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Andrei P. Tsygankov

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Valentina Feklyunina

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INTERNATIONAL NORMS AND IDENTITY

Valentina Feklyunina

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY, UK

The rise of social constructivism in International Relations (IR) theory has had a major impact on studies of Russian foreign policy (RFP). Although this may also be true of foreign policy studies related to other states, constructivist studies of Russian and Soviet foreign policies played a crucial role in the emergence of social constructivism as one of the mainstream approaches to studying international politics more broadly. It is sometimes suggested that the rise of social constructivism in IR was linked to the inability of other theoretical approaches at the time to predict or explain the largely peaceful end of the Cold War (Wohlforth, 1994). While the intellectual roots of social constructivism go back long before Moscow's largely unexpected withdrawal from the Cold War (Adler, 2013; Fierke and Jorgensen, 2015), this tectonic change certainly challenged the then dominant structural and rational choice explanations of the Soviet Union's international behaviour. As argued by Guzzini (2013: 196), 'what spurred the constructivist critique was . . . that prevailing theories did not even recognize the possibility that it would happen in the first place'. It is hardly surprising that during the first post-Soviet decade the theoretical development of social constructivism in IR and the study of Soviet and RFP were often closely linked (Neumann, 1996; Checkel, 1997; Hopf, 2002).

This chapter provides an overview of the existing constructivist work on RFP and discusses some of its most significant contributions to our understanding of Russia's international behaviour. Similar to constructivist studies in IR and Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) more broadly, the constructivist work on RFP is remarkably diverse. It encompasses studies with fairly different epistemological and methodological positions, which focus on different aspects of Russia's foreign and security policies broadly defined, ranging from the role of ideas in policy change to Russia's engagement with cultural mega projects, such as the Sochi Olympics. Some studies explicitly articulate their constructivist positions, while others avoid attaching the label of 'constructivism' – and sometimes even explicitly differentiate their approach from constructivism – but nevertheless draw on the concepts which are central to the constructivist viewpoint. The diversity of constructivist work has led to numerous attempts to identify distinct constructivist approaches. Hopf (1998: 172), for example, differentiates between conventional and critical constructivisms, while Adler (2013: 115) singles out modernist, modernist linguistic, radical (which, in Adler's view, includes a poststructuralist approach) and critical constructivisms. While these labels remain contested, they point to the continuing epistemological debate. Yet, despite their differences, constructivists generally share several key assumptions. As formulated

by Guzzini (2000: 174), ‘constructivism is epistemologically about the social construction of knowledge and ontologically about the (social) construction of the social world’. Thus, constructivists understand the social world, i.e. the world of social relations, as ‘a project under construction, as becoming rather than being’ (Adler, 2013: 113). They also recognise that our understanding of this world can never grasp the world ‘as it is’, because our knowledge of the world is itself socially, i.e. intersubjectively, constructed.

When applied to the study of RFP, these assumptions translate into the focus on the construction of Russia’s identity and its interests, and on Russia’s understanding of the world and its place in it. Despite their differences, constructivist studies emphasise the importance of the historical context and the need to open up the black box of the Russian state. It is also important to note that constructivist studies of RFP often draw on insights from other theoretical approaches in IR or other cognate disciplines, for example, historical institutionalism (Checkel, 1997), post-colonialism (Morozov, 2015), social psychology (Clunan, 2009; Larson and Shevchenko, 2010) or cultural studies (Makarychev and Yatsyk, 2014). This chapter is structured in the following way. It begins by briefly discussing some of the key constructivist assumptions as compared to other theoretical approaches in IR, and by introducing key constructivist concepts. The second section presents an overview of several major strands within the existing constructivist work on RFP, by focusing on such themes as (i) Russia’s identity; (ii) recognition and non-recognition of Russia’s identity by Others; (iii) norms; and (iv) practices and habits. The third section looks at various methodological challenges as they are addressed in constructivist studies of RFP. The chapter concludes by discussing possible avenues for future research.

Key assumptions: what makes constructivism constructivist?

Having initially developed as a critique of rationalist approaches, IR constructivism has rapidly become one of the main approaches to studying international politics (Ruggie, 1998; Wendt, 1999; Guzzini, 2000; Adler, 2013). Although a very broad church, constructivism includes several key assumptions that are shared by most scholars subscribing to this research tradition. Compared to rationalist approaches, including neo-realism and neo-liberalism, constructivism emphasises a deeply social nature of international interactions. Unlike rationalist assumptions about the overriding importance of material structures, such as the distribution of material capabilities, constructivists argue that ‘normative or ideational structures are as important as material structures’ (Reus-Smit, 2013: 224). While not denying the significance of material factors, constructivists generally believe that these factors matter not on their own but through shared meanings that actors attach to them. To quote Wendt (1995: 73), ‘material capabilities as such explain nothing; their effects presuppose structures of shared knowledge, which vary and which are not reducible to capabilities’. This emphasis on *shared* knowledge points to the notion of intersubjectivity as central to the constructivist approach. Unlike psychological approaches that focus on peculiarities of cognitive processes of individual decision-makers (McDermott, 2004), constructivists are concerned with the social rather than with the individual. They see individual decision-makers as being able to ‘know, think, and feel only in the context of and with reference to collective or intersubjective understandings’ (Adler, 2013: 121). Thus, most constructivist studies are concerned with intersubjective understandings of identities, interests, international norms or rules as they develop and change in particular cultural and historical contexts.

In addition to their emphasis on ideational structures, constructivists generally agree that agents and structures are co-constituted. While the existing structures shape actors’ identities, actors reproduce and transform these structures through their practices (Reus-Smit, 2013: 225).

To illustrate this point about co-constitution, Wendt (1995: 74) uses an example of the Cold War which he describes as 'a structure of shared knowledge'. Although it shaped identities of both the Soviet Union and the United States and was reproduced by them for several decades, 'once they stopped acting on this basis, it was "over"'. Unlike rationalist approaches that treat states as strategic actors pursuing pre-existing interests and preferences in the international realm, constructivists see states and other agents as inherently social actors whose identities and interests are constituted in the process of interaction. Although constructivists vary in their conceptualisation of identity (see, for example, Wendt, 1999; Hopf, 2002), it is, in one way or another, central to most constructivist studies. Constructivists generally agree that our understandings of who we are shape our interpretations of our interests and thus inform our behaviour (Wendt, 1999). Most constructivists also understand identity as an inherently relational concept. In other words, a socially constructed understanding of 'who we are' implies an idea of an Other – often conceptualised as an external Other, for example Europe in the case of Russia's identity (Neumann, 1996). Some constructivists have also empathised the importance of recognition or non-recognition of actors' identities by their external Others in the processes of identity and interest construction (Ringmar, 2002). At the same time, others have questioned the inevitable need for external Others, and have suggested that othering can occur in relation to multiple Others – not only in relation to external or spatial others, but also in relation to temporal Others (for example, in relation to the Soviet Union in post-Soviet Russia) or even in relation to abstract ideas (Hopf, 2002; Abizadeh, 2005).

Seeing any intersubjective understandings of social reality as closely linked to the cultural and historical contexts in which they develop, constructivists are particularly concerned with how some understandings become dominant at any particular time. Yet, this general concern coexists with significant disagreements, among other things, on *whose* understandings matter, and on how competing understandings may be linked to the state's international behaviour. Wendt (1999: 197), for example, speaks of a *state* identity and argues that 'states are real actors to which we can legitimately attribute anthropomorphic qualities like desires, beliefs, and intentionality'. However, his state-as-a-person approach has been challenged by many other constructivists and especially by poststructuralists who have focused on the domestic contestation of meanings as they are articulated by political and intellectual elites, produced and reproduced in education and in popular culture, or practised in diplomatic interactions and in everyday life (Zehfuss, 2002; Guzzini and Leander, 2005; Hopf, 2013). Adler (2013: 112) is certainly right when he argues that compared to the earlier constructivist project, more recently a growing number of constructivist work 'has moved just a little closer to critical and linguistic constructivist approaches, without uncritically adopting their ontological and epistemological arguments'.

Constructivist studies of RFP

Compared to other approaches, social constructivism has provided scholars of RFP with a framework which is particularly well suited for exploring change and continuity in Russia's interests. By seeing Russia's interests as socially constructed and historically contingent, it has challenged those explanations of Russia's international behaviour that deduce Moscow's interests from the country's geopolitical position, its political system (with an authoritarian system almost automatically implying a more assertive or even aggressive international behaviour), or its material needs. Similar to IR constructivism more broadly, constructivist studies of RFP vary in their epistemological positions, with some studies coming closer towards the positivist end of the spectrum (Checkel, 1997) and some moving towards the post-positivist end and often explicitly engaging with the poststructuralist work (Snetkov, 2014; Morozov, 2015).

Yet, despite their differences, all of these works are concerned with an attempt to understand Russian interpretations of social reality. Needless to say, this chapter cannot cover all of the studies that have either implicitly or explicitly built on the constructivist tradition. Instead it examines some of the major themes in the rapidly growing constructivist literature while inevitably omitting many other significant contributions. These themes are: (i) Russia's identity; (ii) recognition and non-recognition of Russia's identity by Others; (iii) norms; and (iv) practices and habits.

Ideas, identities and RFP

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, constructivism to a large extent developed as a challenger of the then dominant rationalist and materialist explanations of international behaviour. During the first post-Soviet decade, the growing focus on ideas and identities was picked up by scholars who did not necessarily associate themselves at the time with the constructivist project, but nevertheless played a major role in its development. Jeffrey Checkel's study of the role of ideas in foreign policy change, for example, differentiates his 'institutional argument that allows for an exploration of the process through which new ideas are empowered' (Checkel, 1997: ix) from the emerging constructivist literature. Unlike the constructivist focus on shared meanings, Checkel focuses on ideas which he understands as 'beliefs held by individuals' (ibid.: 130). According to Checkel, new ideas may bring about a significant change in a state's foreign policy when they are successfully promoted by policy entrepreneurs who have sufficient access to relevant decision-makers during the windows of opportunity created by a major change in the international environment. Using the method of process tracing, Checkel examines ideas articulated by Soviet and Russian policy entrepreneurs during the détente of the late 1960-early 1970 period, during Gorbachev's *Perestroika* and, finally, in the early 1990s. The role of ideational factors in RFP is also explored in an influential study of identities and foreign policies in Russia, Ukraine and Poland by Prizel (1998). Although situated in the field of nationalism, Prizel's impressive investigation of the competing understandings of Russia, Ukraine and Poland has definitely paved the way for later constructivist studies.

With the development of IR constructivism, a growing number of RFP studies have focused on the processes of identity and interest construction, and examined competing interpretations of Russian identity vis-à-vis Russia's Others and their change over time. Scholars of RFP generally agree that all major frameworks or discourses of Russia's identity, despite significant differences in their understandings of the country's past, present and future, view Europe and the 'West' more broadly as a major reference point for interpreting Russia (Morozov, 2015; Tsygankov, 2016). As argued by Iver Neumann (1996: 1) in his agenda-setting study of othering in Russia's identity formation, 'the idea of Europe is the main "Other" in relation to which the idea of Russia is defined'. Scholars of RFP also generally agree that Russia's interpretations of its historically peripheral and undecided position in or vis-à-vis Europe on the one hand, and the recognition or non-recognition of Russia's European identity by Europe and the West more broadly on the other, have been exceptionally important in shaping understandings not only of Russia's international interests, but also of its domestic goals (Zevelev, 2002; Feklyunina, 2008; Tsygankov, 2012). Finally, they largely agree that Russia's interpretations of its inclusion in or exclusion from Europe have shaped its understandings of security threats, ranging from Russia's position towards terrorism (Snetkov, 2012, 2014) to its position towards NATO enlargement (Williams and Neumann, 2000; Pouliot, 2010).

At the same time, we can identify at least three key points that have structured the identity debate. First, while most constructivists agree that understandings of identity may change both in response to external and internal factors, their empirical analysis often privileges either the

external or the internal dimension. Second, studies of Russian identity differ in *where* they locate the site of identity construction. While some look at Soviet or Russian official documents and statements (Light, 2003), or focus on elite debates (Clunan, 2009; Tsygankov, 2016), others emphasise the importance of popular understandings as they are articulated in popular fiction, mass media or textbooks (Hopf, 2002, 2013), or reflected in public opinion surveys and focus groups (White and Feklyunina, 2014). Finally, studies of Russian identity differ in their attention to material factors and in the ways in which they understand their role.

Seeing domestic identity contestation as crucial to understanding Russia's international behaviour, scholars of RFP have sought to identify competing identity frameworks, discourses or schools of thought, and to account for their change over time (Neumann, 1996; Hopf, 2002; Light, 2003; Clunan, 2009; White and Feklyunina, 2014; Tsygankov, 2016). For example, Neumann's genealogy of Russia's identity debate from the Decembrist uprising of 1825 to the early 1990s points at two major identity frameworks which he labels as Romantic Nationalist and Liberal positions. More recent constructivist studies have questioned the appropriateness of interpreting Russia's identity spectrum as split between two positions reminiscent of the 19th-century debate between westernisers and slavophiles. Tsygankov (2016), for instance, suggests that Russia's identity debate in the post-Soviet period has been dominated by three rather than two 'schools of foreign policy thinking' – Westernist, Statist and Civilisationist. Tsygankov links changes in their understandings of Russia's interests and in their relative prominence in the domestic debate to the changing nature and behaviour of the 'West' as Russia's Other. Using the idea of identity coalitions that emerge and dissolve in the changing context, Tsygankov (2016: 29) demonstrates how Russia's dominant understandings of its interests have transformed from Gorbachev's 'New Thinking' of the late 1980s, to the 'Integration with the West' of the early Yeltsin years, to the 'Assertiveness' of the late 2010s, and to the understanding of Russia's interests in 'Civilisation' terms during President Putin's third term in office.

The understanding of the 'West' as Russia's most significant Other, and the focus on the elite debate have been challenged in Ted Hopf's studies of the Soviet Union's and Russia's popular identities (2002, 2012). Rather than focusing on elites, Hopf (2002: 3) emphasises the importance of 'the routine, repetitive, habitual, customary, and everyday'. According to Hopf, policy-makers, like everyone else, are limited by the existing social cognitive frameworks in what they can imagine as possible in their interpretations of the Soviet Union's and Russia's interests and in their understandings of other international actors. Hopf's variant of what he describes as a 'societal constructivism' calls for uncovering these social cognitive structures by exploring the topography of popular identities. For Hopf, studies of identities should not take for granted the significance of external others, such as Europe or the 'West', but rather they should empirically investigate which Others – external, internal, historical or even abstract – are important for any particular identity at any particular time. Having traced the topography of Soviet popular identities in 1955, Hopf (2002: 105) singles out five primary identities – class, modernity, nation, difference (New Soviet Man) and great power – that formed the social cognitive structure in Moscow at that time. Each of these identities implied different interests in relation to other international actors. Hopf's investigation of the identity topography in 1999 arrives at four competing identity discourses – New Western Russian, New Soviet Russian, Liberal Essentialist and Liberal relativist (Hopf, 2002: 157). In his more recent study of the Soviet identities at the beginning of the Cold War, Hopf (2012) explores the transformation of the dominant identity discourse in Moscow during and after Stalin's rule. Hopf shows how an alternative identity discourse of difference, which had persisted in the Soviet society during the Stalin years, allowed a major change in the Soviet understanding of itself and of others after Stalin's death.

Other constructivist works have sought to capture changes in competing understandings of Russia's identities and corresponding interpretations of interests in Russian public opinion by using public opinion surveys or focus groups (White et al., 2010). In a comparative study of competing identities in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus over the post-Soviet years, White and Feklyunina (2014), for example, identify three competing identity discourses articulated by political and intellectual elites that envisage different understandings of Russia's position vis-à-vis Europe, which they describe as 'Russia as Europe', 'Russia as part of a Greater Europe' and 'Russia as an Alternative Europe'. Focusing on Moscow's relations with the European Union (EU), White and Feklyunina demonstrate that these identity discourses not only interpret the EU differently – as primarily a normative, an economic or a geopolitical actor – but they also arrive at strikingly different assessments of the EU's ability to overcome its present challenges. Having explored the transformation of these discourses over two post-Soviet decades, White and Feklyunina examine the trajectory of these three identity frameworks and associated policy preferences in Russian opinion surveys. As argued in the study (White and Feklyunina, 2014: 248), popular understandings of Russian identity are not only important in shaping the limits of what can be imagined or seen as legitimate, but also in asserting an indirect pressure on Russia's decision-makers who have 'to generate and maintain popular legitimacy'.

While all of the studies discussed earlier acknowledge the significance of material factors in identity construction, they mostly discuss them as important in having either a constraining or an enabling effect on RFP-making. This view is challenged by Morozov (2015: 78) who suggests that material factors, and particularly economic relations, are 'the single most important factor which is not given sufficient attention in the literature discussing Russia's undecidable position in relation to Europe and the West'. Drawing on the post-colonial and poststructuralist approaches in IR and engaging with the world-systems theory, Morozov (2015) argues that Russia's ambiguous position vis-à-vis Europe and the 'West' more broadly is produced by what he describes as its identity as a 'subaltern empire'. This identity, according to Morozov, stems from the legacy of Russia's imperial past and its dominant position in its immediate neighbourhood, on the one hand, and the legacy of Russia's historical economic and normative dependence on Europe, on the other. Thus, Russia's awareness of its backwardness and its persistent claims for a great power status are to a large extent a product of a particular pattern in Russia's economic development.

Recognition and non-recognition of Russia's identity

Morozov is certainly right in pointing out that 'most of the existing approaches converge in describing Russia's position in Europe as undecidable, liminal and/or peripheral' (Morozov, 2015: 41). This fundamental uncertainty of Russia's position and Moscow's attempts to secure the recognition of its identity by its significant Others, first and foremost by the 'West', are explored in a large constructivist literature on identity recognition in Russia's relations with other international actors, especially with Europe and the 'West' more broadly. The literature also explores the importance of status recognition, honour and respect in Russia's foreign policy and Moscow's attempts at image-projection, public diplomacy and exercise of soft power.

Probably the most well-developed theme in the constructivist literature is Russia's engagement with the idea of great power-ness and Russia's search for recognition as a great power both historically and in the post-Soviet period (Zevelev, 2002; Smith, 2014; Urnov, 2014). In a seminal article on Russia's quest for such recognition, Neumann (2008) argues that the persistent salience of the great power discourse in Russia since at least Peter the Great's rule indicates the historical importance of this idea for Russia's identity. Moreover, recurrent references to

this idea both in Russia's official discourse and in the elite debate suggest that Russia's attempts to secure its recognition as a great power by the established great powers have not been successful. As explained by Neumann (2008: 129), 'if an identity claim is successful, it forms part of the horizon of the political debate rather than its substance'. Unlike realist understandings of great power politics as rooted in material capabilities, a constructivist understanding emphasises the socially constructed meanings that are attached to the idea of a great power at any historical period. As demonstrated by Neumann, Russia's great power claims have historically been undermined by a persistent mismatch between the models of governance in Russia and in the 'West'. Neumann's (2008: 148) conclusion about the importance of the 'liberal standard of civilization' in the dominant definition of a great power leads him to suggest that, given the ongoing domestic developments in Putin's Russia, 'Russia will not be counted as a fully-fledged great power for decades yet'. The importance of great power aspirations in Russia's foreign policy is also underscored in Clunan's study of 'the social construction of Russia's resurgence' (Clunan, 2009). As argued by Clunan (2009: 16), 'history and status far outweighed political purpose and practicality in determining Russia's post-Soviet identity'.

Constructivist studies have also emphasised the importance of recognition or non-recognition of Russia's desired identity by the 'West' not only for RFP, but also for the country's domestic politics by strengthening or undermining the relevant identity coalitions among the Russian political elite (Splidsboel-Hansen, 2002; Tsygankov, 2016). Looking at Russia's identity debate at the turn of the 20th century and during President Putin's first term in office, several studies examine Moscow's attempts to re-interpret the country's great-powerness as that of a 'normal' great power (Zevelev, 2002; Tsygankov, 2005). Yet, Russia's reconceptualisation of its 'normal' role has proved difficult, as Moscow has struggled to gain what it sees as an appropriate recognition of its status. The mismatch between Russia's understanding of Self and its recognition has been particularly acute in Moscow's relations with Washington. As explained by Zevelev (2002: 459), 'the post-Cold War US perception of self, and its vision of the world, did not allow for the kind of bilateral relationship for which Russia was striving'. The non-recognition of Russia's 'normality' has been seen by some constructivists as contributing to Russia's difficulty in overcoming the legacy of its autocratic past and making it significantly more difficult for Russian reform-minded elites to succeed (Splidsboel-Hansen, 2002: 417).

The problem of recognition and non-recognition of Russia's identity has also become central in the rapidly developing constructivist literature on status, honour and respect (see Forsberg et al., 2014). In several agenda-setting articles, Larson and Shevchenko (2003, 2010, 2014) demonstrate the importance of status considerations both in Soviet and Russian foreign policies. Drawing on insights from the Social Identity Theory (SIT) as it developed in Social Psychology, they differentiate their approach from the constructivist tradition. Yet, their focus on identity makes their work relevant to the constructivist literature. As argued by Larson and Shevchenko (2010: 68–72), state leaders as representatives of a state in the international arena strive to maintain a positive state identity compared to relevant out-groups (other states). When faced with a humiliating defeat or any other development that has a negative effect on their status (relative standing compared to other states) and self-esteem, the state leaders attempt to improve their self-esteem by resorting to one of the identity management strategies which Larson and Shevchenko describe as social mobility, social competition and social creativity. Their analysis of the Soviet Union's adoption of a dramatically more cooperative approach under Gorbachev, for example, suggests that Gorbachev's New Thinking was an example of the social creativity strategy – an attempt to reinterpret the Soviet Union's positive identity and status when the USSR struggled to maintain its status compared to the US with material means (Larson and Shevchenko, 2003). In a later study, Larson and Shevchenko's analysis of Russia's and China's

identity management strategies points at the negative consequences of status non-recognition. Seeing the 2008 Russian war with Georgia as stemming from Russia's 'sense of injury', Larson and Shevchenko (2010: 95) warn that 'the United States must learn how to treat China and Russia in ways other than as rivals or junior partners if it is to obtain their cooperation'.

Tsygankov's analysis of Russia's understandings of honour and their impact on RFP reaches similar conclusions (Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist, 2009; Tsygankov, 2012). While sharing with Larson and Shevchenko the starting point that state leaders and political elites experience a psychological need to maintain positive self-esteem, Tsygankov (2012: 4) shifts the focus of attention from status to the idea of honour – a socially constructed understanding of 'what is a "good" and "virtuous" course of action' that has developed in Russia over centuries. According to Tsygankov, Russia's attempts to act according to its sense of honour have often been misinterpreted by the 'West', with the 2008 Russian-Georgian war being one of the latest examples of such misinterpretation. Emphasising the importance of recognition of Russia's identity, Tsygankov's study explains major shifts in RFP – from cooperation to a defensive reaction to assertiveness – by the varying extent to which Western nations as Russia's significant Other recognised or rejected Russia's understandings of honour and its interests stemming from those understandings. Based on a wide range of historical case-studies – from Russia's participation in the Holy Alliance that emerged in the post-Napoleon Europe to the 2008 Russo-Georgian war – Tsygankov's analysis suggests that Western recognition was a crucial factor in encouraging Moscow's cooperative approach. Thus, as argued by Tsygankov (2012: 7), the 'ability [of Western nations] to engage Moscow will only be successful when they acknowledge Russia's distinctive values, interests, and right to develop in accordance with its internal perception of honor'.

The impact of status considerations and of the psychological need for respect on RFP is further explored in a 2014 special issue in *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* edited by Heller, Forsberg and Wolf (see Forsberg et al., 2014), which takes stock of the existing status-related literature and seeks to develop a more coherent research programme. While generally agreeing on the psychological importance of status aspirations and associated grievances for Russian political elites and foreign policy decision-makers, these studies nevertheless disagree on the significance and implications of Western recognition or non-recognition of Russia's status. Forsberg's analysis of Russia's status grievances, for example, points at 'a gap of how Russia and the West perceive Russian status and in particular Western acts in honouring or ignoring it' (Forsberg, 2014: 329). The example of Russia's involvement in the crisis in and around Ukraine is particularly illustrative of this gap.

In addition to the rapidly expanding literature on status, the questions of recognition and non-recognition of Russia's identity have become central to the constructivist studies of Russia's image projection and Moscow's engagement with and exercise of soft power. These studies argue that Russia's instrumental efforts to transform its international image, and particularly its image in the 'West', can be explained not only by rational concerns with the investment climate or geopolitical considerations, but also by a need to secure a recognition of Russia's identity (Kassianova, 2001; Makarychev and Yatsyk, 2014; Kiseleva, 2015). A constructivist reading of Russia's image-projection has been particularly important in accounting for Russia's seemingly contradictory approach to public diplomacy and the idea of soft power (Feklyunina, 2012, 2016; Kiseleva, 2015). Competing understandings of Russia's identity often produce fairly different visions of what image Russia should project in the international arena and how it should engage in image-projection. While some of Russia's efforts have sought to project an image of a reliable partner, others have increasingly prioritised the image of a strong state and a great power at the expense of the idea of reliability.

Norms and RFP

The rise of social constructivism in IR has also spurred a growing literature on Russia's engagement with international norms, often understood as 'a standard of appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity' (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 891). While in the early 1990s Russia appeared to accept the dominant international norms, the subsequent growing rift between Moscow and the 'West' has led to a debate on Russia's normative understandings and their impact on its behaviour. As argued by Makarychev (2008: 30), 'Putin is not only eager to get involved in the global normative debate, but tries to use this debate to reassert Russia's leadership'. Constructivist studies have been particularly important in highlighting Russia's engagement with the norm of sovereignty and in analysing Russia's responses to the ideas of humanitarian intervention and the Responsibility to Protect (Snetkov and Lanteigne, 2015; Deyermond, 2016). Focusing on the idea of 'sovereign democracy' as it was articulated in Russia's dominant discourse in the mid-2000s, Ziegler (2012) highlights a significant clash between Russian and Western interpretations of the link between sovereignty and democracy. Russia's socially constructed understandings of sovereignty are further explored by Ruth Deyermond (2016), who demonstrates that these understandings vary depending on *whose* sovereignty it is. While Russia explicitly defends a traditional Westphalian understanding of sovereignty in relation to itself and states outside of its immediate neighbourhood, Russia's interpretation of sovereignty in relation to states of the former Soviet Union is radically different. As argued by Deyermond (2016: 982), in the post-Soviet area Moscow interprets sovereignty 'as porous in relation to Russia while remaining impermeable in relation to states outside the region'.

Constructivist studies have also discussed the implications of Russia's distinctive normative understandings for its relations with other international actors. When speaking of Russia's relationship with the EU, Makarychev (2014), for example, concludes that both actors hold 'different visions and models of international society'. Russia's apparent normative challenge to the 'West' has also raised urgent questions about any convergence between Russia's normative understandings and those of any other major non-Western powers, particularly China. While on the surface Russia's and China's approaches to sovereignty and humanitarian intervention appear to share some common ground, recent constructivist studies suggest a growing difference in Moscow's and Beijing's understandings. Looking at Russia's and China's reactions to the conflicts in Libya and Syria, Snetkov and Lanteigne (2015: 114), for instance, demonstrate that while Moscow resorts to vocal criticism of Western approaches to humanitarian intervention, Beijing refrains from explicitly opposing the dominant understandings.

Practices, common sense and RFP

Following a 'practice turn' in IR constructivism, several recent studies have made a major contribution to our understanding of what Vincent Pouliot (2010) has identified as 'the logic of practicality' in Russian foreign and security policies. In his agenda-setting monograph on NATO-Russia diplomacy in the post-Soviet period, Pouliot draws on Bourdieu to explore the role of practices in the development of security communities. Unlike the constructivist work discussed in this chapter earlier – that starts from the premise that our interests and, thus, our behaviour are shaped by our understandings of our identity – Pouliot (2010: 5) suggests that 'practices also shape the world and its meaning'. Pouliot's study examines routine diplomatic interactions between Russian and NATO representatives in the NATO-Russia Council, and seeks to recover their taken-for-granted understandings that are 'embodied' through these

practices. Pouliot's analysis points at a significant gap between the taken-for-granted background understandings of Russian security practitioners about Russia's position in the world and their diplomatic practices on the one hand, and taken-for-granted understandings of NATO practitioners on the other. As argued by Pouliot (2010: 2), 'pervasive Great Power dispositions lead [Russian] security practitioners to construe their country's position as much higher in the international security hierarchy than other players in the field, especially NATO are inclined to recognize'.

In a more recent study, Neumann and Pouliot (2011) apply the practice-focused analytical framework to account for persistent symbolic struggles in Russia's relations with the 'West' which, as they argue, have characterised Moscow's engagement with its Western neighbours over the past millennium. Looking at several historical epochs – from Kievan Rus' to medieval Muskovy to the Soviet Union's and Russia's relationship with the 'West' in the 20th century – Neumann and Pouliot (2011: 106) emphasise the importance of what they refer to as Russia's 'untimely diplomatic practices'. Their argument centres on the idea of 'hysteresis' – 'a mismatch between the dispositions agents embody and the positions they occupy in a given social configuration' (Neumann and Pouliot, 2011: 109). By applying the *longue durée* approach, Neumann and Pouliot are able to demonstrate the nuanced ways in which Russia's current dispositions are shaped by its past experiences.

The focus on taken-for-granted understandings is also central to Hopf's theory of 'commonsense constructivism' which he applies to the analysis of Russia's response to the neo-liberal project in the post-Soviet period. Drawing on Gramsci's understanding of hegemony and differentiating his approach from the practice-oriented constructivism discussed earlier, Hopf (2013) calls for more attention to the common sense understandings of the masses as opposed to an exclusive focus on interpretations articulated by political elites which persist in many constructivist works. As argued by Hopf (2013: 317), 'if political elites do not take into account the taken-for-granted world of the masses, elite ideological projects would likely founder against daily practices of resistance'. Hopf's empirical analysis demonstrates a significant gap between the neo-liberal ideas adopted by Russian elites after the Soviet Union's collapse, and the common sense understandings of ordinary Russians, with the latter constituting a major challenge to the elite project on a daily basis.

Methodological considerations

As demonstrated in this brief overview of several major strands in the existing constructivist scholarship, these studies have made fairly different methodological choices. It is worth noting that the earlier constructivist literature was often criticised both by the opponents of the constructivist approach and by its 'critical friends' for its insufficient attention to methodological concerns and to empirical research (see Zehfuss, 2002). More recently, however, constructivists have made some significant contributions to the discussion of methodology and method (Klotz and Lynch, 2007; Pouliot, 2007, 2010; Lupovici, 2009; Fierke and Jorgensen, 2015). As a broad church, constructivist scholarship has relied on a variety of research methods and has utilised different types of evidence, ranging from popular fiction to statistical data. These choices, however, should be seen within a broader methodological context. While methods are usually understood as distinct 'techniques for gathering and analysing bits of data' (Jackson, 2010: 25), a methodology is a set of fundamental ontological and epistemological assumptions that prescribe how we can conduct an enquiry. To quote Pouliot (2007: 360), it 'formulates its own scientific standards and truth conditions'. Thus, the choice of methods and evidence can never be arbitrary, but should be always consistent with broader methodological commitments. If we go back to the previous

section of the chapter, we will see that some constructivist studies of Russian identity(s), for example, used discourse analysis of official documents. Others, on the other hand, used historical evidence to reconstruct the practices that constituted Russian identity(s) over time. While sharing the basic assumption about the constructed and intersubjective nature of social reality, these studies proceed from fairly different conceptualisations of identity, from different views on the role of agents in the processes of social construction and from different epistemological positions. It is hardly surprising that as a result they chose different methods and types of evidence.

We can, for example, notice distinct approaches to the understanding of causality and the appropriateness of hypothesis testing. Those studies located towards the positivist end of the constructivist spectrum often ask ‘why’ questions, seek to uncover causal mechanisms and adopt the language of variables and hypothesis testing (Checkel, 1997, 2006; Lupovici, 2009). Studies located towards the post-positivist end of the spectrum tend to ask ‘how possible’ questions, speak about co-constitution rather than causality and see hypothesis testing as inappropriate. While these differences stem from distinct epistemological positions, they do not, however, constitute a rigid dividing line. As argued by Klotz and Lynch (2007: 15), the apparent difference between ‘why’ and ‘how possible’ questions in empirical research should not be taken for granted, and we should not ‘preclude the possibility of causal answers to constitutive questions, or vice versa’. Thus, instead of uncritically adopting or rejecting the language of hypothesis testing, we need to ensure that if we do use hypothesis testing, our practices are consistent with our broader ontological and epistemological commitments. To illustrate this point, we can consider Hopf’s use of hypotheses in his work on Soviet and Russian identities in 1955 and 1999, where ‘hypotheses derived from domestic identities and their discourses are evaluated against the empirical record of Soviet and Russian understandings of external Others’ (Hopf, 2002: 28).

Taking into account the diversity of constructivist approaches discussed earlier, what is distinctive about constructivist methodologies as compared to other research traditions? Since all constructivists agree that both social reality and our knowledge of social reality are socially constructed, all constructivist studies in one way or another are concerned with analysing the meanings actors attach to the world. To capture these subjective meanings, as suggested by Pouliot (2007: 359), ‘a constructivist methodology should be inductive, interpretive, and historical’. Pouliot’s emphasis on induction is consistent with the constructivist assumption that our understandings of ourselves and of the world are neither pre-given nor fixed, and are always in the process of re-interpretation. If we want to recover the meanings as they are understood by the actors – albeit constructivists acknowledge the limits of such recovery – we need to avoid as much as we can any imposition of our own understandings. As advocated by Hopf (2002: 9, 25), ‘the researcher . . . must try to resist the categorization of meaning for as long as practicable’ and ‘to avoid pretheorization’. Although constructivist studies vary in the extent to which they follow Hopf’s call to avoid pretheorization (and one can argue that avoiding it completely is hardly possible), constructivists certainly treat induction more seriously than positivists.

Having inductively recovered subjective interpretations of social reality, constructivist studies must make a further step in order to interpret them. Pouliot (2007: 359) envisages this research process as proceeding from subjective knowledge to objectified knowledge through ‘contextualization and historicization’ – a set of steps that Pouliot refers to as a ‘subjectivist’ methodology. By contextualising the inductively recovered subjective meanings, constructivist studies locate these understandings in relation to others in a particular cultural context. For instance, Hopf’s analysis of popular identities in Moscow in 1955 and 1999 includes ‘contextualizing the meanings of identities within texts and relating them intertextually to the vast variety of other texts for that year’ (Hopf, 2002: 24). Finally, by historicising the contextualised meanings, constructivist studies locate them in a larger historical context, which allows them to trace how particular

understandings of social reality become possible in particular historical circumstances. Some constructivist research projects, such as Morozov's study of Russia's identity as a 'subaltern empire', or Neumann's and Pouliot's study of the hysteresis in Russia's relations with the 'West' adopt a *longue durée* approach, which allows them to trace the transformation, as well as continuity in dominant meanings and practices in changing historical circumstances over a long period of time (Neumann and Pouliot, 2011; Morozov, 2015). Others adopt a shorter timeframe and explore contested meanings in a particular historical period, such as the early years of the Cold War or the post-Soviet period (Hopf, 2012; White and Feklyunina, 2014; Tsygankov, 2016). Yet others focus on one or several in-depth case studies, while locating them in a broader historical context, such as Forsberg's study of Gorbachev's policy towards Japan and Germany in the final years of the Cold War, or Heller's analysis of Russia's reaction to the NATO campaign in Kosovo in 1999 (Forsberg, 1999; Tsygankov, 2012; Heller, 2014; Smith, 2014).

Constructivist studies of RFP use a variety of research methods. However, they all share a primary concern with recovering subjective understandings of social reality, which generally leads them to employ interpretive methods. Some scholars, especially those who empathise the role of language in the processes of social construction, often resort to discourse or narrative analysis (e.g. Neumann, 1996; Hopf, 2002, 2010). As argued by Klotz and Lynch (2007: 19), discourse analysis is particularly well-suited for constructivist studies due to its ability to 'capture the creation of meanings and accompanying processes of communication'. Scholars of RFP have used a variety of approaches that fall under the umbrella of discourse analysis (see Milliken, 1999). Some studies have engaged with the poststructuralist discourse tradition by drawing on the variant of discourse analysis as developed, for example, by Hansen (2006) while maintaining their constructivist ontological commitments (White and Feklyunina, 2014). Others, such as Morozov's study of 'othering' in Russia's identity construction, explicitly identify with the post-structuralist tradition (Morozov, 2009). Studies adopting a *longue durée* approach have drawn on Foucault and employed the method of genealogy which allows them to trace the development of particular understandings over time, such as Neumann's investigation of Russia's identity discourses over several centuries (Neumann, 1996).

While scholars of RFP vary in their application of discourse analysis, the focus on discourses generally tends to emphasise the role of social structures in shaping or producing particular understandings of Russia's identity and interests, and to underplay the role of actors in transforming these structures. Other studies have attached more significance to agency by focusing on narratives articulated by political actors, including different groups among the Russian elite, Russian leaders, diplomats or public diplomacy practitioners (Clunan, 2009, 2014; Larson and Shevchenko, 2010; Leichtova, 2014; Tsygankov, 2016). For example, Feklyunina (2016) in her study of Russia's soft power vis-à-vis Ukraine, analyses narratives of the 'Russian World' as they were articulated by President Putin, Patriarch Kirill and Russian public diplomacy practitioners in the run-up to the 'Ukrainian' crisis. Having established the key elements of these narratives, she proceeds to explore the extent to which these narratives were accepted or rejected in competing identity discourses in Ukraine. By focusing on narratives, constructivist studies of RFP explore the role of agents in promoting particular understandings of social reality, including their interpretations of Russia's identity and interests, while acknowledging that these understandings are themselves shaped by dominant discourses. The focus on actors is even more pronounced in studies adopting the method of process tracing, such as Checkel's investigation of the role of ideas – as they were promoted by policy entrepreneurs and accepted or rejected by Soviet and Russian leaders – in the Soviet Union's and Russia's foreign policy change (Checkel, 1997).

Another method often employed in constructivist studies of RFP is semi-structured interviewing. As demonstrated in Pouliot's study of diplomatic practices in Russia's relations with

NATO (Pouliot, 2010), interviews can be particularly helpful in recovering subjective meanings of research participants when the researcher cannot rely on textual evidence or observe diplomatic practices through participant observation. In Pouliot's study, participant observation of the working meetings at the NATO-Russia Permanent Council would clearly have been more desirable than any other method. However, since the researcher could not get access to such meetings, interviews with diplomats and security experts provide an alternative strategy to recover the taken-for-granted understandings of both Russian and NATO security practitioners. Similarly to discourse and narrative analysis of textual evidence, interviews allow the researcher to gain an insight into the participants' understandings of social reality through their own voices, which is especially important for constructivist studies. When analysing popular identities and interpretations of social reality, constructivist studies have resorted not only to discourse analysis of popular texts, such as popular fiction, textbooks or mass media publications (Hopf, 2002, 2012), but also to focus groups and public opinion surveys. For example, in their comparative study of identities in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, White and Feklyunina (2014) use focus groups to recover popular understandings of identity through the voices of participants, while using opinion surveys to establish the distributions of particular identity frameworks across the populations in individual countries and to trace their change over time.

While the methods discussed are particularly useful in recovering subjective understandings, other methods, such as macro-historical comparisons, counterfactuals or even statistical analysis, can be equally important when researchers attempt to locate these understandings in relevant cultural and historical contexts. For instance, Morozov's investigation of the patterns of Russia's economic relations with European states over several centuries is crucial in developing his argument about Russia's economic dependence on Europe and its subaltern position (Morozov, 2015). To reiterate the point made earlier in this chapter, adopting a constructivist methodology does not imply that we are limited to some specific 'constructivist' methods. Rather we can use any method as long as its application is consistent with our ontological and epistemological assumptions, and as long as it allows us to answer our research questions.

Similar to any other theoretical approach, social constructivist studies of RFP encounter a number of methodological challengers. One of the major challenges is selection of sources, whether it is about the selection of textual evidence in studies employing discourse or narrative analysis, or the selection of research participants in projects employing interviewing. Another major challenge is to do with the categorisation and interpretation of meanings in the selected texts, interview transcripts or observation notes. As argued by Hopf (2002: 25), 'for a work on identity, it is absolutely imperative that meanings remain what they mean and do not become what the researcher needs to test a hypothesis'. Hopf's warning about the danger of imposing rigid categories or our own subjective meanings on the data is important for any constructivist project. This danger is particularly evident not only when selecting or coding the data, but also when posing questions during semi-structured interviews or focus groups, or developing questionnaires for public opinion polls. At the same time, constructivists generally recognise that researchers always bring their own understandings of reality and their normative commitments into their study. Indeed, even the topics that we are interested in and the research questions that we pose, are shaped by these understandings and commitments. This recognition stems from the basic constructivist assumption that knowledge is socially constructed rather than an unproblematic reflection of an independently existing social reality. To address this major methodological challenge, constructivist studies tend to be noticeably more self-reflexive about their methodological choices compared to positivist approaches. They also tend to be more modest about their validity claims. For example, Hopf (2002: 24) speaks of 'claims to validity that I expect to be true only in relation to other interpretive claims, not to some objective reality'. Depending on their position on the

constructivist spectrum, constructivists also tend to be very cautious about generalisations (Klotz and Lynch, 2007: 20). Once can agree with Hopf (2002: 31), however, that while empirical generalisations are often problematic due to constructivism's emphasis on the importance of cultural and historical contexts, constructivist studies can still make important theoretical generalisations.

Conclusions

As we have seen throughout this chapter, constructivist studies of RFP have made an invaluable contribution to our understanding of the sources of Russia's international behaviour. They have challenged explanations based on peculiarities of Russia's domestic political system, and they have convincingly argued against interpreting Moscow's behaviour as stemming from a geographically or geopolitically determined expansionist drive. By focusing on contested and evolving understandings of Russia, of its interests, of its place in the world and of its normative commitments, constructivist studies have argued against seeing Russia's interests as fixed or inherently anti-Western. At the same time, by focusing on the constitutive nature of Russia's interactions with its Others, first and foremost with Europe and the 'West' more broadly, they have called on 'Western' decision-makers to adopt a more reflexive approach towards Moscow.

To take the constructivist project forward, scholars of RFP can follow a variety of paths. Yet, three of them appear particularly promising. First, constructivist studies of RFP would benefit from more explicit and more consistent engagement with ethics. Following the constructivist logic, studies of the social construction of reality contribute to the production of this reality. Thus, studies of competing identity discourses in Russia, for example, can contribute to the reification of these discourses. To quote Guzzini (2013: 219), 'categories we use for classifying/naming people interact with the self-conception of those people'. While we cannot avoid this, we should be more reflexive about our own role in the construction of social reality. A critical engagement with the poststructuralist tradition can be particularly helpful in addressing this challenge (Dauphinée, 2007). Another ethical challenge stems from the constructivist attempt to see the world through Russia's eyes. Although this is arguably one of constructivism's main contributions to our understanding of Russia's behaviour, it also opens up the possibility that our attempt to understand Russia's views may intentionally or unintentionally turn into an apology of Moscow's international behaviour. As suggested by Morozov (2015: 4) in his discussion of Russia's attempt to position itself as representing the subaltern and challenging the hegemonic 'West' on its behalf, 'a voice claiming to speak in the name of the subaltern must not be endowed with unquestionable moral authority'. To address this challenge, constructivists could be more explicit about their normative commitments.

Second, constructivist studies of RFP could build on the existing research to develop a better understanding of popular identities, their relationship with elite identities and their role in Russia's foreign policy-making. With the rapid rise in the number of Internet users across Russia since the mid-2000s, constructivist studies of RFP could do more to explore the role of social media as sites of identity and interest construction – a research area that has produced a growing number of studies in the geopolitical research tradition (Suslov, 2014; Suslov and Bassin, 2016). Another research area that could benefit from more attention in constructivist scholarship is the role of material factors in Russia's identity construction and contestation. Studies of RFP could, for example, focus more explicitly on the role of material factors in the construction of Russia's status aspirations and Russia's status management strategies, or in Russia's engagement with the idea of soft power.

Finally, constructivist studies could enrich our understanding of RFP by experimenting with research design and methods. A larger number of comparative constructivist studies could, for

example, explore peculiarities of Russia's engagement with the idea of great powerness as compared to China, Great Britain or the US, or investigate the differences and commonalities in Russia's and other states' responses to perceived humiliation. Experiments with research methods could, for example, include ethnographic research which has recently become increasingly prominent in IR studies more generally (see MacKay and Levin, 2015). Another promising direction is experimenting with a mixed-method approach. While scholars of RFP do employ qualitative and quantitative methods together, these methods often remain distinct in covering different sub-questions of the larger project. One possible way to benefit from both qualitative and quantitative insights in a more coherent and systematic manner is through applying Q-methodology (see Aalto, 2003). Although rarely used in IR studies, Q-methodology can be helpful in establishing relationships between different meanings, and can assist scholars of RFP in tracing distinct frameworks of understanding Russian identity and interests. These suggestions are only a few of the numerous ways in which social constructivism can enrich our understanding of Russia and RFP.

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