Ievhen Lazarenko, chancellor of L’viv State University and a member of the regional Party committee, shocked his fellow Party members by comparing their past actions to those of the capitalist enemy. At the time, June 12, 1953, Lazarenko and other Communists of the L’viv Region in Soviet Ukraine in a plenary session were discussing a secret report by Lavrentii Beria, head of the country’s security services. Beria’s report, addressed to the Central Committee in Moscow, criticized national discrimination against native Ukrainians in the republic’s western regions and illegal repression of the local population in the immediate postwar years.2

As with others in the plenary session, Lazarenko aimed his remarks in favor of Beria’s report, criticizing abuses of power that Party and state officials in the L’viv Region had committed in the past. He and other Party members present at the plenary session emphasized the need to restore “socialist legality,” promote natives of the region to positions of power, and encourage the use of the Ukrainian language in the educational system.

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2. In 1946, Beria, remaining Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers and a member of the Politburo, delegated leadership of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) to General Kruglov and leadership of the Ministry of State Security (MGB) to Abakumov. N. Vert, Istoriia sovetskogo gosudarstva (Moscow: “Ves’ mir,” 2000), p. 347. Power over both state organs, of course, remained strongly under Beria’s control.
and in public life. Yet Lazarenko at one point went further. He declared, “Sometimes the policy conducted in the L’viv Region was similar to the policy that colonizers conduct.” Fellow Party members at the plenary session quickly berated Lazarenko for making such a comparison, and at a later plenary session, after Beria had been arrested, some even called for the Party to punish him.

Lazarenko had clearly stepped out of bounds when he insinuated that the Soviet regime treated native Ukrainians from Western Ukraine as colonial subjects. His words struck hard at the anti-imperialist ideology that Party and state leaders in the Soviet Union were actively promoting in their opposition to the capitalist West in these early years of the Cold War. While much of Africa and some parts of Asia remained under colonial rule in 1953, while Americans were exercising “imperialist” policies in Korea and Western Europe, how could there be colonialism in Western Ukraine?

This article will address the resistance to practices resembling colonial ones that intellectuals, students, and some broader segments of the population of L’viv offered through Polish media and encounters with Poles in the decades after Stalin’s death. A colonial setting in its Asian or African context may not be applicable to Galicia under Habsburg and Polish rule or Western Ukraine under Soviet rule. Yet such colonial practices as the imposition of the language and culture of one community over that of another, as well as the favoring of members of one community over another in positions of power, had been aspects of life among Ukrainians in Galicia during Habsburg and Polish rule. They were also characteristic of Soviet times as the integration of Western Ukraine into the rest of Soviet Ukraine took place in the postwar years.

As this article will show, Ukrainians in L’viv who were natives of the region for the most part became loyal Soviet citizens. They accommodated themselves to the behavior and values shared by others throughout the Soviet Union. But in doing so, they also resisted the constraints that a Soviet identity imposed on them “without necessarily rejecting, by assessing, making tolerable, and, in some cases, even turning to one’s advantage the

3. A transcript of this regional Party committee plenary session, held June 12-13, 1953 to discuss the May 26, 1953 Central Committee decree from Moscow, “The Issue of the Western Regions of the Ukrainian SSR,” is in Derzhavnyj arkhiv L’vivs’koi oblasti (DALO), fond P-3, opys 4, sprava 692.
