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How a Realist-Constructivist Theory Can Contribute to Understanding the 2014 Ukraine Crisis

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Abstract

Realism has been the predominant paradigm for analysing Russian foreign policy in recent times, however, it can sometimes appear lacking in convincing power. Constructivism offers some explanation for the motivation behind policy, however, again appears lacking in convincing power alone. Realist-constructivsm has been suggested to bridge the gap, as it were, between traditional notions of power, and cultural influences. The main argument for realist-constructivism is that some of the basic principles of realism must have a constructivist base, for example, in order to define the 'us' and 'them' in international politics and to determine with whom one is competing for power and influence, there first must be an understanding of how one defines the 'us'. This analysis examines the realist-constructivist theory as put forward by Barkin (2004; 2010), analyses its advantages and disadvantages, and seeks to view the Ukraine crisis of 2014 through a realist-constructivist lens, hoping to contribute something to the still young and developing discussion around a realist-constructivist theory.

Keywords

Realist-constructivist theory; NATO; national identity; Ukraine; Crimea; the EU; 2014; annexation

21, 362 words

Declaration of Authorship

1. The author hereby declares that she compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature
2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited
3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

Prague 05/05/18 Sophia Rigby

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How a Realist-Constructivist Theory Can Contribute to Understanding the 2014 Ukraine Crisis

Introduction

Norman Stone is fond of reducing the complex causality of the twentieth century's world wars to the claim that "the Germans went ape". The story of the twenty-first century has pretty much been the same: the Russians went ape.

Andrew Wilson, (2014b)

Competing narratives have surrounded the Ukraine Crisis, with Russia dominating much of the propaganda-battle in successfully spreading its message into the West, where even if it is not supported, it is discussed as an equally legitimate narrative of events. The fundamental facts of the situation are however, as follows. The Ukraine Crisis and Russia's annexation of Crimea came seemingly out of the blue for the West after a period of deteriorating relations with Russia. Following the suspension of the EU Association Agreement with Ukraine by then-President Yanukovych in favour of closer economic ties with Russia, mass protests broke out on Maidan Square in Kiev, which became known as the "Euromaidan". Heavy-handedness by the government and military and a refusal by the protestors to submit led to the overthrow of the President. Russia regarded the new government in Kiev as illegitimate and began sending forces (unofficially) in to Crimea. Initially these "little green men" were claimed to be local defence forces; they provoked protests and a "referendum" for independence was held with support of the Russian government and military. Held without external observation, the "referendum" results declared the will of the people to be independence, although the international community has rejected the validity of both referendum and results. The peninsula was then annexed by Russia, "according to the will of the people" and deemed the historically and morally just action (Putin, 2014). Similar events, with special forces minus insignia stirring up unrest and encouraging local groups to fight Ukrainian government forces, soon arose in the eastern regions of Ukraine. That conflict is still ongoing, with Russia still claiming non-involvement.

Winston Churchill famously described Russia as a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma. Lesser known is his proposal for the key: Russian national interest. This has been the cornerstone for analyses of Russian behaviour, especially in recent decades. In attempting to explain Russian behaviour on the international stage, many scholars have taken a largely realist view, proposing Russia's national interest and power play motivates its foreign policy, particularly with reference to

the 2014 events. NATO expansion, and recently EU expansion, have been put forward to explain Russia's increasingly aggressive behaviour towards states in the post-Soviet region. However, there are some scholars who see realism as slightly lacking in its explanatory capabilities. Realism focuses on power, the competition between states for that power, and the steps states take to ensure their national interest. But how do states decide what is in their national interest? It is not a proscribed term. Rather, a country's national interest is defined largely by what that state's society and political culture dictate.

Constructivism places an emphasis on societal and cultural influences; it is not purely national identity. However, national identity is an important factor, and significantly for traditional realist areas of interest, how the national identity and political structures interact and modify one another. Neither are fixed, they are constantly in flux and determined to a large extent by the context in which they are found. History, shared experiences and memory, and culture all contribute to create a unique context in which a state's politics is formed and developed. Politicians themselves are not primarily political beings; they are first and foremost social beings. They were socialised into a culture and then became political actors. Even considering differing political stances along the political spectrum, there are still cultural commonalities for politicians within one state community.

The possibility of a realist-constructivist theory has been proposed by some scholars and its merits discussed over the last two decades (Barkin, 2004; 2010; Jackson, 2004). The fundamental argument is that some of the basic principles of realism must have a constructivist base, for example, in order to define the 'us' and 'them' in international politics and to determine with whom one is competing for power and influence, there first must be an understanding of how one defines the 'us'. There is still some debate over exactly how a realist-constructivist theory could be implemented or whether the two paradigms are even compatible, however, there are some interesting propositions about the importance of context and identity that are often ignored by realist interpretations of political action.

This work seeks to review the common arguments given by scholars for the 2014 annexation of Crimea and why Russia acted in such an aggressive and illegal way towards a fellow sovereign state, and to look at both the realist and constructivist arguments to see if and where those arguments used in combination could strengthen understanding. This is still a new theoretical idea in international relations study and so far, while there has been some thought-provoking discussion over the possible form of such a theory, there has been little empirical work on case studies to support the theoretical conception and to assess its usefulness. Considering the evolving nature of the theoretical framework, this Master's work is largely experimental, a result of a natural curiosity of political culture, a strong emotional attachment to my own cultural background, and therefore an interest in the interaction

and possible confluence between societal values and political stance. Therefore, this work seeks to assess the main arguments of the motivations for the annexation of Crimea and identify areas where realism and constructivism coincide, and which motivations could appear stronger or significant because of both realist and constructivist principles.

Discussion of the theoretical concept remains dominant and over whether it is possible to combine the basic principles of both independent theories and in what way. Should ideas such as power and national interest be given one realist-constructivist definition, or should two separate definitions be used together to show the important yet differing dimensions of one argument? It is an interesting puzzle to examine the realist and constructivist elements of each argument to see if and where synthesis can occur.

The first section looks at the literature that has been generated around the crisis and the main arguments that are proposed for the annexation of Crimea. The second section examines both the realist and constructivist theories and the proposals for a realist-constructivist theory: how it is delineated and the important factors. The third part is an analysis of the main arguments that are given from both the realist and constructivist sides and how an understanding of both can strengthen the understanding of a particular factor. Finally, a conclusion will draw together the main advantages and disadvantages that appear from using a realist-constructivist theory.

It must be noted that the use of constructivist arguments and the narratives that have emerged, some recent and some long-standing, is not an attempt to legitimise arguments that should not be legitimised, for example, the common argument that Ukraine is not really a separate nation and that they are too close to Russians as a people to be separated by arbitrary borders; but, the argument is present in Russia, is commonly supported, and has been used in justification for actions in Ukraine. This work does not seek to support moral relativism and argue that because Russia believes it, then therefore it must be true. However, to find a solution to any riddle, mystery, or enigma, both in and out of the political sphere, full comprehension of the problem must be achieved. This cannot happen if part of the argument for the annexation of Crimea is neglected.

Literature Review

Mearsheimer (2014:82) argues that Putin's actions are easy to comprehend. Ukraine has served as a buffer state against Nazi Germany, Imperial Germany, and Napoleonic France. No Russian leader could tolerate a hostile military alliance operating in Ukraine. Teutmeyer (2014) suggests that Russia still views NATO as a hostile organisation and that the Ukraine Crisis is Russia drawing a definitive line in the sand for NATO, and EU, expansion. Russia perceives NATO expansion as trying to move Ukraine and other post-Soviet states out of Russia's influence and into the West's (Mearsheimer, 2014).

MacFarlane (2008:39) says that from a realist or geopolitical perspective, NATO expansion, and perhaps also democracy promotion, weakens Russia's position in Europe. It is natural that extending their zone of cooperation, even if states refrain from full membership, increases NATO influence, which in turn could decrease Russia's (Teutmeyer, 2014). However, both NATO and the EU have taken a more active interest in the "borderlands" of Eastern Europe to increase their own security and to achieve their stated aim of a more democratic Russia (Blank, 2008:173). Braun (2008b:92) contends that NATO has listened to outsiders' demands for collaboration and adheres to a strategy of inclusion, with a desire to create a whole and unified Europe, thus emerging as the backbone of Europe's security architecture. Blank (2008:173) refers to the increasing resentment in Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine at Russia's efforts to dominate them and their calls for Western security institutions to help settle the frozen conflicts in their regions, and help reform their economies and politics so that they can move towards the West. However, Russia is beginning to retaliate by undermining the stability in countries like Ukraine, playing on the West's anxieties about the democratic and economic stability of the post-Soviet region (Simao, 2016).

Should the West have gained influence over Ukraine and extended NATO membership to them, Russia could conceivably have lost their naval base at Sevastopol which ensures near naval supremacy in the Black Sea. NATO in Ukraine would also lead to the Black Sea becoming predominantly NATO, with Ukraine, Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey in the Alliance and on the shores of the Black Sea and leave much of Russia's southwestern flank exposed to NATO. The Black Sea region has strategic importance for the West and NATO for their operations in the Middle East. As Simon (2008) points out, this region is largely controlled by Russia, with it being outside the West's influence, with weak, regional governments reliant on Russia, and frozen conflicts that burden the region. However, there are few places on the northern shore with waters deep enough for a full naval fleet. In this respect, Sevastopol is important. Klotz (2017) suggests that one motivation for the annexation of Crimea was fear of a termination of the contract for the Russian presence at the naval base once Yanukovych was overthrown, which would have been a significant strategic loss for Russia, not only for its presence in

the Black Sea and its dominance in the region, but also for its operations further afield in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

Russian and EU relations have changed over the last few years. While previously, Russia appeared to view the EU as a benign organisation, it is increasingly viewed as a threat to the regime's stability. MacFarlane (2008) references Russia's negative reactions to any western efforts to project democratic norms and values into Russia and/or the post-Soviet space, excepting the Baltics. While there is difference in foreign policy preferences between the elite and the mass population, there is a general anti-Western trend among both groups (Braun, 2008a:31). Putin seldom uses the word "soyuznik" (ally) with reference to the West, preferring the term "partnior" (partner). Whereas ally suggests a formal and binding connection with rights and duties, partner suggests a more informal, and discretionary relationship that is not exclusive and contingent upon certain conditions. Braun further adds that the most profound fears in Russia since Putin became president revolve around the West plotting to diminish Russia's place in the world, especially since Putin has presided over an economic revival. MacFarlane (2008:44) also references the key theme of Putin's presidency of "partnership" with respect to the US, Europe, and China. He suggests that this multipolarity was more a quest for cooperative relationships with the various centres, rather than a balancing effort.

Putin's moves were largely opportunistic, according to Wilson (2014b:2). He felt threatened by the Uprising in Kiev, but things may have turned out differently had Yanukovych not fled Ukraine or had Ukrainian forces resisted in Crimea. The Euromaidan can be classed along with the colour revolutions that rocked the post-Soviet space between 2004-2008. Not only did these revolutions threaten Russia's privileged position in the region with governments coming to power who favoured a more western-oriented policy direction, they directly threatened the regime should such ideas penetrate Russia and spill over onto Russian streets. Similar events took place in 2011-2012 in Russia's big cities where protestors demonstrated against corruption, the economy, and Putin himself. The legacy and success-rate of such events needed to be stamped out. Russia believes that the West is trying to bring about regime change in several countries that include Russia (Ven Bruusgard, 2014). They also view the West as subverting the legal norms of sovereign states. In their view, the removal of President Yanukovych could only have proceeded successful impeachment proceedings: 338 votes out of 450 were required for his removal; only 328 so voted (Burke, 2017:47). Therefore, in Burke's view and according to him, Russia's view, the US's immediate declaration of the legitimacy of the new regime in 2014, and the lack of any legal study of the initial incorporation of Crimea into the newly independent Ukraine in 1991, subvert the legal structures of the international community in favour of establishing US interests. The encouragement of the Colour Revolutions has been seen in Russia as the abandonment of the Westphalian principles, a dangerous precedent which would lead to chaos

and the destruction of the international system (Finkel, 2012). The support given by the West has been framed in terms of an East-West rivalry, with the West interfering in Russia's natural sphere of influence for the purpose of limiting Russian power. The Colour Revolutions presented both a foreign and a domestic threat for Russia (Wilson, 2010); it threatened the stability of the Putin regime as well as attacking its interests in its near abroad.

While Ukraine is often described in close familial terms by Russia, relations were strained in the years leading up to the Crimean annexation. Menon (2015) points to disagreements over energy, trade, transit, and past debts; identity questions aside. Moscow wanted closer ties, including Ukrainian participation in the Eurasian Customs Union and the Eastern Economic Union. Kyiv resisted, even courting the EU and NATO, although the US was more concerned with other foreign policy challenges in Georgia, the Middle East, and the "reset" with Russia; Europe, although affected by Ukraine through the transit of gas, had internal crises to deal with from economic difficulties in Greece, Italy, and Spain, to disagreements about the future of the union. Russia was reminding them that Russia would not ignore Ukraine in favour of more pressing concerns. Ukraine exists in the Russian imagination as "Little Russia", and because of their deep cultural and historical ties, and the transformation of both territories under Peter the Great into the Russian Empire, Ukraine and Russia should stick together in international politics (Riabchuk, 2016). For Ukraine to look westwards is, in Russia's eyes, a betrayal of their history, culture, and language which binds them together as a Slavic civilisation that differs immensely from the Western world.

Russia is determined not to be a junior partner to either Brussels or Washington, as it has often appeared since the 1990s (Trenin, 2009). After 500 years as an empire, 70 years as the Cold War antagonist, decades as a military and nuclear superpower, they are unwilling to give up their power status. Rosefielde (2017) provides more long-standing causes for the annexation, including Russia's roots in the tsarist empire, the Soviet Union's collapse, the post-Soviet "partnership", the re-emergence of Russia's authoritarian nature, and military modernisation, which although does not necessarily suggest the Crimean action was pre-planned, suggests an overall trend towards aggression towards its post-Soviet neighbours who attempt to leave its sphere of influence. He suggests that the planning for the annexation began long before Euromaidan as control of Crimea gives Russia control over the Sea of Azov, secures the Sevastopol naval base, and encloses Ukraine.

Great Power status for Russia means building their power so that no state will oppose them. In order to increase its security against outside threats, Russia needs states that are reliant upon them and that are weak in comparison. Putin's Russia believes that it strengthens its own security by weakening that of other states (Wilson, 2014a:68). Putin also believes that states such as Ukraine that are small and

uncompetitive do not deserve foreign policy choice, which is masked by his emphasis on the connections between Russian and Ukrainian identity and history. There are suggestions that Russia's annexation of Crimea herald the beginning of a new world order; the post-Soviet era of pursuing democracy, the rule of law, and national independence are at risk from Russia's annexation of Crimea (Rosefielde, 2017). The 2014 Ukraine Crisis serves as the new geopolitical battleground between East and West, and, as in previous decades, has been decided by the West and the East, rather than by the country itself (Biersack, 2014). Mead (2014) suggests that the current status quo is no longer acceptable to Russia and that they believe US power to be the main obstacle to their regaining dominance of the former Soviet Union region. Rosefielde (2017) presents a different view: the strategy following the annexation of Crimea does not lead to a "clash of civilisations" or another struggle between irreconcilable ideological systems but is rather a stance designed to portray to the West Russia's refusal to kneel before Western hegemony. Instead it is a demand to the West to recognise co-existence: The West may be the West, but it must let Russia, and its sphere of influence, continue with their ways. The new assertiveness is seen as the result of Russia's perception that they do not have equal status with the West and that they have not been able or permitted to shape the international agenda in any meaningful way (Nitoiu, 2017).

"Legitimacy-building", if successful, makes change more permanent and less open to externally-imposed changes (Leichtova, 2016). Russia's legitimation techniques have varied from political metaphors, emotions, and geopolitical imagination (Suslov, 2014). A multitude of official statements about the geopolitical and legal issues surrounding Crimea have been used in conjunction with the Russian Orthodox Church's interpretation of the region's sacred importance to Russia, the belief that Crimeans are Russians who were abandoned but who have now returned home, and the illegitimacy of the ruling government in Kiev and their repression of the natural rights of Crimeans to promote Russia's legitimate national interest in, and responsibility for, the region. Russia firmly believes that it is a prominent member of the international community but needs the approval of other powers to confirm this (Leichtova, 2016). However, despite believing themselves to be an important international actor, most Russian elites view Russia as a "unique" Eurasian civilisation that differs from both Europe and Asia, and which gives them a right to present their alternative views and to be heard (Riabchuk, 2016). Russia's legitimacy comes not only from its nuclear arsenal and its European history as one of the former great powers, but also from its "otherness".

Traditionally, Russia has not accepted western excuses for humanitarian intervention and the need to protect civilian populations from harm. Since the Responsibility to Protect concept first developed, Russia maintained a scepticism of the motives for such interventions (Baranovsky, 2016). However, in Crimea, the need to protect ethnic Russians from Ukrainian persecution was given as a justification

for Russia's actions. Bartles (2014:47) draws a comparison between Crimea and Georgia arguing that the action was based on the need to protect ethnic Russian or Russian-speaking citizens from local persecution, which has led to the annexation of Crimea and the de facto annexation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia. This suggestion that the military action was predicated on the defence of the Russian population is supported by Biersack (2014), and the historical and cultural ties that Crimea shares with Russia. Persson (2014) suggests that Russia's new policy direction of intervening in other country's domestic issues is demonstrative of Putin's Doctrine, a Brezhnev-style Doctrine that views ethnic Russians as needing protection, rather than socialist states. The Russian narrative sets Putin and Russia as the sole guarantor for Russian-speakers' and ethnic Russians' rights, wherever they are in the world (Mulford, 2016).

Russia is a significant energy supplier for Ukraine and the rest of Europe. Gazprom, as of 2014, met over half of Ukraine's gas demand and close to a third of Europe's imported gas transited through Ukraine's pipelines (Koranyi, 2014). Umbach (2014) argues that the annexation was driven by Russia's desire to undermine Ukraine's developing energy diversification strategy. With the loss of Crimea, Ukraine has been deprived of significant offshore oil and gas resources, and the conflict in eastern Ukraine has led to the de facto loss of the coal industry and the shale gas reserves in the industrial heartlands of the east. Russia has a significant hold over the energy supplies for much of Europe, but it has been an especially useful political tool in their relations with Ukraine. As Wilson (2014a:68) points out, Russia has invariably used energy as a soft power tool in their relations with Ukraine: soft power is when the prices decrease, hard power is when they increase, or the supply is cut off. As well as using prices to punish Ukraine, they have also provided a useful bargaining chip for Russia: following the Kharkiv Accords in 2010, Russia had extended their lease on the Sevastopol naval base to 2042 in exchange for charging Ukraine less for Russian gas (Brusylovska, 2017).

From a historical, geographical, and ethnic point of view, Ukraine and Russia can be difficult to separate; added to this is the ethnic intermixing along the border and significant numbers of Russians in the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine which leads many Russians to conclude that Ukrainian nationality is a fiction and there is little justification for a sovereign, independent Ukraine (Melvin, 1995:78-9). Many Russian historians take Kieven Rus as the ancestor of modern Russia and so Kiev is central to much of Russian mythology and thinking about its identity (Melvin, 1995:82). It has also been argued that due to these ties, the "estrangement" of Ukraine is a "tragedy" for Russian identity (Tolstykh, 2014:886). This view is recognised, but disputed by Menon (2015), who suggests that key to the 2014 Ukraine Crisis are disputes over historical interpretations and identity. He further argues that Ukraine is important to Russia, as together with Belarus they constitute the "Slavic Trio" which evokes memories of the first state, Kieven Rus. The annexation of Crimea was presented to the Russian

population as the "return" of historical Russian lands (Wilson, 2014b). This resounded well within a population, many of whom share Putin's belief that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a tragedy (Levada, 2018) because it divided ethnic Russians and separated the state from much of their lands. With Crimea the only region in Ukraine to have a majority of Russian-speakers and ethnic-Russians, the annexation of Crimea was a significant coup for the regime to garner support.

Wilson (2014b:vii) argues that Russia's action in Crimea was really Putin's action, but it was also the product of Russia's addiction to dangerous myths – myths which, at some point in the 1990s, the world stopped correcting: that Russia had been humiliated; that the former USSR was the lost territory of historical Russia; that Russia's historic fear of encirclement was replaying itself because of NATO expansion. Confusing narratives around the Ukraine Crisis and the annexation of Crimea include Sergei Naryshkin's claim that Ukraine had annexed Crimea in 1991, which Biersack (2014) maintains was merely part of the effort to provide narratives that justified Russia's annexation. The metaphor of family has been used to frame the narrative as Crimea returning home to Russia, history has invoked the memory of the "(Russian) heroic defenders" of Crimea since the times of Peter the Great, and religion presents the region as sacred for Russia due to its location of the baptism of Grand Prince Vladimir (Leichtova, 2016).

Russian national identity is complex and controversial. The fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s necessitated the building of a new national identity which for the first time saw Russia as a nation-state rather than at the head of an empire. Piirainen (2000:181) describes the trauma experienced due to the disintegration of the Soviet Union as precipitating an identity crisis, and an injury to the Russian soul. Yeltsin paid little attention to nation-building as marketisation and privatisation took over and so Putin was able to fill the vacuum with his own brand of a Russian identity based on myths and historical memory (Kuzio, 2016:5). Wilson (2014b:24) suggests that the 2000s were a time of construction, not only of institutions, but also myths. The serious implications of these myths has become apparent with the rhetoric surrounding the Ukraine Crisis and the justifications that were presented by the regime and their supporters. But the new identity is still evolving; it is an error to assume that national identity is fixed (McCrone, 2015:23). Hellberg-Hirn (2000:7) points out that national identity changes as the nation "creates and re-creates itself through continuous symbolic discourse about its present and future, by referring to its past". The new Russian identity has had to reconcile ethnic Russians (russki) with Russified settlers (rossisski) (Melvin, 1995:5). This has not always been seamless, but perhaps more significantly for foreign policy, the new Russian identity has developed to include the Russian diaspora communities abroad, both in the former Soviet states who found themselves outside Russia when the Soviet Union fell, and those who had emigrated further abroad. The new Russian identity falls on a "fault-line" – it is between ideas of empire and nation-

state; its identity oscillates between ideas of ethnic Russianness and ideas of imperial greatness (Franklin, 2004:5).

Realist-Constructivist Theory

Theory is a very valued aspect of international relations study. Mearsheimer and Waltz (2013:435) describe theories as providing a mental map with which one can more easily navigate the complex and diverse realm of international relations. Theories help us make sense of the world and aim to draw out the important aspects in order to explain a certain phenomenon. Two of the common theories used in the analysis of Russian foreign policy in recent times have been realism and constructivism. There are merits to both, however, the realist-constructivist theory put forward by Barkin (2003; 2010) is intriguing because it combines two perspectives I have used myself in different contexts, and because, while I found a purely realist interpretation of the Russian actions in Ukraine to be largely convincing, it seemed to lack some important factors. A purely constructivist interpretation hardly seems plausible for explaining the severe Russian actions in Ukraine, considering their perceptions of the NATO threat; however, in tandem with a realist interpretation there are some interesting conclusions.

Many of Russia's arguments for its foreign policy position include its privileged position in its near abroad, the origins of the Russian state and Orthodoxy religion, and the emphasis placed on national identity. While to realists these may seem flimsy arguments of no great importance to state affairs, they have a much stronger emotive influence on people. Admittedly, propaganda exaggerates and plays on societal norms, beliefs, and myths, nevertheless, to be successful, propaganda has to play on ideas that will be recognised and will resonate; they exaggerate what already exists. Therefore, regardless of an outsider's view of the societal norms, beliefs, and myths, they are real for those within the society and thus are able to exert influence. That power exerts influence is a recognisable feature of a realist's politics; constructivists recognise national identity and social norms, as a feature of, and influence on, power.

Realism

Classical realism is one of the oldest, and still most important and prevalent, analytical paradigms in the study of international relations. The study of the effects of, and motivations due to, power on interstate relations is still one of the significant factors in the field and is very often applied to analyses focused on Russia's role in world affairs. It is often suggested that Russia itself views the world in terms of purely realist thought, especially due to its disinclination for norms-based politics, such as humanitarian interventions. Cold War studies still rely heavily on realism to analyse the relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States, despite realism's inability to predict the fall of the Soviet Union. This is often presented as proof of realism's limitations and weaknesses as a paradigm, although no other paradigm predicted the end of the Cold War either.

In post-Cold War studies, realism has remained popular in the study of Russia-Western relations, and in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine Crisis of 2014, has gained a new lease of life. In the context of a NATO-dominated western flank, western sanctions, and a growing western presence in the region through NGO activity and political assistance running contrary to Russia's belief in their privileged position in what they see as their sphere of influence due to a mix of historical, imperial, cultural, and linguistic factors, and the relative strength of their economic position in the region, power relations have gained a new relevance post-2014 and has given rise to a growth of questions about Russia's intentions in the region and beyond.

Idealism had reigned in the academic and political sphere during the interwar years, but with the advent of realism in the late 1930s/early 1940s, the role that international institutions and organisations could and should play became irrelevant in the study of international relations, especially when the Second World War brought about the end of the League of Nations. E.H. Carr (1939) called for the study of international politics to take reality into account to be considered a relevant scientific study. Classical realism allows for the inclusion of morals and normative values of states, however, the focus on power dominates. Power is at the centre of a state's motivations and intentions, as politics is essentially a struggle over power (Morgenthau, 1948), whether the state's aim is to protect its present power capabilities, or to increase its power through territorial or influential increases; regardless, they are in constant competition with other states.

While realists agree on several common assumptions about the international sphere and interstate relations, - each state is a unitary actor pursuing goals developed from fixed preferences, which it views as in its international interest, and is in constant conflict with other states, between which anarchy reigns as no jurisdiction exists to police the international, - they assume different end goals for states, ranging from simple survival of the current state to world domination (Legro, 1999:12-14). The problem is that the definition is simply too broad. There is a wide spectrum between survival and world domination, and the perception of survival may vary depending on the state. For example, survival for the Soviet Union meant domination over many other states in their sphere of influence. Survival for the states in the eastern bloc eventually meant, not domination over the Soviet Union, but independence and national sovereignty leading to the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Schweller (1997:927) identifies seven core features of the realist school of thought: 1) humans do not face one another primarily as individuals but as members of groups that command loyalty; 2) international affairs take place in a state of anarchy; 3) power is the fundamental feature of international politics and the currency of international politics required to secure any national goal; 4) the nature of international interaction is essentially conflictual; 5) humankind cannot transcend

conflict through the progressive power of reason to discover a science of peace; 6) politics are not a function of ethics but morality is the product of power; and 7) necessity and reason of state trump morality and ethics when these values conflict. It is a very pessimistic and negative line of thinking, not surprising considering many of the great realist thinkers such as E.H. Carr and H. Morgenthau were writing in the 1930s and 1940s, but it is also a very stark view of international relations. Cooperation between states is unlikely, unless it is in their interests, but will not be perpetual, and conflicts cannot be resolved in such a way that long-term hostility will be avoided. For realists, such as Carr and Waltz, such conflicts are inherent to the system because international anarchy will always make states insecure and international relations is a constant struggle for power (Vasquez, 1999:301).

There is not necessarily a morality in classical realism in the sense that we, in the western, democratic world would see morality, but there is a type of morality. The idea that necessity and reason should trump morality is precisely the morality of realism. There are many instances of states following a more rational than ethical foreign policy direction, although it must also be recognised, that, in the west in particular, when this happens, that state often faces criticism from both inside and outside the state. Realism demands that the study of international politics be empirical and theoretical, not normative and historical in order to develop a research paradigm that is systematic and allows for cumulative research (Vasquez, 1999:39). While this may appear to strip a case back to the essential factors for analysis, there is always the danger that half the picture is missing. Case complexity demands that we discover the fundamentals, but there is a possibility that the realist paradigm loses too much in focusing only on factors relating to power.

Realism, with its fundamentally pessimistic view of the human world does not envisage a world in which humans manage to create universal peace and harmony due to a prediliction for security, power, prestige, and influence and an egotism that inclines humanity towards immorality (Schweller, 1997:928). However, Mearsheimer had argued earlier (1994/5:48), that realism, and its balance-of-power theory was the best guide to maintaining peace. With states working to balance the others' power to prevent a hegemonic power, none would attack knowing the other could reciprocate, therefore ensuring peace.

Constructivism

The constructivist conviction that "the world is of our making" upends the traditional realist views that the fundamentals of the international system are pervasive and enduring (Flockhart, 2015:140). Instead of a set of unchanging rules and systems, constructivists view the international system as a

continuous construction, creating and re-creating itself as it interacts with actors and institutions. Barkin (2010:26) identifies two key components to constructivism: intersubjectivity and co-constitution. There is a collective knowledge and understanding embedded in social structures and social routines that are reproduced by society, and, as people and society interact, they constitute and change the other. Neither the way social norms are created, nor which norms they are are important; what is important is how they influence the population and how they make them behave. Of course, traditions and societal norms in one's culture are important, however, they are merely a "starting point" (Smith, 2017:489). While they may be incorporated into one's beliefs and behavioural norms, ultimately they do not determine behaviour; they merely provide inspiration and influence. Nevertheless that inspiration and influence differs among different social groups leading to different ideas influencing international politics as those societies interact.

Constructivism offers a similar argument to the chicken and the egg conundrum: which came first? Barkin (2010:28) argues that as international relations is intersubjectively constructed rather than objectively given, it does not exist outside of mutable norms and discourses which define the identities and interests of the actors. Political institutions were not created separately from social institutions. Political institutions developed within societies and the actors within those institutions first developed within societies. People do not become political actors at birth. They are first socialised into a culture and then develop political opinions. Some influences of society must remain; there cannot be an objective view of politics free from the influence of socialisation.

Constructivism focuses less on power and political structures, and more on the dominance of society and societal norms. Constructivism is not only considerate of state action, but also the structure that contributes to state action, therefore resulting in 'greater reflexivity in the conception of social phenomena and their continuous transformation' (Bobulescu, 2011:39). This would seem to argue for a greater understanding of the particular context in which one is studying and suggests more of a limitation of the generalisability of claims and predictions in separate studies. The understanding of the context requires a knowledge of the particular group's criteria for factors like power, meaning, thought, truth, etc (Miller, 2016:369). For some power may mean an economic power that ensures the country is able to support all its citizens, for others perhaps military strength is more important, and for some perhaps power comes from the normative idea of what is right and being the power that is respected. This is not to suggest that constructivism supports any kind of moral relativism, or that it should, where actions are excused because the indigenous people of the state accept particular norms, but rather that in understanding what those norms are, the analysis of the political culture is made clearer.

Teti (2010:188) says that "if constructivism is anything, it is not simply identity, but the fluidity of ontology deriving directly from identity's mutually constituted inter-subjectivity." While identity is an important aspect of constructivism, it is not simply the identity as is. Identity is not fixed; it is in constant flux, and is interdependent with societal structures. There is an awareness in constructivism that the society and identity of a state change over time and evolve through interaction with one another. While identity may not be the singular aspect of constructivism, it is central in that it is crucial for the formation of interests, and societal norms mean that the political elites are more likely to follow policies that chime with the beliefs of the population of the state (Dyson, 2013:422), or at least, they are less likely to follow policies that will be wholly unpopular. Thus, their power-political policies will be influenced to some degree by the normative standards of the state's society. While society and the society of the state are central to constructivism, there is a greater emphasis placed upon human agency in constructivism, and a recognition that while structure acts upon human agency, so human agency acts upon the structure; they are interdependent (Bobulescu, 2011:41). Therefore, although there are assumed actions taken in particular situations, ultimately human agency is unassumable.

Constructivism has been criticised as merely existing as a social version of realism because it has failed to overcome the centrality of the state and its self-defence against the international anarchy (Jaeger, 1996:317). While this may perhaps be true, in constructivism it is about the social norms that the state imposes upon the population and conversely, how social norms among the population inform decision-making. Much of the study of international relations focuses on interstate relations, it is true; but there is no truly effective international organisation for maintaining peace – the UN has a statute book but has no military strength of its own or police to enforce its rules and regulations. Therefore, study tends to focus on the centrality of the state which reflects the international situation as it stands today.

A Realist-Constructivist Theory

Jacobsen (2003:40) refers to constructivism as "seizing the middle ground" as it borrows from other paradigms. No social science theory explains every relevant case (Mearsheimer, 2013) and if a significant factor is ignored due to its incompatibility with the particular theory, then this hinders analyses' validity of conclusions. This is where a combination of realism and constructivism can complement one another to show how the international arena is filled with competing motivations, societal and power-political, that both contradict and cooperate with one another to exert influence upon the state. As Glaser (2010:27) points out, theories that appear to compete, can explain independent variables, thus offering a more complete theory in combination.

Morgenthau is often critiqued for moving social issues to the periphery of realist thought, however, he was concerned with a realism that could make "critical political and normative judgements", especially one which refused the the conclusion that politics was "nothing but violence" (Williams, 2004:634-5). Today's realists are becoming more aware of the importance of social constructs in national and international study, and so when constructivism is used in conjunction with realism, it could provide greater insight into the national interest of one state in particular and why something is considered in the national interest, which in turn could help to better explain what motivates their foreign policy. It can sometime seem as if realism focuses too much on the practical and the rational factors involved in foreign policy decision-making, whereas constructivism gives it a little more of a human flavour. There may be more factors than simple power-politics, and, especially when other factors have a more normative interpretation, these additional factors may influence the decision and alter how their power-political factors are perceived and how policy is developed with regard to these different motivations. After all, according to the logic of the social, people cannot be understood separately from their social context, which, made up of intersubjectively held norms, rules, and discourses, defines the rules of interaction between people as well as how they view themselves (Barkin, 2010:58). In investigating the Indo-Pakistani conflict, Arndt (2018:111-2) argues that neither realism nor constructivism offer a convincing explanation alone: realism cannot offer a satisfactory explanation of the conflcit without recourse to identity formation and constructivism fails without an answer to the dominance of the conflict in India's foreign and security policies, despite an inbalance of power in India's favour. However, he uses a realist-constructivist perspective which serves to include both the power dynamic and identity formation to create, what he argues is, a more complete analysis.

A realist-constructivist approach would take power as something productive rather than as discrete. Taking into account the logic of the social, power would be treated as a process, as something fluid like other social norms, such as identity, which are also in flux (Mattern, 2004:345). If power is more fluid, like other social constructions, rather than a fixed transhistorical concept, it becomes much more relevant to international politics in the present. Power, as a concept that interacts with actors and other norms and ideas as they develop, becomes much more linked to the system and within, and also much more to each individual system, accounting for different types of power to be valued by different states, e.g. Germany and economic power, America and Russia and military power.

There are many elements to realism that, while at first may appear contradictory to a constructivist or realist view, are compatible. The idea that states crave prestige as well as power and security, suggests that there must be a powerful, distinctive identity with which one is affiliated in order to share in that prestige. It is only a short step away from having pride in the nation, a clear constructivist

idea. Prestige, when it generates pride as well as security, is not a purely rational motivation, but rather comes from the human element of politics that includes emotion. Identity is also generally not considered within realism, yet one could argue that identity is at the heart of both constructivism and realism. The state is central to realism for its role in international power politics but requires the loyalty of those people who identify as belonging to that state, primarily through their nationality. But all of those operating within that system, working collectively to maximise the interests of that state were brought up and developed within that state's social structures and norms. It is generally accepted by realists that the state works to consolidate its power by following policies that are in the national interest. However, the national interest is also the public interest, or at least that is what governments profess to strive for. Constructivists argue that public interest is a set of goals held for the group rather than just individuals (Barkin, 2010:66). Therefore, what is in the national interest may develop from social norms within the country. The common security considerations of enmity, decision, threat, and emergency imply a realist understanding of security, but threat perception depends on the threats that have been constructed (Gallarotti, 2010:48). Threats may develop from differing levels of power, be that power economic, military, or political, or they may have developed from historical alliances or grievances whose historical memory is shared by a society. It has been argued that constructivism could benefit from realist influences, dominated as it has been by liberalism and idealism (Jackson, 2004:338) and so the use of realist conceptions of threats would ground constructivism in the reality of the international system.

Constructivism can allow for the identification of the contradictions that lie in the structures, political and social, that exist within a state (Jaeger, 1996:331), which can then be examined at the international level in an analysis of foreign policy. A state can intentionally act with the objective of doing what is best, rationally, for the national interest, but there will always be a social element that is particular to that state, that is perhaps hidden to even the actor themselves, which nevertheless exerts an influence over them and their actions. Even where contradictions in the theories remain and cannot resolve themselves through compromise, this is indicative of the reality of the world and the constraints and influences acting upon actors. In any given situation, there may be opposing and contradicting forces, but Mouritzen (2017:633) argues that apparently opposing theories [such as constructivism and realism] should be allowed to supplement one another for explanatory purposes. After all, it is generally accepted that the human world is a tangle of different and opposing forces and that our world is messy. Humans try to impose order on the world around them, but rarely achieve a 'clean' solution. They usually have to find a compromise of the 'best fit'. Why should theory be any different? Examples rarely fit into one category alone, and so an amalgamation of theory can allow for greater explanation. Of course, the idea of theory is to condense a complex world into a

manageable analytical unit, however, there is the danger that it can be condensed and simplified too far.

Human agency is not to be forgotten in theories that study international relations. Ultimately, human agency is the last, crucial element in foreign policy, and can be influenced by any number of factors, including, but not limited to, national interest, personal beliefs, religion, and power. But while power is an important factor in the analysis of international relations, "an exclusive focus on power can tell us nothing about the ends to which power is used" (Barkin, 2004:350). The human element is so important to the question of power: why it is needed or desired and what is considered demonstrative of power. The Greeks recognised the importance of motivation, and the questions of identity that drive who we are and what that identity means to us and others, have been considered of vital importance throughout the centuries, whether that is who we are as individuals, as a gender, a generation, or who we are as a people, as a nation. People everywhere are motivated in some way, and to a different degree, by a combination of interest, honour, and fear (Lebow, 2004:348). If the different motivations and the degree of motivation for each can be understood, then the way power is wielded makes much more sense and can thus be understood by foreign powers and inform their policy in relation to the state in question. There is already conflict between states in their perpetual struggle to attain their national interests in the international arena, but if so much conflict may come from a lack of understanding of another's actions, outside of 'they want more power', then how much conflict could be eliminated if there is more understanding? Power has more meaning when it is contextualised, both at the domestic and international levels.

Realism was heavily criticised following the collapse of the Soviet Union for having failed to have predicted such a calamitous event. However, realism's focus on power politics and its neglect of human agency would seem to suggest a reason for this. Human agency is, ultimately, as the adjective human would imply, unpredictable. Constructivism also faces the possibility of criticism for its lack of predictability power, however, human agency is a prominent factor in this paradigm as well. That being said, a greater understanding of context and the social factors that are at work behind the power politics of the state, can only provide more, and more relevant, information that would be useful for the predictive power of a theory. Where the Russian almost 'tradition' of suffering and collective suffering is ignored, sanctions seem like an effective tool to make the Russian state back down from its actions in Ukraine. But the lack of results from sanctions can be explained, not just by the Russian state's unwillingness to back down in the face of western pressure, but also the hold of the state over the people, and their endurance in the face of adversity, their loyalty and dignity, (Levada, 2014) which is almost viewed as a source of pride in the Russian identity among the population. This, combined with anti-western propaganda in the state media, helps explain the Russian state's support among the

population at large and the lack of domestic pressure that sanctions would be expected to exert on the state from a disgruntled people.

Critiques of Barkin's realist-constructivist theory have criticised Barkin's preoccupation with power and morality which Sterling-Folker (2004:341) believes leads to a classical realist theory with little contribution from the constructivist paradigm. However, constructivism can contribute to the understanding of the terms of power, national interest, and security with a more social definition than realism has previously applied. Mattern (2004:345) also criticises Barkin on the basis that it appears to intend only to study norms and rules as social constructs, instead of studying everything in international relations as social constructs and suggests that a realist-constructivist approach would be more useful as it takes international politics as a whole to be socially constructed. An important criticism of both paradigms is compounded with the combination of theories where the criticism concerns the definition and boundaries of concepts, for example, how does one define either power or identity (Flockhart, 2015:142), which despite the vast debate among the literature of both paradigms has failed to reach a consensus. Theoretical debate on the merits or faults of a combined realist-constructivist approach has mostly focused on the compatibility of the paradigms and how, or if, they could work in combination. MacKay (2018:75,77) criticises the lack of empirical work using the realist-constructivist framework to make substantive claims, with much of the academic work focusing on the affinities between realism and constructivism and being primarily theoretical. So far, little debate has centred upon the difficulties of agreeing on definitions for important key concepts, which would appear even more important when these theories are used in tandem. For instance, realism and threat-based approaches posit that states who are perceived as having "aggressive intentions" will be seen as a threat and other states will respond accordingly (McCalla, 1996:456). However, there is little in realism to define exactly what will be viewed as "aggressive intentions" by different states. Here, a contribution from constructivism, from the states' historical and social memory and norms, could offer insight into what will be viewed as threatening by other states and by which states.

Realism is more associated with expressions of hard power, while soft power demonstrates ideas more consistent with constructivist thinking (Gallarotti, 2010:16). Nations already combine hard and soft power strategies at the level of implementation, so perhaps there is legitimacy in considering realism and constructivism in tandem at the theoretical level. As Donnelly (2000:196) points out, the issue in the study of international relations shouldn't be which paradigm is right, but rather when and where realist and constructivist theories, for example, can offer insight and offer plausible explanations. He also agrees that paradigms that usually operate independently can offer greater understanding working in unison than alone. In Snyder's opinion (2005:56), both realism and constructivism offer strong arguments about the importance of material or structural factors and

agency or ideas but suggests that a strategy that integrates both these approaches is needed. Powerful theories can revolutionise thinking; they can transform understanding and explain puzzles that previously made little sense (Mearsheimer, 2013:435). It is therefore my intention, to adopt a realist-constructivist theory in the analysis of the main arguments explaining the Russian intervention in Ukraine and Crimea to assess how and if a realist-constructivist theory could contribute significantly to our understanding of Russian foreign policy and their intentions and motivations.

Realist-Constructivist Analysis

The literature around the Russian invasion and annexation of Crimea appears to fall broadly into ten categories: (1) it was to prevent NATO expansion into Ukraine; (2) it was because of Crimea's importance to Russia; (3) it was to deter EU and US involvement in Ukraine; (4) it was a reaction to the threat the Colour Revolutions and the Euromaidan posed to the Russian regime; (5) it was to remind Ukraine to whom they owed their loyalty; (6) it was to reassert their Great Power on the international stage; (7) it was to gain legitimacy on the international stage; (8) it was a humanitarian intervention to assist the ethnic-Russian and Russian-speaking population at risk from Ukrainian anti-Russian policies; (9) it was to secure energy resources and dominance; and (10) it was due to an addiction to dangerous myths entrenched in both the Russian elite and the population. This analysis section will look at each of these arguments to see if and where a realist-constructivist interpretation could be useful to understanding why Russia took such a foreign policy direction in 2014.

Many of the interpretations of the Ukraine Crisis have developed from a largely realist theoretical standpoint. This analysis does not seek to negate the realist interpretation, indeed in many cases it upholds a largely realist view; however, it would sometimes appear incomplete, which is why this analysis intends to use both a realist and a constructivist perspective in combination to provide a more holistic interpretation that includes certain cultural aspects often overlooked by a realist reading. That is not to say that culture directly produces policy, but rather that an understanding of cultural values can provide an insight into why certain policies were considered acceptable by and in Russia and were considered worth the risk of considerable international condemnation, particularly from the West.

The Russian covert invasion and subsequent occupation of Crimea happened stealthily yet decisively. What began with the deployment of Special Forces and ended with the annexation, ostensibly justified by the Russian government as the result of the declared "will of the people" displayed in the results of the (independently unverified) "referendum" has been interpreted variously as a resurgent Russia reminding the world of its importance to world events, a reaction to NATO expansion, a counter-move against the soft power of the EU, and the result of traditional Russian values fighting back against Western values in what it sees as its privileged zone of interest.

This analysis doesn't aim to define the most convincing argument for the Crimean annexation for the author. Instead, it looks at some of the common arguments that have been put forward explaining Putin's annexation of Crimea from both the realist and the constructivist camps and attempts to show how both views could be complemented by considering where the corresponding paradigm could develop the argument to provide greater insight. From the realist perspective, this analysis looks at the role of NATO and the EU, the importance of the Black Sea region and Fleet, the colour revolutions,

and international status as a legitimate and Great power. The constructivist element brings in the issue of national identity, the regime's status and the constructivist elements of pride, and the cultural and historical bonds that tie Russia with Ukraine.

It was to prevent NATO's further expansion

One realist interpretation of the events in Crimea posits that Russia invaded and annexed the territory in order to prevent Ukraine joining the EU and NATO and withdrawing from Russian influence and preventing the geopolitically strategic naval base at Sevastopol falling into NATO hands. From a realist or geopolitical perspective, NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe weakens Russia's position, whether NATO offers full membership, cooperation under the partnership scheme, or promotes other democracy promotion efforts (MacFarlane, 2008:39). Mearsheimer (2014:77) refers to NATO enlargement as the key issue in the Ukraine Crisis, viewed in Russia as a means of moving Ukraine out of Russia's orbit and integrating it into the West. This reading places NATO at the centre of the crisis, and as its impetus, arguing that power was its cornerstone and what was at stake for Russia. However, this also implies that Ukraine was not an autonomous actor in the crisis and was merely a pawn in a long-standing power rivalry between NATO and Russia. It places the conflict in very simplistic terms: Russia was setting a boundary over which NATO could not step. This boundary originally was, according to the Russians, supposed to be East Germany, when it was promised to Gorbachev that NATO would not expand eastwards were Germany to reunify. However, this "original sin" of a broken non-enlargement pledge was not formally agreed in written form, and according to those present it was only agreed would not happen overnight (Gragl, 2018:246). However, this alleged broken promise has been a thorn in NATO-Russia relations during every expansion and proposed expansion over the decades since the early 1990s; Ukraine and Georgia being the most recently discussed countries for MEPs. Viewing Ukraine as merely a pawn in an East-West conflict refuses to accept the role of the EU and the way Europe has changed since 1945. Security remains a major element of the European Union, however the efforts that would have to be made to guide Ukraine towards membership would require considerable time and resources from EU members states. Anti-corruption measures, the strengthening of the rule of law from the police to the highest judges, the efficiency and competitiveness of the economy do promote security on Europe's border but at a huge financial cost. The EU would have to support another state that could pose a financial risk to the eurozone. Russia has no more interest in seeing Ukraine a haven for criminals that threaten international security or terrorist organisations than the EU. Therefore, it suggests that the EU and the West in general have more value-based incentives for their NGO and democracy promotion efforts in Ukraine.

NATO has been viewed as a threat largely owing to its waves of expansion and out-of-area operations, which have served to increase NATO's power and conviction of its role to offer protection to its members and deliver humanitarian aid to those in need. Its first foray outside of its borders in 1999 during the Yugoslav wars was declared a humanitarian intervention to prevent the genocide of Kosovar Albanians by the Serbian forces but was seen in Russia as illegal and excessive punishment of the Serbs engagement in "counterterrorism activities" (Bartles, 2003). This perception of the KLA as terrorists by Russia may explain some of the wariness around NATO's involvement. Russia's two campaigns in Chechnya, often described as counterterror operations, were criticised by the West for their heavy-handedness and reports of human rights abuses (Politkovskaya, 2002). Perhaps there was fear that NATO would feel they could intervene in Chechnya to prevent further human rights abuses. The fact that NATO managed to achieve strong support for its Kosovo campaign testifies to the normative power of NATO. Even Germany, who could not participate in the air strikes due to the UN veto, but whose politicians spoke of the duty to prevent a repeat of human rights atrocities on the continent, supported NATO through the UN's peacekeeping forces.

While Ukraine contests the legitimacy of Russia's actions in Ukraine and demands that the peninsula be returned to Ukrainian ownership, there is little hope now of them joining either the EU or NATO. Even if they were to overcome the other obstacles standing in their way of membership, such as the level of corruption, the poor state of the economy, and their dependence on Russia, the fact that they are now in a territorial dispute with Russia all but destroys their membership potential. While there are NATO members currently involved in territorial disputes in violation of NATO membership rules, such as Cyprus and Turkey, the UK and Argentina, and the UK and Spain, none are involved with a country with whom overall NATO relations are as strained as they are with Russia. Russia must be aware that many NATO members will not entertain the idea of Ukrainian membership while the dispute with Russia is ongoing for fear of open conflict. Despite Article 5 of the Washington Treaty offering some protection against Russian adventurism, Central and Eastern Europeans would likely still be critical battlegrounds if there were a hot military conflict.

Constructivists view identity as an important aspect in the analysis of relations between states. Identities and interests can evolve into rivalry and war-making, and these identities are further developed through socialisation and institutionalisation (Flockhart, 2015:142). NATO and Russia have been rivals for the better part of seven decades, and although the 1980s and 1990s saw an alleviation of the tensions of previous decades, their identities have for a long time been that of enemies. From the constructivist perspective, NATO can be viewed as a 'social group', where, borrowing from social psychology, shared norms and values provide the group with a sense of belonging, a 'we-feeling' (Flockhart, 2015:149). With NATO expansion and the desire for membership by Georgia and Ukraine,

this leaves Russia as a conspicuous 'Other', not only because of the antagonistic relationship with NATO, but because it cannot share in this social grouping. Realists divide the world into groups who compete for power, but it is constructivism and social psychology that appear to better explore the why and wherefores of these divisions. Considering Russia's privileged position as the only nation outside of the alliance to be offered a working cooperation through the NATO-Russia Council (even if it serves as merely a channel of communication), Russia's strong dislike of NATO seems to be lacking explanatory power without the constructivist element of and 'us'-and-'them' identity mentality applied in conjunction with the realist power competition.

Sevastopol on the Crimean Peninsula is home to Russia's Black Sea Fleet. As the only part of the Northern shore where geography allowed for the placement of a Russian naval base, the security of Russia's position and dominance in the region depends upon the securing of the base. Were relations with NATO and the US to worsen further, the Black Sea Fleet could serve as an important counter force in the region, considering the presence of NATO members on its shores. Moreover, the Black Sea region has acquired greater strategic importance since NATO and Russian involvement in the Middle East has developed (Jeffrey, 2008:100). While NATO and Russia share some concerns over terrorism emanating from the Middle East, they often find themselves supporting conflicting interests in the region, as shown by recent events in Syria. Russia's interests are not compatible with a strong NATO presence in the Black Sea; a strong NATO presence in the region would put more pressure on Russia to bolster their forces further and would see their pre-eminence threatened. Sevastopol has significant geopolitical importance, however the influence of context and history upon the interpretation of interests and thus the impact upon choices made is underplayed in a purely realist interpretation (Jacobsen, 2003:41). Crimea's historical background and connections to Russia, dating back to the tsarist empire, make the possibility of a NATO presence on the peninsula an anathema to Russia. Crimea has been the site of several significant military clashes over the centuries, from the Crimean War with the British, French, and Turkish to the Second World War battles against Axis powers. Furthermore, the Second World War had a strong impact on Russian self-perception. The glory and the sacrifices made are never far from images of Russia, and in a place as revered as Sevastopol, are significant factors in the importance of the region for Russian interests.

The historical symbolic and cultural presence of the Black Sea Fleet in Crimea cannot be overstated (Biersack, 2014:256). The naval base at Sevastopol was an important strategic position kept by the Soviets during the Second World War, and many Russian and Soviet lives were given in defence of the naval base. The Soviets' and Soviet Russians' heavy losses on the Eastern Front during the War, in comparison with other Allied powers are often noted, displaying their immense sacrifice. Putin refers almost immediately in his Crimean speech on 18th March to the graves of the Russian soldiers who

fought and the "legendary cities" that symbolise this "military glory and outstanding valour" (Putin, 2014). The Russian military victory during The Great Patriotic War holds symbolic power over present-day politics in a way that perhaps can only be compared to Germany's strong emphasis on diplomacy and economic power over military strength since the end of the Second World War. Sevastopol is one of those names that evokes the glory of the Russians because of their sacrifice and hard-earned victory of 1945. Further compounding the mythical importance of Sevastopol are the stories of the "glory of the Russian soul" built upon the myths of the Crimean War heroes, who gave their lives defending Sevastopol from the British and French forces in the nineteenth century (Qualls, 2014:216). Hegel's view is that national identity develops particularly from the "solidarity-building" of past and future wars, at both the elite and public levels (MacKay, 2018:88). Shared historical memory and the stories passed down through generations contribute to this solidarity and evolution of national identity. Therefore, the thought that this base could one day play host to a NATO fleet is intolerable, especially considering NATO has been deemed Russia's enemy and existential threat for the last fifty years.

From NATO identity and the direction and motivations for new out-of-area operations, to the significance of Sevastopol, the realist and the constructivist merge to compound the meaning of the Crimean Peninsula for Russia. NATO is viewed as a threat both to Russia's territory and power extension and the strategic importance of Sevastopol in realist terms is imbued with a constructivist, symbolic narrative of the military glory of the fallen heroes who gave their lives for Russia. Once again, this is not to excuse Russia's actions, but to explain them more fully to allow for a nuanced understanding that refrains from the over-simplified explanation of Russia hates NATO.

It was because of the importance of Crimea

In analyses of the annexation and the motives, a large amount of literature has focused on the role of NATO and the possibility of Ukraine being accepted for membership, and the subsequent threats that Russia would face. However, little has been put forward about the significance of the Black Sea region and the now dominant role that Russia plays there and its place in Russia's near abroad. Triantaphyllou (2009:226) refers to the region as "high-priority", not just because of Russia's now significant presence, but also due to the region including EU member states (and therefore the Union), the South Caucasus, Ukraine, Russia, and Turkey. Cross (2015:164) emphasises the importance of the region for Euro-Atlantic politics because the mix of NATO members, Russia, and conflict-ridden states creates an environment ripe for a serious flashpoint. A flashpoint so close to NATO member states and Russia's provocations in the region with the deployment of anti-ship and anti-aircraft systems, in response to increased NATO presence (Cross, 2015:165), could have serious implications for future security within

the region. Romania, in particular, has called for greater US involvement in the region to offset Russian dominance (Delanoe, 2014:377), however NATO must tread lightly in order not to contravene the Montreux Convention of 1936 which regulates access for foreign countries. The region is also significant for its implications for energy security, the presence of frozen and unresolved conflicts, trade, and migration (Triantaphyllou, 2009:231).

Apart from the issues that greater Russian dominance in the Black Sea has for its relations with NATO, Russia has gained significantly from the annexation in other ways (Cross, 2015:375). Russia has a longer coastline and is no longer obliged to locate its ports on the more dangerous Caucasian shore, but instead has access not only to Sevastopol, but also Yevpatoria, Feodossia, and Kerch. Its continental shelf has been extended, which not only provides Russian sovereignty over the not insignificant Pallas gas and oil field but has also given Russia greater control over both the Azov and Black seas. Significantly for its relations with the West, the possibilities for Russia to increase its presence in the Black Sea means a greater presence in the Mediterranean to assist its activities in the Middle East and beyond (Cross, 2015:370). Combined with greater vocalisation to its aspirations of Great Power status, there has been a greater involvement further abroad, as seen recently with the conflict in Syria and Russia's involvement.

The human mind lives on images, absorbing and re-creating them as a means of understanding and, when shared, are a way to understand shared experiences and the current world inhabited (Jacobsen, 2003:45). Shared images and understanding are used to represent people as a community and therefore must hold shared truths and histories. The annexation of Crimea has largely been put forward in official statements as the return of a historically and militarily significant territory (Suslov, 2014:588). However, while Kiev is considered important to Russia, which traces its ancestry back to Kieven Rus, Crimea is important for being the birthplace and place of baptism of Prince Vladimir, who brought Orthodoxy to Russia. The baptism of Prince Vladimir connects the historical with identity, and the region's history is presented as sacred, holy, and spiritual for Russians, strongly binding the region with the very core of what it means to be Russian (Leichtova, 2016:300). The location of Crimea as the place of Prince Vladimir's baptism and the Orthodox values that unite the Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian peoples is foremost in Putin's Address to the State Duma (Putin, 2014). This further emphasises the incompatibility in Russian minds of Crimea and NATO, with such strongly contrasting worldviews: Russia as the spiritual civilisation and NATO representing the corrupt West.

The role of religion in Russia is complex. Although only 34% see religion as either quite important or very important in their lives, there is greater demand for the Church to play a role in public life. Only 15% believe the Church should not interfere at all, 20% believe the Church should encourage social,

national, and political harmony, 47% believe the Church should support public morals and ethics, and a 71% majority approve of Patriarch Kirill's actions (Levada-Centre, 2016). Even though Russia today is capitalist, in contrast to many Western capitalist countries, there has been a revival and increasing popularity of the Russian Orthodox Church, possibly as a reaction to the loss of Soviet atheism (Just, 2016:89), which contributes to a specifically Russian religious identity (Jahn, 2004:64). Russian Orthodoxy provides an element of uniqueness and, with the decline of religion generally across the West, also provides a sense of moral and spiritual superiority. Russian spirituality and a sense of the mystical combine within Orthodoxy, signalling a higher power and an individuality of the Russian people. 'Russian spirituality' has become politicised, with references to the need to protect the spiritual growth and ties of the Russian people at the official level (Foreign Policy Concept, 2016), which, in realist terms in particular, are neither defined nor easy to interpret with reference to the international sphere.

The idea of Crimea as the "cradle of the Russian civilisation" and as being a place of rebirth and renaissance dates back to the time of Catherine the Great who wanted a regeneration of the Ancient Greek civilisation, and today this "reunification" of Crimea with Russia appears to many as the beginning of the restoration of "historical Russia" (Suslov, 2014:593). Crimea has appeared to have awakened a sense of what it means to be Russian in the public consciousness. According to Byzkov (2016:67), this consciousness is based around four archetypes: Russia should be an empire, the unifier of the Russian world, a Great Power opposing the West, and supported by its population who identify the traitors within. There was no gradual relinquishing of the empire through negotiations, fights for independence, and a growing understanding of the wrongs of colonialism and imperial thought for Russia as there was for other imperial powers. There is no recognition that there is huge diversity within the Russian world, as there is within a comparative Anglophone or Francophone world. The return of Crimea to Russia is seen as righting a wrong rather than a move reminiscent of an outdated mode of thinking. For many, the "return" of Crimea to Russia has signalled a national rebirth, from which Russia has emerged as a morally and spiritually strong and self-conscious nation, standing up to the powerful and bullying West (Teper, 2016:387). This concept of empire, or at least a strengthened historical Russia concept, in realist terms should be strong and powerful and able to extend its influence over the international community, is nonetheless bolstered by constructivist, religious imagery.

Crimea has both foreign and domestic importance. For foreign policy, it has largely realist implications through its geopolitical position in the Black Sea. However, in domestic politics it was presented in constructivist terms of history, religion, and identity, because these concepts resonate within the public mind. Again, the context of the annexation and what Crimea means to Russia outside of the

national interest today provides greater insight into why Russia accepted the risk annexation posed to its economy, its international standing, and its relations with the West.

It was to prevent EU and US involvement in Ukraine

EU membership, rather than NATO membership, for Ukraine presents fewer risks for other members and could bring another member of the post-Soviet region into a prosperous union, however, EU member states must have stable institutions that are able to guarantee democratic practices and the rule of law, and a functioning market economy that is able to compete within the EU market (EU, 2016). Ukraine, while implementing reforms, particularly in the energy sector, still faces widespread and institutionalised corruption that subverts democratic practices and the market economy.

There is a clear rivalry between the Kremlin and the EU over values and whose will gain supremacy in the region. In the post-Colour Revolution period, the role of the EU has changed in Russia from a partner in modernisation to an existential threat to Russia's interests in its sphere of influence (Bechev, 2015:340). Tsygankov (2015:280) views Putin's more assertive foreign policy in Ukraine, and the former Soviet region in general, as signalling his refusal to be treated as a junior partner by the EU and the US, and as indicative of his view that the Colour Revolutions undermine Russia's role in the region. Neither Russia nor the EU can compete on equal terms – the EU cannot match Russia's military capabilities and Russia is in no position to challenge the economic and integrational capabilities of the EU – however, the EU's economic capabilities are framed within the EU's standard narrative of functionality, modernisation, and economic efficiency, whereas Russia frames its actions in more emotive terms, emphasising the shared historical memory, culture, and national destiny (Bechev, 2015:342). In realist terms where power is the ultimate goal, the EU should be more successful: power requires economic strength and efficiency above all in order to prevent dependence on influential states. However, the constructed identities built upon historical memory and shared culture are often powerful tools that the Kremlin can employ in its near abroad region. Russia's civilizational narrative is also important here; the Kremlin is able to tap into historical, collective traumas and grievances (Bechev, 2015:346), as well as cultural differences that manifest themselves in values-based arguments, the trope of "Gayropa" is successful in more traditional, Orthodox countries which see themselves as closer to the Russian cultural values system. Russia fears the EU both for its economic power and its attractiveness for the emerging post-Soviet economies as well as its normative and social values which run counter to so many of Russia's. In combination, they make the EU a formidable enemy for Russia that needs to be combatted.

Putin's Russia operates on the principle that weak neighbours contribute to Russia's strength (Wilson, 2014a). A strong Ukraine (and Georgia) can choose with whom they ally themselves, Russia or the EU. The weaker they are and the more dependent they are on Russia, the more easily they are held under Russia's political influence and away from western institutions. In contrast, stability in Europe's neighbourhood is considered to strengthen Europe as instability is pushed further away (Teutmeyer, 2014:435). However, this stability is usually supported by EU soft power and the threat or promise of NATO hard power, both of which threaten Russia's position. A pro-Western Ukraine would lead to the complete collapse of Russia's claim to the status of moderator within the post-Soviet region (Teper, 2016:379). Russia is able to claim the status of moderator while Ukraine remains a weak state on their border. Lebow (1994:258) defines power as a function of the size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, and political stability and competence. Ukraine's population size and territory are nothing compared to Russia's, but consequential in comparison to other European countries. They do have large natural resource deposits and have recently begun diversifying their energy production to increase their resource pool. Their military strength is negligible, however cooperation with NATO would (have) developed their capabilities, and although their political stability and competence is poor, cooperation with the EU could improve their political institutions. Russia could have feared that with western support and intervention, Ukraine could have become a strong and powerful state, sharing a large border with Russia but with close western ties and supporting western values. In a country with a significant Russian diaspora, this could bolster the opposition in Russia and prove troublesome for the regime.

The tug-of-war between the EU and Russia could be viewed as an interesting perspective of a realist-constructivist theory in that the EU presents both realist and constructivist arguments for engagement with them: economic support and building first and foremost that is combined with the EU normative values of democracy and rule of law and equality for all citizens; and Russia also uses both realist and constructivist elements to garner support: as with the pressure on Ukraine to drop the EU Association Agreement in 2013 with the narrative of shared histories and memories while offering a cut in gas prices and a hefty financial loan (Bond, 2014). However, ultimately in this case, it would appear that the financial incentive was perhaps more influential than the constructed identities that connected them.

It was a reaction to the threat of the Colour Revolutions

The EU is now considered a threat to Russia's domestic interests. The abandoned agreement with the EU was perhaps the largest factor prompting the so-called Euromaidan, the second revolution to shake

Ukraine's political elite in a decade. The Russian-friendly Yanukovych government abandoned an EU trade agreement which would have developed ties between Ukraine and the EU, seen by many as the first step towards eventual membership, but instead the government chose to develop ties with Russia. The resulting Euromaidan protests and subsequent overthrow of the Yanukovych government were presented as a fascist coup by the Russians who vehemently denied the new government's legitimacy. The Colour Revolutions in former Soviet states have shaken Russia and are considered a significant threat to national security. The Russian public could not witness the successful overthrow of a pro-Russian government in favour of a pro-EU government in a neighbouring state, especially one seen to be a close relative of Russia.

The 2011-12 protests in Russia, combining an anti-corruption and anti-regime message demonstrated clearly to the Kremlin the threat that such ideas could be in Russia. The driving force behind the protests was unusual: relatively well-off urbanites who had become accustomed to the standard of living that the Putin era had secured, who had therefore developed values of self-expression instead of basic survival (Ostbo, 2017:202). The values of the Colour Revolutions were broadly similar; rejection of the status quo and desire for a functioning, efficient economy and political system that worked for the people rather than just the elites. In the Kremlin's view: Western values. The rhetoric that surrounded the Crimean annexation and the use of spiritual language that connected the sanctity of Crimea with Russia today not only prompted widespread support for the Kremlin, but also set Russian spiritual and moral values apart from the "values" that govern the West. The concept of "spiritual and moral values" has emotional connotations with Russian history and culture, but also anti-Western connotations, which is instead not only liberal and secular, but godless, decadent, and immoral (Ostbo, 2017:201).

The Colour Revolutions have always been viewed as a threat to the Russian regime. Zarudnitsky (2014) described them as masked aggression by external states, which are funded and used to overthrow a hostile regime and to replace them with a regime friendly to the West, in particular, the US. The recent Colour Revolutions have seen demands for democratic practices and greater civil freedoms in countries from Libya and Syria, to Georgia and Ukraine. Wilson (2014b) argues that a primary motive for Russia's intervention came from a desire to see the Uprising fail. Ukraine, with its similarities and proximity to Russia, posed a significant threat; if democracy could find root in Ukraine, why not in Russia? In order to safeguard the regime in Russia, the Ukrainian Euromaidan could not be a success. In light of Russia's still recent demonstrations against Putin and corruption, war would also be an effective means of uniting and galvanising the population in defence of Russia, or at least could portray the West as the root of the ills caused in the region in recent years. Russia ultimately seeks security, but above all it needs security for Sistema (Wilson, 2014a), without which the entire political system

could be overturned. National security in Russia also means protecting the political system from revolution. A Colour Revolution in Russia would bring the entire political system crashing down. Every political system tries to protect itself from radicals, whether that is left-wing radicals in the UK and the US, or right-wing radicals in France and Germany: in Russia, it is pro-democracy and pro-Western radicals.

The realist-constructivist theory suggested by Mattern (2004:345) combines the social constructs such as ideals and values with the realist topics of power and national interest to further the understanding of the fear of a Colour Revolution in Russia as motivation for the Crimean annexation as normative values and national interest overlapped and are difficult to separate.

It was to remind Ukraine to whom they owed their loyalty

Ukraine's geopolitical position has always been vitally important to Russia's survival. As Wilson (2014b:88) rather poetically points out, "Ukraine is a huge expanse of land that Napoleonic France, imperial Germany, and Nazi Germany all crossed to strike at Russia itself"; as a buffer state Ukraine is hugely important. In recent years, the borders of NATO power have pushed forward, closer to Russia's own. No Russian leader could tolerate an alliance that for more than half its existence has been Russia's enemy. Ukraine not only shares a long geographic border and Slavic culture, but their economies are also closely interdependent (Tsygankov, 2015:281). A Russian-controlled "Novorossiya" territory would provide Russia with a little more security against NATO moving into Ukraine. Some in Russia, including Aleksandr Dugin, view sovereignty for Ukraine as a dangerous strategic risk and believe Russian power and control should extend into the south and west of Ukraine (Kysacyk, 2016:165). Strengthening Russia's borders is considered vital within the context of extending the borders of influence, if not physical borders, in order to keep the external threats as far from Russia's interior as possible (Mäkinen, 2016).

The concept of Novorossiya was reconceptualised during the Crimean crisis. Initially associated with Catherine the Great's annexation of the territory and desire to build a great civilisation, as well as independence movements of the early 1990s, such as in Transnistria, it was re-envisioned largely to legitimise the political actions of the Kremlin and claim popular support. Geopolitically, it was meant to encompass the territory of south-eastern Ukraine, to justify the Crimean annexation, and to justify Russia's interest in Ukraine and its privileged position in the region. It evoked ideas of imperial monarchism as well as Soviet nostalgia to present the idea of the restoration of perennial truths and the 'natural' order of things that the fall of the Soviet Union had put asunder (Suslov, 2017:211).

Laruelle (2016:57) defined this form as “red” Novorossiya, which emphasised the memory of the strength, breadth, and unity of the Soviet Union, and which stood in opposition to the West. However, it also had an ideological element including narratives of Russian civilisation; it was the revolutionary awakening of Russia’s true self, therefore it was not only a territory, but Russia’s future (Suslov, 2017:212). It was a cultural and spiritual concept which could transcend borders to where there were Russians who identified with it.

It is debateable how influential the Novorossiya concept was in the minds of the populations of both Russia and Ukraine, however, it has nonetheless introduced a further element of instability into Ukrainian national unity, which pushes prospects of EU and NATO membership further away. Even though the Russian state has distanced itself from the term, for various reasons including fears of disappointing domestic expectations or the risk to the regime of the more radical incarnations of the concept (Laruelle, 2016:67), it has supported their aim of preventing a western foothold in the region in the near future.

It has been seen in other international conflicts that Russia is sensitive about the portrayal of its wartime actions. When President Yushchenko called for official recognition of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army for their defence of Ukrainian Independence during the war, despite their being condemned at the Nuremburg Trials for crimes against Soviet citizens and awarded medals of Hero of Ukraine to alleged Nazi collaborators Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevich (Tsygankov, 2015:289), Russia was offended. However, politically, Russia could view such actions as a threat to its Russian citizens living within the hostile country. Russia’s rhetoric about defending its citizens is well-documented. In a hostile environment, ethnic Russians are offered citizenship from Russia and Putin has referred to his unwillingness to ignore those who turn to Russia for protection (Tsygankov, 2015:293). Mouritzen (2017:642) suggests that decision-makers may be influenced in their foreign policy by lessons learnt through personal experience or socialisation. While much of Russia’s thinking seems to present a clear realist mentality with concerns over the security and strength of Russia’s borders, which is maintained by NATO remaining out of Ukraine, they would also have been socialised during a time when experiences of war were within living memory for family members and ties between the Soviet republics of Russia and Ukraine were extremely close. The West may not agree with Russia’s perception of the relationship between themselves and Ukraine and the roles which they should play, however, a realist-constructivist approach, which sees both the economic and political ties as well as the historical and political, can help understand why Russia has such a perception.

Narratives might not always enjoy support within a population. However, as with the Novorossiya concept and its connection to the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, it is enough that it exists to foster

instability and uncertainty. Although some narratives, particularly those evoking wartime Russia, often have the power to strengthen support. The power and strength of the Soviet Union during the war was perhaps not always evident in terms of success and victory, however, the portrayal of the people is always positive, self-sacrificing, and glorious. In Russia's eyes they saved much of Eastern Europe from the evils of Nazism and still is a period to be revered. The connection of power and identity of wartime Russia cannot be easily untangled, and so realist-constructivism could support both these important elements.

It was to reassert their Great Power status internationally

Russia inherited its seat on the UNSC from the Soviet Union. Russia today holds the view that its international status is significant, should be significant, and its opinion should be considered significant by other states. Nitoiu (2017:40) views Russia's assertiveness as a result of Russia failing to have gained an equal status with the West and its frustration that its worldview and interests are yet to shape the international agenda in any meaningful way. While Russia has power of veto on the UNSC, there have been times, such as during the Kosovo and Iraq wars, when the West has not taken heed of the veto and implemented their intended strategy regardless. Russia's refusal now to adhere to international law could be a reaction against what it views as a legal structure that is apparently no longer binding for any party.

As memories have blurred in Russia, many view the defeat of the Soviet Union as a betrayal and desire the restoration of Russia's former greatness (Rosefielde, 2017:29). Russia did not willingly relinquish control of the republics and was not welcomed into the international community as a great power moving on from communism but perceived as a defeated and diminished state. Germany in the 1950s was supported and developed, but that was not done for Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Menon, 2015:160). Russia was not integrated into any structures or given any substantial support to develop their economy to Europe's market standards and to cushion the effects on the public.

Russia appears to confuse modern-day international status with an eighteen- and nineteenth-century conception of great power politics. It views the world as a handful of imperial poles fighting over influence in the smaller surrounding states which is not the reality of global politics today (Trenin, 2009). Russia is often accused of outdated imperial thinking, perhaps due to the fact that Russia's national state and identity began to develop at the same time as its empire (Pipes, 1996/7:56). The 'imperial syndrome' denotes the residual effects of the empire that remain in former empires, which include: the imperial body which are the former territories of both the Russian and Soviet empires and

the calls for their retention; the imperial consciousness which is the desire for a wise tsar to lead the country and the division between the 'big and younger brothers'; and the imperial power, which is a significant influence on both foreign policy thinking and Russia's Great Power identity (Smith, 2016:173). Plokhy (2000:370) suggests that if we accept Hosking's view that while Britain had an empire and Russia was an empire, then the dissolution of the USSR meant not only the loss of imperial possessions, but the loss of its identity. Kasamara (2012:279) references the fact that 58% of Russians in 2011 still lamented the loss of the Soviet Union and the feeling of inferiority it left them with. Tsygankov (2015), however, criticises the imperial argument saying that it overstates Putin's ideological commitment and willingness to go as far as Russian nationalists would will him to go. But Putin need not stake a claim to former imperial territories to act in such a way as to ensure the malleability of those territories to Russian influence and power. Great Power status, that Russia avowedly aspires to, is merely former empires or superpowers staking their claim to an elevated status in the international sphere due to their level of power, which naturally is above that of former colonies or territories.

When it comes to its international status, there are many constructivist concepts that appear significant in any interpretation of Russia's actions that appear based in realist thought. An important feature of the constructivist interpretation of Russia's foreign policy is the importance Russia places on its identity, both for its own citizens and for foreign states. Simao (2016:494) argues that understanding Russian national identity is 'central' to understanding Russian foreign policy, especially in regional politics. Russian identity suffered a crisis following the fall of communism. Seemingly overnight it went from one of the two nuclear superpowers to a nation-state, which while still Eurasian in geography, appeared to have limited international as well as domestic capabilities in the post-Soviet world. For the first-time in its centuries-long history it was a small nation-state (relative to its historical size and scope) rather than an empire or the dominant, controlling actor in a union of states. Throughout the 1990s, Russia struggled to come to terms with its new, reduced position in the international sphere and felt humiliated by what it saw as a series of broken promises by the West. Instead of viewing 1989-1991 as Russia throwing off the chains of communism and choosing to adopt a more Western capitalist form of state, it is often suggested in Russia that the West view the end of the Cold War as a victory for them against the Soviets, and that Russia was beaten in an ideological war. This has been the accepted narrative in both the East and the West in recent times, which Wilson (2014b:vii) argues is merely a combination of dangerous myths – he says Russia had not been humiliated, the former USSR territories are not the "lost territory" of the historic Russian homeland, and NATO was not provoking Russia's historic fear of encirclement. The fact remains, however, that these myths, sentiments, beliefs, as a narrative have been entrenched within the population and

political elite, and to some degree must have some influence over political life, even if only in recognition of what is believed among the people. As Wilson (2014b:193) points out, people can come to believe their own myths even if they themselves created them. They are created to be emotive and convincing, and to create a connection to an identity, a country, a person.

Russia needs to promote a positive national identity for the diaspora living outside Russia's borders. While it was seen as a tragedy that Russians became foreigners in their homes in the post-Soviet republics, it is also a powerful foreign policy tool. The protection of the diaspora has become one of Russia's primary concerns and another reason for its privileged position in the post-Soviet region (Melvin, 1995:6). However, in order for this political tool to be effective, the diaspora have to want to identify themselves as Russian, meaning Russian national identity has to be viewed positively. The diaspora not only provide Russia with justification for foreign policy, but also offers Russia a new identity as the "historic homeland" for all Russian communities abroad. Russkii mir has been a tool with which to engage the Russian diaspora and to promote Russia outside its borders. When accused of being an imperial scheme to promote dissention and foster instability within another state's borders, Russia counters that it is about preserving spiritual and cultural ties between people, especially as so many Russians are living outside their borders (Smith, 2016:175). The political and cultural intertwine and interact here as the constructivist concepts feed into the realist. Even if those interacting with Russkii mir are doing so for cultural reasons to engage with their family's heritage, Russia is nevertheless gaining a powerful foreign policy tool within another state's borders.

NATO and EU advancement have been accompanied by various democracy promotion campaigns in countries such as Ukraine and Georgia. Not only are these a threat to Russia in realist terms, as their power in the region would be diminished by successful democracy promotion, they are also a threat to their identity image internationally. In promoting democracy abroad, a state is projecting itself as democratic and enforcing on other states the identity of non-democratic (Huber, 2015:35). Russia has styled itself a "sovereign democracy", but these western measures undermine that identity. If other states are successful in proscribing a particular identity (in Russia's case, that of an authoritarian regime), then that state could lose some of the power projection capabilities as they are viewed negatively in the international community.

Russian power and identity (and therefore realist and constructivist concepts) combine in their Great Power status. It is common to hear that Russia resents the West for conspiring to diminish Russian power in the world; Braun (2008:31) refers to these "most profound Russian resentments and fears" converging with the economic revival of the 2000s under President Putin, convincing many of the need to augment and re-establish Russian power on the international stage. It is generally accepted that in

order to be a Great Power, the state needs a combination of military and economic resources, and coercive powers combined with an attractiveness for, and recognition by, other Great Powers (Shchelin, 2016:93). While it is debateable to what extent this applies to Russia, the action in Crimea and the military and coercive powers they demonstrated could be intended as testimony to their deserved inclusion among the Great Powers. The discussion about Russian identity and the belief in Russia's status as a Great Power is not only about recognition from other states and the ability to influence and contribute to decisions made by the international community, but also to invoke pride in the Russian identity for the people. Constructivists argue that power or material capabilities are only important insofar as what the recognition they bring from other states means to themselves (Tsygankov, 2012:698). Recognition is important for both the political elite and the population. This is important as national identity is a mechanism for giving people a sense of individual and collective worth, without which they cannot function (McCrone, 2015:10). While the degree to which this is true may vary, it is nonetheless a convincing argument that a government could be more effective if it enjoys the support of a population that views its country positively. This constructivist argument is significant for foreign policy, because even if a nation and its identity is an imagined community and nothing more than a mental construct containing the foundations for a collective identity, this identity is real to the people who believe it and identify with it emotionally (Wodack, 2009:22).

It was to gain legitimacy on the international stage

Russia recognises that status as a Great Power requires a general positive acceptance of Russia and their policies internationally (Just, 2016:84). Russia has attempted to build its soft power capabilities in recent years, however, unlike the West which encourages independent NGOs and other civil society groups, soft power in Russia is very much a top-down initiative controlled by the Kremlin. As well as the recognition of the success of the Crimea operation, Russia recognises that to maintain its privileged position in international affairs, to be in a position to affect change, it must legitimise its actions. Western and EU states are not the only states belonging to the UN and so if Russia can legitimise its actions for a significant number of other states, the likelihood of a forced reversal of ownership is reduced. Legitimacy makes change more permanent as it generates, if not respect, then at least acceptance from the international community (Leichtova, 2016:293): the Crimean annexation being carried out so decisively and efficiently made it appear a fait accompli so that other states would not contest it; the legitimacy campaign (the "referendum", historical narratives, and human rights) was intended to gain acceptance and permanence.

An important aspect of Russia's legitimation of the annexation was the "referendum" held in Crimea. Putin (2014) announced to the State Duma that over 96% of Crimeans (with an 82% turnout) had voted in favour of reuniting with Russia. He referred to the Kosovo precedent, and how Crimea were doing the exact same thing in demanding separation from Ukraine without the central authorities' permission, although that almost negates his argument for legitimation as he has always denied the legitimacy of Kosovo. According to Tolstykh, Professor of Law at Novosibirsk University, (2014:883-4) the Kosovo precedent justified Russia's intervention to secure the conditions under which a legal referendum could be held to support a declaration of self-determination. He further concludes, in keeping with the Russian narrative of the right to self-determination, that an absence of human rights violations like those which occurred in Kosovo, is no excuse for refusing the legitimacy of the right to self-determination. However, he adds that attempts to establish "cultural qualification" can amount to "cultural genocide", meaning that as the Ukrainian authorities were attempting to stamp out any identity that wasn't Ukrainian[1], especially Russian, the Russian authorities, in his opinion, provided the justification to protect those compatriots at risk of "cultural genocide". Although most European states and international bodies have rejected this version of events, the narrative still appears to hold sway among some media outlets, admittedly Russian-sponsored such as RT and Sputnik.

Russia has framed the Crimean annexation as a "return" of Russian territory and the active role of the Crimean authorities and citizens is emphasised over Russia's political role (Leichtova, 2016:299). The Crimean annexation was not only welcomed by those in Crimea who had promoted the idea, however. The Crimean annexation was viewed by much of the population as "historic justice" (Trenin, 2016:29). The fall of the Soviet Union cannot be rectified, but this small return has been portrayed and accepted as righting a wrong that befell the people, both Russian and Crimean. Putin referred to the "personal initiative" of Khrushchev to transfer Crimea to Ukraine in 1954, offering the reasons that it could have been to win the support of the Ukrainian establishment or to atone for the repressions of the 1930s, but makes it clear that this decision was, in his opinion, in violation of constitutional norms, then and now (Putin, 2014). He referred to the "historical injustice" of this decision that became apparent only with the fall of the Soviet Union when citizens who "knew in their hearts and minds" that Crimea was a "historically Russian land and Sevastopol a Russian city" found themselves outside Russia's borders (Putin, 2014).

Legitimacy is important for international prestige. Prestige requires a state be prominent in international relations, meaning that they are part of the significant treaties and organisations.

[1] The post-Yanukovych government repealed a 2012 law that had allowed for the official use of Russian and other minority languages in regions where the minority accounted for more than 10% of the population (Biersack, 2014:249).

International prestige, being a significant member of various committees and its seat on the Security Council, is not only a source of power for political reasons as it permits a greater say in international events, a naturally realist concept, but also bestows Russia with a much-needed sense of pride. This is more a constructivist concept in international relations, however, for Russia it appears important. During its history it has been an important player in European politics, from its clashes with Napoleon and its various alliances and its part in treaties such as the Westphalian Treaty. The 1990s were an abnormality where Russia was a diminished world power, and as support for Putin has shown when he acts decisively (Levada Centre, 2018)[2], the population responds well to a strong and decisive leader.

It was a humanitarian intervention

From the initial development of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) concept, Russia's approach was characterised by reservations and hesitations (Baranovsky, 2016:49). Political culture has not developed a sense as it has in the West that there is a responsibility to act ethically and morally, setting aside the primary notion of sovereignty. Traditional norms and models of behaviour are overruled in favour of a set of specific values (Baranovsky, 2016:50). A significant element of Russia's disinclination for norms-based politics comes from the ambiguity that norms-based politics introduces surrounding the motivations of states. The perception in the West that they have a duty to intervene in states' internal affairs for the sake of human rights and democracy is viewed in Russia as pure demagogy (Engström, 2014:362). Since the Kosovo experience, Russia has adopted a deeply suspicious and negative attitude towards R2P (Baranovsky, 2016:51). Russia's traditional interests in the Balkans and its historic ties to Orthodox Serbs (Cross, 2015:152) led it to favour a political solution to the crisis, however in defiance of Russia's veto against military action, airstrikes went ahead. Russia has always insisted that the UN is the only body with the authority to authorise such action, with unanimous support, and was concerned about the upset to the rule of international law.

Russia's conduct in Crimea and Ukraine seems to contradict their long-held attitudes towards R2P and humanitarian intervention if their profession of protecting compatriots is to be believed, at least in terms of their intentions if not the need in reality; however, Russia believes it has a legitimate right to establish its own rules in its near abroad (Baranovsky, 2016:61). The action in Ukraine could be viewed as a message to the US: Russia understands their tactics and can adapt them and implement them themselves. For Russia, the humanitarian pretexts for military intervention are simply pretexts. They also believe that the US have begun to change their methods of ridding themselves of hostile regimes;

[2] Since 2000, Putin's approval ratings according to the Levada Centre indicators have not dipped below 60%, and ever since the Crimean annexation have remained above 80%.

namely, to sponsor the opposition to force the government to use force, which enables the US to impose sanctions, and finally to deploy military forces under the guise of peacekeepers and to support the opposition into government (Bartles, 2016). Russia has not viewed the humanitarian pretext as truly valid, but focuses on the geopolitical gains of any intervention, which they generally view as fostering governments and regimes friendly to the US and which operate contrary to Russian interests. One of the common tropes of Russian thought is that the West has "malicious intent" towards Russia, which is the primary motive of western intervention under the humanitarian pretext (Engström, 2014:365).

Despite the UN making clear at the time that Kosovo was an exceptional case and not to be used as a precedent, Russia has used the example of the Kosovar Albanians gaining independence from Serbia because of the human rights abuses to legitimise Crimeans "throwing off the shackles of an oppressive Ukrainian regime which limited their civil freedoms, especially their language rights" and "asserting their right to self-determination". It is important to recognise this argument, but as Allison (2014:1255) points out, it is also important to counter claims when they are unjustified. It should also be pointed out that Russia has only supported claims to self-determination when they are in Russian geopolitical interests. Russia failed to prove that the Kiev government had failed to protect the populations in Crimea and the eastern regions of Ukraine, it could not obtain UNSC authorisation, it did not have a request from a legitimate authority in the host country, and there was no attempt at a political settlement (Baranovsky, 2016:61). The Russian claims of human rights abuses in the region were not corroborated by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights who reported that Russian reports of human rights abuse towards the Russian-speaking population in either Crimea or Eastern Ukraine could not be supported, but that harassment of Crimean Tatars and others who opposed the "referendum" was present post-invasion (Allison, 2014:1263).

For Putin, the overthrow of Yanukovych was an "unconstitutional coup" and so he was justified in supporting the "true" regime, and when it became apparent that they had failed, he saw it as his role to protect the Russian-majority in Crimea from retribution from the "fascist", "anti-Russian" government in Kiev. The idea of "protecting compatriots" has become a threatening tool in Moscow's foreign policy kit. Baranovsky (2016:62) argues that Russia may be adapting the liberal values of R2P to a domestic audience that may be more supportive of policy that is justified by the robust vocabulary of "protecting compatriots". This rhetoric may be used in several ways to promote Russian power, such as making countries with a large Russian diaspora more susceptible to Russian influence, however, considering the current climate and attitudes towards Russia, there may be justifiable concern about the treatment of diaspora communities in areas where anti-discrimination law is not strong.

Humanitarian intervention is a values-based concept, which, at its heart, does not allow for states to follow their national interest and seek to increase their power. However, motivations behind humanitarian intervention can be hidden, and it is not always easy to gain the proof needed to demonstrate the need for a humanitarian intervention. Therefore, the perception of states, their values and political system, and their perception of the states involved is important. There is little to suggest that the use of a realist-constructivist approach in assessing the humanitarian aspect of the conflict would offer greater insight into Russian foreign policy. There is controversy regarding every aspect of humanitarian intervention, however the basic principles of the R2 concept according to the UN are that the state has a responsibility to protect its people and when it either cannot or chooses not to, that responsibility falls to the international community (IDRS, 2001:xi). Ukraine had not failed to protect its citizens (Allison, 2014:1255) and therefore the use of Russia of the humanitarian pretext is at best misguided, and at worst a cynical distortion of an already complex tool which aims at doing good. Constructivism appears to offer little added insight; realism, it would seem, provides the framework for what we need to understand.

It was to secure energy resources and dominance

Russia, while recognising the EU's dominance west of the region, demands an entirely free hand in the CIS, and although Ukraine is only an Associate Member, Russia's goals in the region require diminished sovereignty of the individual states in favour of Russian hegemony (Blank, 2008:168). Ukraine's energy needs are supplied by Russia, and at a reduced rate. The fluctuation in costs for Ukraine have served as a reminder that Russia, and not the EU, is the financial power in the region and that any attempts to diversify or move westward will be met with financial penalties (Koranyi, 2014). Therefore, notwithstanding the Slavic background that connects them, Russia expects a certain amount of loyalty from a country it views itself as subsidising.

That is not to say that there are not realist concerns regarding energy that prompted Russian military action. In the months and years preceding the crisis, Ukraine had been working to diversify its energy supply to reduce its dependence on Russia. There are those that argue the Kremlin's actions were predominantly motivated by a need to disrupt Ukraine's diversification efforts. Ukraine's endeavours have been affected by the annexation of Crimea and the practical loss of the vast offshore gas and oil resources in the Black Sea as well as one of its two largest shale gas fields in Donetsk and Kharkiv and the separatist and Russian aggression in the region have also threatened Kiev's plan to switch to coal, as they have lost 46% of its coal reserves to the instability (Umbach, 2014). It must also be pointed out that it does appear Western involvement could have been driven by a concern over energy supplies.

EU member states' reliance on Russian gas and Ukraine's position as an important transit country are key national security concerns in the West (Koranyi, 2014). The West would not want to repeat the gas cut-offs experienced in 2009. A strong Ukraine that could diversify would strengthen the West in comparison to Russia, rendering them less dependent on Russian gas and more able to negotiate in other areas, such as Russian interference in Georgia and its not infrequent airspace incidents involving Russian planes buzzing sovereign states' airspace or flying close to foreign planes (Schultz, 2017).

The gains that Russia has made in the Black Sea region have implications for Europe's energy security and choices for diversification, and the options for Ukraine as well. Ukraine has not only lost the coal industry in the east because of the ongoing conflict but has also lost the Pallas gas and oil field off Crimea, as mentioned previously (Delanoe, 2014:376). Russian dominance in the region also limits European options for alternative supply pipelines as Russia owns much more of the continental shelf and has a greater exclusive economic zone.

The constructivist argument here appears to contribute little to the realist interpretation that Russia seeks to control Ukraine's efforts to diversify because they threaten Russia's role as the dominant energy supplier for Europe. Diversification would also imply a need to advance technological capabilities, something that would be more likely to lead to greater Ukrainian-Western cooperation that Ukrainian-Russian. Although it is another area where Ukraine has traditionally depended on Russia for supplies as well as funds, it would seem that the constructivist interpretation that Ukraine owes Russia is rather insignificant in comparison to the power and influence that Russia wields through its energy dominance.

It was due to an addiction to myths

Ukraine is one of the Slavic trio, along with Russia and Belarus. The ethnic, linguistic, and cultural similarities are strong. However, Ukrainian national identity has developed, especially since the end of the Cold War, and is considered separate from the Russian. Russia refuses to accept that differences exist between the two peoples and has even gone so far as to refuse to accept that Ukraine is a legitimate separate state. From a historical, geographical, and ethnic point of view, Russians and Ukrainians are extremely difficult to separate (Melvin, 1995:78), although this seems rather lazy. The same could be argued for the four nationalities of the UK, and yet for the Welsh, Scottish, and Irish, despite having lived centuries under English dominion, there are distinct differences between themselves and the English, in terms of both culture and self-perception. The West, in general, is happy to accept that Austrians are distinct from Germans, the Welsh, Scots, and Irish distinct from the

English, the Belgians distinct from both the French and the Germans, so to accept Russia's argument that a distinct Ukrainian identity does not exist is not only lazy, but hypocritical. As Menon (2015:1) points out, Ukraine has a history external to Russia and does have a distinctive identity, although Ukraine itself, as a result of regions being ruled by various empires and states over the centuries, is regionally, culturally, and politically diverse. Indeed, while the Novorossiya concept may have held sway in Russia, in southeastern Ukraine, over 50% viewed Novorossiya as a myth, and 44% of the 25% who had said it was fact, disagreed that it was a basis for separation from Ukraine[3] (O'Loughlin, 2017:133).

However, for many Russians in the early 1990s, the idea of a Russian state existing without the 'fraternal' Ukrainian and Belarusian peoples was almost inconceivable (Teper, 2016:380). The central power of the Soviet Union defined much of its identity through its de facto empire and its relations to the other republics. While the other states were able to develop their own identities without much difficulty post-1991, Russia found it more difficult to redefine itself outside of the role they had held for centuries. Tsygankov (2015:296) argues, however, that historical differences between Ukrainian and Russian peoples should not be exaggerated due to their common European roots and predominantly Slavic and Orthodox cultures. But this fails to take into account differing historical experiences that come from being the imperial power and those under that power.

The idea of Ukrainians as "Little Russians" was established in the Russian popular imagination a few centuries ago, which continued into the Soviet period where there were few differences recognised and Kremlin propaganda has little work convincing the Russian population of this brotherhood, as most Russians have a historically informed inability to recognise any significant differences between the two peoples (Riabchuk, 2016:82). This also contributes to the idea of the Crimean annexation being of little significance legally and internationally because they are the same people so why should it matter? In the minds of many, Ukraine is Russia. However, it is true that since the seventeenth century, Ukraine and Russia have fought common enemies and were elements of the same imperial state, and then Soviet empire, and Russia is therefore resentful of perceived western attempts to sever those historical and cultural ties by inducting Ukraine into their own system of values, often alien to those of Russia (Tsygankov, 2015:288). Bukkvoll (2016:268) argues that despite it having been

[3] The survey was conducted in six of the eight regions generally considered to be Novorossiya – Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia, Mykolaiv, Odesa, Kharkiv, and Kherson (Donetsk and Luhansk were not surveyed due to the conflict). Large numbers, however, responded with "I don't know" – depending on the question, between 20 and 40%, reflecting uncertainty about the term itself and concern about answering a seemingly innocuous question that has important consequences for the country.

said that Ukraine was not a separate country, Russia does not necessarily have a problem with Ukrainian independence, as long as the country is 'with Russia'.

Putin's version of Russian national identity centres on religion, language, and history; for him, the Russian identity is ancient and strong (Goble, 2016:37). This he has used to project Russian power beyond its borders to wherever there are Russian-speakers or ethnic Russians who need protecting. Religion and history bring together the stories people recognise from their childhoods, albeit perhaps historical myths over truths, and language binds them as a common folk. Putin has also rejected the idea of Russia integrating into the West. Most Russian leaders support the idea that Russia is a unique civilisation, neither Asian nor European, and believe that the Russian Orthodox Church should play a special role in the national "spiritual revival" (Riabchuk, 2016:76).

Cultural myths and what a nation identifies as its foundations is fundamentally a constructivist concept. However, it cannot be denied that myths and cultural 'truths' are often exaggerated and embellished for the purpose of propaganda and legitimation. While cultural arguments should not be dismissed merely because they are just stories and ideas, they are powerful and emotive and can promote Russia abroad and be used to legitimise their actions through foreign policy. Cultural myths and histories are part of a nation's identity. Identities are all constructed through the choice of histories, myths, and traditions that are incorporated but myths are often no less real in identities that the histories that are recent and accurately described. Realist interpretations of events could benefit from combining with constructivism to examine the background of these claims and extract what is true and what is an exaggeration and can no longer be valid in international politics.

Conclusion

You understand that the feeling which makes them work is not a feeling of pettiness, ambition, forgetfulness, which you have yourself experienced, but a different sentiment, one more powerful, and one which has made of them men who live with their ordinary composure under the fire of cannon, amid hundreds of chances of death, instead of the one to which all men are subject who live under these conditions amid incessant labour, poverty, and dirt. Men will not accept these frightful conditions for the sake of a cross or a title, nor because of threats; there must be another lofty incentive as a cause, and this cause is the feeling which rarely appears, of which a Russian is ashamed, that which lies at the bottom of each man's soul — love for his country.

Leo Tolstoy, The Sevastopol Sketches

Man is not born into politics. He is born into society. Before he has developed an understanding of political structures and institutions, the issues that he is passionate about, and decided where he stands on the political spectrum, he has read literature, listened to music, and he has thought about who he is as a person. No individual actor is separate from the society into which he was born. Identity is ever-changing and constantly in flux, that much is true. But the values that one's society espouses are embedded deep into the consciousness. There are a set of ethical and moral rules that one follows without even thinking about it because they are 'natural' in that society. Therefore, it must be true that influences that develop throughout childhood remain influential, even if ultimately, they are ignored, or if they remain influential without one being conscious about it.

Realism has been a powerful analytical tool in international politics but there is sometimes something lacking. According to realism, states are in constant competition with one another, and they each seek to increase their power and work to attain goals that are in their national interest, which naturally must happen at the expense of others'. But how do states view power and what do they consider to be in their national interest? In Russia's case, military strength and the ability to influence the states in their near abroad are important for their power status and being the dominant player in their privileged sphere in the near abroad is in their national interest, but it is also something that is important to Russia's identity that has developed and that connects it to its "glorious and spiritual" history.

There are some arguments which appear highly convincing from the realist perspective. Russia's dominance over energy resources and their desire for that status quo to remain seems not to have a convincing constructivist element to it. Ukraine's diversification strategy, their not insignificant

resources of oil and gas off the Crimean peninsula and their industrial east would appear to threaten Russia's dominant position in energy production. Were Ukraine to diversify significantly, Russia would also lose a powerful means of wielding influence over Ukraine's decision-makers. Therefore, in this argument, a realist-constructivist approach appears to add little to the debate. Likewise, Russia's attempts to legitimise the annexation through the humanitarian argument seems to have little constructivist dimension to it and appears to be strongly convincing purely through a realist interpretation alone, as it appears motivated by concerns over power and influence rather than a belief in the values of humanitarian intervention.

However, the realist arguments for Russia's action being to keep NATO out of Ukraine and the importance of Crimea are less convincing alone. The context of Crimea as the site of significant World War Two battles and the great loss of life sustained by Soviet Russia in the region, makes the possible presence of their long-time enemy untenable, even if relations were to ameliorate. While common sense dictated that opposition within NATO to Ukrainian membership and the huge obstacles facing Ukraine such as corruption, infrastructure, military capabilities would hinder their membership and suggest that NATO membership is a long way off for Ukraine and did not require such a drastic and damaging policy from Russia, especially as now Russia faces significant sanctions with the prospect of their continuation (EU, 2018), Russia nonetheless committed to a strategy that secured its dominance in the region but also promoted its historical and cultural inseverable ties. The EU could not hope to compete with such an emotive narrative until its own were more compelling. The narrative, although perhaps created after the policy to present a more palatable proposition for both the public and the international community, is nonetheless an important aspect in Russia's motivation. If they believed the narrative could be effective, the policy would be less of a risk. Therefore, the use of the realist-constructivist theory here helps explain the motivation and lack of restraint of that motivation.

The role of the EU and Russia's emphasis on its Great Power status also appear to gain in explanatory power with the use of a realist-constructivist theory. It may be that Russia fears its national interest will be affected if the post-Soviet countries turn westward and integrate with the EU, however, the more constructivist factors of Russia's historical interests and cultural ties in the region cannot easily be separated from concerns over power and influence concerns. The EU not only undermines Russian influence in the region, but also undermines Russia's normative identity. The EU casts Russia as the backward-thinking, imperialist power that seeks to repress weaker states and keep them suppressed. That proscribed identity harms Russia's international standing as a Great Power because of the impression it presents to other nations. Power in the twenty-first century comes not only from economic and military power, but also from the normative power that states yield. This also explains why a realist-constructivist perspective appears interesting when looking at Russia's fear of the Colour

Revolutions. The strength of the regime depends on the support, or ambivalence, of the population. Should EU-norms and "Western" ideas be allowed to permeate Russia, the regime is threatened.

It must once again be emphasised, that the use of constructivist elements such as national identity and cultural values are not meant to justify their use. For instance, the religious argument of the baptism of Prince Vladimir in Crimea and the Russian belief that Ukrainian national identity does not exist, should not be validated, but this analysis proposes that their understanding is important within the context of the Crimean annexation. Invalid narratives need to be contested, however, it must also be recognised that within a society, narratives can often become firmly entrenched as they are repeated and come to be believed, even by those who promote them for more realist purposes. The danger with a realist-constructivist argument is perhaps that the narratives that are invalid and yet believed are given the same value as the constructed identities that exist outside of politics, for example, the importance of the wartime narratives concerning the bravery of the people.

The realist-constructivist theory is still young and developing and lacking in empirical case studies, however, there have recently been some interesting works using the theory, one being MacKay and Levin's Hegelian Realist Constructivist Account of War, Identity, and State Formation (2018), which takes a realist perspective of power but emphasises the importance of ideas and identities to the construction and implementation of power. Hegel, being a philosopher rather than a social scientist, is an interesting advocate of such a theory, as he is able to weave between power concepts associated with war and social concepts of ideas and identities without being too drawn to either one paradigm. This work attempted to show that there were factors given for the 2014 Ukraine Crisis that could navigate between these two theories in order to present a stronger argument for the different factors. However, this is a new theoretical concept and so more case studies will need to be carried out in order to fully assess the uses of such a theory.

This analysis assessed the main arguments presented for the Crimean annexation and examined how the arguments set forth could be viewed from both a constructivist and realist perspective and could combine to strengthen understanding. It is the author's view that a realist perspective that considers both the traditional elements of realism but from within a constructivist context of the region of analysis could contribute important points of understanding that would otherwise be neglected. A realist-constructivist view demands the analysis of more factors, this is true, and perhaps the disadvantage is that from within a specific context there is less capacity to use the conclusions to transfer knowledge to a different area. However, for those scholars looking into Russian foreign policy from another culture, more information can only deepen understanding. Problems are not solved by

understanding half the problem. The riddle needs information to be solved, the mystery clues to be unravelled, and the enigma codes to be decoded.

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