

Why the War in Ukraine Is a Post-Colonial One

Professor William Partlett, Melbourne Law School

Thursday 13 October 2022: 5.30pm for 6pm-7pm AEDT. Dyason House, 124 Jolimont Road, East Melbourne, VIC 3002

When the Soviet Union collapsed 30 years ago, it was more than just the end of the Cold War. It also represented a significant setback to centuries of Russian empire-building. The collapse of communism, it was thought, signalled the unchallenged rise of its ideological competitor – democracy. And there is no question that democracy spread to some parts of the former Soviet Union. The war in Ukraine can be understood from this perspective – as an authoritarian Russia invading a democratic Ukraine.



But there is another way to understand the war in Ukraine. In 1992, Russia became a post-imperial power struggling to define itself without its empire while the newly independent former republics (like Ukraine) needed to forge a new identity.

Seen through this post-colonial lens, Russia's invasion is a desperate attempt to preserve its imperial identity as leader of the 'Russian world.' On the other side, Ukraine's resistance is an assertion of its independent post-colonial identity and desire to break from Russia.

This post-colonial context is critical to understanding the origins and future of Russia's war on Ukraine. In his latest book *The Post-Soviet as Post-Colonial* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022), Will Partlett describes the collapse of the Soviet Union as a moment of decolonisation and the ongoing impact of post-coloniality on the constitutional politics of the region.

What is the relationship between post-colonial constitutional politics and ongoing struggles for national identity in places like Ukraine and Russia? What do the post-colonial dimensions of the war say about the fundamental causes of the war? How does this post-coloniality challenge key dimensions of realist theories of international relations? And why will the war in Ukraine be so hard to end?



William Partlett is an Associate Professor at Melbourne Law School. He has travelled extensively in Russia and the former Soviet Union. His written work on the region includes publications in both academic journals as well as *The Conversation* and *The National Interest*. His insights draw on both his training in Russian politics, language, and history at Oxford University and Princeton University as well as his legal training at Stanford Law School. His latest book is *The Post-Soviet as Post-Colonial* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022). *For a 35% discount, please use the code 'PART35' at checkout.*

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