

On the Margins of a EU-Dominated Space: Three Approaches to Russia's Identity in the Baltic Sea Region

Introduction

International politics is often characterised in terms of binaries that characterise regions and political actors in relation to what they are not: East and West, North and South, democracies and non-democracies, First World and Third World, core and periphery. Foreign policies are based on the differentiation of what is within from what is outside. Today, in the context of what some are describing as the 'new Cold War', distinctions between 'us' and 'them' persist and are becoming all the more salient in the case of Europe and Russia. For centuries, these entities have constituted their identities in relation to one another; in few other political relationships have dichotomies of East and West, Orient and Occident, civilisation and barbarism manifested themselves more markedly (Malia 2000).

The division between Europe and Russia is not a geographical one – they share the same continental landmass – but is based on culture and identity. Today, it is symbolised by the European Union (EU) as an embodiment of 'normative power Europe', and the Russian Federation. The EU-Russia relationship is the background of my research into Russia's identity in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). I view the BSR as an ideological space where the relationship between the EU and Russia plays out and is contested, altered and challenged. I also view it as a space where the antagonistic binaries that so define EU-Russia relations at the international level are problematised. Using the regional level of analysis as opposed to the international brings different issues to light that challenge the notion that defining the identities of Europe or Russia is as simple as resorting to binary oppositions. Instead, the existence of the Kaliningrad Oblast – neither European nor entirely Russian due to its geographical location and its colonial history – fundamentally challenges the way we think about the EU-Russia relationship, and about Europe and Russia.

This paper forms the preliminary stage of a doctoral project that will analyse foreign policy representations of Russia's political identity in the BSR. It is an attempt to stimulate discussion of the ways in which International Relations (IR) scholarship has positioned Russia in this space since the end of the Cold War. It addresses some of the tensions and debates that exist between different theoretical approaches and sheds some light on how these approaches can help us to understand Russia's political identity in the BSR at the present time and how this might impact upon practical cross-border cooperation in the region.

This paper situates itself within the context of broader theoretical and philosophical discussions on identity and space that have influenced the field of IR. Discussions about Russia's identity in the BSR draw substantially on discourse theory and postcolonial theory, approaches that reject rational and essentialist methodologies that continue to dominate the discipline and instead focus on the relationships between knowledge, power and discourse. They provide a contextual and analytical background to the literature discussed in this paper and will be referred to throughout.

I will begin by discussing the recent history of the BSR within the context of post-Cold War EU-Russia political relations. I will then analyse and compare two approaches taken by IR scholars in relation to Russia in the BSR, before considering a possible alternative. By locating these approaches within broader discussions about identity and space, and examining their relevance and usefulness for understanding Russia's position in the BSR today, I adopt a critical perspective in relation to the material. Rather than arguing for the benefits of adopting one approach over another, I seek to compare and contrast them and illuminate their advantages as well as their limitations. Finally, the paper draws attention to the challenges presented by these approaches and offers some thoughts about the potential for future research into Russia's identity in the BSR.

The Baltic Sea Region: An Imagined Community

The Baltic Sea is an inland sea that exists in a physical and geographic sense. The Baltic Sea *Region* is in contrast a contingent space that has been socially constructed by political actors. It is this socially constructed region that I am referring to in this paper:

the actors, interests and ideas that converge around the physical space. There is an increasing amount of literature on regions and the BSR in particular and there is not sufficient space to discuss it in detail here. But this paper takes the view of the region-building school that a region is an 'imagined community': a social construction that is brought into being by political actors and is subject to change (Neumann 1994). Importantly, the BSR is an imagined community that has predominantly been shaped by the EU, as the majority of the states that border the Baltic Sea are EU member states. Subsequently, I view it as a EU-dominated space that on an ideational and institutional level reflects the EU's ideological interests and an extension of Western hegemony.

The term 'Baltic Sea Region' emerged in IR literature after the end of the Cold War. Wæver (1992) was the first to point to the emergence of a new spatial reference point oriented around the Baltic Sea that he argued would replace Norden as a point of reference in Northern Europe. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, the security dynamic in this region altered dramatically. During the Cold War the Soviet Union bordered a significant portion of the Baltic Sea coastline. But the geopolitical changes that the collapse of the Soviet Union, reunification of Germany, and successive EU enlargements instigated meant that by 2004 Russia found itself on the periphery of a EU-dominated space. The Kaliningrad Oblast, already geographically disconnected from the rest of Russia, became sandwiched between the new EU member states of Lithuania and Poland. According to the region-building school (an epistemic community led by figures such as Wæver and Neumann), IR scholars were of fundamental importance in shaping the identity of the BSR. Only after phase one – the creation of an identity for the region – could phase two – practical activities that would turn the region from an idea into a pragmatic reality – begin (Wæver 1997).

Indeed phase two was already underway as Wæver was writing. The BSR became increasingly institutionalised in the 1990s, with both transnational and state-based organisations that had the Baltic Sea as their focal point emerging in response to the changing geopolitical climate in the region after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The state-based Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) was among the first to be established, followed by Euroregion Baltic in the mid-1990s and the EU's Northern Dimension (ND) initiative in 1999. These frameworks were later followed by the EU's first macro-

regional strategy, the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), along with the South Baltic and Central Baltic cross-border cooperation frameworks initiated under the INTERREG programme.

The Kaliningrad Oblast, along with the proliferation of these institutional frameworks with overlapping geographical parameters, problematised the EU-Russia relationship in the BSR. Russian regions were included to a greater extent in some of these frameworks than others and Moscow grew increasingly wary of regionalisation, wanting to maintain control of its exclave. Since the 1990s, Russia has been constituted – and has constituted itself – as both inside, outside, and somewhere in between this region.

Three Approaches to Russia's Identity in the Baltic Sea Region

Interpretivist and critical theoretical approaches unsurprisingly dominate discussions on this topic. Rationalist IR considers identities to be fixed and pre-existing, and is therefore not useful for those of us who would examine how identities form and change over time. Two dominant approaches can be discerned in the IR literature on Russia's identity in the BSR: one constructivist and one poststructuralist. Both approaches emerged in reaction to rational approaches such as realism and began to influence IR during the 1980s. Constructivism concentrates on understanding how identities are formed and change over time, while poststructuralism focuses on deconstructing and problematising identity categories, which it views as unstable and constituted in language. Postcolonial approaches to identity politics in IR emerged more recently and have not yet been applied to Russia's identity within the BSR context specifically. While postcolonialism is also a critical approach that draws on constructivist and poststructuralist perspectives, it places more emphasis on structural inequalities and the agency of the subject in identity politics. It is considered here as an alternative approach to the other two that can potentially account more adequately for the agency of Russia in constructing its own identity.

I shall examine the key ideas and debates within each of these approaches, also considering what is omitted from their analyses. As the constructivist and poststructuralist approaches are often difficult to separate (and are grouped together by

some scholars – see Morozov 2013), I will examine them here as collectively forming a dominant mode of thinking about Russia in the BSR, before considering the differences between them and the potential for a postcolonial approach to offer an alternative perspective. I will then offer some reflections on the challenges for future research and how we can use these approaches to understand Russia's identity in the region today.

Dominant Perspectives: Constructivism and Poststructuralism

Constructivist IR preoccupies itself with ideas and their role in constructing the identities of political actors. The constructivist turn that began to shape IR in the early 1990s was influenced by social theory and its debates about the social construction of reality. The world, its institutions and norms were all considered to be the product of human agency and interaction. What this meant for IR is that the identities of states and other actors in the international system, which were considered as pre-existing by the dominant theoretical approaches, could now be considered as fluid and dependent upon political actors who shaped them.

Poststructuralist IR is a more radical form of constructivism concerned with relationships between language and knowledge. Stemming from the work of Derrida (1967) on deconstruction, poststructuralism rejects claims to universalism and objectivity and sees binary oppositions as fundamental to the construction of meaning. In an IR context, this means that identities are considered to be based on difference – constructed in relation to an external other. Campbell (1992), for instance, applied poststructural theory to IR by focusing on foreign policy as a way in which something 'foreign' is constituted in relation to the Self. Poststructuralist literature on Russia's identity in the BSR draws frequently on Political Discourse Theory that draws on the ideas of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), for whom politics is essentially concerned with the formation of an 'us' as opposed to a 'them'. This perspective, which deconstructs Gramsci's theory of hegemony, views antagonisms as central to hegemonic practices.

At times it is difficult to determine who are the constructivists and who are the poststructuralists, with there being an element of overlap. Poststructuralist analyses of Russia in the BSR are influenced by constructivism and remained preoccupied with

binary oppositions but they go one step further and problematise them. In their quest to dismantle structures of meaning, identity categories are deconstructed and their claims to be fixed disputed. The identities of 'Europe' and 'Russia' are therefore not pre-existing, objective structures of meaning but constituted in language, shaped by political actors, and mutually reinforcing. Constructivists and poststructuralists see the construction of Europe, in other words, to be tied to the idea of Russia as the Other (Neumann 1999). And just as Russia has been defined as Europe's Other, Europe has also been the central other against which Russia has defined itself (Neumann 1996). In the literature that focuses specifically on the BSR, the consensus is that Russia is positioned as the Other in this space.

Constructivists looking at Russia's identity in the BSR tend to draw attention to a distinction between modernist and postmodernist politics. They argue that the EU, in stark contrast to its purported postmodern project, in fact demonstrates a modernist understanding of territorial sovereignty when it comes to its external borders, with Russia being positioned as the Other in the BSR (Browning 2001; Browning 2003a; Jakobson-Obolenski 2005). EU regional frameworks, in particular the ND, are criticised for failing to be as inclusive as they purport to be and are a part of an ongoing process of Russia's othering in the region (Moisio 2003). These scholars analyse discourses and ideas and how these reflected enduring relationships of inside/outside and Cold War divisions in the BSR. From this perspective, the tension between EU policy and actual practice is emphasised.

It is not only the EU that is seen to be engaging in modernist foreign policy. Morozov (2004) concluded that security still dominated a discourse that reflected Putin's modernist, nationalistic political project. Aalto et al. (2003) acknowledged the modernist political projects of both the EU and Russia. Moscow's fears that region-building projects in the BSR would lead to secession were and continue to be recognised as obstacles to Russia's inclusion within the region (Sergounin 2000). These scholars acknowledge the Russian perspective, while still recognising that there remains a problem of divisive geopolitics in the region.

A distinct difference between constructivist and poststructuralist approaches is that those adopting a poststructuralist approach problematise these divisions and define them as unstable. Prozorov (2009), for instance, has argued that Russia is simultaneously in and out of Europe, and this idea can be found in poststructuralist work examining the Kaliningrad Oblast in the BSR. Problematizing Parker's (2000) conceptualisation of margins, Browning and Joenniemi argue that Kaliningrad is best tackled from a poststructuralist standpoint that acknowledges the instability and interdependency of margins (Browning and Joenniemi 2003, 2004). While constructivists focus on the identity categories of Europe and Russia, poststructuralist work also examines those in-between, peripheral spaces that problematise the inside/outside relationship. Marginal spaces such as Kaliningrad may both uphold and evade modernist understandings of territorial sovereignty (Browning & Joenniemi, 2004). As a marginal 'third space' between the EU and Russia, Kaliningrad blurs the boundaries between conceptual categories, problematising a simplistic dichotomy of inside/outside and also acts as an exploratory space or laboratory to test the EU-Russia relationship (Browning and Joenniemi 2003, 2004; Browning 2003a). There is therefore a distinction between this and a constructivist perspective that looks at how modernist discourses continue to position Russia as the 'Other', clearly demarcating who is inside and outside of the European Self (Browning 2001; Browning 2003b).

Here it is perhaps necessary to point out the ambiguity in the object of study. In constructivist work, *Russia* appears as the clearly constituted Other in relation to the European Self. But the Kaliningrad Oblast, an exclave and sub-national *region of Russia*, is a problematic space that eludes a categorical definition and thus necessitates a poststructuralist deconstruction of identity categories. The way in which we perceive Russia's identity in the region depends not only on what theoretical approach we adopt, but also on what the subject of our research is. If we examine 'Russia' as a single, homogenous entity, then it is easier to resort to binary oppositions. But by focusing on the regional level, and acknowledging the existence of those in-between spaces that belong fully to neither Self nor Other, identities are complicated and problematised. This is the value that a poststructural approach can lend to our understanding of Russia's identity in the BSR.

Russia may be considered the enduring Other in the region from a constructivist standpoint, but this is a position that is considered possible to overcome by scholars with a normative agenda. While some scholars writing around the time of EU enlargement in 2004 saw EU foreign policy in the region as modernist and territorial, others were more optimistic and saw potential for Russia's inclusion. State-based cooperative frameworks such as the CBSS were seen as providing a more inclusive framework contributing to the construction of a non-hierarchical identity in regional discourses in which Russia was becoming a part of the 'Self' (Tassinari 2003). Jæger (2000) argued that it was time to conceive of a 'Europe of difference' that included Russia. Joenniemi (2000) expressed optimism for the moving away of exclusionary dichotomies towards debordering and 'fuzzy' borders.

These views are inherently Eurocentric in the sense that they assume that Russia wants to and should be included within EU institutional frameworks. They do not consider the notion that Russia may not be interested or is even distinctly opposed to inclusion in the BSR as a EU-dominated space. Möller (2003), while expressing the normative view that the differences between Russia and the West can be used to build a security community in the BSR, critiqued scholarship that failed to consider Russia's role in the development of a security community in Northern Europe, criticising a liberal representation of security communities and the notion that peaceful change can only come about through Western liberal-democratic values. His argument is a valid recognition of how the Russian perspective is often marginalised in IR scholarship, much like Russia itself in the BSR. Is it also the case that a cohesive BSR identity is only able to come about through an EU-directed political project that incorporates Russia into its institutional frameworks?

Much of the constructivist and even poststructuralist literature conveys an underlying assumption that this is the case. Although poststructuralists have attempted to problematise relationships and dichotomies between regionality and sovereignty, East and West, inside and outside, their work nevertheless can be criticised for maintaining some of these divisions. This is no less evident than in their distinction between modernist and postmodernist politics, embodied in the forms of nationality and regionality respectively (Joenniemi 1997; Browning 2001, 2003a). Scholars distinguish between modernist politics that are based on upholding a Westphalian idea of territorial

sovereignty (nationality), and postmodernist politics that necessitate the disintegration of borders and fluidity of movement and people beyond the nation-state (regionality). The reason that cooperation and regionality in the BSR is failing is seen as the result of the pursuit of modernist politics and modernist discourses that dominate in the region, clearly demarcating who is in and who is out (Browning 2003a, 2003b). Christiansen (1997) identifies a tension between postmodern Western states and the Eastern states that are still embedded in modernist frames. He describes a positive role for the CBSS in straddling the East-West divide.

This points to the assumption in poststructuralist work that the 'old' security agenda (that which the 'East' continues to uphold) is lacking and inferior in contrast to the new and improved agenda espoused by the West (Joenniemi 2000). The idea – not explicitly articulated but implicitly assumed – is that a new concept of security based on regionality that has already been adopted by the West is the way forward, while Russia remains entrenched in old concepts of security that revolve more around territoriality. There is an implicit notion that modernist territoriality equals backwards, contrasted with the forward-thinking of postmodernist regionality exemplified by Europe. In these assumptions, the old dichotomies of East/West, inside/outside, inclusion/exclusion are in fact perpetuated by an approach that seeks to deconstruct such identity categories.

These analyses must, of course, be considered in relation to their context. Published between 2003 and 2005, just before and in the aftermath of the biggest EU enlargement in history, during which Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania all became EU member states, these scholars naturally focused on trying to understand what the BSR would become and what the role of Russia would be in the new context – and predominantly European – space. It is no surprise, therefore, that scholars writing at this time would have focused on the EU-Russia relationship and considered relationships of inclusion/exclusion in a region that was becoming institutionally more Europeanised. However, one could argue that the epistemic community is contributing to the perpetuation of these binaries.

An Alternative Perspective? Postcolonialism

In recent years, a distinctive postcolonial approach within IR has addressed Russia's identity in relation to Europe. While a postcolonial approach has not yet been applied specifically to the BSR, it warrants some attention here for the reason that it problematises the Self and Other relationship and argues that the Other can possess agency and subsequently shape the identity of the Self. This approach would certainly assist our understanding of the political identity of Russia in the BSR.

Postcolonialism emerged in reaction to colonialism and imperialism, taking Gramsci's theory of hegemony as a means to critique the ideological dominance of the West. A variant of postcolonial theory is subaltern studies, originating among southeast Asian scholars and concentrating on 'subaltern' actors: disenfranchised individuals and groups whose agency is limited and whose voices are not heard as a result of the hegemonic social order (Morozov 2015:1). Said's seminal text of postcolonial thought, *Orientalism* (1978), studied how the 'Orient' (which in his work was mainly the Middle East) has been represented by the West through Orientalist discourses as the inferior Other in contrast to the superior West. Postcolonial analyses of the Europe-Russia relationship have drawn on this and other key works of post-Marxist critical theory, postcolonial theory and subaltern studies (see for example Spivak 1988; Bhabha 1994; Spivak 1999; Chakrabarty 2000; Mbembé 2001). Tentatively – and not uncontroversially – they have applied these perspectives to the post-Soviet world. Despite the fact that Russia has not been colonised by anyone other than itself, scholars that apply postcolonial thinking to the post-Soviet world consider Russia to be both coloniser and colonised. In other words, Russia acts as a 'subaltern empire' (Tlostanova 2008; Morozov 2013, 2015) that has engaged in internal colonisation while at the same time being colonised ideologically by the West. It is, according to Etkind (2011), both the subject and object of orientalism. It is in this sense that Russia can be examined from a postcolonial perspective.

The postcolonial approach positions itself as an alternative approach that is not necessarily in opposition to constructivism and poststructuralism but brings different issues and relationships to light and therefore considers elements that they exclude. The

central idea that postcolonialism examines is that of *agency* and to what extent the Other can utilise it to influence the Self. The key argument is that “liminal Others may exercise agency in the constitution of political identity” (Morozov & Rumelili 2012:29). Postcolonialist perspectives acknowledge that constructivists examine identities in relation to the Other but argue they “have generally shied away from looking at this relationship from the perspective of the Other” (Morozov & Rumelili 2012:28) and criticise both constructivist and poststructuralist approaches for lacking a theory of the agent (Morozov & Rumelili 2012:33). Postcolonial approaches, on the other hand, move away from ‘self-Centered’ analyses of identity and look at how the Other can in fact play a subversive role in identity politics.

In this sense, postcolonial approaches to Russia in the BSR share much in common with earlier poststructuralist discussions of Kaliningrad as a marginal space that possessed agency, power and subjectivity. But they incorporate discussions of othering into a postcolonial framework, combining poststructural analysis with relations of inequality and subversion. A postcolonial approach would agree that Kaliningrad wields some policy influence, but would examine it from the perspective of a subaltern that evades the category of external Other. A postcolonial perspective appears particularly relevant in looking at the Kaliningrad Oblast, a region of Russia that has a history of colonisation by different powers – the Teutonic Knights, Prussia, Germany, the Soviet Union and now the Russian Federation. The city, called Königsberg prior to 1946, was inhabited by Germans who were forcibly removed from the region after the Soviet takeover. A postcolonial perspective could perhaps bring such issues to light and problematise the notion of taking a binary approach to politics in the region and instead consider the history of Kaliningrad and its interaction with the larger entity of Russia and with those EU member states around it.

But there are also challenges to using a postcolonial approach. Some scholars taking a postcolonial approach to Europe-Russia identity politics assert that the very agency that Russia possesses as the Other is enacted within dominant discourses: “Russia, even when it opposes the West, cannot present a meaningful alternative and thus has to use the language of liberal democracy to voice its concerns” (Morozov 2013). In this light,

can the Other really be argued to any agency at all, if it is using the discourse of its ideological coloniser in its efforts to resist?

Another problem that the postcolonial perspective acknowledges stems from the idea that the voice of the subaltern is not always to be trusted. Positioning themselves in opposition to postcolonial approaches that supply normative superiority to the voice of the subaltern, Makarychev and Morozov (2013) question the subaltern's speaking position. Indeed, in a contentious article, they argued that the tendency towards relativism and the politicisation prevalent in Russian IR has resulted in Russia's position as the West's antagonist being amplified and that it is therefore of no scholarly use (Makarychev and Morozov 2013).

If the agency of the Other is used simply to reinscribe existing divisions and utilises the discourse of the dominant Self (Europe), then essentially this is not agency at all; it is a discursive use of power disguised as agency. Morozov and Makarychev suggest that the only way in which Russia/Russian scholars are able to define themselves is in opposition to Europe/European scholarship, the irony being that in celebrating Russia's distinctiveness in relation to Western hegemony they are in fact contributing to the persistence of Western hegemony itself. From this perspective then, Russia cannot escape being the Other, both as a result of Western hegemony and its own attempts to oppose it.

A decolonial perspective could perhaps provide a relevant alternative here. Developed by Mignolo and applied to the post-Soviet space by scholars such as Tlostanova (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012), the decolonial option seeks to escape mainstream postcolonial theory that it believes remains dominated by Western modes of thinking about the world (Mignolo & Escobar, 2010).

Can a postcolonial perspective shed new light on the identity of Russian spaces in the BSR? At the very least, it offers an alternative to the constructivist and poststructuralist analyses that dominate the IR literature and bring discussions up to speed with developments in the wider IR discipline. I believe it could also contribute to a more nuanced perspective on the Kaliningrad Oblast that accounts for its unique position in

the BSR. Empirical research needs to be conducted that applies a postcolonial perspective to an analysis of foreign policy within the BSR context.

Concluding Remarks: Challenges for Future Research

So what do these approaches omit and are there other ways we can think about Russia in the BSR? It is clear that all these approaches offer critical alternatives to rationalist ways of thinking about politics and they all possess value in accounting for the role of ideas and discourses in shaping Russia's identity. Despite the potential for these critical approaches to help us understand Russia's position in the BSR in a new way, there remain some outstanding issues that require attention. I will identify five challenges in particular for future empirical research.

Firstly, all perspectives remain locked in a discourse of Othering, even those that purport to problematise or deconstruct the idea of the Other by giving it a degree of agency. For example, approaches that claim that the Other/subject has agency implicitly *grant* them this agency, in the sense that the subject remains passive, being granted their agency by the scholar. Can the Other only become an active participant in identity politics if it is granted agency by the epistemic community? Can it not be an agent in its own right?

Secondly, Russia remains the Other – an Other with agency, but an Other nevertheless. This begs the question, is there any approach that can escape a discourse of Othering? Is there any other way in which we can conceive of Russia in relation to Europe both in general and in the BSR specifically? At least for the time being, it appears not.

Thirdly, all approaches remain inherently Eurocentric. A solution to this problem would be to examine Russian IR and consider the ideas it puts forward. However, according to Makarychev and Morozov (2013), Russian IR is not useful as it is too relativistic, politicised and stuck in existing dichotomies. Is it best, as they suggest, to ignore Russian IR completely? Surely this is another way of perpetuating existing dichotomies. Another solution is to consider the idea that being on the periphery is also not necessarily a negative situation for Russia. There is an implicit assumption in the literature that being

the Other, on the margins, outside, peripheralised – in essence occupying any position that is not the centre – is something that signifies something unwanted, while those pursuing a normative agenda look for ways in which Russia can belong to the EU-constructed BSR. But Russia's marginalisation in this region is not only something that has been forced upon it by Europe, nor is it necessarily a problem that only Europe (or the EU) can rectify. It is also a conscious choice on behalf of Russia in which it actively participates in its own marginalisation. We should ask, how much does it suit Russia to be the peripheralised entity in this region? It is not only due to enduring European hegemony that Russia is marginalised in the BSR, but a complex combination of EU foreign policy peripheralising Russian regions, and Russia as a political actor in its' own right that sees some benefit in being marginalised. Regionalisation, particularly in the Kaliningrad Oblast, is considered detrimental to federalisation and this significantly dictates Moscow's decision not to actively participate in all cross-regional projects and activities. Empirical analysis will shed more light on these matters, but for now I would argue that a new way of understanding Russia's identity in the BSR is required that accounts for the fact that Russia's enduring marginalisation in the BSR is not only due to Europe, but forms a part of Russian policy as well.

Fourthly, there is ambiguity in regards to the object of study. Something to consider is the significance of studying *Russia* as the object of analysis as opposed to *regions of Russia* (such as Kaliningrad). The differences between these two categories require further definition and articulation, as the literature does not make it clear to which it is referring at times, resulting in the two becoming blended together. In this paper, I have referred to 'Russia', the Kaliningrad Oblast, and Russian regions within the larger BSR; different levels of analysis that complicate the study. When we examine EU-Russia relations in the BSR, should we look at Russia the sovereign entity, the Kaliningrad Oblast as a problematic region of Russia that exists within this space, or at those regions that share the Baltic Sea coastline? For future empirical research, this question is of vital importance.

Finally, the literature is overly theoretical and requires empirical testing. In order to determine what political identity Russia has in the BSR it is necessary to analyse foreign policy documents and political rhetoric, and to conduct interviews with politicians and

members of the multitude of macro-regional and cross-border political institutions present in the region. This paper has restricted itself to a discussion of the existing approaches and debates regarding Russia's identity in the BSR. The next step is to apply these theoretical approaches to empirical case studies to test their applicability and relevance. This will be the focus of the remainder of my doctoral project.

This paper has attempted to introduce three different approaches to Russia's identity in the BSR; two dominant approaches and one alternative. Ultimately I do not believe that any single approach can adequately account for the complicated situation that Russia finds itself in within the BSR. Nor do I believe that any of these approaches truly enables a full understanding of how Russia constructs its own identity in this region. It is important that we view Russia not as a passive subject but also as an actor in its' own right that plays a role in projecting its own identity just as much as this identity is shaped by hegemonic discourses. This is important as Russia's role in the BSR has an impact on practical cross-border cooperation. The remainder of my doctoral project hopes to stimulate awareness of the impact of ideas and constructed identities upon practical cooperation in the BSR and suggest solutions as to how to overcome these challenges.

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RSA Annual Conference Graz 2016
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