The Double Headed Eagle: Looking East, Looking West: A Postcolonial Analysis of Russia's relations vis-à-vis the EU

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Abstract

This thesis contends that previous attempts to theorise Russian foreign policy have been splintered by their failure to conceptualise the nuances of the Russian case, as a nation caught on the periphery of both Europe and Asia. These theoretical disparities stem from the inability of Western-oriented IR to transgress clear-cut boundaries, a discrepancy most profound in an analysis of Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea. Thus, in an attempt to resolve these deficits, this study argues that understanding Russian foreign policy can be greatly nuanced by the critical guise of a postcolonial lens, as a theory sensitive to structurally constructed systems of power and their impact on the selection of foreign policy choices available to international actors. This will be explored in conjunction with the theoretical stronghold of constructivism, whereby identity and foreign policy are regarded as intimately linked and mutually constitutive processes. This study will then progress to yield these arguments to identify and analyse instances whereby President Putin engages in a practise of 'mimicking' of the West, of which this study will argue is an effective strategy of resistance to challenge their peripheral subordination in the eyes of their Eurocentric superiors. Identification of this is crucial to understand the oxymoronic and contradictory nature of Putin's foreign policy. However, this dissertation will ultimately conclude that these strategies, in engaging in an endless game of catch-up with the West, will inevitably fall-short. This dissertation seeks to offer explanations as to why this is the case.

Above all else Russia was, is and will, of course, be a major European power. Achieved through much suffering by European culture, the ideals of freedom, human rights, justice and democracy have for many centuries been our society's determining values.

-   Vladimir Putin (2005)

Sometimes it is necessary to be lonely in order to prove that you are right.

-Vladimir Putin (2014)

In the 2013 edition of the *Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation,* an official white paper that outlines the main interests and priorities of the Russian state, the Kremlin described their foreign policy as 'transparent, predictable and reliable.' Just a year later, Putin shocked the Western world with his 'surprise' annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, paving the way for a significant deterioration in Russian-Western relations. This begs the question, how did the West fail to see it coming? Specifically, how did scholarly International Relations (henceforth IR) fail to see it coming? Indeed, in 1939, Winston Churchill famously observed that Russia is a 'riddle wrapped inside a mystery inside an enigma.' And at a first glance, it would seem this enigma has once again resurfaced. Such is the view of American International Relations Scholars, for instance, of which only 14% predicted Russia's annexation (Foreign Policy, 2014). Similarly, moving closer to home, scholars have speculated that the Russian debate about Europe increasingly resembles something of a 'curiosity cabinet' (Neumann,

2016, p. xii). Thus, whilst the Russian debate remains as contested as ever, what has become clear is the fact that 'Western leaders would love to know what Putin's "endgame" is' (Marten, 2015, p. 191). In seeking to nuance our understanding of Russian foreign policy post-1991, it is this debate that motivates the production of this study.

Since the collapse of the USSR, studies of Russian foreign policy have rooted their locus within the contours of realist International Relations, consulting the phenomenon through the more conventional lens of *realpolitik.* Accordingly, any attempt to deviate from the institutionalised status quo EU-Russian relationship has quickly been regarded as Russia's attempt to stretch their revanchist arm in pursuit of the creation of *Russkiy Mir*, a 'Russian World' (Klimkin, 2017). This is a trajectory Western politicians have been quick to charge with full force in guiding their responses to Russia, seemingly re-embedding the 21st century back in the binary dynamics of the Cold War (Parkin and Buergin, 2014; Al Jazeera, 2017). However, this study contends that in doing so, realist scholarship has fallen incredibly short. The purpose of theory is 'to give order and meaning to a mass of phenomena which without it would remain disconnected and unintelligible' (McClelland, 1960, p. 9). Yet, in failing to predict the Crimean annexation, it seems that realist scholarship, as a theoretical framework for making sense of the world, has failed in its role. In context of this, the purpose of this research will be the location and construction of an alternative conceptual framework to effectively accommodate the seemingly conflictual nature of Russian foreign policy. This is of heightened importance if we consider the Kremlin's U-turn in policy, especially in comparison to the integrationist rhetoric of *Perestroika* forged just quarter of a century prior.

Utilising Russia's insurgency in Ukraine as a starting point, this study will first seek to pay debts to the main scholarly traditions where Russia's foreign policy has figured centrally. This will include an analysis of the constructivist relaying of the intimate link between foreign policy and identity, a theoretical stronghold this paper employs and builds on. This forms the basis of Chapter One, where our critical examination will assess the value of these theories in producing explanatory frameworks that can account for the nuances of the Russian situation. However, this chapter will conclude with the assertion that these approaches are restricted due to epistemological deficits and ontological restrictions regarding methodological parameters.

Once this conceptual groundwork has been mapped, Chapter Two will flesh out theoretical postcolonialism as an analytical framework. It is crucial that the study devotes significant attention to exploring this, given the controversy that a postcolonial approach to an often-regarded 'imperial' nation may generate. In the latter half, this study will then apply this framework to make a 'postcolonial' case for Russia. This will be explored in consultation with contemporary Russian foreign policy vis-à-vis the EU.

Chapter Three will then test the conceptual framework that this thesis has elucidated, adding empirical grounding by returning to the original case at hand— Russia's annexation of Crimea. Here, it will be argued that a nuanced understanding of intervention could be gleaned from a postcolonial lens. Finally, this will be brought together and discussed within the conclusion.

Crucially, while arguing that postcolonial scholarship can bring a necessary dynamism to the Russian debate, it must be stressed that this thesis does not purport that Russian foreign policy can or should be studied via one interpretative schema. Indeed, the unidimensional perspective characteristic of previous scholarship is what this study precisely seeks to supplement. This paper proposes that postcolonialism can offer a medium through which fruitful, interdisciplinary dialogue can be fostered, with the end goal the construction of a conceptual toolkit capable of teasing out the nuances of Russia's foreign policy. In this fashion, this study seeks to employ a relatively infant nexus between realist, constructivist *and* postcolonial scholarship. Similarly, this thesis does not serve to propose any definite answers. Instead, in being pragmatic about theoretical choices, this study intends to explore how different scholarly traditions can be welded together to yield new and innovatory benefits.

Lastly, as an exercise in critical IR, this study does account for domestic factors that may influence the production of policy. This should not be regarded as an analytical choice, for domestic political tension is critical for understanding any nation's foreign policy – no less in Russia. This study does not however account for individual presidential terms, and the fluctuation between Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev. Instead, a general trajectory of continuity is assumed in accordance with the thematic orientation of this dissertation. This is simply due to the scope of this thesis, for its length does not permit a discussion that could compellingly incorporate its influence into examination. As a result, it is fruitful to consider this thesis in drawing on the tendency of constructivist scholarship to locate a 'plethora of minor or isolated conflict issues into an overarching narrative…offer[ing] an interpretation of its occurrence in the ethico-political terms of identity and difference' (Prozorov, 2006, p. 28).

Chapter One: Theoretical Underpinnings: The Problem of Russia

1.1: The Problem of International Relations and Russian Foreign Policy: The 'West' as

Gatekeepers

Although scholars have increasingly attempted to tackle it in recent years,

contemporary mainstream IR still suffers from an extreme deficit of understanding of

the cultural and historical origins of the modern international system (Zarakol, 2011, p.

6; Salter, 2002, pp. 114-120). As a conceptual paradigm, literature derived from the

classical, structural or neo-realist schools have largely propagated this omission; by

restricting the level of analysis to the confines of the international, realist scholars

theorise the behaviour of states directly as a result of the international system itself,

which assumes as given that states, as the central actors on the global stage, operate

from the exogenous premise that they are sovereign, rational entities. Through this

classical prism, the relationship between states and the international sphere is best

understood as 'anarchic'; states retain absolute autonomy over the policies they chose

to implement, including, if necessary, the monopolisation of force (Waltz, 1979; Glaser,

2010). Understanding states' behaviour towards other actors is thus reduced to the

very imperative of each state to survive, rendering their drive for power the most

important motive:

> 'The concept of interest defined as power…infuses rational order into the subject
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> matter of politics, and thus makes the theoretical understanding of politics

possible. On the side of the actor, it provides for rational discipline in action and creates that astounding continuity in foreign policy which makes American, British or Russian foreign policy appear as an intelligible, rational continuum' (Morgenthau cited in Steele, 2008, p. 9).

In a similar regard, since its 're-emergence' from the relics of the USSR, analysis of Russia's foreign policy posture have followed suit, with scholars locating the level of analysis on that of a geostrategic and or security dimension (Blank & Rubinstein, 1997; Black, 2004). Since Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, this literature has received a revived injection of interest, with theorists seeking to understand Russia's conduct chalking up the old balance-of-power rhetoric reminiscent of the Cold War discursive practices(Mead, 2014; Allison, 2014). Such scholarship typically rehashes and recycles references to Russia's 'Great Power' identity, using it as a synonym for a more revanchist agenda 'typical' of Russia's character; this adds considerable weight to arguments that seek to identify Russia's international choices with that of a relentless neo-imperialist agenda, oriented towards restoring old Soviet geopolitical boundaries, a trend that is noticeable, such scholars argue, throughout Russia's history (Kotkin, 2016; Isakova, 2005, pp. 11-80; Grigas, 2016). These assumptions are therefore preconditioned by the notion that the trajectory of Russian foreign policy should still be considered within the binary of Russia vs. the West, and thus 'beset by irresolvable tension and an obsession with gains by an increasingly assertive, even aggressive, Moscow' (Averre, 2008, p. 29). As a result, it is compelling to suggest that such scholarship regards foreign policy a 'domain of intricate statecraft, divorced from ideological considerations and seeking to attain an advantageous balance of power' (Prozorov, 2007, p. 316). Whilst scholars such as Mankoff (2012) and Oliker *et al* (2009,

pp. 83-138) seek to progress this level of analysis, mediating explanations of Russia's

foreign policy choices in the dynamic intersection between the international and the

domestic, such texts are still limited by their entertainment of the narrow guise of

realpolitik.[1]

Indeed, analysis of foreign policy at the state level is a key methodological strategy of

international relations (Leichtova, 2016, p. 2). However, the consequences of restricting

analysis to this level are more severe than a flaw in methodological strategy, for foreign

policy is not merely limited to strategic security concerns (Tsygankov, 2007, p. 376).

Rather, this explanative framework carries profound implications for individual actors

typified as on the 'underside' of modernity, for Waltzean neorealism operates from the

uncritical reception of a 'Western-led' world order, concurrently regarding the

institutional structures and practices that characterise the international order a

universalised model (Kapoor, 2008; Ziai, 2016). This Western-oriented epistemological

bias is underpinned by the notion of development as a teleological, linear process in

which economic 'maturity' is rendered an objective indicator that can be measured by

modernisation (Rostow, 1990, pp. 4-16). For Russia, emerging from the relics of a failed

modernisation project coined under the acronym of 'communism', their contemporary

development has been stunted by this game of catch-up. Implicit in this is the notion of

the West as a 'benchmark' for civilisation (Abalkin, 1995). Thus, by privileging an

analytical model that renders relations between states as motivated by the analogous

drive for *power,* realist scholars play an integral part in reproducing Eurocentric

subjectivity, and are hence responsible for the maintenance of the specific normative

structures that constitute the Western model of the world (Toulmin, 1990). In turn, realist scholars significantly underplay the notion of *identity* in the formation of foreign policy, and thus ignore the conditioning influence of a vast culmination of 'truths' and 'norms' that may differ to the Western assumptions realists recognise as 'fact' (Roberts, 2017, p. 29; Wiarda, 1981).

Whilst this thesis does not entirely seek to discount the explanative merits of *realpolitik* and realism for understanding Russian foreign policy, it emphasises that this lens fails to account for the restraints that influence the selection of foreign policy options available. In practice, more often than not states are *not* free to act how they please and are *not* motivated by the sole influence of geopolitics. The so-called 'rationalist' approaches of IR fail to explain, as poignantly summarised by Samokhvalov (2018) 'why Putin – while condemning EU sanctions against Russia – still sits humbly at the negotiating table with Angela Markel and Emmanuel Macron' (p. 810). Perhaps most infamously, theory was also unable to elucidate why, after half a century, the leaders of the Soviet Union stood idly by as the Warsaw Pact unraveled in front of their very eyes (Donaldson et al, 2014, p. 5). As a result, traditional IR as an analytical tool has been unable to theorise why some kinds of interaction, and some kinds of policy choices, are constituted as thinkable, or perhaps more importantly, *unthinkable.* In a similar fashion, foreign policy analysis stemming from the loci of *realpolitik* has largely restricted its own efficacy as a result of the failure to consider the historic constraints that greatly limit the agency of certain actors to act as they please. This is of heightened importance if we consider the complex contemporary situation of Russian foreign policy: even if we limit the scope of analysis to considering the impact of Russia's tumultuous experiences throughout the twentieth century on the composition of policy, as highlighted by Derek

Averre (2008, p. 28) we can note, at the very simplest, internal tensions between those who seek to promote 'a strong, independent, "sovereign" Russia, and a Russia seeking to integrate into – or at least play a constructive role in – an interdependent, globalising international order.' It is the tendency of realist scholarship to grossly oversimplify, therefore, that testifies to the exploration of alternative conceptual frameworks in the theorisation of Russian foreign policy.

1.2 The Problem of the 'Other'

As illuminated by Tsygankov (2008), one of the biggest consequences of this insensitivity of Western IR to the historical and cultural disparity of the field is the inability of the theory to come to terms with the Self/Other dialectic. Treating the Other seriously requires a commitment to acknowledging the Other's 'equality to the Self', especially in terms of 'defining parameters and boundaries of knowledge' (Tsygankov, 2008, p. 764). However, in propagating theorisations committed to pro-Western discursive structures, realism operates on the assumption of the superiority of the Self, and in turn, treats the Other as secondary and thus inferior (Blaney & Inayatullah, 2016, p. 70). By failing to engage in a constructive dialogue with the Other, scholarship situated within the contours of mainstream IR has become significantly hamstrung by its inability to theorise the problem of difference. Indeed, if we contextualise this lapse as implicative for understanding why Russia acts the way it does, this neglect shows itself to be critical, for scholars consistently cite and make reference to the problem of difference as paramount in the constitution of Russia's foreign policy (Leichtova, 2016, pp. 67-94).

Since the early 1990s, however, constructivist scholars have established a strong analytical tradition in which tackling this deficiency has taken centre stage. In contrast to self-proclaimed rationalist approaches, constructivists argue that international politics is socially constructed; as prescribed by Wendt in his pioneering study on social constructivism in IR, this is the fundamental basis for the claim that 'anarchy is what states make of it' (Wendt, 1999, p. 313). Thus, Wendt argues that states are fundamentally 'purposive actors' and thus on an analytical level, the anthropomorphic concepts such as identity, interest, and intentionality can be applied (Wendt, 1999, pp. 317-318). Crucially, this difference between constructivism and rationalism is most profound in the nexus of identity: for the rationalist, the boundaries of the Self are fixed, for their identity is known *a priori* and are simply not at stake or changed by interaction with the Other. For the constructivist, the boundaries of the Self *are* at stake, and hence collective identity formation is subject to a constant process of change and transformation. (Wendt, 1999, p. 317). Drawing on Hegels' theory of recognition, constructivists generally operate from the premise that identities are relational: it is only through social interaction, in which actors engage in 'struggles for recognition' with each other, that a sense of Self is formed (Greenhill, 2008, p. 345; Petersson, 2013, p. 14; Weber, 2010, p. 62). Thus, identity and foreign policy can be considered as mutually constitutive; foreign policy is both a producer of, and an anchor of identity, for it coalesces a broad range of shared norms – what 'We' are – in relation to what 'We' are not - our 'Others' - therefore distinguishing the parameters between 'Us' and 'Them' (Medvedev & Neumann, 2012, p. 18). Privileging foreign policy as instrumental in producing these boundaries has become a well-versed promulgation of constructivist thinking.

Wendt's concept that the Self does not exist prior to interaction with the Other has subsequently been mobilised as an analytical referent in which normative policy and interstate relations are understood as driven by identity construction (Buitrago, 2012, p. xiv). States as actors can therefore be understood as sites of contestation themselves, products of a 'political project to include certain individuals or collectives at the expense of foreign or threatening others' (Steele, 2008, p. 30). However, arguably as a result of the need of constructivism to be in theoretical competition with realism, in employing a process with high levels of abstraction, constructivists have paradoxically often found themselves fraught by their failure to conceptualise norms as 'tools of power.' (Zarakol, 2011, pp. 17-18). Whilst it would be unreasonable to suggest that constructivist scholars are blind to the stratifying potential of international norms, they often fall short in theorising why and how 'states…may be persuaded by norm entrepreneurs (or other states) to choose from a menu of international norms.' Consequently, constructivist scholars very rarely engage in an analysis that acknowledges the potential that power dynamics, inherent to any relationship between actors, may be reproduced by the socialising process itself (Zarakol, 2011, pp. 14-16). This has significant consequences for understanding how certain Self-Other relationships prevail, such as the Russia-EU relationship – and thus who may be perceived and presented as an 'Other', for as highlighted by Makarychev (2008) the norm can be yielded as an instrument of 'conformity, which is contrasted with irregularity, disorder or eccentricity' (p. 1). Those with the power to perpetuate the norms, therefore, retain significant control over who is excluded and included in the creation of political subjectivity. As a result, constructivist analysis very rarely consults the Self as a product of a wider international system (Morozov, 2015, p. 45). It is this

deficiency which hence necessitates an exploration of other theoretical frameworks as absolutely critical in order to bring the process of the manifestation of normativity, and thus the creation of the Other, under scrutiny.

1.3 The Problem with 'Essentialising' Identity

Importantly, this de-contextualisation has resulted in an uncritical foregrounding of the Self-Other dichotomy that has remained central to colouring analysis of identity construction (Epstein, 2010) 'essentialising' identity. Here, as highlighted by Epstein (2010), 'the self-other relationship stands as fixed and already constituted prior to the onset of the process, as something that is then to be undone by that process, rather than that which is centrally constituted by it' (p. 337). Thus, the agency of the Other is tacitly restricted in constructivist analysis as necessitated in existence only to the extent that it is a mere presence in reproducing the identity discourses of the Self in the Self/Other dialectic (Morozov and Rumelili, 2012). As purported by Campbell (1998), these more Self-centered accounts are misguided, for it often alludes to the nature of Othering as an endogenous process, concurrent with more antagonistic interpretations which have reduced the role of the Other to something of an enemy figure; the Self is thus solely defined as being 'positioned in contradistinction to difference', and thus identity composition manifests through what the Self views itself not to be (p. 74). If this characterisation of the Self-Other dialectic is taken as assumed, then theorisations of identarian relationships, and thus foreign policy choices, are already limited to the narrow dichotomy in which conflict or cooperation become the only options available, before even engaging in any productive analysis. (Hopf, 2002, p. 3). This oscillation is not a theoretically sustainable presumption.

This precondition has often adversely affected scholars who have placed Russia under a constructivist lens. If we dissect Neumann's (1995; 1999) seminal studies on Russian identity and foreign policy, for example, we can deduce a similar conclusion as drawn from Neumann's categorisations of 'True' and 'False' Europe. Employing a *longue durée* framework to trace the extensive history of relations between Russia and Europe, Neumann diagnosed Russia's ambiguous position as a result of a continuous process of Othering, in which the idea of Europe exists as the main 'Other' through which the identity of Russia is defined, and vice versa. Methodologically, the process of Othering occurs through the manifestation of discursive practises; foreign policy is regarded as the product of an extensive collection of dialogic acts which have been packaged together to render certain 'truths' and norms possible, in turn translating into the particular representations and images that compose the representation of the Other. Thus, '"Europe" is seen as a speech act; it is talked and written into existence' (Neumann, 2016, p. 21). Crucially, however, Neumann identified only two 'ideas' of Europe that have preconditioned the policies the Russian Self has toyed with over the course of their tumultuous relationship: 'True' Europe – seemingly progressive, liberal, secular – and 'False' Europe – conservative, legalist, religious (Samokhvalov, 2018, p. 792). This discursive identity conflict lays the boundaries for different policy outcomes, an idea reinforced by Ted Hopf's (2002) seminal study, which traced the 'identity terrain' of Moscow in 1955 and 1999 to identify how different representations of the Other conditioned international affairs.

Importantly, Neumann's twin studies have been pivotal in advancing the notion that this is first and foremost a debate over what Russia views itself to be as measured in

relation to its predominant Other, Europe; its actions seemingly follow suit. Without discounting an awareness of a vast and dynamic literature, this idea profits off an extensive catalogue of debates rooted in the dichotomy between 'Westernisers' and 'Slavophiles' that have raged since the 18th century, a debate which has subsequently experienced a revival with Putin's presidential inauguration in 2000 (and again in 2012), leading many scholars to assert that contemporary Russia is on a mission to (re)find their place in the world (Toal, 2017, pp. 81-92; Samokhvalov, 2017, pp. 211-247). For popular Western media, this is a mission that has established its roots firmly in fashioning an identity solely out of opposition to the West (including Europe), an idea that is beset by the ominous precondition of Russia's inherent drive to Great Power (Bohm, 2013). Indeed, this is a belief which has been significantly exaggerated by Putin himself: even in the earliest days of his presidency, Putin profoundly declared "either Russia will be great or it will not be at all" (Putin as cited in German Association for East European Studies, 2014), crucially retorting that:

> Russia is not claiming a great power status. It *is* a great power by virtue of its huge potential, its history and culture (Putin, 1999).

This debate is amplified if we consider Russia's perplexing geopolitical location. In their study on Russia national identity, both Franklin and Widdis (2004) captured this intricate situation in its more nuanced format particularly poignantly:

> Where, for example, is Russia? Is it 'Western' or 'Eastern'? It 'ought' to be
> Western in that – like the 'West' (which in such comparisons tends to be seen as
> a single cultural entity) it is heir to the traditions both of Christianity and of the

Enlightenment, and has been a full and leading participant in 'Western' traditions of literature and music. Or perhaps it 'ought' to be Eastern: located prominently in Asia, it is said to be mystical and authoritarian in its approach to religion, monolithic and despotic in its governance. Yet, it is not quite 'the East' either: not India, Persia or China –also lumped together as a single cultural entity in such comparisons. Russia's indeterminacy even leads it to the invention of a special physical and conceptual space for it: "Eurasia"' (p. 2).

With this considered, therefore, scholars have purported that Russia plausibly has two paths it can follow: this is best pronounced within the categorisations of *transitionalism* and *traditionalism* coined by Prozorov (2006, pp. 11-19). Here, 'transitionalist' scholars speculate Russia as inherently European, thus arguing it is 'in dire need of learning from the West' (Haukkala, 2003, p. 276). On the other hand, those who accentuate its more Asiatic characteristics, 'traditionalists', argue Russia is bestowed with a 'special messianic mission to save the Western world from itself' (Taylor, 1996, pp. 252-280). Regardless, it is a debate monopolised by the necessity of a choice: there is no room for a power with a somewhat 'dual' identity.

This is an idea that this thesis will continue to employ and develop, especially since it can be afforded a compelling concrete grounding. If we employ the dichotomy of 'True' and 'False' Europe to an assessment of Russia's contemporary political climate, for example, Russia's recent conservative turn in domestic and foreign policy can be attributed to its increasing regard of itself as 'True' Europe. In contrast, as Neumann (2017) has more recently highlighted, contemporary Europe is considered to be a 'degenerate cesspool that can only be salvaged by following Russia's shining example'

(p. 89), a prime example of which can be poignantly located within the restrictive boundaries of Russia's managed democracy, liberal in form yet rigidly autocratic in content (Nygren, 2010). Indeed, in striving to be 'True' Europe, Putin evokes the language of liberalism – seemingly consistent with that of the EU – whilst simultaneously retaining an often conflictual and oxymoronic commitment to the traditional norms and values of the Russian Orthodox Church (Putin, 2011a; 2018).[2] Thus, whilst this study recognises the utility of these works, it also remains cautious of the precondition that Russia's identity –and thus foreign policy – can be neatly categorised into the boxes of European or Asian, conflict or cooperation. Indeed, as illuminated by Hall (2009), identity should be regarded as 'contradictory, as composed as more than one discourse, as composed always across the silences of the other, as written in and through ambivalence and desire' (p. 203). Thus, to factionalise is to oversimplify. Recognising this is crucial in order to develop a framework which avoids the pitfalls that previous scholars have fallen into, but instead accounts for all the nuances of Russia's identity, a concept surveyed and explored in the ensuing sections.

Thus, whilst this study does not seek to disregard the more abstract theorisations of the Self Other dichotomy, it simply aims to draw upon the nuanced contours of the field that lend themselves greatly to synthesis with postcolonial scholarship to advance 'identity' as the product of a dynamic, multi-faceted process in which there can be no one single 'spatial or temporal source' (Campbell, 1998, p. 74). In doing so, Othering must be considered a *process* that can constitute a multitude of modes and mediums; this is crucial to understand the Other as an actor *with* agency, possessing a subversive power

in its own right to negate, contest and produce the intersubjective meanings and prepositions that are paramount for explaining why *liminal* identities appear – identities such as Russia, that are formulated from 'partly self / partly other' subject positions (Morozov & Rumelili, 2005; Diez, 2005). It would be reductionist, therefore, to see Othering merely as the practise of 'discrimination, denigration, exclusion and violence' (Morozov & Rumelili, 2005, p. 31). If we followed this logic, it would be tempting to regard Putin's foreign policy solely as an instrumental manipulation of a resentment for the 'West', for as suggested by Roberts (2017), 'little unites a nation more than a common enemy' (p. 33). However, as this study has so far emphasised, Russia's identity and foreign policy should not be shelved into neat, distinguishable pigeonholes; to do so adds considerable ammunition to realist scholarship that has been quick to dismiss Putin's as without cause for legitimacy.

Chapter Two: Making a Case for Postcolonialism

2.1 Postcolonialism as a Methodological Framework

It is here that this thesis advances that constructivism meets at an important intersection with the discursive and analytical parameters proposed by postcolonialism. This chapter will now seek to develop this juncture, before then proceeding to apply the framework to an operationalisation of Russia's foreign policy.

Although itself subject to debate, it is generally agreed that the genesis of postcolonial thinking emerged during the articulations of freedom and liberation of the anti-colonial

struggles of the 19th and 20th centuries (Young, 2009). As highlighted by Bhabha (1994), this has therefore rendered the theory as concerned with:

> ...the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order. Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of 'minorities' within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South (p. 245).

The dated geopolitical labelling aside, postcolonialism as understood as a voice for the voiceless therefore gained academic currency as a field generally concerned with the salience of power and inequality in fashioning Self-Other relationships (McEwan, 2008, pp. 34-74; Krishna, 2009, pp. 63-104). Crucially, however, postcolonialism purports that we can only understand these relationships by foregrounding the long and extensive history of unequal development fostered by colonialism, of which facilitated the surreptitious universalisation and institutionalisation of the meta-language of Eurocentrism (Chakrabarty, 2000). Here, colonialism is generally referred to as an anachronistic term for capitalist expansion and domination (thus equating globalisation as neo-colonialism), for postcolonialism understands both processes as intimately linked, and thus providing the enabling conditions for the other to flourish (Sethi, 2011, p. 5; Krishna, 2009, pp. 3-4). As a means to identify a starting point for this chapter, it is therefore analytically useful to employ a definition of theoretical postcolonialism as offered by Young (2016):

> [postcolonialism is a] critique of contemporary power structures [as] combined
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> with an interventionist methodology for the analysis of the subjective and
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> material conditions of the postcolonial era (p. 58).

Here, the term 'postcolonial' is not used as a temporal marker; the use of the prefix 'post' does not presuppose an end to the colonial era as in accordance to the chronological periodisations and epochs generated by Western modernity thinking (Ganguly, 2006, pp. 162-179). Instead, the 'post' in postcolonial should be understood as signifying 'the entire historical period after the beginnings of colonialism' (Seth, 2013, p. 1). Thus, as highlighted by Rutazibwa and Shilliam (2018), it is more fruitful to consider the term 'postcolonial' as a 'marker of limits', used as a lens to attempt to grapple with the continuing fluidity of constraints imposed on actors as generated from the legacies of empire (p. 5). As a result, postcolonial studies, as a theoretical discourse, paves the way for a fundamental shift in the loci of analysis; offering a 'language of and for those who have no place', postcolonialism prompts important questions about representative and structural practises located at the very epicentre of identity construction (Young, 2009, p. 14).

Crucially, it is important to clarify that in choosing to offer a definition of postcolonialism, this thesis does not intend to suggest that postcolonialism should be considered in a similar regard to that of more rationalist thought, such as realism. These can typically be classified as embodying one theoretical entity, espousing a specific set of ideas and methodological practises and thus lending itself, by nature of theoretical parameters, to the capacity to be defined. Rather, as highlighted by Abrahamsen (2003), more analogous to that of constructivism, postcolonialism should be treated as a

diverse 'set of ideas and problematizations of major areas in contemporary social and political theory' (p. 191). Consequently, whilst it is plausible to suggest that this has painted the field with a certain degree of ambiguity, leading many scholars to apply its framework somewhat indiscriminately to the all people of the Global South, this thesis will argue that it is this very condition of inconclusiveness that provides postcolonialism with its very strength, for it bestows the theory with a heuristic malleability to able to transgress the traditional dichotomies that have restricted the efficacy of more traditional theories, such as thus explored prior (Gandhi, 1998, p. viii).[3] As a result, the critical gaze of theoretical postcolonialism can be adapted to a vast range of actors and contexts, stretched beyond those of its initial consideration.

Thus, as a methodological framework, postcolonialism possesses a greater elasticity than constructivism to be able to mediate between both the specificities of the local and the ambiguity of the global, regarding them as intimately entwined phenomenon and structurally dependent on each-other. As a result, the uniqueness of each individual actor is accommodated for, as postcolonialism espouses the conceptual tools necessary to interrogate, deconstruct and provincialize the ontologies that constrain the production of intersubjective meanings and identities in the international sphere. As highlighted by Said (1995), even the more critical of IR theories, such as Marxism, have stunted their own growth in this regard by uncritically accepting Western preconditions as their starting points, such as the assumption of a natural and basic distinction between East and West (p. 88). Subsequently, rather than asking 'what is postcolonialism?' it is perhaps more fruitful to consider, as suggested by Huggan (2016,

p. 18), 'what can postcolonialism do?' Indeed, whilst the point should be made that postcolonial scholars would place little value in discussing foreign policy for it is a promulgation of the nation-state, itself a product of modernity's ontological coding, it is more the uncompromisingly critical nature of postcolonialism, grounded empirically in its concerns for questioning the preconditioned and deep rooted grammars of the international system, that this thesis employs (Seth, 2000, pp. 214-226). In suggesting that an understanding of Russian foreign policy could benefit from postcolonialism's epistemic and ontological frameworks, it is this important distinction that this thesis intends to advance.

In a reciprocal manner, the peculiarities of the Russian case also produce somewhat of a 'productive tension' within the field, for it breathes fresh air into normative concepts that have become more or less accepted as staples of postcolonial thought. As poignantly highlighted by Morozov (2015), the assertion of Russia as a subaltern in the world system does not necessitate that we afford it with an 'unquestionable moral authority', despite Russia itself subscribing to a number of hybrid techniques that postcolonial scholars attribute as characteristic of the restricted agency of the subaltern (p. 4). Indeed, to do so would be counterproductive, for as aptly suggested by Tlostanova (2018), 'the wolf's fangs stick out of its sheep's clothing' (p. 3). However, it is this somewhat pseudo-subaltern position, which sees Russia speaking in the name of the subaltern, yet itself reinforcing an imperial order via the consolidation of an oppressive internal authoritarian regime, which throws new light onto old concepts, highlighting their versatility whilst simultaneously defining their limits (Morozov, 2015, p. 4). In a similar regard, therefore, this thesis argues that postcolonialism must abandon any spatial binary that presupposes or conflates a dichotomy between the

colonial and the colonised; this is absolutely crucial for the theory to decentre itself, and thus render itself capable to foreground the experience of nations caught in an awkward, oxymoronic 'blind spot', such as Russia (Waldstein, 2010).

2.2 Making a Postcolonial Case for Russia

This thesis will now seek to advance the argument of postcolonialism's utility, fleshing out its epistemological concerns that can be consulted in conjunction with an analysis of Russia's foreign policy. This section seeks to add considerable weight to the more dynamic strands of Othering Section 1.3 identified, whilst simultaneously proposing solutions to some of the shortcomings. This is crucial in order to emphasise the argument that if we consider Russia as a bi-product of secondary Eurocentrism, we can illuminate the influencing factor structures of power and inequality have yielded over foreign policy.

It is first necessary to identify that since the collapse of the USSR in 1991, postcolonial studies have been reluctant to reach out to the former Soviet Bloc as a whole. Recently, a small albeit burgeoning trend of literature has attempted to fill this lacuna, capitalising on the analytical pragmatism to conceptualise the relatively untouched void of the 'post-communist experience' (Tlostanova, 2012; Velickovic, 2012; Buchowski, 2006; Morozov, 2015). This void has typically been filled by the particularities of area studies (such as Russian studies), and thus failed to bridge the gap between the local and the global. Thus, in drawing parallels between the structurally constructed situation of the international and the position of marginality that ex-communist states endure, this literature has acknowledged post-communism as a 'certain structural situation',

illuminating that the trajectory of such countries can too be consulted in a similar manner as former colonies (albeit crucially, not the same), for they too are bounded by the similar constraints on self-representation, agency and voice that Eurocentrism has produced (Morozov, 2015, pp. 40-41).

It is useful here to re-root our discussion in the crucial takeaway point from the work of Neumann – Europe as Russia's Other – for it serves as an effective springboard through which we can launch a postcolonial analysis. Crucially, by highlighting the relationality of Russia's identity, Neumann teased the notion of Russia as *dependent* on the West for definition, and thus not only inferred Russia's liminality in the eyes of the EU, but also suggested that Russia has internalised a Eurocentric world view, rendering itself transformable to European standards, although this idea was not fully elaborated. Postcolonial scholarship on identity construction, on the other hand, allows us to take this analysis one step further. Indeed, by regarding colonialism as a process that was enabled by the way in which identities of the subjugated were imagined and managed, postcolonial scholars have illuminated how structures of hegemony reproduce themselves through *difference* (rather than similarity) and through *power* (rather than oppression), and thus spearheading the crucial theorisation that there is an inherent power in representation (Hall, 1996, p. 17; Gandhi, 1998, p. 5; Enloe, 1996). Borrowing from the ideas of Gramsci, this was a concept vividly conceptualised in Spivak's denotation of the 'subaltern', illuminating the inevitably problematized development of the colonised subject as precluded by an 'insufficient access to modes of representation' (Chattopadhyay & Sarkar, 2005, p. 359). In contrast, by privilege of their hierarchical positionality, the coloniser retained the ability to conceptualise themselves through contradistinction to difference, and thus withheld a normative monopolisation on the

'terms of the production of truth and rationality' (Abrahamsen, 2016, p. 156), which, as highlighted by Seth (2000), directly constitutes 'different forms or being' (p. 226).

In his seminal study, Said (1995) invited us to consider this hegemonic structure as operationalised socially, as a 'corporate institution for dealing with the Orient [the East] – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorising views of it, describing it, settling it' (p. 88). Here, the Occident derived its power directly from its jurisdiction on 'truth' in the narrative-making process; the East could thus subsequently be presented as 'the Other from which the West had to delimit or limn its identity' (Neumann, 2016, p. 19). In a Foucauldian spirit, Said stressed this system as a complex conglomeration, embedded and reinforced through the Occident's 'flexible positional superiority, which put the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the upper hand' (p. 90). Thus, in the words of Foucault (1990), Said inferred power to have an omnipresent archaeologic structure, to the extent that it 'is not something that is acquired, seized or shared, something that one holds onto or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile relations' (p. 94).

Applying this interpretative schema to an analysis of EU-Russian relations reveals parallels between the coloniser-colonised relationship and the hegemonic position of the EU. This can profoundly be located within a discussion of the EU as a 'normative power', which sees the EU exert its influence (in addition to 'hard' means, like military might) through the representative power derived from the 'universalistic' model embodied by liberal-capitalist norms (Headley, 2015). In a Huntington fashion, therefore, not only is the proclaimed 'success of this representation a precondition for

other actors to agree to the norms set out by the EU', but, as argued by Diez (2005), it also has important implications for the way EU policies treat others, for an actor's deviation from the prescribed norms are subsequently regarded erroneously (p. 614). Thus, the EU withholds the power to define the definitive. After the fall of the Soviet Union, for Russia this had the immediate impact of fostering a sense of urgency as epitomised through the narrative of 'catch-up' which engulfed Yeltsin's tenure. Discussing the period of the 1990s in Russian foreign policy Donaldson *et al.,* (2014) highlighted:

> Like Gorbachev before them, they knocked on many doors, concluding treaties of friendship and cooperation with individual Western states, seeking membership for Russia in that most exclusive of Western "clubs", the G-7… pursuing opportunities to cooperate with (and ultimately join) selective organisations such as the EU [and] the Council of Europe…as well as broader financial associations such as the General Agreement on European Bank for Reconstruction (p. 255).

Yeltsin as a 'norm-taker' was a trend initially continued by Putin (albeit, more cautiously) as Russia saw a change in the hands of the Presidency at the dawn of a new millennium (Headley, 2015, p. 212). If we direct our attention to the 2000 edition of *The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, then we can similarly note Putin reinstating a subscription to European norms, whereby relations with the EU were considered 'of key importance' for Moscow, crucially regarding the processes of EU expansion, emergence of a joint foreign policy, and the emergence of a defence identity as an *'objective'* component of European development through which Russia would

strive to cooperate with (Putin, 2000). Importantly, this had the immediate effect of situating Russia's own identity discourses within the parameters set out for them by the 'pan-European discursive field', for the only way Russia could gain recognition, emerging from the debris of the USSR, was to accept the role of the hegemon (Morozov & Rumelili, 2012, p. 42). Effectively, if Russia is to play the game, then they must play by the rules established for them by their superior, the EU. Such was the basis for an establishment of the 'Strategic Partnership' between both parties, codified in 1994 with the signing of the *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement*; although framed in the rhetoric of mutual cooperation and respect, it's aim of gradual integration of Russia with the EU was inherently asymmetric, especially if we consider, as highlighted by Felzmann (2016), that the agreements began to be concluded as the effects of the 1997-98 financial crisis rendered Russia particularly vulnerable. This imbalance is amplified by the Centre for European Reform's (2007) observation:

> The EU hoped that by working closely with Russia, and by offering aid, advice and its own best practise, it could help the country become more open and democratic. During the decade or so that the EU has followed this approach, Russia has moved in the opposite direction.

Similarly:

> The underlying assumption…is that EU capital, technology and training might make Russia more Western oriented, open and easier to deal with (Barysch, 2010).

Here, the role of the EU was to guide Russia to become, simply, European, and thus render Russia more attuned to its normative practices and models. This was not so much in the deepest interests of Russia, but more so for the EU. Thus, we can speculate that the role of the EU reproduces persistent representations evocative of the colonial legacy, whereby the West is a 'legislator of righteous conduct' (Jabri, 2014, p. 380). Paradoxically, if Russia deviates from this path, they subsequently risk being excluded on the basis of their more irrational, authoritarian status, adding fuel to the fire of those who see Russia as different to Europe, thus sustaining the manifold of practises through which Said argued that the West retained hegemony over the East (e.g. Shevtsova, 2018; The Fund for Peace, 2019; Pew Research Centre, 2006). In this regard, Russia is effectively plagued by the label of the Orient. Note again the comments from Charles Grant (director of the Centre for European Reform) on Russia's human rights record:

> Russians are very contradictory people. They hire people to improve their image, then they do things like Greenpeace and Pussy Riot. Maybe it makes them feel strong and powerful. But it doesn't do them any good in the outside world (Charles Grant as cited in *The Guardian*, 2013).

Such actions allow the EU to exclude Russia, either by way of discourse or hard economic sanctions. Crucially, either way Russia is subsequently rendered an Other by product of its normative deviance to the EU, which therefore places strict limits on Russia's ability to conceptualise itself. It also reinforces the Russian view that Europe does not treat Russia as an equal partner, despite the fact that 'Russian schools since the tsarist era have had a traditional pantheon of European heritage as the core of their curricula' (Baranovsky & Utkin, 2012, p. 65). This paves the way for politicians with a

more revanchist, illiberal agenda to succeed, profiting off this disregard by capitalising on Russia's defensive claim to Great Power status to remind Russians that the West has always treated Russia like an 'out-of-place Tatar dressed as a Frenchman' (Tlostanova, 2012, p. 135). We can cite these ideas of irreconcilability within an article written by the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov (2014) to the states of the CIS:

> You should decide who you are with – Europe or Russia. If you accept the European choice – then you must fulfil all the orders of Brussels, even if they do not comply with existing obligations, including within the framework of the CIS. Such an approach is contrary to the logic of the actions aimed at erasing dividing lines in Europe, which is formalised in OSCE documents; it looks like another round of attempts to move these lines to the East.

Crucially, these acts project an image of Russia as inherently coercive and mighty, intrinsically dominant and powerful. However, as Bhabha stressed, 'the image is only ever an *appurtenance* to authority and identity; it must never be read mimetically as the appearance of a reality' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 73). In this regard, therefore, this image of Great Power can be regarded as a defensive mask from the uncompromising drive of Eurocentric modernity.

2.3 Putin's Mimicry

What becomes more complex, however, is when we add Russia's ability to compile an effective normative challenge to the EU to the equation. Indeed, Russia is not a passive actor, nor has it been subject to the same degree of silencing as the postcolonial subject.

Thus, if we resume with the more dynamic process of Othering Section 1.3 identified, we can speculate Russia as an actor with a certain degree of agency to contest the boundaries aimed to subjugate it. This can then further be nuanced if we combine this assertion with a Foucauldian (1990) analysis of power, which asserts that by definition of its ubiquity, 'where there is power, there is resistance' (p. 95). Here, the prevalence of EU norms, as a discourse of modernity's universalistic guise, can similarly be identified as operationalised through the same archaeological construction. For Bhabha, this structure is crucial. Discussing the agency of the colonised, Bhabha suggested that as a result of the very ambivalence of colonial authority, the ontological structure of resistance is able to manifest itself internally, in the 'interstices' where we can recognise 'the overlap and displacement of domains of difference' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2). These can be located within the 'third space' of colonial encounter, wherein over the course of mutual interaction, we witness a process of 'splitting', which 'destroys the calculations of the empowered, and allows the disempowered to calculate strategies by which they are oppressed and to use that knowledge in structuring resistance' (Bhabha cited in Jefferess, 2008, p. 29). Crucially, this has the resounding effect of rendering both the colonised and the coloniser as hybridised subjects, such to the extent that the process 'disturbs the visibility of the colonial presence and makes the recognition of its authority problematic' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 159). Thus, unlike Said, who inferred a more clear-cut, stable dichotomy between the colonised and the coloniser, acts of resistance do not have to take on the form of grandeur; rather, the act of mimicry, 'as the metonymy of presence', allows the colonised to subvert the basis of their subjugation, such to the extent that 'other "denied" knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority' (p. 129; p. 162).

Hence, if we apply Bhabha's conceptualisation to the realm of the international, not only do we immediately problematize any binary of conflict cooperation, but as suggested by Jabri (2014), it allows us to consider the nature of agency, in its more radical form, as 'the capacity to disrupt settled norms, to exactly constitute them as potential sites of hybridity'. Accordingly, 'the destabilising moment in the constitution of "hybrid" discursive formations might be said to derive…from created spaces that are neither of one nor the other' (p. 381). If we apply this to Russia, we can poignantly locate instances with Putin's own hybridised perception of European values as derivative from his awareness of Russia's geopolitical status as 'neither here nor there', as the West but 'different.' In the construction of this discursive space, Putin mimics and employs the language bestowed on him by the normative structures of the EU – the language of democracy, liberalism, sovereignty – but uses them as a masquerade to legitimise an alternative Russian path of development (Morozov, 2013, p. 21). A very powerful incarnation of this narrative has been Russia's establishment of a 'sovereign democracy', a system and concept promoted by the Kremlin since 2006. Although the exact meaning of what this resembles has divided scholars, it is generally agreed that for Russia, it quite simply means: 'We'll do it our way' (Nygren, 2010, p. 55). We can also note a similar trend in Putin's discourse (acting at the time as Prime Minister) surrounding the establishment of a Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), an 'integrationist' model which was framed on the terms of 'close, mutually beneficial cooperation', and an 'open liberalised trade regime', paving the way for members to become 'leaders of global growth and civilizational progress, to achieve success and prosperity' (Putin, 2011). Not only does this parallel the language of the project of the EU, but it also mimics the rhetoric of mutual beneficiaries used by the EU in the original 1994 agreement with Russia, albeit this time, Russia, as the initiator of the Union, is leading

the way. Importantly, Putin does not frame the Union as in contradistinction to the EU. Referring to the concerns of CIS members that the EEU may conflict with their European allegiances, Putin (2011b) remarks:

> I think this is a false fork. We are not going to shut ourselves off from anyone and oppose anyone. The Eurasian Union will be built on universal integration principles as an integral part of a Greater Europe united by *common values of freedom, democracy and market laws.*

Thus, whilst Putin employs the notion of difference in the proposal of the Union, his utilisation of the language of liberal modernity also capitalises on and reaffirms Russia's status as a hybrid-European entity, but crucially: he does so when it is strategically viable to do so. As a result, for Putin's establishment recognition of Russia's 'difference' from Europe has proved to be a very powerful force, a force which has subsequently been mobilised in conjunction with, and to amplify, any underlying resentment generated by the EU's processes of exclusion. Indeed, this had led to many Western media outlets to claim a dangerous resurgence of Russian nationalism (e.g. Charles Glover, 2017; McKelvey, 2014). But importantly, if we follow Bhabha, it is also a very powerful form of *resistance,* for Putin is able to oscillate between subverting the authority of the EU whilst simultaneously empowering Russia via the very tools they provided him with. Thus, to use the words of Bhabha (1984), through the exploitation of 'partial presence', Putin has effectively 'reversed "in part" the colonial appropriation by now producing a partial vision of the coloniser's presence' (p. 129). Paradoxically, Putin is able to capitalise on the universalism of European values, for it is exactly because of this status that their basis for expansion 'can avoid the charge of "cultural imperialism"'

(Kølvraa, 2017, pp. 15-16). With this considered, it is thus plausible to suggest Putin's tenure should be considered as 'a successful act of political engineering by which the West…has been cast as Russia's main Other' (Hansen, 2016, p. 359). Thus, by drawing on postcolonial texts in the establishment of this analytical frame, we begin to move away from the perspective of Russia as an untamed arbitrary actor.

Chapter Three: Russian Intervention in Crimea: An Act of Mimicry?

Thus far, this dissertation has aimed to demonstrate the utility of postcolonial theory to nuancing an understanding of Russian foreign policy. This study will now seek to buttress this analysis with a more concrete grounding provided by the case of Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea. Crucially, before this analysis proceeds, it is important to stress that this chapter does not attempt to accommodate all the nuances of intervention; the literature regarding annexation is complex and multifaceted, and thus to attempt to account for all of the theoretical schools involved in the discussion would place this dissertation at risk of great oversimplification. Instead, in seeking to further the merits of postcolonialism this chapter will identify instances of mimicry and hybridity as generated by Russia's subaltern structural position. Additionally, is also important to note that references to 'Putin's foreign policy' should be regarded as synonymous with 'Russia's foreign policy' as so rendered by the nature of Russia's executive presidency (Roberts, 2017, p. 31).

Lastly, a note on methodology: if we consider the work of Foucault (1972), studying discourse is of paramount importance for they are 'practises that systematically form

the objects of which they speak' (p. 49). Thus, if we mould this Foucauldian lens with the postcolonial frame, we may begin to see the 'loosening of the embrace, apparently so tight, of words and things, and the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practises (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). This is absolutely paramount to teasing out the nuances embedded in strategies of linguistic choice. Crucially, however, this has largely been ignored by prominent Western politicians and media sources in the consultation of Putin's discourse. As highlighted by Toal (2017), 'there is a fear [in the West] that using Putin's words or presenting his perspective will somehow legitimate his point of view – that it will infect thought and confuse or relativise what should be clear moral distinctions' (p. 11). However, this chapter contends that in the process of doing so, the West continues to fail to understand the very genesis of why Putin acts the way he does. Indeed, this does not necessitate that we abandon our critical guise and naively accept Putin's words as representative of the 'truth.' However, it does implore that we move beyond a perspective whereby the Russian view is somewhat 'tabooed' in order to logically consult the discourse of the Putin administration in conjunction with postcolonialism's motivations of disclosing more deep-seated structural grammars. Finally, this study acknowledges that this analysis will inevitably be limited as rendered so by my own lack of Russian language skills, which have forced me to rely on Kremlin translations. However, this study contends that an effective analysis can still be conducted, these restrictions considered.

3.1 Justifying Crimea as a Case Study

Prior to Russian annexation in early 2014, Crimea was legally an autonomous republic of Ukraine. Thus, it is more than tempting, as many scholars have done, to interpret

intervention in Crimea as an act of strategic *realpolitik.* Accordingly, Putin's actions have

been widely discredited by the Western international community; in a statement

marking the five year anniversary of the annexation, the North Atlantic Treaty

Organisation (NATO, 2019) purported:

> This violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity is a serious
>
> breach of international law and a major challenge to Euro-Atlantic security. We
>
> strongly condemn this act, which we do not and will not recognise.

This is a view largely buttressed by the EU, even leading some prominent politicians to

liken Putin's annexation with Hitler's occupation of the Sudetenland, a view held by the

then British Foreign Security, Boris Johnson (Yorke, 2018; The EU, 2019b). If we

consider the geopolitical importance of Ukraine for both the West (understood here as

NATO and the EU) and Russia, we can add significant weight to this interpretation.

Ukraine is an example of a 'shared neighbourhood' between the EU and Russia: for the

EU, Ukraine is both a member of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), a 'joint initiative'

between the EU and six CIS states, and a key partner in the European Neighbourhood

Policy, an agreement between the EU and it's Eastern 'Neighbours' to foster

'stabilisation, security and prosperity' in accordance with the EU Association Agreement

(European Union External Action, 2019; The EU, 2019a). On the other hand, for Russia,

Ukraine is a key member of the CIS nations, symbolically, strategically, culturally and

economically important for reasons the length of this study does not permit a sufficient

examination of (Tsygankov, 2015). Indeed, this is such to the extent that the Ukrainian-

Russian relationship has even been likened to that of the 'U.S.-U.K. special relationship'

(Calamur, 2014). As a result, it is almost a commonplace critique to assert that the

ratification of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement in 2014 triggered the crisis in Ukraine by nature of its insensitivity to Russian interests, a notion we can afford a compelling weight if we consider the treaty itself:

> …[the EU] recognis[es] that Ukraine as a European country shares a common history and common values with the Member States of the European Union (EU) and is committed to promoting these values.

Similarly:

> …[the EU] confirm[s] that the European Union acknowledges the European aspirations of Ukraine and *welcomes its European choice*, including its commitment to building a deep and sustainable democracy and a market economy (The EU, 2014).

Indeed, this is also amplified if we consider the rhetoric of the 2013 edition of *The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, whereby Ukraine is singled out as a 'priority partner within the CIS', the CIS itself of the highest importance for Russia due to a 'share[d] common historical background.'

However, if this is the case, as argued by Samokhvalov (2017), not only would Russia have turned to aggression against Ukraine as motivated by the angst generated during the initial talks of 2009-2010, but Russia would have also had sufficient cause to invade other CIS nations who have similarly signed the Association Agreement with the EU, such as Georgia and Moldova (pp. 221-222). As a result, we can quickly deduce that for

both 'sides', the stakes in Crimea exceed the boundaries of *realpolitik.* Instead, it is more plausible, as suggested by Kazharski and Makaychev (2015), to regard the stakes in Ukraine as *identitarian,* 'for fighting to reformat this space also means fighting to reformat the Self' (p. 331). Crimea is therefore a profound example of Russian foreign policy meeting at an intersection with the discursive boundaries of the West. Thus, if we identify Ukraine (and thus Crimea) as an integral part of the 'Shared Neighbourhood', we have sufficient ground to employ the ideas of Bhabha to consider it as an area of significant ambivalence, rendered a 'third space' between the EU and Russia (proverbial for the 'West' and the 'East'), and thus an area where the asymmetry of this interaction is stripped bare of any protective veil. Subsequently, Crimea serves as a ground for a consistent process of mutual interaction, an area whereby articulations of difference are projected in an attempt to shape the definition of the Other, and through which, the hybrid Self.

3.2 'Almost the same…but not quite': Selling Crimea

If we employ Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and mimicry, we can identify the creative ways in which the Kremlin has worked to (mis)appropriate the language of liberalism as a resistant strategy to frame intervention in Crimea. These examples can most clearly be located in the deviance between the EU and the Kremlin over the language of sovereignty, where Russian intervention is framed on the basis of the 'democratic reunification' of Crimea in contrast to the EU's assertion of 'illegal annexation.' Note, for example, Putin's (2019) remarks at a concert marking the fifth anniversary of Crimea's 'reunification with Russia':

> Friends…I would like to congratulate you on the fifth anniversary of Crimea and Sevastopol's reunification with Russia…this was possible thanks to the referendum that took place five years ago, where all of you took part and voted for this historic decision.

Ending the speech, Putin even remarked:

> I congratulate you…I wish all of you good luck and happiness. I give all of you a hug!

Here, Putin evokes the discourse of democratic liberalism and thus mirrors inherently foundational concepts of the EU, importantly reminding the people of Crimea that it was *them* who 'voted for' the decision to become part of Russia, and thus reaffirming a commitment to Western notions of sovereignty and self-determination. Instrumentalisation of the 'soft' discourse of liberalism are awarded a further basis for legitimacy by the 'hard' facts of Russia's historic allegiance with Crimea, signified on the basis (however simplistic) of a Russian speaking majority and the fact that the majority of residents are assumed to identify as 'ethnically Russian' (Knott, 2018, pp. 282-285). This ethnic allegiance formed the basis of a comment issued by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2014), responding to NATO's claims that accused the Kremlin of escalating the conflict in Crimea; instead, the Russian Ministry argued that it was their duty to protect the citizens in Crimea from those in Ukraine who seek to achieve 'irresponsible political goals.' Indeed, this is an argument consistently frequented by Putin, framing Russia's move on the basis of 'unity' and 'historical justice' (Putin, 2016). Note Putin's discourse at a meeting coined 'We are together!'

> After a long, hard and exhausting voyage, Crimea and Sevastopol are returning to
> their harbour, to their native shores, to their home port, to Russia!

Similarly:

> We are not just neighbours, we are family and our future success depends on
> both of us, Russia and Ukraine….I would again like to thank the residents of
> Crimea and Sevastopol for their courage and persistence, for staying true to the
> memory of their historic ancestors and for carrying their love for our
> motherland, for Russia over decades (Putin, 2014a).

Importantly, by framing the Crimean narrative through the unilateral contours of justice, law and 'truth' in a desire for authenticity, Putin mimics the ordaining role of the EU, paralleling their discursive and normative jurisdiction to emphasise Russia's allegiance and commitment to 'unit[ing] neighbours, rather than divid[ing] them' (Kazharski & Makarychev, 2015, p. 337). Thus, in the process of presenting a Russian 'breed' of liberalist modernity, Putin consistently subverts the position of the West, which have regarded the results of the referendum as 'illegal' and 'illegitimate' on the normative basis that it undermines the 'territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine (The President, European Council, 2014). In doing so, Russia seeks to shift its subordination from a 'norm-taker' to a 'norm-giver'; the West, on the other hand, is portrayed as increasingly antagonistic and conflictual. Note, for example, Putin's discourse in his speech to the Russian Federation:

First, we had to help create conditions so that the residents of Crimea for the first time in history were able to peacefully express their free will regarding their own future. However, what do we hear from our colleagues in Western Europe and North America? They say we are violating norms of international law. Firstly, it's a good thing that they at least remember that there exists such a thing as international law – better late than never.

Similarly:

[The West] are constantly trying to sweep us into a corner because we have an independent position, because we maintain it and because we call things like they are and do not engage in hypocrisy. But there is a limit to everything. And with Ukraine, our Western partners have crossed the line, playing the bear and acting irresponsibly and unprofessionally (Putin, 2014b).

Here, Putin emphasises the Kremlin's role in sowing the seeds for democracy to flourish, thus enabling the people of Crimea to exercise their democratic right - as part of a democratic country – to choose. On the other hand, the Kremlin's 'colleagues' in the West are painted as subversive and incendiary, actively perverting the course of justice. Effectively, therefore, Putin purports that it is *Russia* who should be awarded the moral high-ground. To recall Neumann, it is Russia who is now 'True Europe.'

As a result, we can quite plausibly deduct that by appropriating the 'gaze of otherness' Russia has sought to displace the hegemony of the EU by disrupting the very authority on which it governs. In the words of Bhabha and Foucault, Russia has thus sought to

'shatter the unity of man's being through which he extends his sovereignty' (Bhabha, 1984, p. 129). However, if we consider Bhabha's notion of 'splitting', a mutually contingent process that by definition effects both the 'colonised' and 'coloniser', paramount for enabling mimicry as a resistant strategy, then we must effectively 'reverse' our analysis and question the extent to which Russia's circumvention has challenged the authority of the West, for the very power of hybridity resonates in the ability to 'enact a destabilising disruption to the normative' (Jabri, 2014, p. 380). Indeed, this is by no means a simple question to answer. However, from Putin's perspective, we can comfortably conclude that intervention can be regarded a success on the basis of the discourse of 'reunification'. This is such to the extent that the 18th March has even been afforded the status of a Public Holiday in Crimea (The Moscow Times, 2019). Additionally, the 'swift' military operation involved in annexation largely took the world by surprise in its ability to challenge Western perceptions of an 'outdated' military that have prevailed since the Cold War (Renz, 2016). In this regard, we could suggest that the West has largely been challenged by annexation. However, the 'shock' factor aside, Putin's annexation was not merely aimed at challenging the corrupt regime of President Viktor Yanukovych in an attempt to defend 'rightfully Russian' citizens. Instead, 'the crisis was about challenging the entire post-Soviet order' (Wilson, 2014, p. viii). Thus, it is only fitting that we can begin to speculate how successful Russia's appropriations have been as measured against the extent to which the basis of Western authority has been normatively 'threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double' (Bhabha, 1984, p. 127).

Thus, as suggested by Samokhvalov (2017), on the basis of annexation as in violation of international law, in the immediate aftermath of the conflict, 'Europe drew several red

lines, which showed Russia that further escalation of the conflict would be counterproductive and bring no diplomatic benefits' (p. 243). Furthermore, as highlighted by Freire (2017), this aggressive behaviour may result, rather counterintuitively, in undermining and de-legitimising both domestically and internationally Russia's own attempts to build a Great Power Identity on the basis of an alternative normative hegemon, irrespective of its liberal masquerade. For Putin, whilst the novel employment of the rhetoric of sovereignty provided an almost instantaneous boost in national approval ratings, knighting him the title of the 'defender of ethnic Russians abroad', this victory tide was seemingly short lived as the Kremlin struggled to straddle the thin line between 'reacting' on events in Ukraine rather than 'acting' on them, the latter of which would provide evidence of Russian orchestrated meddling and thus undermining the defence of self-determination (Kolstø, 2016, pp. 702-725). Similarly, Putin may find himself at risk of collateral damage from the struggles to maintain his own narrative as the Russian economy falls increasingly downhill. Thus, in basing its narrative of appropriation of the West on an extremely fragile bedrock, foreign policy 'could become a source of 'embarrassment, humiliation, and eventually remorse and anger' (Aron, 2017, p. 79). Ultimately, this balancing act is an incredibly difficult equilibrium to maintain.

Discussion & Conclusion

In conclusion, this dissertation has argued that analysis of Russian foreign policy –
seeking to understand why Russia acts the way it does – can be significantly nuanced by
a postcolonial lens. In doing so, it has illuminated that Russia still finds itself chained to
their status as an Other in the eyes of the West, namely, Europe. This is so greatly
evidenced by the fact that the only strategy through which Russia could attempt to
legitimise intervention in Crimea was through the means defined for them by their
normative superiors. Undoubtedly, in Putin's Russia, 'words and images are made to
serve political needs, to construct the realities required at the moment' (Toal, 2017, p.
300). However, crucially, these words still depend on the West for their very definition.

Thus, it is hard to envisage how Russia's strategy of mimicking the West could
materialise as a clean epistemic break, whereby the myth of Great Powerhood finally
blossoms as Putin's own reality. Paradoxically, however, it may also be the myth *itself*
that may prohibit this transition, for the logic of the Great Power identity 'does not try
to question the logic of modernity as such, but merely (attempts to) alter Russia's
position in it' (Tlostanova, 2018, p. 11). Indeed, this is the ontological paradox of
modernity: despite its inviting democratic glaze, its very pervasiveness renders the
'erosion of choice' and the 'closure of possibilities' a reality (Allen cited in Murray Li,
2007, p. 25), whereby we witness the conditioning of 'individuals and groups by their
enfolding into the hierarchical distribution of identities' (Prozorov, 2006, p. 172). For
Russia, unable to shake the lure of the seductive game of catch-up with their European
superiors, a strategy promulgated on trying to 'out West the West' is therefore
inevitably doomed to fail.

However, as this study has shown, this does not necessitate that Russia, as the subordinate, will not try. Indeed, it is the 'specific nature of a second-rate empire never really sure of itself in the presence of the west [that] generates transmuted forms of postcolonial impulses' (Tlostanova 2012, p. 135). In a quest to combat their asymmetry, this transmutation has manifested itself as the establishment of a new narrative of modernity – a 'Russian' modernity. Crucially, however, it is not the West that will be affected the greatest by these strategies. Instead, fully in accordance with the logic of imperialism, it is those geopolitically weaker states surrounding Russia, such as Crimea - incapable to mobilise the means to defend themselves - that will fall victim to these narratives, masquerading as mutations of modernity.

Moving forward, this somewhat bleak conclusion should not be taken as a call to passively accept the relentless drive of Eurocentric hegemony. Nor should it be taken as a plea to sympathise with the revanchist rhetoric of the Kremlin. What should be noted, however, is that as this study has shown, a greater dialogue between academic fields is a mutually beneficial exercise that can further our ability to find 'method in the mayhem.' As in translation for the 'real world' of geopolitical fuelled battles, this is a notion politicians could seek to greatly benefit from.

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Appendices:

Notes

See the corresponding in-text footnote:

1. For popular media coverage, see for example: R. Pipes in The Moscow Times, Craving to be a Great Power <http://old.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/craving-to-be-a-great-power/379920522.html> [Accessed 31st March 2019].

2. See Putin's (2011) Comments: "Our people made a firm, unflinching choice in favour of democracy and building a strong federal state, and proclaimed human rights and freedoms as the supreme value." Putin retained a commitment to promoting Russian Orthodox Values in schools across the country in a 2011 Meeting with Russian Orthodox Church Representatives, 5th December 2011, announcing the inauguration of the subject 'Foundations of Religious Culture': <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/13374> [Accessed 20/04/2019].

3. See, for example Leela Gandhi's (1998) critique: Postcolonialism lacks "an 'originary moment' or coherent methodology."