

# **Post-Soviet Kaliningraders and Place Identity - an Autoethnographic Approach**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores how young Kaliningraders navigate their own identities in relation to the mixed heritage of the city they inhabit. Such an exploration, however, is constructed through my own perceptions, and as such autoethnography is used to ensure that the fallacy of the divide between researcher and research is not maintained. The work places the identities of young Kaliningraders within a larger conversation regarding constructivist theories of national identity formation. More specifically, Kaliningrad's architecture, and a related theory of place identity, will form the prism through which identity is constructed on the individual level.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Prologue

‘‘He’s probably a spy’’

*Dima Gerasimov, Facebook*

I was sitting in my apartment in Budapest in early May when the bell rang. The cadence was a familiar one; it was not my doorbell, which had stopped working the previous September, but the notification bell on my mobile phone. This wasn’t particularly surprising, as I had just come back from a rather eventful research trip to Kaliningrad and had shared my experiences on social media. With the intention of interviewing around fifteen Kaliningraders, thanks to the generosity of Facebook and V Kontakte groups, alongside Instagram accounts, I had been contacted by upwards of sixty people. Not only had I achieved my goal, but the researcher had become the researched. To my great surprise, I was contacted by two regional news outlets, *klops.ru* and *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, to whom I gave interviews, as well as by the regional branch of Channel One to give a televised interview, although unfortunately I was approached whilst *en route* from Kaliningrad back to Budapest. All in all, I was on a high from the success of the trip.

It was only when I opened the notification that my positive outlook took somewhat of a blow. Someone had commented on my post regarding my interview in *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, saying, ‘‘You have no right to talk about our people and our city’’ (*ty ne immesh’ pravo govorit’ ni o nashikh lyudyakh, ni o nashem gorode*). I had experienced some negativity during my search for interviewees, as a comment section underneath my benign appeal in a Facebook group had led to responses stating that I was a spy, a man from the Caucasus looking to find potential wives, and even a human trafficker looking to steal young women to sell their organs

on the black market! Just as in the situation from the previous week, I decided not to engage with any comments, and quickly deleted the comment on my Instagram post to reduce the likelihood of any further unsavoury debate or toxicity in the comment section.

Almost instantaneously, I received another notification. The same account had commented again, this time somewhat threateningly, demanding that I “look at what people are saying about me,” with a link to a page in the Russian social network V Kontakte. I clicked on the link to a group entitled ‘It’s König, Kiddo!’ (Это Кёниг, детка), where the entire article had been copied and pasted from *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. With 4600 views, 70 comments and dozens of likes and shares, what was written had indeed caused quite the stir, not least among the very same woman who commented on my Instagram post. The headline ‘Englishman in Kaliningrad – “The House of the Soviets is brutal, and Königsberg Cathedral is boring,”’ had clearly evoked the response the journalist had intended. Did my appreciation of the House of the Soviets and lack of infatuation with the Königsberg cathedral warrant being called a ‘stupid mug’, ‘British twerp’, and once again, a ‘fake foreigner’? Moreover, a certain Veronika was so enraged that she called for other members to hunt me down on social media, where my Facebook and Instagram accounts were quickly found. Veronika indeed explained her strong conviction in my idiocy by claiming repeatedly that she saw me on the trolleybus number seven that same day, which was interesting as I was already back in Budapest by then, and I had never travelled on the trolleybus during my research trip!

The decision not to reply to any comment seemed wise, as I quickly understood that Veronika from V Kontakte was indeed the same account that commented on my Instagram post, and when others had spoken in my defence it led to a 40 comment strong thread with her refusing to yield. Not only did this reaction confirm the strong emotions a topic such as architecture and

identity could evoke, but also put into clear focus my own subjectivity in the project. The suspicion I was regarded with in the comment section only confirmed my conviction that I could not leave my identity aside when engaging in discussions with locals about their own identity. To have attempted to be an ‘objective’ researcher would have been fruitless, for curiosity amongst respondents in a Russian-speaking Brit studying a place such as Kaliningrad could easily have led to distrust if I had not have been open about my intentions and therefore aspects of my personal life and interests in Russia and Kaliningrad. To obtain the frank and open discussion of identity I desired, my personal presence was also of utmost importance, as the somewhat suspicious and negative reaction to the printed representation of myself stood in stark contrast to my more than pleasant conversations with Kaliningraders in person. My use of personal information at the start of every in-person conversation, as anticipated, clearly diffused any potential queries Kaliningraders had.

My first experience of social media hatred had well and truly shattered the illusion of the objective researcher and the idea that I could somehow detach myself from the experiences and findings that came from my research trip to Kaliningrad. I sincerely hope that in beginning this thesis in a somewhat unorthodox fashion, I have enabled you, the reader, to more clearly appreciate the situatedness inherent in all of our academic endeavours in the discipline of International Relations.

## Introduction

Having now established the prism through which I myself have experienced this research, it now falls to define the very nature of the research itself. The central research question of my project could be characterised as the following: *What are the ways in Kaliningraders born after 1991 interpret their architectural surroundings as part of their identity?* The selection of those born after 1991 is a way to expand on work such as those of Narvselius and Klemeshev, in looking at architecture through the lens of a *mythscape* for both the Soviet period and the Pre-Soviet period, where the German and Soviet eras are in the realm of ‘myth’ and not lived experience. It would seem highly illogical to exclude the House of the Soviets, an undeniable symbol of the city that caused such intense debate regarding its past, present and future, in an analysis of how Kaliningraders incorporate ‘their’ past into their identity construction. So that both pre-Russian and pre-Soviet elements can be considered in the similar framework, it was necessary and desirable to find interlocutors that had no lived experience of either era.

As you, the reader, will already be aware of, this thesis will also include elements of narrative writing, adhering to principles outlined by those such as Oded Löwenheim and Elizabeth Dauphinee, seminal figures in the narrative turn that the study of international relations is undergoing (Dauphinee 2013, Löwenheim 2010). The use of narrative, as will be developed in further detail later, is a form that allows the inclusion of the subjectivity of the researcher in a direct challenge to power hierarchies inherent in feigning the supposed objectivity of the researcher and their area of study. I follow Löwenheim’s characterisation of the study of IR as ‘the part of an international system in that it a) may directly influence state conduct and, b) has ‘an input in terms of the creation and reproduction of pictures of the world that inform policy and set the contours of policy debates’, whilst also acknowledging the risk of being perceived as narcissistic in writing in such a fashion (Löwenheim 2010, 1025). To avert this, the purpose



of writing involving the self should have at its heart the intention of invoking a response in the audience, in order that they too ‘reflect upon their *own* experience as human beings and the construction of their own subjectivity’ (Löwenheim 2010, 1025). Current debates framing Kaliningrad as wedged between two opposing views have political consequences, affecting the everyday lives of Kaliningraders in terms of their freedom of movement and their economic circumstances (most evident in the indefinite suspension of the cross-border travel arrangement between Poland and Russia). In contesting that writing *is* political, this thesis is therefore an attempt to understand the nuances in individual identity construction through architecture that does not, intentionally or otherwise, reify the state-centric identity construction that hinders debate surrounding the nature of identity on an individual level.

In the next section, I will focus on three main theoretical strands that form the basis of this thesis. Firstly, I will theorise the narrative turn in international relations and the relationship between narratives and agency. Secondly, central theories regarding identity and statehood will be addressed to explore the contours of national identity construction. Finally, the notions of identity construction on a national level will be complemented by theories of place identity from an interdisciplinary perspective, namely environmental psychology and sociology, to provide the analytical bond between architecture and identity construction. Focus will then be drawn to my research trip and the core tenants of individual identity construction through architecture drawn from my time in Kaliningrad, namely *a reverence for history, interlocutors’ lived experience, aesthetics, the purpose of the physical site, and the uniqueness of Kaliningrad* through her architecture.

## Introduction to the region

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Kaliningrad (formerly the East Prussian city of Königsberg) has been the subject of vocal academic debate in a number of disciplines. The position of the city (and its surrounding region of Kaliningrad Oblast) as an exclave of the Russian Federation and an enclave of the European Union (nestled between Poland and Lithuania), has been discussed in terms of economic development (Richard, Sebentsov, and Zotova 2015; Sebentsov and Zotova 2018; Nilov 2018) and cross-border cooperation (Sagan et al. 2018; Żęgota 2014; Mironyuk 2017). The largest body of literature dedicated to Kaliningrad specifically looks at the question of identity, unsurprising considering the almost 700-year non-Soviet and non-Russian history of the city, which ended in its almost total destruction during the Second World War before being ceded to the Soviet Union in 1945. In July 1946, the city was renamed and its pre-German population was expelled, with the city and region repopulated by Soviet citizens primarily from Russia (Holtom 2003, 159). Multiple quantitative studies have been conducted to investigate the question of a regional identity in Kaliningrad that differs from a national Russian identity (Miłosz J. Zieliński 2015; Klemeshev, Fedorov, and Fidrya 2017), while other research has focused primarily on Kaliningrad's identity through its German past (Berger 2015, 2010). As Kaliningrad's German population has been non-existent since 1951 due to Soviet policy of resettlement, any remnants of a German past can primarily be experienced only through the remaining physical sites in the city and wider region. These physical sites play a primordial role in both historical accounts of the region and the question of identity, from university buildings to the central cathedral (see Dementyev 2015; Костяшов 2016; Clarkson 2017).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Aspects of this section have been incorporated from a paper submitted as part of Professor Thomas Fetzer's MA course "Dark Legacies: Coming to terms with Europe's Twentieth Century", titled "The Mythscapes of Kaliningrad from 1945."

While physical sites and identity have been areas of focus in academic discourse surrounding Kaliningrad, often the relationship between the two is not as well-explored. In her work on fortification buildings and Prussian heritage in modern-day Kaliningrad, Narvselius argues that a ‘*virtualisation*’ of the pre-Soviet past has taken place, where Kaliningraders use physical objects, authentic or not, to ‘imagine’ the Prussian heritage of the region (Narvselius 2018, 402). It is suggested that after the fall of the Soviet Union, an openness regarding Prussian heritage emerged, used by national and local actors to encourage economic growth and investment in the ‘island of decay within Europe’ (Narvselius 2018, 402). Despite state attempts to reinforce a national Russian narrative of a ‘thousand-years-long history’ and historical Russian presence in the region, there are now ‘myriad ways’ in which Germanness is engaged with (Narsvelius 2018, 401). Although her argument that the existence of contestation towards a singular anti-German narrative began after 1991 is perhaps simplistic - Dementiev (2012) has argued that contestation to official narratives can be seen notably in the 1968 debates regarding the demolition of the ruins of the Königsberg Castle - her invocation of Bell’s idea of a *mythscape* is to be commended. In particular, Bell’s definition of a *mythscape* as ‘the temporally and spatially extended discursive realm wherein the struggle for control of peoples’ memories and the formation of nationalist myth is debated, contested and subverted incessantly’ (Bell 2003, 66) is a particular useful framing through which to see how the varying actors in the region contest its history, particularly when the history lies outside the realm of lived experience and thus cannot be characterised as ‘memory’ but as, in Bell’s words, a ‘myth’. Although Narvselius does suggest that there is a ‘renewed quest for local identity’ (Narvselius 2018, 416) in the region, often it is assumed that national Russian narrative ‘myths’ run counter to this local identity, which seems to close the analytical opportunity for the existence of a more fluid identity as soon as it is opened. Furthermore, the notion that a change

in attitude towards the region's German past that has erased ideas of enmity and denial is only mentioned briefly in the conclusion, alongside another brief mention that this is 'preconditioned' by, amongst other elements, a 'generational belonging', unfortunately lack further elaboration (Narvselius 2018, 417). Although the nuances of a particular local identity are given some opportunity for analysis in the article, the strength of the work is weakened by a decision to seemingly place national narrative myths in opposition to any internalisation of the pre-Soviet past. Moreover, and interestingly for this project, although a generational aspect is tacitly mentioned, the potential for those born after 1991 to see the Soviet past in terms of a *visualisation* in the vein of the region's pre-Soviet past is given an analytical logic that is left untouched. If indeed it is a lack of lived experience that leads to an 'imagination' of Kaliningrad's pre-Soviet heritage by its residents, then surely the same goes for Kaliningrad's 1945-1991 heritage for those born after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

After the fall of Communism and collapse of the Soviet Union, a visible trend in rediscovered 'lost pasts' through (re)construction of landmarks has taken place in cities throughout Eastern Europe (Czaplicka, Gelazis, and Ruble 2009, 195). From L'viv and Warsaw's celebrations through physical sites of a diverse past to examples such as Vilnius where Polish history has arguably been denied or erased, it is clear that 'contemporary mythmaking' has assumed as distinctive 'concrete form' (Czaplicka, Gelazis, and Ruble 2009, 4). The same is indeed true of Kaliningrad, which has experienced a marked transformation in its historical centre, from the reconstruction of the Königsberg Cathedral in the mid-1990s, the renovation of the façades of Soviet *khrushchevki* into a Prussian style, and indeed the complete rebuilding of a synagogue on the same spot it stood until WWII, notably was opened on the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kristallnacht (Oshevskaya 2018). What perhaps distinguishes Kaliningrad from other eastern European cities, however, is the way in which the inclusion of aspects of European history is

seen as oppositional to a national ‘myth’. Indeed, this seeming dichotomy is explicit enough to appear even in the title of research related to the region, namely Sezneva’s chapter *Locating Kaliningrad/Königsberg on the Map of Europe: “A Russia in Europe” or “a Europe in Russia”* in Czaplicka et al’s aforementioned work (Czaplicka, Gelazis, and Ruble 2009, 195). Although quite rightly this shift in development is characterised as ‘history-attentive’ rather than the utopian, ‘future-oriented’ urbanism of the Soviet era, and strongly emphasises the influence of capitalism, namely investment in the post-Soviet era on urban development (2009, 195), there is a logic that Russian and European identities are somewhat in opposition to one another.

Inevitably a consequence of the Slavophile/Westerniser<sup>2</sup> debate of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, which it has been argued, has mischaracterised Slavophiles as anti-European (Rabow-Edling 2006), the consequences of the prevalence of such dichotomies, as will be argued throughout this thesis, does not allow for a nuanced approach to identity, and its usage in fact reifies national identities. This is true even in cases where the intention is to show the fluidity of identity in Kaliningrad, such as Sezneva’s aforementioned work, and even quantitative studies intending to uncover the ‘specific Kaliningrad character of Russian identity’, which although do attempt to use labels such as ‘local’ and ‘regional’ to look at non-national identity, still are unable to fully explore the dynamics in fluid identity construction in the region (Klemeshev, Fedorov, and Fidrya 2017). Quantitative approaches, in their aim for generalisability and parsimony, echo those of actors in mnemonic regimes intent upon representing history as ‘partial and easily digestible’, which in Kantian terms is a prerequisite for the possibility of nationalism (Bell

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<sup>2</sup> The Slavophile/Westerniser debate first emerged between Russian scholars in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It divided them into two camps; the Slavophiles who argued for a traditional ‘Slavic’ way of operating, notably structured around the retention of pre-existing socio-economic conditions based upon serfdom and the cultures surrounding this. And the second camp of Westernisers, who instead argued that the Empire should adopt a more Western outlook, becoming more liberal and embracing Western technologies and progress. Debate centred upon what it meant to be ‘Russian’ and how one should shape the nation, according to the supposedly unique Russian soul (*dusha*) or as part of a more reflexive and adaptive European collective.

2003, 67). Indeed, even qualitative approaches, such as Clarkson's regarding historical memory debates surrounding the city's university and Zieliński's regarding history teaching in secondary education, continue to characterise Kaliningrad as a 'balancing act' between two seemingly opposite ends of the spectrum, Europe and Russia (Clarkson 2017, 256). In a post-2014 era where the future trajectory of Kaliningrad has been a topic of debate in academic, journalistic and political circles, from Zieliński's discussed 'new conservatism' (Zieliński 2018, 11), to well publicised claims of a 'creeping Germanisation' (Sukhanin 2018) and Poland's decision to close the cross-border traffic regime with Kaliningrad (TASS 2016), it seems of utmost importance to explore how this supposed opposition between European and Russian identity is experienced on the individual level.

## Chapter One - Theoretical Framework

This chapter will locate this thesis initially within IR's narrative turn and the use of autoethnography as a methodology to collapse the barrier between the scholar and their research, drawing clear parallels to my own project, which requires the use of autoethnography to give an accurate representation of the results of my research. Following this, constructivist IR discourse on ideas of identity construction on a national and individual level, namely from Campbell, Weldes and Bhabha, will be outlined, in order to outline national identity narratives in the Russian context that pervades Kaliningraders' sense of self. Finally, the use of architecture as a prism through which to see identity construction in Kaliningrad will be justified, alongside theoretical concepts of *politics of space* and *place identity* that draw clear connections between architecture and identity constitution.

## 1.1 IR's Narrative Turn and Autoethnography

As with many of the social sciences, International Relations (IR) has, since the turn of the millennium, undergone somewhat of a 'narrative turn'. Whilst not the *de facto* research style within the discipline, recent years have seen an explosion in scholarship written in narrative style ( see Löwenheim 2010; Inayatullah 2011; Daigle 2015), with Dauphinee's (2013) seminal work *The Politics of Exile*, arguably the first International Relations *novel*. Indeed, debate surrounding the use of narrative as a 'mode of explanation and understanding' in both academic and public fora has been characterised as 'ubiquitous' (Roberts 2006, 703). The increasing, if still uncommon, use of narrative in IR scholarship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should not obscure the fact that such use of narrative was evident prior to the millennium. Even foundational International Relations texts include narration, such as Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations*, which can be attributed to the influence of the discipline of History on International Relations. Whether it be in the UK, where International History is seen as a core tenant of IR, or across the Atlantic, where the interaction and crossover between the two disciplines is frequently debated (Roberts 2006, 704-705), the use of narrative in History is seen as its 'central defining practice', where the search for accuracy in explaining, understanding and even experiencing past events centres upon the 'claims and counter-claims about the adequacy of differing narratives' (Roberts 2006, 703).

In addition to the influence of International History, the primordial role realism has played in International Relations is undergoing a significant constructivist challenge to its naturalistic and positivist tenants, alongside the 'exposure' of meta-narratives underpinning IR theory by authors such as Berkhofer (1998), and a widening discourse surrounding agency (Roberts 2006,



703). Constructivism, in its contestation that facts are social interventions, agency is vested within individuals not states, ideas construct reality, and agents and structures are *mutually* constituted (Das 2009, 961), provides a clear ontological distinction from realism. Constructivist discourse has often focused on national security *construction* through norms, cultures and identities (see Katzenstein 1996; Wendt 1992), a clear departure from realist thought of nation security being the natural terrain of self-interested rational actors. Nevertheless, the fact that this constructivist turn emerged during the post-Cold War period did not seem to engender self-reflexivity of the scholars themselves of their own positionality within this discourse. Indeed, the epistemological foundations of the scholars echoed those of realists, as ‘they did not render the observer/researcher the subject of the same self-reflective critical inquiry’ (Das 2009, 964). Authors such as Doty and Campbell have used the social construction of national security and foreign policy to talk about the constitution of the self in relation to the state, through the production of meanings and boundary-making practices respectively (Das 2009, 965). These scholars, referred to henceforth as *critical*<sup>3</sup>constructivists, do indeed depart epistemologically from realism and earlier forms of constructivism.

The constraints upon writing in ‘omniscient social scientific prose’ (Lowenheim 2010) have arguably been evident since the seventeenth century (Clifford 2008, 5). Western science excluded ‘rhetoric’, ‘fiction’ and ‘subjectivity’ in the name of ‘transparent signification, ‘fact’ and ‘objectivity’, with the work espousing the three excluded aspects labelled under the umbrella ‘literature’ (Clifford 2008, 5-6). However, this complete exclusion is illusory as, according to Derrida, these ‘imperatives of classic pedagogy’, if taken to the nth degree, would result in ‘silence, tautology and tiresome repetition’ (Doty 2004, 379). Beyond this, in using

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<sup>3</sup> It is understood that the categorisation of branches of constructivism is contested (see Das 2009). For the purpose of this project, however, the term *critical constructivist* will refer to scholars that engage with the construction of the self (through narrative or otherwise) in their work.

Barthes' two modalities of writing it is arguable academic objectivity itself is an illusion. Writing, for Barthes, comes at the intersection of *language*, the seemingly 'ordered space' of habits, syntax and grammar that facilitate communication, and *style*, a biological and biographical physical delivery of 'image, delivery and vocabulary' (Doty 2004, 381). In this sense, *writing* is the 'choice of tone, of human attitude, and of ethos', where the identity of the writer is established. Hence in seeing writing as the result of a 'negotiation' between *language* and *style*, it is impossible for writing to be neutral, and even the attempt to portray objectivity using 'zero-sum writing' or 'omniscient scientific prose' is a *style* of portraying the absence of *style*, a subjective *choice* that had political consequences. (Doty 2004, 383-386).

Although further elaboration on the key concepts of statehood and identity will be dealt with later in the chapter, the notion of *self-reflection* within critical constructivism is essential in placing the narrative turn within IR scholarship. The narrative turn in IR emerged in part from multiple disciplines, such as History and Sociology, but also from critical constructivism, which allowed for the researcher to be placed within the 'object' of inquiry, as both are seen as mutually constituted. If social reality is constructed and therefore unnatural, where individuals do have the agency to (re)construct it, then surely the scholar, and therefore their academic output, is part of this process. In History, there is a growing popularity of historians writing their own autobiographies and in Sociology the usage of autoethnography as a methodology is prevalent (Löwenheim 2010, 1024). In IR, reception to this radical attempt to change the fundamental way issues such as national security and identity are written within the discipline has been mixed, as Naeem Inayatullah's (2011) work *Falling and Flying* indicates. The rest of this section will deal with questions of voice, agency, ethics and intentions of the *narrative turn* in IR.

As scholars, our *voice* is predominantly heard through what we write, and much like speech, our writing can convey a plethora of emotions and responses through *what* is written, what is *not* written, and *how* it is written. This may appear to be common knowledge, but the adoption of one particular style of writing within academia is often not a conscious decision, but in fact a subconscious selection through ‘osmosis’, as particular styles pervade particular academic journals, are the required style for top grades in assessment and are then passed down to newer students in a somewhat endless, uncritical cycle (Doty 2004, 380). After time, this style becomes internalised, as other *voices*, other ways of speaking, are ‘ignored or marginalised, left to the poets and the novelists’, and the academic becomes *disciplined* by the discipline of International Relations (Doty 2004, 381). The inherent political nature of such silencing, tantamount to epistemic violence, has been explored in areas where discourse affect policy in the security sphere (see Cohn 1987), and indeed the political ramifications of objectifying individuals on a larger scale to, borrowing from Edkins’ terminology, obscure their own ‘personhood’ (Inayatullah 2011, 29). Not only is the academic lost in the writing, but the interlocutors too. In her work regarding missing persons, Edkins uses a Foucauldian sense of power to assert that this objectification of human lives renders them ‘identical figures in a population administered to be made secure, where there is no space for exceptions, for difference, for concessions’, and that a solution can be found in researching the *person-as-such*, the individual that need not be categorised and made generalisable (Inayatullah 2011, 29; Edkins 2011, 194). With grand narratives given by state actors to missing persons and their views in terms of policy, the political consequences of silencing are clear, whether it be state actors or academics that frame issues in ways that obscure the multiplicity of voices. Using Rancière’s often-quoted statement that ‘politics is always local and occasional’, Edkins provides a way to give silences for these unheard voices – through ‘stories’ (Inayatullah 2011;

Edkins 2013). The use of the academic's own voice is therefore essential to avoid silencing of both the researcher and their field of inquiry.

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and occasional', Edkins provides a way to give silences for these unheard voices – through 'stories' (Inayatullah 2011; Edkins 2013).

The discouragement of writing not in 'omniscient social scientific prose', to use Löwenheim's (2010) term, has arguably been evident since the seventeenth century (Clifford 2008, 5). Western science excluded 'rhetoric', 'fiction' and 'subjectivity' in the name of 'transparent signification, 'fact' and 'objectivity', with the work espousing the three excluded aspects labelled under the umbrella 'literature' (Clifford 2008, 5-6). However, this complete exclusion is illusory as, according to Derrida, these 'imperatives of classic pedagogy', if taken to the nth degree, would result in 'silence, tautology and tiresome repetition' (Doty 2004, 379). Beyond this, in using Barthes' two modalities of writing it is arguable academic objectivity itself is an illusion. Writing, for Barthes, comes at the intersection of *language*, the seemingly 'ordered space' of habits, syntax and grammar that facilitate communication, and *style*, a biological and biographical physical delivery of 'image, delivery and vocabulary' (Doty 2004, 381). In this sense, *writing* is the 'choice of tone, of human attitude, and of ethos', where the identity of the writer is established. Hence in seeing writing as the result of a 'negotiation' between *language* and *style*, it is impossible for writing to be neutral, and even the attempt to portray objectivity using 'zero-sum writing' or 'omniscient scientific prose' is a *style* of portraying the absence of *style*, a subjective *choice* that had political consequences. (Doty 2004, 383-386).

From a critical constructivist standpoint, it has already been established that *zero-sum writing* has political consequences (see Löwenheim 2010; Dauphinee 2013), and is in fact not objective for it masks a subjectivity in the desire to remain free of *style*.. It could also be argued that the authoritative academic voice raises serious questions in terms of the veracity it claims to achieve. Following Dauphinee, what at stake here is not some sort of 'objective veracity of

any particular claim' (in fact other critical constructivists such as Edkins (2011, 197) would allege that, in acknowledging we *cannot* fully understand the *person-as such*, objective veracity is out of reach for academics in certain circumstances), but the method is which *veracity* is generated (Dauphinee 2010, 807). The illusion of objectivity in *zero-sum* writing has enabled us to label academic output as 'truth writing' but other forms of subjective writing as 'narrative' or 'story' (Dauphinee 2010, 808). In fact, the constructed traditional academic prose can be considered 'a creative story presenting itself as truth, but ultimately grounded in the imaginations of individual and collective writers and readers', where ideas and ethical concerns are shaped to fit the 'professional voice' (Doty 2004, 380). Once this fiction of objectivity is uncovered, pertinent questions surrounding the trustworthiness of academic endeavours involved the other come to the fore, alongside ethical concerns, the remedies to which can be found through autoethnography. Autoethnography, in its use of first-person narrative and self-reflection, 'offers a way of giving voice to personal experience to advance sociological understanding' (Wall 2008, 39)

As has already been established, writing emerges from 'a point of view, a gender, a class, a race, a nationality, a cultural heritage, a historical specificity, and a biography' (Inayatullah 2011, 5). To overcome the lack of trust stemming from the 'fictive distancing' of the scholar and the object of study, it is therefore necessary to bring the *I* into IR, to use Inayatullah's (2011) phrase, and autoethnography, in its use of the first-person, is a successful methodology to use. If all writing is subjective and hence subject to certain biases, surely you, the reader, would have more trust in the work of a scholar who clearly acknowledged their own positionality within their research? Of course, the question of veracity could be asked of autoethnographers, but this necessarily leads to the question of trust, for in any academic work we trust the veracity of the sources we use, interviewers we conduct, and responses we receive.

It could even be said that data collected and reported by a field researcher using a positivist methodology is ‘just as suspect’ as that of an autoethnographer, and arguably even more so, as an autoethnographer does not aim to make large generalisable and parsimonious conclusions, but to ‘refigure the self that compiles the information and does the knowing’ and ‘re-centre a self that has long since been absent in mainstream IR’ through decades of silence (Dauphinee 2010, 812-813). This allows for a ‘deeper sort of judgement’ from the reader as the intentions of the scholar are evident (Dauphinee 2010, 813). Of course, the use of autoethnography also provides ‘new knowledge and understanding of general social structures and conditions’, such as identity construction through architecture, for ‘a whole social organisation is needed to create each unique experience’ (Löwenheim 2010, 1025). In writing about the other with an active engagement of the self, autoethnography can engender a level of trust from the reader in its conclusions. However, for that to be successful, the purpose of such a methodology must be adequately explained.

For Löwenheim, what distinguishes autoethnography from ‘narcissistic’ writing about the self is the purpose with which it is conducted (Löwenheim 2010, 1025). The purpose of using autoethnography in this thesis is not to regale the reader with tales of a research trip to Kaliningrad. The purpose is to take the political decision to challenge traditional IR methodologies in order to break through silences caused by *zero-sum writing* to evoke an emotional response that enables the reader to reflect upon their own subjectivity, and their own identity constructions. It is already evident in IR scholarship that emotions play a role in world politics at both the state and individual level, from diplomatic ties to studies of particular leaders (Prior and Van Hoef 2018, 48). This ‘emotional turn’ has even produced scholarship in the Russian national context, including an analysis of anger in Russian foreign policy (see Heller 2018). It is well understood in constructivist approaches that emotions can construct

social reality (Heller 2018, 75), and so a piece of academic work, such as this thesis, that evokes a stronger emotional response from the reader, itself can be a political statement.

In the interests of frankness with the reader, I imagine you may be questioning my decision to write this chapter in a seemingly *objective* manner. The justification for this decision is based on both the remit of this thesis and the desired emotional response I hope to gain from you, the reader. As we are all well accustomed to the theoretical framework of a thesis being written in a *neutral* manner, I feel strongly that it should predominantly be written in a form that is most convincing to the reader, so that the decision to write the following chapters will be less contested. I hope you are cognisant of the fact that the lack of the first-person pronoun in this chapter has not been an unconscious decision, and there are no pretensions to an illusory objectivity. Furthermore, much like in the inclusion of a prologue alongside and introduction, I hope that the juxtaposition of the two *voices* further underlines the increased emotional engagement to narrative, autoethnographic form chosen.



## 1.2 Nation, Identity, Mythscapes

It is undeniable that the nation-state remains a significant referent object in the discipline of International Relations, as the name *international* ('between nations') would suggest. The origins of the sovereign nation-state, as claimed by both traditional IR theory and core textbooks for IR students, lies in the seminal year of 1648 and the Treaty of Westphalia, where the modern sovereign state and states-system we live with today emerged (de Carvalho et al. 2011, 737). This characterisation of the nation-state, however, is deeply problematic and has had profound implications on the discipline itself, as the supposed 'natural' emergence of the nation-state in a Hobbesian-style state of anarchy is not challenged at a historical level (de Carvalho et al. 2011, 736-737). In fact, ideas of the nation-state and sovereignty taken for granted today, are a product of the nineteenth century, not the seventeenth. It is this distorted view of the origins of the basic unit of IR that has resulted in a 'rigid statist ontology' that, in not attesting to the state's true origins, leaves IR 'ill-equipped to handle the challenges of global governance, suzerainty, empire and international hierarchy' (de Carvalho et al. 2011, 737).

Benedict Anderson's well-known definition of a 'nation' is a particularly insightful counterbalance to the traditionalist view of nation states as a 'natural' phenomenon. For Anderson, a *nation* 'is an *imagined* political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign' (Anderson 2006, 6). Originally published in 1983, Anderson's seminal work on nationalism argues that nations are *imagined* because even in the smallest of nations members 'will never know their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (Anderson 2006, 6). Nations are *constructed* by nationalism; they are not self-evident nor natural phenomena waiting to be discovered. The *nation* is also *limited* in a territorial sense, bounded by others and thus

acknowledging its co-existence and mutual constitution with other nations, reliant upon the existence of borders that delineate the self from the other (Anderson 2006, 6). Rather than merely suggest the sovereign nation state emerged somewhat naturally in 1648, the *imagining* of the nation was only possible at a historical moment when three criteria were fulfilled: firstly, the doubt in the belief in a script-language offered ‘privilege to ontological truth’ because it was itself part of that truth; secondly, the doubt in the belief that society was ‘naturally organised around high centres’, i.e. led by divine monarchs; and thirdly, the unmooring of the conception of temporality in which ‘cosmology and history were indistinguishable’, meaning the origins of all were identical, that rooted human lives in the ‘very nature of things’ (Anderson 2006, 36). The decline of these ‘interlinked certainties’, due to economic change, scientific discoveries and, perhaps most vitally, the development of rapid communications (such as the printing press), created this fissure between cosmology and history and enabled growing numbers of people to ‘think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways’ (Anderson 2006, 36).

Through elements such as territory, language, shared history and belief systems, the *self* therefore began to be imagined, began to identify itself in contrast to the *other*. Although the terms *self* (or *sense of self*) and *identity* are used interchangeably in academia, there is a definitional distinction between the two, the former defined as either ‘absolute sameness; exact likeness’ or ‘who somebody is’, and the latter as ‘an individual’s feeling of identity, uniqueness, and self-direction’ (Bamberg 2011, 6). To speak of self and identity therefore refers to both similarities between the self and the other (which could be regarded as the self in an imagined community), and differences that render the self ‘unique’. This duality of meaning is expressed convincingly by Bamberg, and therefore it is his definition that will be

used throughout this investigation. Identity, for Bamberg, ‘is a label attributed to the attempt to differentiate and integrate a sense of self along different social and personal dimensions’ (Bamber 2011, 6). Identities can therefore be ‘differentiated and claimed’ according to a plethora of socio-cultural categories, such as ethnicity, class, age, race, gender, or nation state (2011, 6).

This definition of identity means that any claim of a certain identity faces three dilemmas:

- i) Sameness of a sense of self across time in the face of constant change
- ii) Uniqueness of the person vis-à-vis others in the face of being the same as everyone else
- iii) The construction of agency as constituted by self (with a self-to-world direction of fit) and world (with a world-to-self direction of fit) (Bamberg 2011, 6).

These dilemmas, alongside the definition of identity, are echoed by Campbell’s work on identity and US foreign policy. For Campbell, identity ‘is an inescapable dimension of being’ that no ‘body’ could be without (Campbell 1998, 8). Whether this identity is personal or collective, attributed to a state or to a body, it is *not* ‘fixed by nature, given by God, or planned by intentional behaviour’. Identity is constituted by difference, and in turn, difference is constituted in relation to identity. This constitution of identity of both ‘the body’ and ‘the state’ is *performative*, and this constitution is achieved through the ‘inscription of boundaries which service to demarcate an ‘inside’ from an ‘outside’, a ‘self’ from an ‘other’, a ‘domestic’ from a ‘foreign’ (Campbell 1998, 8). Due to this mutually performative constitution, it thereby follows that the identities of the body and the state are not entirely stable, and the state is, in fact, a ‘paradoxical entity’ that has ‘no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality’, and the appearance of stability for an identity is achieved through a ‘regulated process of repetition’ (Campbell 1998, 9-11). Without an ontological status, states are, therefore, necessitated to reproduce identities to ensure their survival. To end such practices of representation would ‘expose its lack of prediscursive foundations’ that need to be

upheld so that the state's territorialisation is seemingly aligned with a prior form of identification, an essential component for the existence of an imagined political community such as a nation state. Indeed, for states, 'stasis would be death' (Campbell 1998, 11). This constructivist approach therefore underlines Bamber's temporal dilemma of identity construction at a time of constant change, and the mutual constitution of identity as seen in the third dilemma (Bamber 2011, 6). Weldes, in their work on the (re)construction of US national interests, too sees agency in state officials who act on behalf of the state but must also gain legitimacy from the audience (i.e. individuals), through a process of interpretation in a language shared with the audience that contains shared meanings through which the world, and the state's role in it, is understood (Weldes 1996, 276-277). This, similar to Campbell's work on national security policy, reinforces the constructivist claim in the mutual constitution of national interests and the identity of the state.

Outside the realm of security, national identity is (re)constructed through the use of physical monuments and commemoration, alongside particular historical narratives of the nation. The mnemonic turn, or 'memory boom', in the social sciences since the 1990s has been discussed almost *ad nauseum*, for both its successes and its 'capricious' nature (Bell 2003, 65). Nevertheless, the question of national identity construction clearly resonates with both elements of mnemonic studies and historical narratives. Ideas of 'collective memory' are significant ways in which group identity is formed, but, in agreement with Bell, the term 'memory' should be used precisely when discussing attempts by mnemonic actors to spread a particular narrative about the unifying features of a certain state. For Bell, 'collective memory', or rather 'collective remembrance', should be used for instances of the collective remembrance of repeated events in a social milieu, for memory is an inter-subjective phenomenon and a result of lived experience (Bell 2003, 65). Although other scholars have invoked the term

‘collective memory’ in broader terms (see Assmann 2006), Bell’s clarification also allows for the contestation of national ‘governing myths’ by collective remembrance. Furthermore, the shared understandings, representations and conceptualisations of past events clearly impact group identity, but as they are not personally experienced, are classified not as mnemonic, but as *mythical* (Bell 2003, 65). For state actors, ‘us’ and ‘them’ act as ‘mutually supporting scaffolds’ when constructing an easily digestible historical narrative that resonates with people in order to invoke a nationalist sensibility (Bell 2003, 67). As identities, or scaffolds, are constantly in flux, the narrative myth of a country’s history should be extremely partial and glorified for without it, according to Kant, the possibility of nationalism does not exist (Bell 2003, 67). Due to the mutual constitution of national identity, the construction of a narrative myth takes place within a wider arena where (re)presentations of identity are contested, described by Bell as the ‘mythscape’, where the myths and memories of the past are contested ‘for the purposes of the present’ (Bell 2003, 66). This of course raises questions of agency and of who indeed can be seen as a mnemonic actor in this ‘mythscape’.

The question of national identity has been much debated in Russia since the fall of the Soviet Union. The loss of a national identity among the Russian people, especially as the majority of those in Russia had only experienced life in the Soviet Union, caused an *identity crisis* in the newly-created Russian Federation (Likhacheva et al. 2015). Debates regarding the place of the once-outlawed Russian Orthodox Church, the nature of governing regime alongside the creation of a new historical narrative that encompassed both the Russian empire and the Soviet Union (Gel’man 2015). Even discourse on Russia’s economic policy was couched in terms relating to the nineteenth century Slavophile/Westerniser debate (see Zweynert 2007).<sup>4</sup> Within

the mythscape of Russian national identity there has been a marked increase in reverence for the Soviet past and even Stalin's legacy, increasing from 2009 (Adler 2012), and the May 9<sup>th</sup> Victory Day commemorations retaining its status as an annual spectacle. Since 2014, a 'negative identity', that being a lack of positive values and unity through an external threat, has developed in Russia, a seemingly obstacle to overcoming EU-Russia political differences (Likhacheva et al. 2015, 4).

It seems quite apparent that governing myths, an oversimplification of history and use of binary categories do indeed create identities through 'an inscription of boundaries' that excludes the self from the other (Campbell 1998, 8). But if these identities are in constant flux, what happens at boundary itself? Homi Bhabha argues that it is in 'the overlap and displacement of domains of difference that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated' (Bhabha 2004, 2). The 'interstitial passage' that emerges between fixed identities allows for the possibility of a 'cultural hybridity' that accepts difference 'without an assumed or imposed hierarchy' is evidence of a moment of redefinition for the concepts of 'homogenous national cultures' that exist (Bhabha 2004, 4-5). Not only does the instability and multiplicity of identities mean that some take prominence over others at certain moments, but at times where identities fit neither boundary a *novel* form of identity can take place, a *hybrid* identity. This construction of political object that is '*new, neither the one nor the other*, alienates our political expectations, and changes, as it must, the very forms of our recognition at the moment of politics' (Bhabha 2004, 25). Although the timing of such a political move is of utmost importance in attempting to open and maintain the space where a *new* identity can exist, every intervention is indeed a political act (Bhabha 2004, 25). To quote Judith Butler, 'the deconstruction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics; rather, it

establishes as political the very terms through which identity is articulated' (Butler 1988, 148).

In this vein, this thesis, in opening spaces through dialogue with those without a fully Russian or European identity, is a political statement.

### 1.3 Architecture and Place Identity

Now that the mutual constitution of (national) identity has been established, it is pertinent to turn towards a prism through which to deconstruct identity constitution – architecture<sup>5</sup>. I have chosen the architecture of Kaliningrad because in the absence of German people in the city and wider region - who were entirely expelled by 1951 (Holtom 2003, 159) – physical sites, such as fortifications, residential buildings, churches and parks, are the only remnants of pre-Soviet heritage in the city. Furthermore, there has been a long history of local engagement in the preservation of pre-Soviet architecture, stretching as far back as the efforts to save the Königsberg Castle from demolition in 1968, and even the decision to maintain the ruins of the Königsberg Cathedral (where the remains of Immanuel Kant were once held) in the immediate aftermath of WWII (Dementyev 2015). Since the Soviet era, perhaps most contested has been the future of the House of the Soviets, a derelict brutalist block standing in the heart of the historic centre, on the grounds of the former Königsberg Castle. Alongside frequent online discussion, in 2013 the ‘Heart of the City’ programme, a brainchild of the governor at the time (who had once called the building the ‘shame of our city’, allowed local, national and international architects to provide detailed plans of the future of the building, with a public vote deciding the winner (Siegień 2016). The result, a plan to rebuild the former castle and demolish the House of the Soviets, was in fact overruled by the administration, which chose a hybrid plan of incorporating many elements of Kaliningrad/Königsberg’s past, with elements of the former castle and House of Soviets in an architectural *mélange* (Siegień 2016). This plan was never implemented and so the building remains derelict and unused to this day. Although somewhat controversial at a time of alleged ‘creeping Germanisation’ in the region (Zieliński 2018, 9), Kaliningrad’s architecture is an effective prism in understanding identity

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<sup>5</sup> The terms *architecture* and *physical sites* will be used interchangeably when discussed the architectural ensemble of Kaliningrad.



construction, due to its salience, and some would say, inescapability, within the environs of the city and its mythscape.

How does architecture affect identity? One such answer to this question can be found through scholarship on the *politics of space*. “(Social) space is (social) product’ states Henri Lefebvre in his seminal work *The Production of Space* (Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith 1992, 26). As a means of production, space is also a ‘means of control, and hence of domination, of power’ and the space produced can serve as ‘a tool of thought and of action’ (1992, 26). With mention of power and agency, space is therefore political and ideological, as we ‘live in and through space made and controlled by others (those with power to shape, form and represent to us its appropriate use) and which we have to navigate to make ‘sense’ of and function in the world’ (Zieleniec 2018, 7). Space is therefore a product of social activity, but it shapes the lived experience of everyday life. This is particular true of urban life, where such meaning-making and lived experience can be more prevalent, and in fact Lefebvre explicitly called for the ‘right to the city’ in his work (Lefebvre, Kofman, and Lebas 2006).

Three elements are required for the production of space, those being *spatial practice*, *representations of space*, and *spaces of representations* (Zieleniec 2018, 6). *Spatial practice* is how space is understood physically, in a way that structures our everyday life and movements. *Representations of space* is the space conceived by planners, urbanists and technocrats (the dominant space of any society), and its representations in the form of diagrams, maps, plans and images is a reflection of the way power creates discourses in the way space is ‘surveyed, surveilled, controlled, delimited, delineated and organised to meet particular ends’ is inherently ideological. Finally, *spaces of representations* is the space of ‘inhabitants and users’, the ‘space as directly lived through its associations and images and symbols’, a passively experienced space which imagination ‘seeks to appropriate’. It overlays the physical space, ‘creating new

meanings or possibilities for spatial practices’ (Zieleniec 2018, 6). In relation to Kaliningrad, it is clear the element of *spaces of representations* is highly applicable to the responses of those who view the physical spaces they inhabit, be it pre-Soviet cobblestone roads or the House of the Soviets, for its symbolism and added meaning, beyond the *spatial practices* of the everyday, as a favourite spot for a *progulka*, or evening stroll, to take but one example. Furthermore, seeing space as political is extremely relevant to a region that was ceded by the Soviet Union in 1945.

Beyond the politics of *space*, Brenner and Elden argue that Lefebvre’s work on state space can be read through a more IR-lens as *territory*. In particular, using Agnew’s call to transcend the ‘territorial trap’ in social science - the tendency to ‘take for granted the territorial extension, constitution and boundedness of space power and political-economic life more generally’ - to open discussion of Lefebvre’s early work on *l’espace étatique (state space)* (Brenner and Elden 2009, 354-355). Although the term ‘territory’ is mentioned infrequently in his work, Lefebvre does make the ‘bold’ claim that ‘the State and territory interact in such a way that can be said to be mutually constitutive’, suggesting that territory is the ‘political *form* of space produced by and associated with the modern state’ (2009, 362). Indeed, it is argued that Lefebvre views territory through a constructivist lens much like space, seeing territory as a ‘social and historical product’ with its own *territorial* practices, representations of *territory* and *territory* of representations. In making these claims, Lefebvre uses the Israeli/Palestinian ‘wall’ as an example of how the border can be physically experienced, placed in maps and charts and then *imagined* through the symbolism it carries (2009, 365-366). Although convincing in its symbolism through *territory of representations*, for this thesis physical borders and wider territories are not as relevant as ideas of space *à la* Lefebvre.

Beyond territory and space, *place identity* allows for an examination of the symbolism of physical sites and space, or *place*, whilst also providing an explicit connection to local and regional identity construction. In their book *Place Identity, Participation and Planning*, Anderson's imagined communities and 'communal myths' are extrapolated from the national context to regional, local and even urban levels (Hague and Jenkins 2005, 10). The distinction between *space* and *place* lies in the fact that *places* have an identity whereas *spaces* do not, and territory is seen as the 'a political demarcation and control of space' (2005, 4-5). Although Lefebvre's concept of *space* does allow for identity construction through meaning-making, Hague and Jenkin's characterisation of *place* is far more explicit in its characterisation of identity constitution. Following constructivist thinking, regional identities are indeed a 'social construct' and not natural, both contested (due to a multiplicity of identities) and contextualised (for to speak of a region identity is necessary differing the self from the national other) and indeed unstable and subject to change (2005, 12). Furthermore, scholarship in the closely related concept of *place attachment* has concluded (perhaps unsurprisingly) that those born in a place are more likely to show a stronger sense of *place identity*, regardless of the number of years they have resided there (Najafi and Mustafa 2012, 7639). Often found in a *place identity* are the following four elements:

- Spatial qualities that distinguish the place from others – e.g. location, but also infrastructure, communication and architecture
- Characteristics or qualities of the inhabitants that distinguish them from inhabitants of other places – e.g. values, customs, physical appearance
- Social conditions and social relations between the inhabitants
- Culture and/or history, seen as a unifying element that again connects the inhabitants to tradition and again distinguishes them from 'the other'

(Hague and Jenkins 2005, 13)

Following Hague and Jenkins' elements of *place identity*, alongside Lefebvre's *politics of space*, Bamberg's three identity *dilemmas* and the plethora of constructivist literature outlined in this chapter, the following chapter, a narrative of my encounters with people born in Kaliningrad after 1991 with autoethnographic reflections, will be structured as follows: Firstly, I will address the *place identity* construction through respondents looking to the past, through a *reverence to history* and *lived experience* of Kaliningrad's architecture. Secondly, I will address the use of *aesthetics* and the *purpose* of the physical sites in a forward-looking intervention of *place identity* construction. Finally, I will recall young Kaliningraders' (*place*) *identity construction* through their *search for uniqueness* in the architecture of the city.

## Chapter Two – Kaliningrad

I flew to Kaliningrad on Friday 29<sup>th</sup> April 2019 knowing I had to hit the ground running. I had ten days to conduct at least fifteen interviews with Kaliningraders born in the region after 1991. Initially, the plan had been to put some feelers out, to have a few initial respondents I could meet and then hope I would find further interviewees through the ‘snowball sampling’ technique, generally regarded as effective when research sensitive or private matters (Waters 2015). Surely young people would recommend me to their friends, and I’d have fifteen in no time? Not quite. I had planned to use social networks popular in Russian, such as V Kontakte, Instagram and, to a lesser extent, Facebook, as well as contact professors at the city’s Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University (IKBFU) before my departure. However, due to the sensitive nature of the project, I did not want to draw too much attention to myself as a foreigner trying to cause tensions, and potentially have my visa revoked at the last minute. I did message the owner of an apartment I stayed at during my first visit to the region in June 2017. During that stay he ferried my friend and I to and from the airport, as well as driving us throughout the region to the Baltic Sea. We had gotten on well, so I received a swift reply. The age limit of my project, however, meant that he could not take part, nor any of his friends.

He did however, send me the name of some groups on V Kontakte with around 150,000 members. With that in mind, once I had arrived in the city I sent numerous messages to these groups on V Kontakte, to student organisations and professors at IKBFU. By Monday morning I had received one reply, saying that an advert on their V Kontakte page would set me back 15 euros. I decided against it. It was then I decided to do something that would definitely start up a conversation with a local, and went to the local barbershop. I had booked an appointment on the phone earlier, and although they thought I was Russian from my accent,

the reservation name gave it away, and as soon as I walked through the door I started my first discussion of the research trip. Just as I had expected, being the Russian-speaking Brit was always bound to spark a conversation. They seemed interested in the project, and I agreed to return the next day to talk in more depth. It was upon my return to the barbershop that I realised my intention to conduct a 15-20 minute recording interview would not go to plan. When probed further on opinions regarding the political nature of architectural sites in Kaliningrad, Alex<sup>6</sup> laughingly said, ‘‘Let’s not talk about politics!’’ Only a month prior had President Vladimir Putin signed a new law criminalising ‘disrespect for Russian society, the government, official symbols, the constitution, or any state body’ (Nemtsova 2019), with punishment starting with a hefty fine and repeat offences leading to prison time. It was going to be difficult to engage in such discussions in any case, even worse with the knowledge that they were being recorded by a foreigner. Knowing that I had to deal with these ethical concerns in order to collect the required information for my project, I decided to:

- a) Not perform the identity of an ‘objective researcher’ and begin every conversation with autobiographical information about myself as well as my intentions for the information collected from the meetings
- b) In order to further engender trust, lean in to my Scottish, rather than English heritage (to prevent any Anglo-Russian animosity and become more ‘unique’), and talk in depth about me being a Russophile and my time spent working and living in Moscow
- c) Be clear with every discussant that I would not be using their real names for the project, and made sure I had their agreement before we began

So began a week of insightful strolls through Prussian and Soviet districts, fascinating discussions about what it means to be from Kaliningrad, and minor local celebrity status in what must’ve been a frighteningly slow news week. In reading the next three sections,

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<sup>6</sup> For ethical reasons I have decided to not use the real names of my discussants, in particular and potential repercussions for comments that could be interpreted as disrespectful towards Russian society and institutions.

centred around identity construction, I would like you, the reader, to reflect on the ways small political interventions were made possible, and how your own identity and subjectivity is perhaps more apparent than the veil of objectivity would have us believe.

## 2.1 Looking Backwards – History and Lived Experience

### *Anna on the roof*

I had already been in Kaliningrad for a week when I met Alyona on a sunny Saturday afternoon. As had by then become routine, I proposed we meet by the monument to the Motherland (*pamiatnik rodine mati*), a Soviet-era sculpture common throughout the former Soviet Union. This particular incarnation was built in 1974 and dedicated to the renaming of the city and region from Königsberg to Kaliningrad on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1946 (Holtom 2003). Although a visible presence in the city centre, larger structures on the nearby Victory Square (*ploshchad' pobedy*) rendered this monument more of a well-known meeting point and playpark for children, who used the curved base as a slide under the mostly-watchful guise of their parents. The monument to the Motherland stood tall on a triangular-shaped square, looking boldly towards the confluence of two road arteries, that being Lenin Avenue (*prospekt Lenina*). Behind her back stood the 'Europe' shopping centre (*torgovy tsentr Evropa*), a modern complex full of cafés and restaurants, where I had expected the respondents and I's conversations to take place. Despite the continuation of the sunny weather that had encouraged others to take a walk rather than stay indoors, Anna expressed a desire to go to a nearby café and our hour-long interaction began.

Born in 1993 in the city to a Russian mother and Moldovan father, Anna was a well-travelled private English tutor, having returned to her hometown after studying abroad in the Netherlands and the UK, where she has completed her degree aged just nineteen. As usual, I did offer to speak in English, although the fact this was asked in Russian perhaps encouraged my discussion to continue the conversation in Russian, as I had intended. After our initial



pleasantries and clarification of age and birthplace, I decided to follow the structure I had used for the entire trip. We started with memories about growing up in Kaliningrad, school life, what it means to be from Kaliningrad, being proud of being from Kaliningrad, before going into questions relating to specific physical sites and their status as symbols. Not before long, our conversation turned away from pre-Soviet architecture to the *bête noire* of the city, the marmite of Kaliningrad – the House of the Soviets. Upon hearing the reverence for the pre-Soviet architecture, I was expecting another strike against the House of the Soviets, but I was mistaken.

“What do you think of the House of the Soviets? What should be done with it?”

“The House of the Soviets has its own style of course, and the Soviet heritage is just as important as pre-Soviet or Russian”

“Have you heard the opinion that people would rather she demolished?”

“Of course! But it would be a shame, I like it. My first date was on the roof!”

Was this not Lefebvre’s spaces of representations in praxis? Whatever the purpose of the building, the symbolism of a Soviet building in the historic centre, the uniqueness of its architecture, not even the fifty-year history of twenty years construction followed by 30 years of degradation and financial problems mattered. It was Anna’s personal connection, her appropriation of space that constituted her identity as attached to the House of the Soviets. The illegal entry (or 200 rouble bribe to the guard) into the House of Soviets, filled with broken glass, empty lift shafts, falling concrete, was a seeming rite of passage for the youth of the city.



### *Third time's the charm*

It was 5.30pm on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> April, and my final 'interview' of the week. As usual, we met by the Statue to the Motherland, and Sofia, a 21-year-old theatre student thought an evening stroll to the Prussian district of Amalienau and its chestnut-tree lined avenues was in order. Toward the end of the 90-minute walk, I decided to ask about one of the most recent additions to the architectural ensemble of the city – the Kaliningrad Stadium, completed in 2018 as Kaliningrad, alongside six other Russian cities, hosted the FIFA World Cup. I decided to ask whether a large monument dedicated to the *Russian* era of Kaliningrad is or could be seen as a symbol of the city. Perhaps lived experience and attachment to the Russian era of the city would raise the stadium's esteem among local young people. The guffaw I heard in response spoke volumes.

It transpired that Sofia not only thought that the stadium was a symbol of Russian corruption and a waste of money, but she also had a personal experience of the scale of the corruption. The stadium, built on marshland to the southeast of the historic centre, went catastrophically overbudget due to the fact the foundations twice sank in the marshy earth, before an eventual success on the third attempt. However, a family friend of Sofia owned a security company, and was contracted to provide CCTV cameras for the stadium. Due to the delays and ballooning of costs, the family friend was given an ultimatum by the authorities: "Either you finish installing all of the cameras for free, or we will close down your business." With no legal recourse, the family friend installed the CCTV cameras free of charge, before his business collapsed due to the lack of revenue. Unsurprisingly, Sofia was adamant that the stadium will never be a symbol of the city like the Königsberg Cathedral.

What struck me in this exchange was the ability of lived experience and history to negatively influence place identity construction. Yet this negative effect is still a constitution of identity, an identity that regards state corruption as far worse than the benefits the World Cup Stadium brought to the city. From here came the realisation, even if a certain building was *not* seen as a symbol, it did not mean the building didn't play a role in identity formation. In fact, it played as much of a role as the Königsberg Cathedral.

### *A change of course*

1.30pm on a Friday afternoon. 25 degree sunshine. Something told me a much needed coffee wasn't on the cards. As faint thoughts of a sit down and a brew floated away into the pale blue sky, Masha appeared from behind the Statue of the Motherland and, as predicted, we set off in the direction of Amalienau. That was however, until we turned a sharp left onto Gvardeisky Avenue, a verdant stretch heading west to Victory Park. I was personally happy at this *turn* of events, for with little time for sightseeing I hoped these *progulki*, or strolls, would eventually see me tick off all of the sights of the city. As our conversation developed, it was clear why we had taken to route we had. On our walk along the avenue named after the guards unit of the Soviet Red Army, we passed a monument to the liquidators of Chernobyl, some of whom were from Kaliningrad, as well as a monument to Russian WWI soldiers, until we arrived at Victory Park and it's great obelisk, a feature in many parks honouring WWII, known as the Great Patriotic War, across Russia.

For Masha, her attachment to Kaliningrad begins in 1945, even if she was born in 1997. For her, Königsberg is Königsberg, a relic of the past and existed on the land but has no connection to her, despite the fact she herself grew up in a German home, a question I often

asked but was left perplexed by. I frequently asked interlocutors if, by growing up in a German house, they saw themselves as different to friends that lived in a Soviet block, and the response was categorically no. Masha did suggest that growing up in a German house did make her more interested in the history of the region, but this only seemed to extend as far as the buildings. When I asked her whether she has ever thought of who may have lived in her house 75 years ago, she replied in the negative.

This conversation left me somewhat confused. How can it be that a reverence for history extends as far as 1945, perhaps earlier if the history is inanimate, but does not extend to human history? How can you argue for a clear delineation between Kaliningrad and Königsberg when the house you grew up in was built before 1945? My conversation with Masha was one of the few where there was an adamant stated separation between the Kaliningrad self and pre-Soviet other. Strikingly, she said that if she was born in Germany, she would have been German, underlying her place attachment to her birthplace of Kaliningrad, yet without an acknowledgement of an internalisation of a German past to the region. What this exchange did reveal was that multiple identities we possess can often be contradictory and seem to have no rigid hierarchy. That Masha's personal symbols of the city were Kant's mausoleum and an old Prussia-era cobbled avenue in the east of the city further confirmed this observation.



## 2.2 Looking Forwards – Aesthetics and Purpose

Although the themes of reverence for history, lived experience, aesthetics, purpose and uniqueness were evident in every conversation, the particular moments where the aesthetics of the physical sites, alongside the purpose of the buildings was discussed, the turn towards the past was often reimagined as a vision for the future, a projection for idealised place identity.

The purpose of the building or renovation of a particular sight can be seen in both an economic sense and in identity projection, of which aesthetics plays a key role. Moreover, the creation of an aesthetically-pleasing city could also have positive economic benefits.

*How do you solve a problem like.... the House of the Soviets?*

One of the most enlightening discussion I had was with Liza, a student of architecture at IKBFU who had contacted me after I emailed her professor, who himself has written extensively on Kaliningrad's history and legacies surrounding its German past (see Dementyev 2015). Currently completing a photography project where she attempts to capture Prussian, Soviet and Russian architecture all in one frame, Liza was well aware of the political ramifications of urban planning and the use of *space*. With a reverence for all three eras of Kaliningrad/Königsberg's history, she finds aesthetic appeal in the authenticity of a physical site, and as such was against the demolition of the House of the Soviets so that the Königsberg castle could be rebuilt, as that would not be authentic but a copy. Instead, she proposed using the House of Soviets as a venue for trade fairs and exhibitions (as had been trialled on the first two floors in 2018), and to assuage supporters of the castle new technology such a virtual reality (VR) could be used to project the castle. Liza clearly saw the richness of architectural diversity in the city that should be encouraged, as long as the purpose is a strive for authenticity that will promote the use of urban spaces.

This stands in contrast to several discussants, namely Ksenia, a 19-year-old linguistics student, and Mikhail, an 18-year-old entrepreneur. Although Ksenia was in agreement with Liza that authenticity is aesthetically pleasing - the orthodox crosses on old German Lutheran churches seen as 'ill-fitting' (*nelepo*) – the House of the Soviets should be torn down immediately, even without any indication of what would follow. Mikhail was interested far more in the economic benefit derived from buildings, such as the prospects of an increase in tourism due to the renovation of façades of Soviet blocks to ones of the Prussian-era, but would rather see the House of the Soviets torn down and replaced with something new or modern, seemingly regardless of the economic cost. For Mikhail, authenticity and aesthetics do not necessarily go hand in hand.

Discussions relating to the future House of the Soviets initially evoked an Orwellian sense of doublespeak, for Kaliningraders like Mikhail underlined the necessity of an economic purpose behind physical sites, yet for the House of the Soviets an economically-disadvantageous opinion was shared. Upon reflection, however, it seems to me that the House of the Soviets is such a polarising issue that extreme opinions are shared without true reflection of how it opposes their other convictions. I need only take one look at the comments section of the somewhat positive opinion of the House of the Soviets in the interview I gave to Komsomolskaya Pravda to understand how vexing the issue of the House of the Soviets can be. Moreover, those interviewed have lived their entire lives with an unavoidable landmark of their city's disrepair due to financial constraints and negligence during the privatisation process. It is no wonder the inactivity on the site over the last 25 years has led to a vocal number of Kaliningraders (in fact the majority of those I conversed with) to call for its demolition.

### *Königsberg Cathedral*

Unlike the divisive House of the Soviets, the Königsberg Cathedral received almost universal acclaim from my interlocutors. But what about the building makes it so loved? From Oleg, a 26-year-old worker in construction, to Nina, a 20-year-old philology student, the cathedral is not only the pride of the city for its aesthetic appeal, but for its symbolic value. The Königsberg Cathedral is the only building left standing on Kneiphof, an island in Kaliningrad's historic centre, which was once a bustling old town full of narrow cobbled streets, crowded merchants and tradesmen, and the world-renowned Albertus University, the alma mater of Immanuel Kant. As the town was the victim of intense allied bombings during WWII, almost all the buildings on Kneiphof were extensively damaged (Clarkson 2017, 258-259), and all ruins were



removed except the remains of the Königsberg Cathedral, seen as a monument to world history as adjacent stood Immanuel Kant's mausoleum (Clarkson 2017, 260). The ruin remained until the mid-1990s, when, with the help of German financiers, the Cathedral was restored. Being the first post-Soviet restoration of the pre-war German legacy of the region, it is therefore clear that the Cathedral gains symbolic value for a being a successful example of restoration of German heritage, at a time where many respondents spoke of historic buildings falling into disrepair throughout the region. As such, and among those whose reverence for history is striking, the symbolic status of the Königsberg Cathedral, as not only a look backwards but indeed a look to the future of a city that reveres its heritage like young Kaliningraders desire, is easily understandable.

## 2.3 The Search for Uniqueness

### *Bol'shaya Rossiia*

Life in an exclave can have its perks. For the small price of absolutely nothing, the ‘We are Russians’ (*My - Rossiiane*) state-run programme provides free trips from Kaliningrad to other Russian cities such as Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kursk, Pskov, Kazan and the towns of the Golden Ring, historical religious towns north of Moscow and famous for their beautiful Orthodox churches (Simonov, 2019). Only those that are lucky enough to be selected, such as Oleg and Liza, don’t refer to the destinations as ‘other Russian cities’ but as ‘big Russia’. For others, such as Masha, it isn’t ‘big’ Russia but ‘middle’ Russia, although ‘big Russia’ is so widespread it came up in every interview I conducted. I even quoted it in my interview with *klops.ru*, only for someone in the comment section to accuse me of being a fake foreigner for using the term *only* Kaliningraders use!

Quite evidently, the term ‘big Russia’ implies that Kaliningrad and the rest of Russia are two different entities, or, if not a totally binary, then Kaliningrad is somewhat different to the rest of Russia. What is clear though, is that Kaliningraders do indeed struggle to verbalise their identity when it comes to being ‘Russian’, but find it far easier to list countless ways in which Kaliningrad is different (read: *better*) than cities in ‘big Russia’. Nina, for example, openly admitted that she didn’t know how to express the difference, and concluded, after some silent thinking, that she feels more ‘European’, although even then what is Europeaness? Every single interlocutor described their identity as, in a phrase, ‘Russian with a difference’. Why is

it that a difference can be striking and seemingly stable but a sense of sameness can't be articulated as such?

Here are just a few of the differences between Kaliningraders and Russians (often Muscovites and those from St Petersburg):

- “Kaliningraders show Russians how to appreciate other cultures” – Masha
- “The German layout of the town and the green spaces: - Oleg
- “I grew up in a German house!” – Nina
- “We’re friendly and nicer – I never met truly evil people until I moved to St Petersburg” – Sofia
- “Our proximity to Europe and location and a ‘first warzone’ in a potential conflict means we’re more integrationist and welcoming: - Liza
- “We don’t throw rubbish away like the Muscovites do – the layout of our town means that we respect our environment more” – Ilya
- “Our German heritage” – Every interlocutor without exception

In a world where we define ourselves through opposition with the ‘other’, we often lack to words to articulate our situatedness at the moment where there has been an intervention into our identity constitution. But perhaps even the pause, the confusion, the struggle is indicative of an identity that exists but fails to be articulated as it does not fit the categorisations we are so accustomed to? As Dauphinee argues, even in the attempt to overcome such silences imposed by the discipline of International Relations, words seem to fail (2013, 805-806).

Does there need to be a way to describe it? I feel that the mutual understanding in that moment that there is a hybridity of identity, one both Russian and European, that feels impossible to articulate.

As I contemplate these ideas, I think about my own constitution of self. In the two interviews I gave to local media, in trying to downplay the potential problems resulting from a throwaway comment that could be taken out of context to be used as clickbait, I stayed very guarded and in fact downplayed the identity-based nature of my project. Although I did clearly state I studied International Relations, I characterised my project as a search into what young Kaliningraders think of the architecture that surrounds them. Factually true, if somewhat obscured the term ‘identity’. This was not an instinctual decision, but one that was carefully reached. I had myself been given the impression that identity politics, and the ‘creeping Germanisation’ of the region, had gained salience in recent years, due to its presence in the media. This was very evident in December 2018, when the public voting for the state re-naming campaign for Russian airports had Immanuel Kant in the lead in Kaliningrad. This led to a flurry of media articles and Russian nationalist attention, with the defacing of Immanuel Kant’s statue in the city even receiving coverage in western European press (BBC 2018; DW 2018). Although conversations with interlocutors in Kaliningrad revealed that this was in fact blown completely out of proportion, and most held no strong opinion on the changing of the airport’s name. Nevertheless, wary that journalists may use my story for a quick sensational headline, I tried to avoid personal comments on spurious issues. I did come a cropper when asked about the House of the Soviets and Königsberg Cathedral, as the prologue to this thesis acknowledged.

Perhaps as a result of this lack of clarity in my academic pursuits, I was characterised by *klops.ru* as a ‘Scottish sociologist’ and by *Komsomolskaya Pravda* as an ‘English urbanist’ (Markov 2019; Pilyute 2019). Somewhat humorous at first, I then began to reflect on what it meant exactly to embody four identities at once, two of which I would not identify myself as.

This is perhaps not me finding words to describe my own selfhood in relation to others, but in the way others have categorised myself. I even received a comment on the very same V Kontakte post as we saw in the prologue, stating, “Finally you’ve said he’s English and not Scottish!” Did it matter that I was given two separate identities? Clearly, according to the reaction. But surely, if any of constructivist theory of identity was valid, I indeed could inhabit both of those identities, and allow one to come to the fore at certain times, showing a true fluidity, *hybridity*, of identity? Throughout my own life I have searched for difference and a sense of uniqueness, being the Scottish-born and raised son of English parents. I was English when I was in Scotland, and Scottish when I was in England. Yet this search for a sense of self ended up othering myself in the process. In a post-Scottish Independence referendum world, I had consciously started to label myself as ‘British’, taking advantage of the category that can encompass both of my identities, whilst also allowing my Scottishness and Englishness to be brought forward where desired, or even necessary (for I purposely played up my Scottishness while in Kaliningrad to attempt to gain more respondents in my uniqueness).

“I’m proud to be from Kaliningrad. I can be Russian when I want to be, and European when I want to be,” said Anna in our discussion. Perhaps if Kaliningraders had a ‘Britishness’ of their own, they too could give voice to their Russianness and Europeanness, and like Britishness, bridge the gap between the two.

## Epilogue

I have chosen to forgo the conclusion, an undertaking mirrored by the work of Oded Löwenheim (2015), replacing it with an epilogue that surmises my arguments in much the same way, but more honestly to the reader, and truer to the intention behind this thesis. This project has endeavoured to illicit the constructions of identity in amongst young Kaliningraders, who have had to imagine the pasts through which they construct their identity, through the prism of architecture. In the context of Kaliningrad, architecture is the most tangible way of accessing a past that remains visible in the present, allowing for the imagination of identities, and fluidity this entails, and I sincerely hope that you, the reader, have been made cognisant of this.

After deleting the overly negative messages on my Instagram page, I looked once more at the Vkontakte page and the Facebook page where I had received the critical comments. The sting had passed, and I began looking at the comments in totality – the dozens of likes for those supporting my view, the countless messages lamenting my age restriction for they would have loved to take part, and I was reminded of the level of hospitality I was received with. The title of the *klops.ru* article couldn't have made it clearer - the response I received from those wanting to share their stories (*slovookhotlivost* 'literally means 'wordhuntingness', or 'desire to speak'), was genuinely surprising to experience. I have many Russian friends, and years of living and working in the country, but I would never have expected the dozens of requests to help, the wishes of good luck, and even the opportunity to speak about my project to a wider audience. As a token of gratitude, I offered to pay for the coffees we shared whilst Kaliningraders gave up their time to help me. And every time, no matter how insistent I was, my interlocutor refused. Fifteen-minute interviews quickly became hour-long walks, and only ended when I had to rush to another engagement. Marina

and Ina gave up their entire evening to show me around the city, and Marina even used her phone to pay for the taxi so that I couldn't pay. Russian hospitality is indeed something to behold.

And perhaps from this the conclusion of this thesis emerges – in order to give voice to the voiceless, all you have to do is create a space for their voice to be heard.

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