency and responsibility. The repetition of the lexical pair “Russia” and “region” reinforces the conceptual merging of the two entities. Lexical saturation with terms such as “restoration”, “development”, “achievements”, and “well-being” constructs a semantic field of progress and care.

These linguistic features contribute to the creation of a depersonalised, paternalistic discourse. Passivity conceals the mechanisms of control, while repetition and positive framing of language normalise subordination. The result is a linguistic simulation of harmony – a discursive façade that masks coercive realities beneath the rhetoric of benevolent reconstruction.

### 5.5 The Role of Information Warfare in Business Control

To enforce economic mandates and suppress resistance, colonial governance requires absolute control over the narrative environment. In Zaporizhzhia Oblast, Russian forces systematically seized and weaponised media infrastructure to control business communication and the flow of information. This is achieved through the seizure and institutionalisation of propaganda, and the suppression of independent economic communication.

The earliest markers of information conquest involved the immediate seizure and rebranding of local media. For instance, the radio station “Free Berdiansk” was renamed to spread propaganda (IMI, 2023). The subsequent broadcasting of “exclusively Russian propaganda content” ensures that the local business community receives only Russian-sanctioned economic updates and regulatory dictates (BBCM).

The institutionalisation of the official economic narrative was formalised by the launch of the “Zaporizhzhia News Agency” in July 2023 (IMI, 2023). This outlet was set up by Russian journalists and is supported by the occupying authorities. It received its registration certificate directly from Russia’s Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media (Roskomnadzor) (IMI, 2023). The publication of official posts by the occupation head, Yevgeniy Balytsky, in the “Official” section of the website (IMI, 2023) acts as a powerful symbolic marker of administrative control over the business information space.

Colonising the information space requires the creation of pro-Russian content and the suppression of Ukrainian economic communications. Russian forces have actively targeted Ukrainian telecommunications infrastructure (ETC), disrupting media access and hindering the flow of independent information. Furthermore, in parts of the region, occupation administrations blocked local residents’ access to

social networks such as Facebook and Instagram. This systematic suppression prevents local entrepreneurs from accessing legitimate Ukrainian legal and economic information. This dependence on information is crucial for maintaining the integrity of the captive market.

In a colonial context, business news is inherently political. Media control is concentrated in the hands of the occupying administration, meaning all published economic information (regarding taxes, subsidies, market access and regulatory compliance) is filtered through them. This systematic control of the business information environment acts as a pre-emptive measure against economic resistance, ensuring that local entrepreneurs view the Russian colonial economic framework as the only viable way to operate and survive.

### 6. Conclusions and Discussions

Analysis of business communications from the Russian administration in the temporarily occupied Zaporizhzhia Oblast conclusively reveals a comprehensive, federally driven colonial and occupational narrative. This narrative is conveyed via specific linguistic markers and systematic administrative procedures intended to secure long-term economic domination and incorporation into the Russian Federation.

The core findings synthesise into three major clusters of colonial discourse:

1. Appropriation rhetoric: legalised theft is masked by bureaucratic processes using terms such as “inventorying real estate”, legislative attention to “abandoned property” and the creation of state-controlled entities like the “State Grain Company”.

2. Coercive compliance: forced integration is enforced through mandatory requirements, most critically “passportisation” and “re-registration under Russian law”, which link the right to conduct business directly to political loyalty. Non-compliance is shown to be met with direct state violence, transforming economic regulation into a mechanism of physical control.

3. Extraction justification: imperial extraction and militarisation are reframed using the rhetoric of “development” and “integration”. This masks the strategic reorientation of vital assets, such as linking ZNPP energy to military projects and incorporating mineral resources directly into Russian federal industrial plans.

These markers collectively reveal a systematic campaign to erase Ukraine’s trajectory towards integration with the European Economic Community, replacing it with an imperial framework based on historical revisionism.

The systemic utilisation of colonial and occupational narratives within the domain of business communication

offers substantial evidence for the establishment of international accountability mechanisms. It is recommended that international bodies and relevant judicial inquiries utilise the specific lexicon identified—such as the terminology regarding the “*integration of the mineral-resource complexes*” and the legislation pertaining to “*abandoned property*” – as primary documentary evidence. This language lends further credence to the assertion that Russia's economic activities

do not constitute mere incidental consequences of conflict, but rather represent a deliberate, federally sanctioned strategy of systemic economic aggression and looting, constituting a gross violation of the laws of war governing occupation. The documentation should concentrate on recording the precise legal and administrative language used to enforce compliance and justify the seizure of strategic Ukrainian assets for integration into the Russian national economy.

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