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FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Institute of Political Studies

Department of Security Studies

Master's Thesis

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Neoclassical realism: a metatheoretical critique

Master's thesis

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Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on July 30, 2022 Michal Šenk

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Abstract

Neoclassical realism entered the fields of International Relations and Security Studies in the late 1990s as a powerful new approach to explaining foreign policy. Building on the combination of structural and classical realism, it promised to offer better explanations than other existing approaches, such as liberalism or offensive and defensive realism. As such, it quickly became a popular and an arguably potent choice for many a scholar, progressively growing into prominence that continues to hold even as it enters its third decade. That said, there exists something of a paradox surrounding neoclassical realism: despite its popularity and scores of sound empirical works under its banner, the school appears dramatically ill-defined to the extent that nobody seems to be sure what it is and what it is about. This is where this thesis comes in to play: building on hitherto scattered and piecemeal critiques of neoclassical realism, it seeks to shed more light on the school's apparent success by providing the first truly comprehensive metatheoretical critique of neoclassical realism. Following the simple question of 'what is neoclassical realism', the thesis arrives at the conclusion that though it may be far from a uniform research program or a general theory, neoclassical realism exhibits a number of characteristics that help explain its attractiveness in the fields.

Abstrakt

Neoklasický realismus se koncem devadesátých let minulého století představil na poli mezinárodních vztahů a bezpečnostních studií jako nový silný přístup k vysvětlování zahraniční politiky. Postaven na kombinaci strukturálního a klasického realismus, tento nový přístup sliboval přinést lepší vysvětlení, než jaká nabízely ostatní existující přístupy jako například liberalismus či ofenzivní a defenzivní realismus. Jako takový se rychle stal oblíbenou a často efektivní volbou pro mnohé akademicky a postupně se dostal do popředí. Tuto pozici si udržuje i v době, kdy vstupuje do třetího desetiletí své existence. Přesto kolem neoklasického realismu existuje cosi jako paradox: navzdory své popularitě a nespočtu solidních empirických prací se zdá, že si nikdo není opravdu jistý, co přesně neoklasický realismus je a čím se vyznačuje. Tato diplomová práce chce osvětlit tento paradox tím, že staví na doposud rozptýlených a dílčích kritikách a předkládá první skutečně komplexní metateoretickou kritiku neoklasického realismu. Na základě jednoduché otázky "co je neoklasický realismus" dochází práce k závěru, že ačkoliv má daleko k jednotnému výzkumnému programu nebo obecné teorii, vykazuje neoklasický realismus řadu charakteristik, které pomáhají vysvětlit jeho přitažlivost.

Keywords

Neoclassical realism; structural realism; classical realism; IR theory; metatheoretical critique

Klíčová slova

Neoklasický realismus; strukturální realismus; klasický realismus; teorie mezinárodních vztahů; mateteoretická kritika

Title

Neoclassical realism: a metatheoretical critique

Název práce

Metateoretická kritika neoklasického realismu

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1. INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

For the fields of International Relations (IR) and Security Studies, the Cold War was a good time. In the decades of relative stability that followed the Second World War, the two fields established themselves as robust academic edifices that, under heavy dominance of realism, seemed all but certain to flourish. However, any such semblance, merited or not, went out of the window as the Cold War came to its sudden end. Not only did the end effectively deprive the fields of a major *raison d'etre* but the abruptness with which it came did much to tarnish the reputation of the fields' major approaches, most importantly structural realism, as it transpired that they had neither predicted, nor could they satisfactorily explain it. As a result, the 1990s would see the fields undergo a period of major disarray and reflection during which new approaches, such that would be more responsive to the complexities of the post-Cold War world, would be searched for.

In this context, **neoclassical realism** would emerge as one such prospective approach. This new approach, coming on the scene at the turn of the millennium, promised to rekindle and revive the realist research tradition in IR and Security Studies by combining the rigor of structural realism with the 'time-tested' knowledge of classical realism. This simple formula, though considerably ambiguous and vague, turned out surprisingly effective, at least as far as attraction is concerned, as neoclassical realism would go on to become a widely popular go-to choice for scholars of international security. In fact, ever since the school's baby steps at the end of the 1990s, there was something of a proliferation of self-described neoclassical realist works, giving rise to a considerable body of literature. A recent search of the key word 'neoclassical realism' on Google Scholar, moreover, shows that with more than ninety thousand hits (about fifteen thousand of which for the 2020-2022 period alone), the neoclassical realist approach continues to be as in demand as ever, if not more so.

Neoclassical realism, however, is not only popular. With a demonstrably strong track record of being able to shed new perspectives on and explain a great deal of international security puzzles, it also appears actually analytically potent. Schweller's work on underbalancing (2004), Dueck's and Layne's works on US grand strategy (2006; 2006), as well as Juneau's much praised appraisal of Iran's foreign policy (2015) are but a few examples of highly informative and sound utilizations of neoclassical realism's analytical lens.[1] This, of course, is not awfully surprising – if something, the demonstrably high quality of neoclassical

[1] For comprehensive lists of high-quality neoclassical realist analyses, see Lobell, Ripsman and Taliaferro (2009) or Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell (2016).

realist works goes some way toward explaining the school's popularity. However, it becomes surprising in light of the fact that more than two decades into its existence and a considerable body of knowledge to boast, neoclassical realism continues to be ill-defined to the extent that there is no real consensus on what it is actually about. As things stand in 2022, controversies persist in respect to neoclassical realism's assumptions, internal theoretical and analytical logic, explanatory scope, inter-theoretical and paradigmatic boundaries, or the very key question of *what it really is*. The latter is no exaggeration: as recently as in 2020, a forum aptly titled *Rethinking Neoclassical Realism At Theory's End*, convened with the explicit objective of appraising the state of the school, did little more than acknowledge neoclassical realism's "diverse" and "fluid nature", converging on the view that it best be described as a broad "analytical umbrella" (Meibauer et al 2020, pp. 22, 23).

Thus, there seems to exist something of a paradox: on the one hand, neoclassical realism demonstrates growing popularity and a sound analytical track record; on the other, it seems to suffer from a major case of indeterminacy. The latter, to be sure, has probably much to do with the school's very origins: save for one review article, there was no real founding moment of neoclassical realism where its parameters would have been laid out. Though the haziness can thus be expected, there nevertheless transpires an acute puzzle: how is possible that a school so conceptually indistinct continues to be both a popular and arguably a potent choice for a great deal of analysts in the fields of IR and Security Studies? In other words, how can neoclassical realism be so successful when no one seems to know what it actually is? Shedding more light on these questions is the motivation behind the present thesis.

Hence, there are two basic and deeply interwoven objectives of the forthcoming analysis. First, reflecting the lack thereof, it is to provide a good and thoroughgoing understanding of neoclassical realism. Second, it is to use this understanding to account for the school's perplexing, yet undeniable success story in the fields of IR and Security Studies.

1.1 The 'official history' of neoclassical realism: a primer

The fact that neoclassical realism appears inadequately understood does not mean, however, that *no* understanding thereof exists. In fact, there is a stream this thesis labels the 'official history' of neoclassical realism that appears to be the dominant narrative of the school's origins, as well as of what it is and what it can do. This narrative, of course, is far from unproblematic: the persistently unresolved controversies outlined above clearly show that it is at best incomplete. That said, the thesis sees it apposite to review the narrative in brief to clearly illustrate what it is up against it, what it seeks to provide an antidote to. As such, this part should

be understood as a literature review of sorts: it will be seen that the nature of the forthcoming analysis does not necessitate a literature review in the traditional sense, as the bulk thereof entails reviewing existing neoclassical literature. The primary goal of this part is, therefore, to lay the groundwork for that by describing the main contending view of neoclassical realism.

When discussing neoclassical realism, it is commonplace to come upon a certain typified account. This account begins almost invariably with Gideon Rose's 1998 review article in the *World Politics* (see Quinn 2013, p. 163). In the article, Rose reviews five works[2] that, he claims, jointly represent a new approach to explaining foreign policy decisions – one that is to challenge, and make up for the inadequacies of, such existing approaches as *Innenpolitik* theories, and offensive and defensive realism (Rose 1998). These approaches, he contends, offer only imperfect foreign policy explanations: they either lean too heavily on domestic-level variables (*Innenpolitik*), focus solely on third-image, system-level explanations and deny the domestic factors any explanatory role whatsoever (offensive realism), or they randomly borrow from either of the extremes, as is allegedly the case with defensive realism (Rose 1998).

In contrast, the new approach is said to offer fuller and more systematic explanations by combining the rigor and parsimony of structural/neo-realism with insights into state behavior derived from classical realism (Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell 2016, p. ix). Assuming that systemic factors – relative power in in the international system – are the best guide for explaining "the broad patterns of nations' foreign policies over time", the new approach nevertheless acknowledges that purely systemic explanations of foreign policy are "bound to be inaccurate much of the time" (Rose 1998, p. 150-152). Rather, to achieve a better understanding of why states act the way they do, it is key to "analyze how systemic pressures are translated through unit-level intervening variables such as decision-makers' perceptions and domestic state structures" (Rose 1998, p. 152). Since these variables play an important role in classical realism, Rose dubs the new approach *neoclassical realism* (1998, p. 152-153).

Thus, neoclassical realism, the official story goes, originated as an attempt to improve upon inadequate structural realist explanations by trading the parsimony of structural mono-causality for greater explanatory power by adding domestic variables, as per classical realism (Narizny 2017). This logic is best captured by Schweller (2004, p. 168), who describes it as a "theory of mistakes" or Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell (2016, p. 26) who refer to it as a "theory

[2] The works are *The Perils of Anarchy: Contemporary Realism and International Security,* edited by Michael E. Brown et al.; *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* by Thomas J. Christensen; *Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler's Strategy of World Conquest* by Randall L. Schweller; *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions during the Cold War* by William Curti Wohlforth; and *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* by Fareed Zakaria.

of sub-optimality or pathology". Since then, however, neoclassical realism is said to have significantly evolved, with some arguing that it now amounts to a full-fledged theory of foreign policy, if not a research program in its own right (Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell 2016).[3]

Though necessarily brief, this overview should convey a good idea of what the 'official history' of neoclassical realism is about. It is not necessary to go into greater detail at the moment, as it will be pondered thoroughly throughout the thesis' analysis. The key point is to illustrate that there exists a dominant view of neoclassical realism that, however, seems incapable of dealing with the many above-outlined issues surrounding the school. This is crucial: although clearly dominant, the persistence of the issues seems to attest that not all is well with the 'official' narrative of neoclassical realism. Indeed, it is the critiques and critical articles in which the issues are identified that caused this author to begin to think critically about the school: although quite limited in number, these 'critics of neoclassical realism' are significant as they, to this day, serve as the only existing antidote to the 'official history'. It is in these works that one learns that the much-touted combination of structural and classical realism is a problematic notion (Vasquez 1997; Rynning 2009; Tang 2009; Quinn 2013; Narizny 2017; Sears 2017), that neoclassical realism inadvertently transgresses the paradigmatic boundaries of realism into the territory of other theories (Legro and Moravcsik 1999; Narizny 2017; Sears 2017), or that the school's internal analytical logic – manifest mostly in its allegedly ad hoc use of variables – displays significant flaws (Quinn 2013; Narizny 2017; Sears 2017). These insights, naturally missing from or papered over in the official history, make these critiques invaluable.

However, for all their value, none of the critiques amounts to a full metatheoretical exploration of neoclassical realism: none analyzes the school in its entirety; they are more scattered and piecemeal. That said, the state of the art existing in the works of the critics is where this thesis seeks to enter onto the scene: to address its two objectives, it builds upon the hitherto isolated and issue-specific reviews of neoclassical realism with the view to providing the first truly comprehensive and thoroughgoing account, the first metatheoretical critique of neoclassical realism.

[3] This is evolution is most explicitly depicted in Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell (2016), who devise a chronologically-based typology of three neoclassical realisms. In this sense, the so-called Type I represents the theory of mistakes, Type II refers to neoclassical realism being a theory of foreign policy, and Type III (which they introduce in the book) describes a neoclassical realist research program.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN

The introductory chapter made apparent a major schism surrounding neoclassical realism. On the one hand, since the 1990s, the school has become a favorite go-to tool for analysts of international security, in no small part owing to its ability to produce powerful explanations. On the other, despite all that, the school continues to be as ill-defined as ever, with the lack of consensus on *what it is* and *how it works* seriously undermining its theoretical viability. This schizophrenic state of affairs makes neoclassical realism long overdue for a proper metatheoretical critique. As suggested, this is broadly the aim of the present thesis. How this aim is to be achieved is the subject of this chapter.

2.1 Research question & research objectives

The ambiguous nature of neoclassical realism is not an anomaly in the fields of IR and Security Studies. In fact, neither classical nor structural realisms are in any way unified, homogeneous research programs (Guzzini 1998). However, what marks these as different from their newest incarnation is that whereas in classical and structural realism conceptual disagreement is likely to stem from a range of competing accounts, neoclassical realism seems to suffer from a paucity of good accounts to begin with. This thesis is motivated to rectify this sorry state: by way of a metatheoretical critique, it sets its sight to supply a *good* account of neoclassical realism. Thus, it defines its **research question** simply as follows:

What is neoclassical realism?

It is hoped that addressing this question will contribute to a better, and perhaps more consensual, understanding of the problematic (meta)theoretical aspects of neoclassical realism. A better understanding may clarify the grounds and perspective from which neoclassical realist explanations of world politics are made, giving these more credence in turn. Most importantly, however, it may offer an explanation as to why neoclassical realism, despite its shortcomings, continues to be such a popular choice for analysts of international security, the main puzzle.

It would be unfair to suggest that there have been *no* attempts to provide a coherent account of neoclassical realism. Edited volumes by Freyberg-Inan, Harrison and James (2009), Lobell, Ripsman and Taliafero (2009), and Toje and Kunz (2012), as well as the ambitious *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* by Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell (2016) stand out as the most important attempts to date. However, the problem is that even with these works in place, the frequent points of criticism identified above remain unresolved. The

question, therefore, to ask at this point is: how will the present thesis be any different? How to ensure that its outcome amounts to more than just another run-of-the-mill retelling of the history of neoclassical realism that, in the end, leaves all of the major issues unturned?

This thesis takes the view that the reason much of the neoclassical realist literature has failed to find satisfactory answers to the multiple issues has to do with it being firmly rooted in the mainstream, *Rosean*, narrative of neoclassical realism – the official history. Put differently, most attempts to theoretically clarify and extend neoclassical realism have uncritically accepted the main tenets laid out by Rose (1998) as their starting point, thus giving rise to the 'official history' outlined in the previous chapter (see Rynning 2009; Narizny 2017). To be sure, many of these works have done great job specifying the broad parameters identified by Rose (e.g. Schweller 2003; Rathbun 2008; Taliafero, Lobell and Ripsman 2009; Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell 2016). However, when it comes to probing the parameters in the first place, they have, for the most part, toed the line.[4] This is not a problem per se; nevertheless, it significantly reduces the chances of uncovering possible built-in flaws in the school that may be at the heart of the unresolved issues. Given the unusual way neoclassical realism got started, the existence of such flaws is, indeed, likely (see Narizny 2017; Sears 2017).

For that reason, it has rather been the above mentioned critiques and critical reviews that seem to have pushed the envelope of neoclassical realism. Although, as mentioned, none amounts to a full-scale metatheoretical critique of neoclassical realism, these works have taken a jab at what mainstream neoclassical realism seems to take for granted. To illustrate: whereas the traditional, *Rosean* approach accepts that neoclassical realism combines the rigor of structural realism with the insights of the classical one a builds from there, a critique asks whether such a combination is possible to begin with (Narizny 2017; Rynning 2009; Sears 2017). In doing so, the critiques have arguably been key to extending the understanding of neoclassical realism (that their insights have largely been ignored by the mainstream neoclassical realists is, however, a different story).[5] Thus, it is in the vein of these critiques that the present thesis wishes to approach its research question. It takes as its starting point the premise that efforts at resolving the main controversies in, and thus providing a better understanding of, neoclassical realism prove little fruitful as long as they are carried out from

[4] The use of the word "parameters" may be taken to correspond roughly to "assumptions" – that is, untested building blocks of a theory. However, the latter it is not used on purpose, as the more generic word "parameters" is seen as more fitting given the informal and unusual way the neoclassical realist school was 'started'.

[5] This point is well illustrated in Rynning (2009, p. 3), where he describes how Fordham's critical contribution to Lobell, Ripsman and Taliaferro (2009) earns him the label of being "non-realist" by questioning the tenability of the so-called "additive approach" to variables – the Rosean dictum that a neoclassical realist explanation begins with structural-level variables and only then, irreversibly, works its way downward to unit-level variables.

within – that is, as long as they uncritically accept the mainstream narrative. Rather, it posits that a more productive approach may lie in taking an *outsider's view*, wherein nothing is automatically taken for granted. Such a view will enable the thesis to explore neoclassical realism in its entirety – free from the 'official mythology' – and, as a result, provide a more sober and clear-eyed description of what it actually is. In other words, before the thesis can begin to understand what neoclassical realism *is*, it must first seek to understand what it *is not*.

Thus, to this end, this thesis divides its analysis into two parts. In the first part, it will seek to provide a critical rereading of the mainstream narrative of neoclassical realism with the goal of retelling it in a way that sheds mythology in favor of a more accurate description of how the school originated and evolved over time. The outcome of this part will then serve as the basis for the second analytical part, where it will be juxtaposed with other critical views of the school with the view to providing an original account as to what neoclassical realism is. The details of each analytical part will now be reviewed.

In effect, the **first analytical part** is concerned with providing a new historical account of neoclassical realism. As established above, and as will be discussed at great lengths below, there exists an official history of neoclassical realism of sorts that continues to replicate itself and that likely hinders clear-eyed understanding of the school. Thus, it is logical that the first step toward understanding what neoclassical realism is must begin with a more objective grasp of its historical development. To that end, for this analytical part, the thesis devises a second research question that asks

What is neoclassical realism, and what is it not, as opposed to what it claims to be?

By following this research question, it is expected that the thesis will be able to dispel the official mythology (i.e. what it claims to be) by supplanting it with a narrative that better describes its evolutionary trajectory. In other words, at the end of the analytical part, it should be more obvious what neoclassical realism clearly is not. Inevitably, limited claims will also be made about what it is, albeit not in the substantive sense of the original research question and the second analytical part. Rather, any such claims in the first part should be understood as a necessary tool for building an alternative historical narrative: their purpose is to help paint possible discrepancies between the official narrative and the actual state by positing a better representation of the latter – not to answer the original research question. Thus, the ideal outcome of the first analytical part should be a positive account of how neoclassical realism developed and a negative understanding of what it is about – i.e. knowing what it is not. What

is expected to remain unanswered at the end of this part, then, is a positive definition – i.e. what neoclassical realism is – that will be addressed in part two.

From the perspective of research strategy, the first analytical part will be guided by two overarching objectives: **exploration** and **description**. As Neuman (2014, p. 38) explains, exploratory research is primarily concerned with the examination of "a little understood issue or phenomenon" with the objectives to, among other things, "[b]ecome familiar with the basic facts, settings, and concerns" and "[c]reate a general mental picture of conditions". In other words, exploration may be thought of as a "systematic data collection designed to maximize discovery of generalizations based on description and direct understanding of an area" (Given 2008, p. 327). Put simply, exploratory research refers to an approach designed to investigate unexplored issue-areas with the view to arriving at better, if preliminary, understanding thereof. In this sense, it seems a good fit for attempting to understand neoclassical realism from the *outside* – a road scarcely traveled.

However, as the above definition by Given suggests, exploration is intimately linked with descriptive research. In fact, the two approaches are often interlinked in practice (Neuman 2014, p. 38; Toshkov 2016, p. 33). This is because descriptive research is primarily concerned with providing a "detailed picture of the issue" (Neuman 2014, p. 39). As Toshkov (2018, p. 223) has it, "[s]cientific description deals with writing down (listing) features of units (cases) and representing these units in a narrative…[or] a collection of categories". Again, simply put, descriptive research aims at delineating how things are. As such, it may be thought of as a logical continuation of exploration: having *explored* an uncharted territory, a researcher then moves to represent it thematically, narratively or both (Neuman 2014, p. 38-39).

This exploration-description sequence is also the way this thesis will carry out its analysis in the first part. It will begin by exploring the field of neoclassical realism anew: it will disregard the mainstream understanding and, rather, look *before* and *beyond* what is usually considered neoclassical realism. This will entail not only critical reading of established works of neoclassical realism but also investigating literature that either predates or seemingly escapes the *Rosean* neoclassical realist label. In this endeavor, the analysis will be guided by a conceptual framework made up of a set of proxy questions and their associated concept-indicators (see part 2.2), derived from the critiques of neoclassical realism and designed so as to mirror the most contested issues in the mainstream understanding of neoclassical realism. This strategy is chosen for two reasons: first, from the methodological point of view, a set of pre-established categories minimizes the need to fall back on purely inductive methods, such as grounded theory, that might prove unduly inflexible for the present subject (see parts 2.2

and 2.3). Second, choosing to focus primarily on the most salient issues also raises the possibility of arriving at an account of neoclassical realism that touches upon what matters.

The step two of the analysis will consist in description. With the knowledge gleaned through exploring the field, the thesis will then seek to represent it. This will be done both thematically and narratively: first, the knowledge will be transformed into emergent thematic categories, broadly expected to correspond to the proxy questions; second, these categories will then serve as the basis for re-telling the neoclassical realist narrative. Such an approach will eliminate the need to provide a static (and, for that matter, misleading) representation of the school, enabling the thesis to come up rather with a periodization tracking how neoclassical realism evolves overtime in respect to the most important issues. Thus, the outcome of the exploration-description sequence will be a retold history of neoclassical realism.

The **second analytical part** will focus on addressing the original research question – i.e. it will seek to provide an original and substantive account of what neoclassical realism is. This part, too, will consist of two steps. First, the thesis will consider the question from the point of view of neoclassical realism's critics. This is a logical move: since the authors provide a lens through which the thesis conducts its analysis, synthesizing their views on what neoclassical realism is seems like a natural outgrowth of the endeavor. However, this approach alone is anticipated to be insufficient: after all, the answer to this thesis' research question continues, the critics' accounts notwithstanding, to be wanting. Thus, following the logic of **double reading**, the thesis will read the critics "not once but twice" – the second time more critically – with the view to uncovering what it is that the critics possibly get wrong when seeking to understand neoclassical realism (on double reading see Ashley 1988, p. 23; or Danwanzam, Saleh and Stephen 2019). Then, in the second step, the thesis will synthesize the original findings from the analytical part one with the double-read views of the critics and, based on this synthesis, formulate an original answer to the original research question of *what is neoclassical realism*. The overall research strategy may be found in Table 1 (next page).

	PART 1	**PART 2**	
Research question	What is neoclassical realism, and what is it not, as opposed to what it claims to be?	What is neoclassical realism?	
Research strategy	Exploration and description of works of neoclassical realists, self-proclaimed or not	2.1	2.2
		First reading of the critics of neoclassical realism	Second reading of the critics of neoclassical realism, synthesis with results from 1 and 2.1
Objective	A retold history of neoclassical realism through the lens of the most salient issues	A synthesis of the critics' view of how best to think of neoclassical realism	An original answer to the research question

Table 1: Research strategy (general). Source: author's own work.

2.2 Conceptual framework

As alluded to above, the thesis will in its first analytical part be guided by a conceptual framework derived from neoclassical realism's critiques. Presenting the framework is the main concern of this part. First, however, the part seeks to clarify how the above envisaged research strategy relates to theoretical considerations more generally.

Exploration and description are usually considered **inductive** research strategies: they seek to generate categories and themes from observing patterns in data (Creswell and Creswell 2018, p. 257; Vromen 2018, p. 245). In that they differ from **deductive** strategies, which begin with pre-established categories (concepts) and only then seek to test these against empirical evidence (Neuman 2014, p. 69-70). This distinction highlights how the two strategies relate to theory: whereas in deduction, the categories are drawn from an existing theory, in inductive research, a theory is generally seen as the outcome (Toshkov 2016, p. 227). This is why deductive and inductive strategies tend to be associated with the goals of *theory testing* and *theory generation*, respectively (Disman 2011, p. 287-288; Bryman 2016, p. 20-24).

In this sense, the present thesis will invariably lean towards the theory generation side of the spectrum: it will seek to come up with a 'theory'[6] of what neoclassical realism is based on bottom-up observation thereof. In other words, it will be inductive in that it does not have a specific a priori theory of neoclassical realism to test. However, that said, it will be also part deductive. As already hinted at, the exploratory stage of the analysis will be guided by a set of proxy questions and pre-established concept-indicators (categories). These will not be drawn from any specific theory, but rather based on preliminary research, survey of relevant literature and the author's familiarity with the subject matter (cf. Given 2008, p. 71). Taken together, the questions and categories, though necessarily underdeveloped and broad at that stage of the analysis, will serve as a basic framework for exploring the subject.

This approach of prior conceptualization in exploratory research, usually referred to as "exploratory conceptual model" or simply "concept mapping" (Given 2008, p. 518), is fully compatible with inductive reasoning. Although induction is sometimes conflated with grounded theory – an approach to theory building that starts with no prior categorization – the two are not synonymous and the latter is not the only approach available to inductive research strategies (see Patton 2015, p. 183; cf. Disman 2011, p. 283-322). In fact, given the potential rigidity of grounded theory, Neuman (2014, p. 177) encourages the use of 'borrowed' concepts

[6] Here, theory may be thought of as a formal proposition of 'how things are'. For various other interpretations of the term, see Neuman 2014, p. 56.

in inductive studies as a way grounding new findings not only in the data but also in existing scholarship on a given topic. This, he continues, raises the likelihood of escaping domain-specificity and arriving at more "general, abstract knowledge" (Neuman 2014, p. 177).

One approach explicitly espousing this principle is the so-called *analytic induction*. As Patton (2015, p. 793) explains, analytic induction describes an approach that is "first deductive or quasi-deductive and then inductive, as when, for example, the analyst begins by examining the data in terms of theory-driven sensitizing concepts…[and simultaneously looks] at the data afresh for undiscovered patterns and emergent understandings". Although this thesis will not employ analytic induction as its methodology (see part 2.3), the deductive-inductive logic of the approach underpins how the thesis wishes to address its research goals.

Thus, in summary, to explore, and subsequently describe, *what is neoclassical realism is, and what is not, as opposed to what it claims to be* the thesis will follow a deductive-inductive logic wherein it will be guided by a set of questions and their associated concept-indicators rooted in existing literature. Together, the questions and concepts will form the thesis' **conceptual framework**. That said, it is now apposite to finally expound exactly what questions and concepts will be used in this endeavor.

As mentioned, this thesis views critiques and critical reviews as perhaps the most fruitful way of addressing the neoclassical realist conundrum. Although these are in no way plentiful, this thesis takes the view that their insights can serve as a potent way of structuring the debate at hand. Thus, what follows is, in effect, a conceptual framework based on the most salient points derived from the critical literature (with the exception of the last point, which, as will be explained, is based on an omission in the literature). Practically, this framework is organized around four questions, with each corresponding to a specific theme of interest: *internal theoretical boundaries*, *external theoretical boundaries*, *methodological and ontological boundaries*, and *empirical and geographical boundaries* of neoclassical realism.

1. WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP OF NEOCLASSICAL REALISM VIS-À-VIS STRUCTURAL AND CLASSICAL REALISM? As established above, the mainstream narrative of neoclassical realism builds, predominantly, on the idea of combining, and thus improving upon, structural realism with insights from classical realism. It is, the story goes, from this combination that neoclassical realism derives its said explanatory power (see e.g. Rathbun 2008). It is, however, also this combination that has over the years earned the school a lot of criticism, with many arguing that taking the combination as the main building block of the theory is largely untenable. Quinn (2013), for example, notes that combining structural and classical realism must inevitably lead

to leaning more heavily on one or the other, causing a conflict within the theory, as choosing either direction is, ultimately, bound to contradict the other. This is the view also of Rynning (2009), who argues that the rigidity of structural realism leaves very little space for the inclusion of classical realist insights in the theory. Arguments along very similar lines can, moreover, be found also in Tang (2009) and, to a lesser degree, Narizny (2017) and Sears (2017). It is not necessary at this point to go into greater detail as to why exactly the combination poses such a problem – it will be touched upon when conceptualizing structural and classical realism (part 2.3), as well as in the analytical part. Rather, for the present purposes, it merely pays to emphasize the combination is a highly contested issue – one that, the critics charge, seriously undermines neoclassical realism's internal coherence.

As a result, the first question making up the thesis' conceptual framework centers on exploring the structural-classical combination said to underline the internal theoretical logic of neoclassical realism – i.e. what is for the present purposes labelled the **internal theoretical boundaries** of neoclassical realism. To this end, it will be inquired as to: What does this combination mean specifically? What exactly does neoclassical realism adopt from structural realism and what does it seek to amend about it? What does it adopt from classical realism? And how does it actually combine the two?

2. HOW DOES NEOCLASSICAL REALISM RELATE TO, AND DIFFER FROM, OTHER MAJOR THEORIES OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS? Neoclassical realism is often said to offer better explanations of international relations puzzles compared to its theoretical competitors, namely liberalism and constructivism (see Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell 2016). However, and perhaps due to this, there is also a great amount of blur when it comes to distinguishing where neoclassical realism ends and the other approaches begin. In fact, already in 1998, Rose somewhat presciently warned that if neoclassical realists follow in the direction he identified – that is, they continue to stretch their research program by including ever more variables to rectify the shortcomings of structural realism – they are bound to, sooner or later, bump into liberal (and other) scholars coming from the opposite direction (p. 170).[7] Indeed, according to some neoclassical realism's critics, this is exactly what happened. Legro and Moravcsik (1999, p. 28), for example, charge that neoclassical realists have stretched their research program so far that it has becomes practically "indistinguishable from nonrealist theories". This leads them to ask, famously, if *anybody is still a realist* or whether *everybody* is now one (Moravcsik and

[7] Rose actually uses the term *Innenpolitikers* – that is, those who seek to explain foreign policy through, primarily, domestic politics – as the contrasting case that neoclassical realists were bound to encounter.

Legro 1990, p. 54). Narizny (2017, p. 157) shares this sentiment, arguing that though it is perfectly conceivable for realism to incorporate non-structural variables, any such incorporation must take good care not to transgress the paradigmatic boundaries of realism – something that neoclassical realism, he asserts, inadvertently fails to do. Finally, Sears (2017) largely concurs, maintaining that neoclassical realists take little care to reconcile realist and nonrealist variables.

Clearly, therefore, the line of separation between neoclassical realism and other, nonrealist theories is murky at best – a fact that undermines, in the view of the critics, the school's position within the realist tradition (Legro and Moravcsik 1997; Narizny 2017; Sears 2017). Consequently, as its second concern, this thesis will consider what it labels the **external theoretical boundaries** of neoclassical realism. This will entail asking questions like: How does neoclassical realism differ from other theories of IR? Where does it draw inspiration, and where does it draw the line? And what makes it distinct – and distinctly realist – vis-à-vis liberal and constructivist approaches?

3. WHAT VARIABLES DOES NEOCLASSICAL REALISM USE AND HOW? The third question reflects what may, for the present purposes, be dubbed the **methodological and ontological** boundaries of neoclassical realism. Although these concerns will inevitably, to a certain degree, overlap with those touched upon in the first two questions, the fact that they constitute one of the key battlegrounds in debates about neoclassical realism merits a question of their own. First, the question will focus on the so-called *intervening variables*: the neoclassical realist approach famously deploys unit-level intervening factors to explain how the independent variable is translated in the dependent one. However, they are often criticized for doing so in an ad hoc manner that gives rise to an unjustifiable variable proliferation (Walt 2002; Quinn 2013; Narizny 2017; Sears 2017). Thus, the nature (including material vs ideational), logic, and justification of the deployed intervening variables will be considered. Second, the relationship between the *independent and intervening* variables will be pondered. Neoclassical realism professes a neat, hierarchical separation between the two: the systemic (material, objective) is analytically prior to the domestic. However, as evident from Fordham (2009), but also Rynning (2009), Quinn (2013) or Narizny (2017), such separation is highly problematic, mainly due to mutual co-constitution. It will, therefore, be asked: are the so-called independent variables treated as objective, and thus, analytically prior to the intervening ones, or are they used in a more interactive manner? Moreover, closely related, it will be asked what exactly are *independent variables* in neoclassical realism. Finally, the logic of neoclassical realist

dependent variables will be considered: reflecting the (in)famous foreign policy vs international politics debate, the analysis will scrutinize what it is that neoclassical realists seek to explain and how.

4. WHAT IS NEOCLASSICAL REALISM ABOUT EMPIRICALLY AND GEOGRAPHICALLY?

Compared to the first three, this question is much less rooted in the existing critiques of neoclassical realism; in fact, except for perhaps some passing mentions, it seems almost completely unexplored. The mainstream literature, for its part, offers certain clues – Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell discuss the school's proclivity towards the question of great powers, most notably the US and the USSR/Russia (2016, p. 182). However, a systematic exploration and description of what types of puzzles and issues, both in terms of substance and geography, neoclassical realists prefer (and how this has changed over time) is, to the author's knowledge, something yet to be provided. The same goes for exploring how this preference reflects the geography of a given neoclassical realist scholar: although touched upon in Toje and Kunz (2012), a more systematic inquiry into the relationship between the researcher's location and his/her empirical interest is also missing from literature about neoclassical realism. That said, the research design of the present thesis seems well suited to take on the two mantels. Thus, the last theme considered will be about the **empirical and geographical boundaries** of both neoclassical realism and neoclassical realists: if all else should fail, addressing this question may still constitute a major and valuable contribution to the general understanding of neoclassical realism. The complete conceptual framework is expressed graphically in Figure 1 (next page).

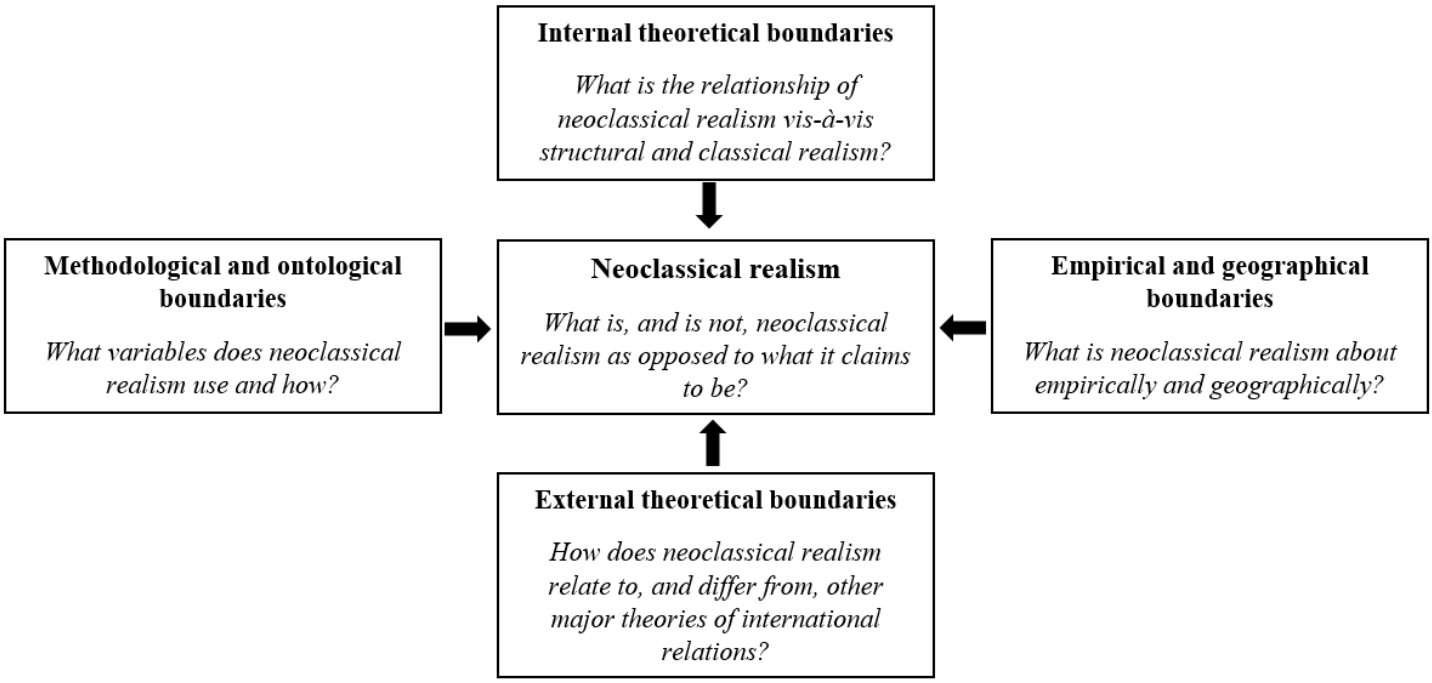

Figure 1: Conceptual framework. Source: author's own work.

2.3 Conceptualization

The previous part outlined the conceptual framework that will be used for the thesis' analytical part (Figure 1). Taken together, the four boundaries should prove exhaustive enough to enable the researcher to fully explore the field of neoclassical realism. In that, as has been suggested, it will be aided by a number of concepts that make up the four categories of questions and that will serve as indicators. Thus, for the discussion to be complete, it now remains to present the concepts in more detail.

2.3.1 Internal theoretical boundaries

To be able to pinpoint and understand how neoclassical realists seek to combine structural and classical realism, it is key to first delineate what the schools are about. Since this question is a convoluted one, it must be anticipated that discussing the two schools will be deeper and more nuanced – and, as a result, longer – than the rest of this part's conceptual debates (2.3.2 through 2.3.4). This is, however, necessary not only for the proper exploration of the question at hand – that is, the internal theoretical boundaries – but also for discussing the other three questions, which, in many ways, directly relate to the first one.

2.3.1.1 Structural realism

Structural realism, or neorealism, is a tradition best associated with the work of Kenneth Waltz, mainly his 1979 book *Theory of International Politics*. In the book, Waltz draws on structuralism and microeconomics to turn realism into a 'scientific' and parsimonious theory of international politics – that is, one that seeks to explain recurring outcomes of state interaction in the international sphere. At the heart of the theory is the idea that it is the structure of the international system amounts to the most important factor influencing state behavior (Vasquez 1997, p. 902; Dunne and Schmidt 2017, p. 108). The reason why this is lies in the three components said to make up the structure: anarchical ordering, undifferentiation of units, and the importance of relative distribution of power.

First, the theory assumes that the international system is *anarchic*, meaning that there is no supreme central authority to make and enforce the rules of state interaction (Dunne and Schmidt 2017, p. 108). This has two implications: one, the *survival* of states – the main units of the international system – is always at stake; two, states are expected to act as *self-regarding* actors that seek, above all else, possibilities of enhancing their chances of survival (Waltz 1979, p. 92). This is not to suggest that states never pursue different objectives: indeed, it is expected

that states may deviate or even systematically pursue objectives other than survival (Waltz 1979, p. 92). However, as a general rule, the theory assumes that the anarchical ordering of the system ensures that the survival motive dominates states' objectives more often than not (see Tang 2009, p. 802; Quinn 2013, p. 178).

The reason survival tends to top state motives owes much to how Waltz's theory understands states. The second component of Waltz' definition assumes that states are functionally *undifferentiated* (Waltz 1979, p. 96-97; see also Waltz 1996, p. 54). From the theory's point of view, it is undeniable that states vary a great deal – including in size, wealth or else (Waltz 1979, p. 96). However, the fact that all face the same constraints of the international system – most importantly, they all seek to survive – allows Waltz to assume that in the tasks that they perform, states are, in effect, *like units* (1979, p. 96; Dunne and Schmidt 2017, p. 108). As he explains:

> "States perform or try to perform tasks, most of which are common to all of them; the ends they aspire to are similar. Each state duplicates the activities of other states at least to a considerable extent" (Waltz 1979, p. 96).

Underlying in this view are two other assumptions: one, states are expected to act as *rational actors* that on balance follow the imperatives of the system and mimic the behavior of others so that their survival is maximized; two, most internal characteristics – including, say, the regime type, individual leaders, or state-society relations – are of little consequence to structural realism (Tang 2009; Quinn 2013, pp. 160-161; Narizny 2017, p. 159).[8]

In fact, it is only the *relative distribution of capabilities* that serves as the sole means of differentiation between states in structural realism (Waltz 1979, pp. 98). In Waltz's view, states are placed differently in the system according to their relative capabilities (1979, pp. 97-98). This assumption, however, lends itself to more than distinguishing between strong and weak states: in fact, it serves as the primary *independent variable* of state behavior in the structural realist view (Waltz 1979, p. 97-99; Dunne and Schmidt 2017, p. 108; Sears 2017). This is because the relative distribution of power, though having root in individual states' capabilities, is ultimately an attribute of the international system – and, as a result, Waltz's third definitional component of the international structure (1979, pp. 97-99). In other words, on top of being anarchic and stuffed with undifferentiated units, the structure is also a function of varying configurations of power distribution across units in the system. Since this last component is

[8] It should be noted, however, that the rationality component is not explicitly present in Waltz's 1979 work.

also the only one expected to change (the other two are static), it makes for a logical locus of structural realists' analytical focus. Consequently, the relative distribution of power, and the changes therein, constitute the key systemic imperatives to which states respond and on the basis of which they tailor their behavior (see Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell 2016, pp. 16-17). As such, structural realism can be said to be a third-image theory of international politics – that is, one where explanation is to be found exclusively at the system, or structural, level of analysis (Waltz 1979; cf. Waltz 1959; see also Weber 2020, pp. 15-32).

In sum, structural realism is a theory focused on explaining recurring patterns that emanate from state interaction – that is, the so-called international outcomes. It builds on the assumptions that the international system is anarchic, and that states are undifferentiated and rational actors that have one goal of survival. The only difference in such a system is made by the relative distribution of power, which thus serves as the primary independent variable explaining state behavior in structural realism.

Based on this understanding of international politics, Waltz formulates his most famous hypothesis: the **balance of power theory** (Donelly 2018, p. 21). He starts with the assumption that states, when faced with changes in the relative distribution of power (typically the potential rise of one hegemonic state), have two basic courses of action: they can either throw in their lot with the riser and *bandwagon* or they can form an alliance and *balance* against it (Waltz 1979, pp. 125-126). Then, considering that states are concerned with maximizing the likelihood of their survival, he goes on to hypothesize that they will, more often than not, engage in balancing behavior (Waltz 1979, p. 128). As a result, the theory goes, balances of power are expected to recurrently form (Waltz 1979, p. 128). To be sure, it is not expected that *all* balancing will lead to the creation of balances: just as it is not expected that states always respond *correctly* to systemic imperatives, the theory allows that factors outside its scope may get in the way (Waltz 1979, p. 128; Nexon 2009, pp. 335-338). Nevertheless, the strong proclivity of states to balance leads the theory to state the recurrence of balances of power as an almost universal law of international politics (Waltz 1979, p. 128; Vasquez 1997, p. 903; Wohflorth et al. 2007, p. 156).

Balance of power theory is certainly not the only hypothesis based on the structural realist worldview, nor is it a universally accepted one within the tradition (for other works see Taliaferro, Lobell and Ripsman 2009, p. 17; for critique see Wohlforth et. al 2007; or Kaufman, Little and Wohlforth 2007). For example, Stephen Walt's **balance of threat** theory seeks to refine and remedy Waltz's hypothesis by substituting the variable of power with that of threat,

defined in terms of "aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive power, and aggressive intentions" (Walt 1985; 1987, p. 22). For the purposes of this part, however, it is not necessary to review such theories in detail. Rather, it is more useful to recount a number of aspects that are, on balance, common to works building on structural realism so that the school's influence on neoclassical realism can be more easily identified in the analysis.

To begin with, structural realist theories are generally united in their commitment to explaining recurring patterns of international outcomes – such as war, lack of cooperation, or balancing – as opposed to foreign policies of individual states (Taliaferro, Lobell and Ripsman 2009, pp. 16-17). By the same token, they unequivocally share being structural theories, holding third-image explanations – the relative distribution of power in the system – supreme and denying other factors, such as domestic structures or ideologies, any real explanatory value. As such, they necessarily hold state motives to be *fixed*. Finally, they also profess to be 'scientific' in nature: at least on the face of it, they subscribe to *positivist* epistemology, adopt the *rational-actor* approach from microeconomics, share empiricist (*materialist*) ontology, and all are *nomothetic* in that they seek to provide universal and law-like explanations (Ashley 1984; Hollis and Smith 1990, pp. 36-38, 92-118; Buzan 1996, pp. 47-65; Guzzini 1998, pp. 125-141; cf. Lebow 2013, p. 59).

Despite the listed commonalities, however, there are also approaches commonly associated with structural realism that do not fit the category quite as easily. One such is the work of Robert Gilpin. In his 1981 *War and Change in World Politics*, Gilpin puts forward a theory of international relations – as well as his most famous hypothesis, the **hegemonic theory of war and change** – that, though sharing some facets, are qualitatively different from Waltz's structural realism in many respects (Wohlforth 2011).

In fact, at the basic level, Gilpin puts forward a view of international politics that is almost contrasting to that of Waltz's: whereas the latter takes a so-called sociological approach, whereby state behavior is understood as a function of the structure of the international system, Gilpin takes a rational-choice lens, seeking to explain how state actions lead to the emergence of international systems as such (Gilpin 1984, p. 288).[9] In Gilpin's view (1981), states make cost/benefit analyses to see whether it is rational for them to try and change the international system: he argues that as a state' power increases, it is increasingly likely to attempt to expand its influence over the system to the point of becoming de facto hegemonic. Once its power

[9] In fact, Gilpin takes this difference between what he calls sociological and economic / rational-choice approach a key argument for why it makes, in his view, little sense to cluster both views as equally structural.

decreases, however, it is increasingly likely to be faced with rivalry from other states, especially those on the rise – a situation that, if not resolved, may lead to a hegemonic / systemic war over the domination of the system. Thus, in essence, Gilpin, like Waltz, puts forward a system-level theory that places power at its center; in contrast to the latter, however, he seeks to explain how states – through their power – shape the system as a whole, not the other way around.

In addition to this, fairly major, difference, a closer inspection of Gilpin's theory reveals that it differs from Waltzian structural realism in yet other respects (for discussion see Brooks 1997; or Wohlforth 2011). For example, though Gilpin generally expects states to seek primarily power and/or security, the fact that the "objectives and foreign policies of states are determined primarily by the interests of their dominant members of ruling coalitions" leads him to question the possibility of any fixed hierarchy of state motives (Gilpin 1981, p. 19; see Brooks 1997, p. 459). Rather, he argues that states may be equally likely motivated by the pursuit of wealth, growth of influence, or the control over world economy, depending on a number of "*internal and external factors*" (Gilpin 1981, pp. 18-25, italics not in the original). The external factors, which include military or economic innovation, are important insofar as they influence a state's relative power in the system; however, it is only the internal factors that ultimately determine the state's behavior (Gilpin 1981, ch. 2). As Gilpin puts it,

> "social, political, and economic arrangements create incentives and disincentives for individuals and groups to behave in ways that contribute to or detract from the power of the state and that thereby affect its propensity to seek to enlarge its control over the international system" (1981, p. 97).

In other words, the so-called unit-level variables in Gilpin's view may determine not only the *form* of state action (as in Waltz) but also whether the action actually takes place or not. As a result, Gilpin's view of the international system is almost eerily reminiscent of that employed by neoclassical realists: it is said to provide "a set of constraints and opportunities within which individual groups and states seek to advance their interests" (Gilpin 1981, p. 26). To be sure, Waltz's conception of systemic determinism is also not as strong as it is sometimes portrayed to be; Gilpin's treatment, nevertheless, seems to offer much more scope for additional factors (see discussion in Nexon 2009). Moreover, for Gilpin, power is not the only source of a state's position in the international system: in fact, it may equally well rest on the state's prestige or what may be dubbed legitimacy (Gilpin 1981, pp. 25-39).

Given this brief discussion, it becomes apparent that Gilpin's realism does not fit neatly within the structural realist tradition; in fact, when it comes to anticipating the neoclassical

realist approach, one may argue that Gilpin's approach is actually a lot more conductive. It will be seen in the analysis that, as a result, it is Gilpin, not Waltz, who serves as the theoretical point of departure for a number of neoclassical realists.

In addition to Gilpin's realism, there are two other traditions associated with structural realism: **offensive** and **defensive realism**. Having originated in the 1990s within the field of security studies – rather than international relations – these two traditions build directly on some of structural realism's basic assumptions but change and develop many of these for the purpose of great practical applicability (see Lamy 2001, p. 187). Most importantly, both share the assumption that the international system is anarchic and that states are unitary and rational actors that seek to, first and foremost, survive in the system (Rose 1998, pp. 148-149). They, however, differ – both from structural realism and between themselves – about the nature of the anarchy, as well as the best prescription for achieving survival. *Offensive realism*, for instance, assumes that in the anarchy security is always scarce, and that the best way to maximize the likelihood of survival is through maximizing power – i.e. to become "the most powerful state in the system" (Mearsheimer 2001, pp. 30-33). In this sense, the world envisioned by offensive realism is starkly different from that of Waltz: since states may never be certain how much power is enough for their survival, they are expected to continuously compete for more, leaving little place for status quo behavior, and, by extension, any universal tendency towards balances of power (Mearsheimer 2001, pp. 32-37; see Kaplan 2019, p. 198).

Defensive realism, on the other hand, takes the view that in the international anarchy, "security [is] plentiful" and that states do best to ensure their survival by maximizing security, not power per se, as too much power leads to greater insecurity in others (Walt 1987, p. 49, quoted in Zakaria 1992, p. 192; Zakaria 1992, pp. 191-192; Rose 1998, pp. 149-150; see also Jervis 1978). In this sense, defensive realists are much closer to Waltz's realism in arguing that, as a result, balancing is the typical state behavior (Walt 1987, p. 49). However, they differ from Waltz – as well as offensive realism – in that they allow for the inclusion of domestic variables in explaining state behavior: whereas offensive realism remains a firmly structural approach, focusing on the relative distribution of power, defensive realists often begin with a structural view but then look inside the states for help (see Zakaria 1992; see also Taliaferro, Lobell and Ripsman 2009, pp. 18-19). This, of course, is not the case with all defensive realists: Walt (1985; 1987), for example, remains at the structural level. Nevertheless, the general trend in defensive realism is that the relative distribution of power in the system is an inadequate guide to explaining state behavior, necessitating the inclusion of additional variables on either the

systemic (as in Walt's focus on threats) or the domestic level (e.g. Snyder 1991).

That said, one may be left wondering how exactly defensive realism differs from neoclassical realism: indeed, it will be seen that the boundary between the two is often blurry (and often merely semantic). This is even more so given that defensive – and to some extent also offensive – realism are, largely owing to their practical orientation, typically presented as theories of foreign policy, not international outcomes, in that they are concerned in explaining state behavior for its own sake (Rose 1998, pp. 148-149; see discussion in section 2.3.3). This is perhaps best exemplified by research questions posed by Mearsheimer, an avid structural realist, at the beginning of his 2001 book, which include, inter alia, such where he seeks to explain different behavior by states similarly positioned:

> "Why did the United Kingdom, which was by far the wealthiest state in the world during the mid-nineteenth century, not build a powerful military and try to dominate Europe? In other words, why did it behave differently from Napoleonic France, Wilhelmine Germany, Nazi Germany, and the Soviet Union, all of which translated their economic might into military might and strove for European hegemony?" (Mearsheimer 2001, p. 6).

Or different behavior by the same country at different times:

> "Why was Bismarckian Germany (1862-90) especially aggressive between 1862 and 1870, fighting two wars with other great power and one war with a minor power, but hardly aggressive at all from 1871 until 1890, when it fought no wars and generally sought to maintain the European status quo?" (Mearsheimer 2001, pp. 6-7).

Thus, despite mutual difference, offensive and defensive realism, though building on structural realism, clearly departed from the theory's focus on explaining international outcomes towards a more state-behavior centric approach. As will be seen in the analysis, this proclivity, stemming in part from dissatisfaction with Waltz' structural realism, did much to pave the way for what would become neoclassical realism.

2.3.1.2 Classical realism

When it comes to classical realism, it has become commonplace to define the tradition by conceding that there simply is no one classical realism to speak of – i.e. that rather than a coherent research program, it amounts to a heterogeneous group of thinkers who merely share a number of common assumptions and world-views (see Taliaferro, Lobell and Ripsman 2009, p. 16). For that reason, it is not surprising to find that many accounts of classical realism proceed along the lines of reviewing, one by one, a given selection of the works of said classical

realists, usually including a number of historical thinkers, such as Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes or Clausewitz, as well as various prominent 20th century (academic and political) figures like E. H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau, Nicholas Spykman, Henry Kissinger, George Kennan, Frederick Schuman, Reinhold Niebuhr, Raymond Aron, John Herz, or Arnold Wolfers (Lebow 2003, Williams 2005). Though there is certainly enough diversity among these (and other) classical realists, this thesis will not go into detail in respect to each of them separately for two reasons: for one thing, given the diversity, doing so meaningfully would likely make for a thesis of its own; for another, as far as indicators are concerned, it is expected that neoclassical realist works drawing on any of these authors would refer to them explicitly. Thus, instead, it makes sense for the thesis to merely try and pinpoint some common characteristics that are usually said to distinguish classical realism from its structural variant, and that may not be directly referenced to any of the classical realists in the neoclassical realist works.

Tellis (1996, pp. 49-51) argues that classical (traditional) realism may be defined at three levels: substantive, analytical, and methodological. First, at the substantive level, classical realists are concerned with the questions of **order and conflict**: they assert that though all political entities seek primarily security, the competition for security inevitably ends in a "struggle for domination [or power]" (Tellis 1996, p. 49). In fact, in the classical realist view, *struggle for power* is an essential trait of social reality, manifest both within and outside the state (Morgenthau 1948, pp. 17-18). However, whereas domestically, institutions and mechanisms have been developed to tame the struggle, the international sphere remains a self-help system where a survival can only be assured through power (Lebow 2013, p. 61). Thus, in common with structural realism, classical realists hold the international system to be anarchic and state interests to be "defined in terms of power" (see Morgenthau 1948; Mearsheimer 2001). However, they differ from neorealists in that they do not hold the anarchy to be the ultimate (or only) cause of international competition.

This relates to Tellis' second point. Classical realists generally agree among themselves that the most important unit of analysis, when it comes to causal explanations, is that of **individuals**: "namely, egoist individuals and their self-regarding nature" (Tellis 1996, pp. 49-50). As Elman (2007, p. 12) explains by way of example: "[p]articular wars are explained, for example, by aggressive statesmen or by domestic political systems that give greedy parochial groups the opportunity to pursue self-serving expansionist foreign policies." In other words, classical realists locate the root causes of international conflict *within* states – not in the anarchy – focusing on such factors as "*human nature*, *ideas*, [or] *domestic politics*" (cf. Narizny 2017,

p. 157, italics not in the original). To be sure, anarchy often plays a key role in classical realist explanations – one not dissimilar from the structural realist treatment – a fact that leads some to conclude that, in this respect, the difference between classical and neo-realism is largely overdrawn (see Parent and Baron 2011, pp. 197-199). Such conclusion, however, runs the risk of putting the cart before the horse: though anarchy is an undeniable factor of international politics, in the classical realist view, the anarchy itself *follows* from the 'evil' nature of human beings (see Elman 2007; and Lebow 2013). This debate serves well to illustrate classical realism's contentious nature; for the purposes of this thesis, however, it is less consequential than the fact that, for most classical realists, studying unit-level variables is at least equally as important as studying the distribution of power in the system (e.g. Kissinger, see Waltz 1979, pp. 60-63; see also Taliferro, Lobell and Ripsman 2009, p. 16).

This leads into Tellis' final point. In terms of methodology, classical realists employ "**empiricist-inductivism**" – that is, they postulate universal generalizations about political life on the basis of "austere perception of visible phenomena" as opposed to the "systematic, deductive" approach fancied by later realists (Tellis 1996, pp. 50-51). This is something of a paradox: though classical realism seeks to, often explicitly, provide a 'scientific' account of political life – complete with objective, law-like regularities – its approach, judged in light of the 1960s behavioral revolution (that inspired Waltz's refinement) as well as today's standards, seems instead almost 'unscientific' (Waltz 1979; Quinn 2013, pp. 162-173; Narizny 2017, p. 157; cf. Morgenthau 1948; and Hollis and Smith 1990, pp. 22-23). This is because classical realism espouses, what is in effect, an *idiographic* (or interpretive, understanding) approach – that is, one geared towards detailed exploration of particularities – as opposed to nomothetic, which is considered a better choice for generalization (Hollis and Smith 1990; Narizny 2017). Given classical realism's emphasis on considering unit-level variables, however this may be seen as a logical consequence.

Although not exhaustive, the three points identified by Tellis can be said to inform the logic of the classical realist work. To better illustrate how exactly, as well as to further emphasize how the approach differs from structural realism, what follows is a number of instances showcasing how the points translate into practical thought.

Balance of power, for example, is as key a concept for classical realists as it is for structural ones (Vasquez 1997, p. 902). However, as opposed to the latter, classical realists do not consider it an ahistorical and recurrent mechanism of the international system that serves to maximize states' security. Rather, they see it as a function of deliberate actions taken by

states with the view to constructing it that must be studied in its specific historical context (see Kissinger 1994; 2014). As a result, they consider, for example, the diplomatic efforts that go into the creation of a given balance, its stability (focusing on, inter alia, its legitimacy), as well as whether it makes war more likely or less (see Wolfers 1962, pp. 117-131; Kissinger 1994 and 2014; see also Guzzini 1998, pp. 27-30; Lebow 2013, pp. 62-65).

Classical realists operate similarly with the notion of *rationality*. As opposed to structural realism, which, for analytical reasons, adopts the assumption that states are rational actors, classical realists draw a distinction between theory – where it is possible to outline the 'most rational' course of action – and practice, which is, by nature, messy and irrational (Lebow 2013, p. 66). Although political leaders make, what they think are, rational choices, classical realists argue that the rationality of the choice can only be established in retrospect – that is, with more complete information and in contrast to some theoretically-devised ideal-type scenarios (Morgenthau 1948, p. 152, cited in Guzzini 1998, p. 28; see also Elman 2007, p. 13). As a result, in their analysis, classical realists often focus on the idiosyncratic features of a given political leader's / state's behavior and their deviations from what would have been considered rational or ideal in a given situation. To be sure, the fact that results of such analyses often serve as the basis for putting forward universal lessons is what earned classical realists their reputation as being unscientific in the 1960s (see Elman 2007, pp. 12-13). However, the approach itself, as will be seen, is reminiscent of that adopted by neoclassical realists.

Another good illustration concerns the use of the concept of *power* as such. Power, as shown above, is paramount to classical realism, a fact often used to paint classical realists as hard-nosed *materialists*, who see power as an *objective* and calculable factor (see Kauppi and Viotti 2020, p. 32). However, as Guzzini (2004, p. 543) shows, when thoroughly engaging with power, classical realists often 'relax' this ontology and consider also such factors as the personalities of foreign policy leaders, diplomatic prowess or the subjective judgement of power. Similarly, they focus also on the 'willingness' of states to use their power and the effects – like influence or control – the power has over the behavior of others (Kauppi and Viotti 2020, p. 32). This is because classical realists understand that power and influence in international politics, though having its basis in material capacity, is ultimately a psychological relationship between given parties that can only be fully explained in its particularity (Lebow 2013, p. 66). Finally, and closely related, though classical realists, in general, assume that states seek power as a means for survival, they allow for a variation of *state motives*: since they are derived from human nature, states can be, at the very basic, *both* status quo and revisionist (Rynning 2009; cf. Parent and Baron 2011, p. 200).

Thus, it can be seen that due to its theoretical-analytical orientation, classical realism differs, on a number of important scores, from the structural variant (summarized in Table 2). To be sure, the above presented points of contention are merely illustrative and it would, again, make for a separate thesis to provide a complete discussion on the substantive differences between the two traditions. For the present purposes, however, they are useful insofar as they can serve as concept-indicators of one or the other. On top of that, it is worthwhile to summarize the distinction between the two traditions in terms of two major aspects to which much other differences can be traced. First, by assuming that the root of all conflicts lies not with the international anarchy but rather with the vice of human nature – manifest in all social and political activity – classical realists are, in their analyses, naturally inclined to consider a multiplicity of factors, an approach structural realists find inimical to their program. As a result, whereas in structural realist works there is hardly space for anything but the relative distribution of power in the system, classical realists are free to discuss factors across all levels of analysis. Second, this proclivity inevitably favors a more thorough, idiographic analytical approach, whereby classical realists engage with rich analyses of specific cases as opposed to testing deductively devised theories – the case of structural realism – which, naturally, calls for as much parsimony as possible.

These two major differences, shown in the last row of Table 2, are arguably a potent complement to the concept-indicators in identifying how neoclassical realism incorporates features of structural and/or classical realism. In fact, it is often implicit in the various critiques of the school that these two differing orientations are what makes the said synthesis of structural and classical realism so problematic to begin with (e.g. Rynning 2009; Quinn 2013; Narizny 2017). Problematically, it will be seen that this distinction – however carefully outlined – is bound to become blurry in light of neoclassical realism's relationship vis-à-vis other theories of IR. Thus, outlining the basic contours of some of those theories is what now follows.

	Structural realism	Classical realism
associated thinkers	Kenneth Waltz, Stephen Walt, John Mearsheimer, Robert Gilpin, Robert Jervis, Robert J. Art, Barry Posen, Joseph Grieco, Jack Donelly, Jack Snyder, Stephen van Evera	Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, E. H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau, Nicholas Spykman, Henry Kissinger, Frederick Schuman, Reinhold Niebuhr, Raymond Aron, John Herz, Arnold Wolfers
major concepts	primacy of the structure, international anarchy, self-help, the motive of survival, undifferentiated and rational states as the main units, relative distribution of power (independent variable), balance of power (automatic), scientific, positivist, nomothetic, rationalist, materialist Gilpinian realism (hegemonic war), offensive realism (power maximization), defensive realism (security maximization)	conflict in all political life, interests defined in terms of power, unit-level of analysis (individual, human nature, domestic politics, ideas, regime type), idiographic, idiosyncratic, balance of power (contingent), rationality in theory vs the study of actual behavior, power (materialist and objective vs subjective, multifaceted and relational), variation in state motivation
main differences	Parsimony Nomothetic, deductive	Multiplicity, richness Idiographic, inductive

Table 2: Structural and classical realism – overview of concept-indicators and differences. Source: derived from the above discussion

2.3.2 External theoretical boundaries

In contrast to internal theoretical boundaries, the external counterpart concerns itself with shedding more light on what happens at the outskirts of neoclassical realism – especially in respect to what makes the theory distinctly realist in contrast to other theories of IR. Thus, to be able to do, it is now necessary to conceptualize both what constitutes the tradition of realism (in International Relations / Security Studies), as well as the other theories neoclassical realism is often said to traverse into: liberalism and constructivism.

As evident from the discussion in the preceding section, **political realism** may perhaps best be thought of as a wide (philosophical) tradition bound together by a number of shared axioms, assumptions, and world-views (see Dunne and Schmidt 2017). Thus, also the most fruitful way of conceptualizing the tradition for the purposes of this thesis may be through concocting a list of common defining features that may then serve as indicators. Such approach is, after all, preferred by those who criticize neoclassical realism for transgressing the realist boundaries. Narizny (2017), for example makes use of a list of six axioms of realism, as devised by Patrick James in his 2002 *International Relations and Scientific Progress*. In this view, realism is said to rest on the following assumptions:

1. "The most important actors in world politics are territorially organized entities […]
2. State behavior is rational […]
3. States seek security and calculate their interests in terms of relative standing within the international system […]
4. Anarchy is the ordering principle of international relations […]
5. States…are undifferentiated by function […]
6. Structure is defined by the distribution of capabilities among states"

(James 2002, p. 21, here as reproduced by Narizny 2017, p. 160).

Similarly, for their article, Legro and Moravcsik (1999) devise a set of assumptions said to describe the realist tradition. In their view, these are: (1) the existence of rational and unitary political units in anarchy; (2) the fixity and conflictual nature of state goals; (3) and the primacy of material capabilities in the international system (Legro and Moravcsik 1999, pp. 12-18). Based on their respective definitions, the authors consequently make their claims about neoclassical realism's transgressions of the boundaries of the realist paradigm.

However, the use of such definitions is far from unproblematic: in fact, it has been argued that both articles use purposefully restrictive definitions to make their cases (see

discussions in Feaver 2000; and Fiammenghi 2018). Such critique holds water: it does not take long to see that though the definitions somewhat correspond to the features of structural realism, they – intentionally or not – neglect those of classical realism. To wit, the two definition's insistence on the existence of rational and undifferentiated actors with fixed preferences would make it increasingly difficult for classical realism to fit inside. Thus, in building its own list of definitional feature of realism, this thesis must take care to be inclusive of both the structural and classical variant.

A good starting point in this sense is a list of various definitions of realism – provided by not only structural and classical realists but also other thinkers on the topic – compiled by Jack Donelly in his 2000 book on realism (pp. 7-8). Though many of these definitions contain features that are not always compatible with one another, they serve as the springboard for this thesis in devising a list of features common to realism writ large. Thus, what follows is a list of axioms, chosen and worded so as to fit both classical and structural realism, that will serve as this thesis' concept-indicators for the realist tradition:

1. **States** are the most important actors in world politics.
2. States have **interests** that are often **conflicting**. This often leads to their **competition**.
3. States operate in an international system that is **anarchic**. The nature of the system means that states must depend on **self-help** above all else.
4. The highest goal of all states in the international system is **survival**. This does not mean that it is the only goal or that it will always be pursued above other interests.
5. States think **rationally** about the choices they make in pursuing their interests. This does not mean that the choices as such are always rational.
6. **Power** is the primary currency and driver of international relations. Ethical and normative considerations are secondary.

It is hoped that this list, though surely far from perfect or objective, will aid the analysis in clearly delineating what is, and is not, realist about neoclassical realism. However, to see whether and how it relates to other major IR theories, it is necessary to also have a positive definition of what those theories are about. To avoid the need of providing lengthy discussions akin to the one in 2.3.1, the thesis decides to define the two alternative theories – liberalism and constructivism – along the lines of the six axioms provided for realism. Though this approach may result in the loss of acute nuance, it should nevertheless prove effective in drawing as strict lines as possible between neoclassical realism and the other theories.

Start with **liberalism**. As with realism – or all theories of IR, for that matter – it would take years to fully explore the ins and out of the liberal tradition in international relations, especially in relation to its numerous variants. To introduce the school(s), therefore, it suffices to mention only a couple of brief characteristics before turning to providing the list of axioms.

The liberal tradition has a long intellectual pedigree, being associated with such historical figures as Montesquieu, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, Adam Smith, Richard Cobden, Alexis de Tocqueville, Norman Angell, or Woodrow Wilson, as well as contemporary thinkers like Michael Doyle, Andrew Moravcsik, or Robert Putnam (Kauppi and Viotti 2020, p. 65; see also Kurki and Wight 2013, pp. 16-17). As such, the tradition is also necessarily diverse: specifically in IR, the liberal school encompasses such strands as *commercial liberalism*, *republican liberalism*, *sociological liberalism*, and *(neo)liberal institutionalism* (Lamy 2001, pp. 188-189). Though each of the strands emphasizes different variables, all of them are united in their ontological focus on peace, cooperation, and their positive view of change in international relations (Russett 2013, p. 95; Snyder 2009; for discussion on the differences see Lamy 2001, pp. 188-189). However, it should be mentioned that neoliberal institutionalism, though a prominent school in the family of IR theories, does not fit easily within the liberal school: in fact, it has been argued that despite its ontological similarities with other liberal theories, it is actually built on (neo)realist assumptions (Moravcsik 1997; Legro and Moravcsik 1997; for discussions see Baldwin 1993, pp. 3-25; Lamy 2001). Thus, in crafting the list of axioms of liberalism, this thesis draws rather on Moravcsik's refinement of the liberal theory, which itself builds on 'classical' liberal theories and is thus more true to the tradition at large, borrowing from neoliberal institutionalism only where possible (sources include Keohane 1984; Doyle 1986; Baldwin 1993; Moravcsik 1997; Legro and Moravcsik 1999; Spindler 2013; Nye and Welch 2014; Kauppi and Viotti 2020). The axioms are as follows:

1. The most important actors in world politics are societal actors such as **individuals** and **private groups**.
2. The societal actors are, on balance, **rational** and **risk-averse**.
3. The interests of the societal actors are represented by **states**. In other words, state preferences always reflect the preferences of a certain domestic group. As a result, there is **no exogenously given hierarchy** of state interests.
4. State interests may be in conflict with one another. However, rather than giving rise to competition, the conflict may be resolved through variants of **cooperative behavior**.

5. **Changes in preferences**, not power, are the main driver of state behavior. Power is merely one possible means.
6. There is no utility in analytically separating the international and domestic levels. In the liberal view, domestic preferences and international outcomes are interlocked in a **two-step process**, whereby the former continuously inform the latter and vice versa.

To summarize, therefore, liberalism (though not necessarily neoliberal institutionalism), subscribes to the *Innenpolitik* tradition, which sees domestic politics (or unit-level variables) as prior to, and largely determinative of, state behavior (see Zakaria 1992). In this it largely differs from realism, which always assumes the existence of exogeneous factors – be it the anarchy or human nature – that push states towards the need to prioritize their preferences (survival). As such, it also inevitable places much lesser emphasis on power as a causal factor. Moreover, their optimistic outlook is reflected in the liberals' expectations for cooperation – a stark contrast to the realist view of self-help. Finally, as opposed to realism, which draws a clear line between the domestic and the international, liberals, though emphasizing the former, suggest that the two may be thought of as two sides of the same coin.

At the same time, it should be emphasized that for all the differences, realism and liberalism also share a number of important views and assumptions: first, both traditions view actors – both states and individuals – as self-interested and rational beings; second, both hold the actors' interests to be pre-defined and prior to social interaction – i.e. they are not products of social interaction; third, both schools are also largely positivist and materialist, focusing on the causal effects of outside and objective forces; finally, Moravcsik's refinement, as well as neoliberal institutionalism, share with neorealism (though not really with classical realism; see above) the adherence to nomothetic epistemology (Wendt 1992; Adler 1997; Reus-Smit 2005; Fierke 2013; Narizny 2017). Thus, though the close affinity between neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism might be a step too far, the idea that realism and liberalism being mirror images of one another – building on the same but diverging assumptions – might be a good way of characterizing the differences between the two schools for the purposes of this thesis. When it comes to constructivism, as will now be seen, the story is not so simple.

Having originated in the 1990s, the **constructivist** tradition in IR now comprises two main branches: *mainstream constructivism* (associated with thinkers like Alexander Wendt, Emanuel Adler, Michael Barnett, John Ruggie, Peter Katzenstein or Martha Finnemore) and, what is usually labelled, *critical constructivism* – a strand more closely related to the post-structuralist tradition (see Reus-Smit 2005, p. 196; Phillips 2007, pp. 64-66 Jackson and

Sorensen 2013, p. 217). [10] Whereas the former refers to the kind that seeks to occupy a 'middle ground' between the so-called rationalist / positivist (realist and liberal) and interpretive (post-modern and post-structuralist) theories, mainly by retaining a number of realist and liberal positions, the latter amounts to a wholesale rejection thereof (see Adler 1997; Das 2009; Fierke 2013, pp. 189-190). To be sure, the mainstream variant is, too, sometimes painted as largely irreconcilable with the realist tradition; however, it has likewise been argued that some form of theoretical cross-fertilization between the two might be possible (Barkin 2003; see also Rose 1998). Thus, in considering how neoclassical realism differs, and what it borrows, from constructivism, the discussion will consider exclusively the mainstream variant. As a result, the here presented conceptualization of constructivism – in the form of a number of axioms – will reflect a form of consensual understanding of mainstream constructivism.

Before turning to the axioms, however, a brief discussion is in order. As Samuel Barkin (2003, p. 326), a famous constructivist-realist cross-breeder, suggests, constructivism in IR may generally be understood as a shared conviction among a largely diverse groups of theorists that international politics is socially constructed: "international politics [is] not reflective of an objective, material reality but an intersubjective, or social, reality" (see also Onuf 1989). Adler (1997, p. 322) puts it similarly, noting that constructivism is the "view that the manner in which the material world shapes and is shaped by human action and interaction depends on dynamic normative and epistemic interpretations of the material world" (italics in original). In essence, therefore, constructivism can be said to have an *ideational* ontology – that is, one in which ideas come first, giving meaning to social interaction, as well as material reality – as opposed to the *material* worldview of (mostly) realism and liberalism, where the material reality shapes everything else.[11] As such, all meaning is necessarily *intersubjective* – created in the course of interaction of various actors – not objective or 'out there' (Jackson and Sorensen 2013, p. 212). Finally, as a result, constructivism stands in contrast to the individualist ontology of realism and liberalism by stressing rather a *social ontology*: states (and other actors) are not individual, self-interested, and naturally rational actors that make decisions solely of their own volition; rather, they are always part of a given social milieu that shapes not only their behavior but also their very identity and preferences (Fierke 2013; Jackson and Sorensen 2013, p. 217; Mingst, McKibben, and Arreguín-Toft 2019, pp. 86-89). It is these basic theoretical orientations that

[10] Such categorization is necessarily an oversimplification of how intricate and divided the constructivist edifice actually is. For more nuanced and detailed debates see, for example, Ruggie (1998) or Hynek and Teti (2010).
[11] Some thinkers, however, reject such simplicity (see Barkin 2003). It is the view also of this thesis that no such clear line can be drawn; for analytical purposes, nevertheless, it seems a fruitful starting point.

serve as the basis for much of the constructivist thought on IR (see the axioms below).

However, it would be hasty to assume that, especially in the mainstream variant, constructivism only differs from realism and liberalism. For example, many constructivists largely concur with both realist and liberal that *states* – though, of course, socially constructed – are currently the main actors in the world politics (Wendt 1999). Similarly, some constructivists agree with the notion that the international system is *anarchic*, though they differ on whether this has major bearing on how states behave (Wendt 1992; see also Mingst, McKibben and Arreguín-Toft 2019, p. 89). Moreover, constructivists, too, subscribe to the idea that *power* is an important factor in international relations; however, they – on top of material capabilities – also stress the importance of such nonmaterial qualities of power as ideas, norms, culture, language, or legitimacy (Mingst, McKibben and Arreguín-Toft 2019, p. 89). Finally, though certainly not all, some constructivists argue that constructivism is essentially "compatible" with a *positivist epistemology*, positing causal explanations with ideational variables (Hynek and Teti 2010, p. 188; see also Checkel 1998; for illustration consider Tannenwald 1999 and 2005; cf. Phillips 2007, p. 63).[12]

Thus, it can be seen observed that despite some major differences, at least some common ground between realism and liberalism, on the one hand, and constructivism, on the other, has been found over the years – though not in an unproblematic manner (see Hynek and Teti 2010). In the analytical part, discussing how neoclassical realism relates to constructivism will be of major importance, not least because of Rose's (1998, p. 152) somewhat misleading assertion that neoclassical realists "occupy a middle ground between pure structural theorists and constructivists." For now, however, it remains to define the axioms of (mainstream) constructivism in IR (sources include: Onuf 1989; Wendt 1992 and 1999; Alder 1997; Checkel 1998; Reus-Smit 2005; Phillips 2007; Fierke 2013; Jackson and Sorensen 2013; Nye and Welch 2014; Mingst, McKibben, and Arreguín-Toft 2019; Kauppi and Viotti 2020).

1. **States**, though socially constructed, are the most important actors in world politics. This does not deny the existence or importance of other actors.
2. State interests or preferences have their basis in **state identity**. The identity is never fixed, but rather acquired whilst interacting with other actors. As a result, neither state interests are fixed.
3. Given that state interests have their root in identity, state behavior does not follow rational choice (logic of consequence) but rather so-called **logic of appropriateness**, following what is 'right' given certain identity.

[12] Checkel (1998, p. 237) writes that "constructivists do not reject science or causal explanation; their quarrel with mainstream theories is ontological, not epistemological."

4. **Power** is an important factor in world politics. However, on top of material, it may be also **non-material**, including ideational, normative, legal, cultural or discursive.
5. The international system is currently **anarchic**. This anarchy is, however, neither natural nor unchangeable. It is also mitigated through norms or laws.
6. Agents and structures are **mutually constituted**.

The last point deserves a few additional words. Though not previously mentioned, the idea that agents and structures are mutually constituted underlies the constructivist approach. This marks one final difference from both realism and liberalism: whereas the structural variant of the former takes the view that structures are the primary determinants of agents' actions, liberalism and classical realism treat actors as prior to the existence of structures. Constructivism, on the other hand, rejects either way, arguing instead that since "agents (actors) and structures mutually constitute one another", any separation as to which comes first is impossible (Kauppi and Viotti 2020, p. 154; see Wendt 1999, ch. 4; and Reus-Smit 2005; cf. Wendt 1987). Although this may, at this point, seem somewhat abstract, this co-called agent-structure debate is of major importance not in telling theories apart but also when it comes to discussing how neoclassical realism operates with its variables, a discussion to which the thesis now turns.

	Realism	**Liberalism**	**Constructivism**
Six axioms	1. States the most important actors 2. Conflicting interests of states and competition 3. International anarchy and self-help 4. Primacy of survival 5. States think rationally 6. Power the most important variable	1. Societal actors are the most important actors 2. They are mostly rational and risk-averse 3. Their interests represented by states 4. Cooperation may resolve conflict 5. Changes in preferences the most important variable 6. International and domestic levels linked	1. States currently the most important actors 2. State interested based on identity 3. State behavior driven by identity 4. Importance of non-material variables 5. Anarchy exists but may be changed and mitigated through norms and laws 6. Agents and structures mutually constituted
Epistemology	Positivist; nomothetic (structural realism), idiographic (classical realism)	Positivist and nomothetic	Compatible with positivism
Ontology	Mostly materialist	Materialist	Ideational
Agent-structure primacy	Structure (structural realism), actors (classical realism)	Actors	Mutually constitutive
Main driver of action	Rational choice; human nature	Rational choice	Identity

Table 3: Realism, liberalism and constructivism – main differences and commonalities. Source: author's own work, based on above listed sources.

2.3.3 Methodological and ontological boundaries

As has been already alluded to, the third conceptual category pertains mostly to the ways in which neoclassical realism employs and works with variables. As such, it inevitable touches upon issues related to both the internal and the external theoretical boundaries – in fact, much of what this category deals with could plausibly be inferred from the two. However, given both the breadth of the first two categories, and the significance of the variables debate in neoclassical realism, it makes sense to reserve an extra category solely for variables to ensure that they receive the discussion they deserve. The inclusion of this category should, therefore, not be seen as an overlap – if something, the extensive conceptual discussion regarding the first two categories minimizes the need to go too much into substantive detail in this section, as much of the problematique at heart of the variables debate has already been covered. As a result, on substantive matters, this section can refer back to the two preceding sections, and focus exclusively on the question of indicators, going into detail only when necessary.

Begin with **intervening variables**. The notion that neoclassical realism understands state behavior to result from the relaying of external, systemic stimuli via various domestic, unit-level variables is perhaps what it is best known for (see Rose 1998). However, as already mentioned in part 2.2, the manner in which neoclassical realists deploy their various unit-level variables is often problematized. Thus, to elucidate how intervening variables are used in neoclassical realist theories, the analytical part will focus on four conceptual clusters: (1) which variables are used; (2) what kind of variables they are; (3) what logic informs the choice; and (4) the specification of the relationship between the variables and their influence.

The first cluster is simple: here the interest lies solely with identifying the many possible intervening variables – that have historically ranged from extractive capacity and leader perception to strategic culture and regime type – that neoclassical realists use in their explanations (for the most comprehensive view see Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell 2016). The second cluster is similar but goes a step further in considering, primarily, whether the variables used are of material or ideational nature, the latter being often alleged of disqualifying neoclassical realism from the broader realist enterprise (see Sears 2017; see also section 2.3.2). The third cluster touches upon one of the sorest points of neoclassical realism: the alleged variable proliferation. Many critics of the school contend that neoclassical realists ‘open the floodgates’ by allowing virtually any variable – including such from distinct theoretical families – to feature as an intervening factor in the transmission belt of the systemic stimuli (see Tang 2009; Narizny 2017; and Sears 2017). Thus, the third cluster will seek to elucidate

the *rationales* employed by various neoclassical realists in choosing their intervening variables: that is, why and how are certain variables chosen. Finally and relatedly, the fourth cluster will concern itself with the *effect* of the variables and the *relationship* between them, focusing on the questions of hierarchy, sequence, and other issues pertaining to the logic of the variable deployment. To illustrate, it will consider why some variables matter more than others, when and how they matter, and how the variables interact with one another (see Tang 2009).

Second, this category will consider issues related to **independent variables** in the neoclassical realist thought. There are two main points of interest in this respect. One concerns the *nature* of neoclassical realist independent variables. It is the case almost exclusively that neoclassical realists borrow from structural realism the notion that the relative distribution of power in the international system (or threats) is the primary explanatory variable (for discussion see section 2.3.1). However, as discussed in Fordham (2009) and Narizny (2017), such notion is a problematic one because it assumes the pre-existence of state motives: "structural pressures…constrain policy choice because they impinge on the state's assumed motives" (Fordham 2009, p. 254). In other words, the relative distribution of power in the system can only be treated as the main predictor of state behavior only if state motives – be it survival, power, or else – are theorized to be fixed (see sections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2). If they are allowed to vary, the notion of power as the sole determinant of state behavior loses its potency, because then there are at least two equally important factors: the relative distribution of power *and* the motivation of a given state. The paradox, of course, is that Rose (1998) acknowledged simultaneously both the structural primacy and the possibility of variation in state motives (see Narizny 2017, p. 169). Thus, first, it will be explored whether in positing the structure as the primary independent variable neoclassical realists make, implicitly or explicitly, assumptions about what motivates states or whether they allow for the variation of the latter, effectively downgrading the sole importance of the former.

The second concern in respect to independent variables, closely related to the first one, has to do with their relationship vis-à-vis intervening variables. Fordham (2009) is illustrative in this regard, arguing that unless state motives are assumed to be fixed it is impossible to retain a clear, hierarchical separation between systemic (structural) and domestic variables – a hallmark of neoclassical realism. As he explains, the

> "neoclassical assumption that domestic and international pressures are easily separable and identifiable is problematic. The nature of international threats is determined to a great extent by the interests of the domestic coalition that governs the state, and domestic political and

> economic interests are affected by international circumstances. Therefore, it makes little sense to treat domestic and international variables in an additive manner, by assuming an objective set of national interests and seeing how domestic political actors respond to them" (p. 251).

On the back of this assertion, Fordham (2009) goes on to propose an alternative model, one based largely on the notion that international and domestic variables interact with one another and, thus, cannot be ontologically separated or hierarchically ordered. However, the model – though well specified and thought-through – has not become a universally adopted standard of neoclassical realist works, largely perhaps owing to the fact that it comes closer to resemble liberal than realist thinking (Rynning 2009, p. 3; see section 2.3.2 on liberalism). That said, for the purposes of this thesis this fact does not matter as much as the logic captured by Fordham's discussion: there are essentially two ways of approaching the relationship between systemic (usually called independent) and domestic (usually called intervening) variables. One imposes strict hierarchy between the two, the other allows for continuous interaction (and, naturally, the blurring of any separation between what is called independent and what intervening variables). Thus, in respect to the relationship between neoclassical realist independent and intervening variables, the analysis will consider whether neoclassical realists tend to treat the two in an *additive* manner – that is, hierarchically and linearly, with a clear cascading logic from the systemic to the unit level – or rather *interactively*, with both systemic and unit-level variables exerting continuous pressure on one another so that the ultimate effect on state behavior is impossible to disentangle (a logic perhaps best exemplified by Putnam's two level game: see 1988; for application and contrast with neoclassical realism see also Šenk 2020, pp. 70-76).

Finally, the question of **dependent variables** will be discussed. In his article, Rose (1998) puts it clearly that neoclassical realism is a theory of foreign policy: foreign policy of certain states is what it seeks to explain; that is, it is its dependent variable. In this, as later reaffirmed in Taliaferro, Lobell and Ripsman (2009), it differs from structural realism, which sets its sights on explaining recurrent patterns of state behavior in the international system – that is, the so-called international outcomes (see Rynning 2009). Put simply, neoclassical realism so conceived concerns itself with the explanation of individual cases as opposed to the general patterns of international behavior. As such, it clearly fits the latter in Waltz's (1996, p. 54) distinction between theories of international politics and foreign policy: as he explains, whereas the former is concerned with

> "explaining why states similarly placed behave similarly despite their internal differences…a theory of foreign policy would explain why states similarly placed in a system behave in different ways."

Waltz posited this distinction as part of his response to Colin Elman's 1996 attempt to transform structural realism into a theory of foreign policy. Back then, Waltz fiercely opposed any such move. He argued that a theory designed to explain international politics – that is, one asking "how variations in conditions external to states push or pull them in various directions" – must necessarily focus solely on international factors and exclude the effects of internal ones (Waltz 1996, pp. 54-56). As such, it is naturally unfit for the explanation (and prediction) of individual state foreign policies, as those invariably require considering internal factors:

> "Under most circumstances, a theory of international politics is not sufficient, and cannot be made sufficient, for the making of unambiguous foreign-policy predictions. An international-political theory can explain states' behavior only when external pressures dominate the internal disposition of states, which seldom happens. When they do not, a theory of international politics needs help" (Waltz 1996, p. 57).

Thus, in Waltz's view, a theory of international politics can only explain foreign policy badly or be so adjusted – Elman himself suggests a number of ways, including the addition of (intervening) variables – that it can no longer be considered a theory of international politics in the first place. This assertion, two years before Rose's article, has led some to argue that neoclassical realism – in effect a theory of foreign policy built on the basis of structural realism – is a troublesome endeavor from the start (mainly owing to structural primacy, see above; see also Quinn 2013; Narizny 2017; and Sears 2017).

Leaving this discussion aside for the time being, the consensus, nevertheless seems to have been for a while that neoclassical realism falls squarely within the tradition of theories of foreign policy. With Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell (2016), however, the picture becomes more complicated: in their book, they assert not only that Waltz's distinction between theories of international politics and foreign policy is largely "overdrawn and counterproductive" but also, as a result, that the dependent variable of neoclassical realism extends much beyond foreign policy decisions individual states (p. 2; and ch. 4). In fact, they argue that the scope of the neoclassical realist dependent variable grows over time, progressively enabling the theory to explain not only decision making and foreign policy but also grand strategies of individual states, systemic outcomes, and, finally, structural change (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016, ch. 4). How exactly this is supposed to work will be discussed in more detail as part of

the analytical chapter. For now it suffices to say that the fact that the authors effectively posit neoclassical realism to be a theory "capable of explaining the behavior of states, their interactions, and international outcomes" – a grand theory of international relations Waltz (1996, p. 57) was skeptical about – necessitates that the thesis pays enough heed to exploring what neoclassical realism considers to be its dependent variable. Thus, in this respect, the analysis will focus, simply, on whether and how neoclassical realists seek to explain foreign policy (as defined above) or rather other dependent variables, ranging from grand strategy to systemic and structural outcomes, that are much closer the theory-of-international-politics end of the spectrum.

Intervening variables	**Independent variables**	**Dependent variables**
Which variables What kind of variables Rational of choice Deployment logic	Primacy of power vs variation in state motives Additive vs interactive	Foreign policy vs international outcomes (grand strategy, systemic change, structural change)

Table 4: Methodological and ontological boundaries of neoclassical realism. Source: author's own work, derived from the sources cited.

2.3.4 Empirical and geographical boundaries

Finally, the category of empirical and geographical boundaries does not necessitate any kind of conceptualization on par with the three preceding categories. Instead, it is sufficient to only briefly recount what exactly is of interest to the research in this regard. First, the analysis in this respect will explore what kind of *empirical puzzles* neoclassical realists prefer – that is, whether they take interest in, for example, great powers or alliances. Second, the *geographical orientation* of the neoclassical realists will be explored, asking, simply, which countries or parts of the world tend to preferred in the research. Third, the analysis will consider, what it labels, the *geography of the researchers*, seeking to shed more light on where neoclassical realists themselves usually come from. Finally, all three clusters will be collated and juxtaposed over time to see how neoclassical realism develops in respect to the three clusters. With that, the complete conceptual framework is presented in a tabular form in Table 5 (next page).

What is neoclassical realism, and what is it not, as opposed to what it claims to be?

Internal theoretical boundaries *What is the relationship of neoclassical realism vis-à-vis structural and classical realism?*	*Structural realism*	What does neoclassical realism adopt from, and change about, structural realism?	
	Classical realism	What does it adopt from classical realism?	
	Combination	How does it seek to combine the two?	
External theoretical boundaries *How does neoclassical realism relate to, and differ from other major theories of IR?*	*Difference*	How does neoclassical realism differ from other IR theories?	
	Inspiration	Where does it draw inspiration?	
	Why realist	What makes it distinctly realist vis-à-vis the other theories?	
Methodological and ontological boundaries *What variables does neoclassical realism use and how?*	*Intervening variables*	*What variables*	Which variables exactly are used?
		What kind	Material or ideational?
		Rationale	What logic guides the choice?
		Logic of deployment	Effects of and relationships between the variables
	Independent variables	*Power vs motives*	Is power an objective IV or are motives allowed to change?
		Additive or interactive	Linear and hierarchical relationship between IVs and IVVs or their interaction?
	Dependent variables	Foreign policy, international outcomes, or else?	
Empirical and geographical boundaries *What is neoclassical realis about empirically and geographically?*	*Puzzles*	What empirical puzzles are of interest to neoclassical realists?	
	Geography (puzzle)	Which countries and regions?	
	Geography (researcher)	Where are neoclassical realists from?	

Table 5: Conceptual framework. Source: author's own work.

2.4 Methodology & data used

Having provided a conceptualization and operationalization, it now remains to discuss what concrete methodology will by employed to guide the thesis' data collection and analysis. Given the research question is to explore and describe the case of neoclassical realism, the methodology used to address the question will be largely **qualitative**. Although the difference is not easily clear-cut, at the very basic, qualitative methodology can be distinguished from the one labeled quantitative: whereas the latter is concerned with the expression and analysis of data in numerical, quantifiable form, the former emphasizes word-based, narrative forms (see Given 2008, p. 713; Bryman 2016, pp. 32-33). Thus, qualitative methodology is often the preferred choice of induction-based inquiries: by virtue of its orientation, it can take a holistic perspective geared toward in-depth exploration and the provision of a truly "thick, rich description" of, usually, a single case (Given 2008, p. 430; Lamont 2015, p. 78; Patton 2015, p. 779; Creswell and Creswell 2018, p. 257; Vromen 2018, p. 245). This makes qualitative methodology a good fit for this thesis' purposes.

In practice, qualitative methodology encompasses a broad range of methods (Toshkov 2018, p. 229). For the purposes of this thesis, however, two will be of major importance: **thematic** and **narrative analysis**. As explained at length above, the bulk of this thesis' analysis will focus on retelling the history of neoclassical realism both thematically and narratively: with the use of the pre-defined conceptual categories, *themes* will be identified in the literature that will then be organized and presented in a *narrative* form (see Creswell and Creswell 2018, p. 268). The choice of thematic and narrative analysis is, therefore, a logical choice for Part 1 of the analysis. Moreover, thematic analysis will likewise be employed in analytical Part 2 to identify themes in the works of the critics of neoclassical realism and to organize and synthesize findings. Thus, in the first half of this part, the basic contours of the methods are overviewed. This overview is then followed by a discussion concerning the data this thesis will use.

Thematic analysis is a frequent choice of (not only) social science researchers, albeit one that is poorly defined and sometimes contested (see Braun and Clarke 2006; Bryman 2016, p. 584). In essence, however, it refers to a "method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 79). Practically, thematic analysis consists in a number of consecutive steps designed so as to transform an unorganized bulk of data into a number of logically structured patterns. Bryman (2016, pp. 588-589), for example, lists six steps:

1. A general read-through and an overview of the data to be analyzed for the purpose of familiarization with the data.
2. Coding of the data.
3. Elaborating codes into themes.
4. Devising a hierarchy of themes and codes.
5. Examining possible links between emergent concepts (themes) and the variation between them.
6. Writing up the results, usually through a compelling narrative.

Braun and Clarke (2006, pp. 87-93), for their part, offer a very similar sequence, running from (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, and (3) collating them into potential themes, to (4) reviewing the themes, (5) defining and specifying the themes, and finally (6) producing a report. That said, it can be seen that though the steps themselves might differ somewhat (and the sequence may be slightly altered), the idea behind the procedure of thematic analysis is fairly simple: *turning data into codes, codes into potential themes, and potential themes into logically structured and linked patterns in the data*. In that, it may be seen as reminiscent of grounded theory, which likewise follows a number of predefined steps and entails consecutive steps of coding (cf. Neuman 2014, pp. 70-71; Corbin and Strauss 2015; Patton 2015, pp. 182-185). However, it differs from it in at least two respects that make it the preferred choice for this thesis' purposes: first, whereas grounded theory is very rigid in its method, requiring strict adherence to its sequence and an almost word-for-word coding, thematic analysis provides the researcher more leeway (no doubt owing to its ambiguous nature) when it comes to the exact procedure of identifying the themes (Bryman 2016, pp. 572-581, 584-589). Second, more substantively, thematic analysis is preferred also because of the way it relates to theory: whilst grounded theory is a purely inductive approach, one that essentially rules out the use of pre-defined concepts, thematic analysis is compatible also with deduction – i.e. it can be "driven by the researcher's theoretical or analytic interest" (Braun and Clarke 2008, p. 84). As such, it is not only less time consuming but also open to the consultation of other, secondary, sources – that is, sources beyond the primary data under the scrutiny – a move expected to be employed in the present analysis (see below).

In contrast to thematic analysis, **narrative analysis** is often said to be much more precisely defined and delimited (e.g. Braun and Clarke 2008). As Neuman (2014, pp. 494-499) explains, narrative analysis is sometimes taken to denote both a concrete method and a broader group of approaches linked together, by and large, by their shared commitment to exploring reality through the narrative. For the purposes of this thesis, two approaches falling into the

broader group are of importance: *narrative presentation* and *narrative analysis* (as a method). The former, which may be thought of as a logical outgrowth of (thematic) analysis, refers to simply a way of presenting findings in a narrative format (Neuman 2014, p. 496). In other words, it refers to a deliberate choice by a researcher to present emergent findings as a "story line" – an adequate approach for retelling a history (Creswell and Creswell 2018, pp. 267-269). As such, it is essentially a descriptive tool. Narrative analysis, on the other hand, takes matters a step further: it denotes a group of methods for actually making sense of, instead of merely organizing, data (Neuman 2014, pp. 496). One such method is called *periodization*, which consists in "[d]ividing the flow of time in social reality into segments or periods" (Neuman 2014, p. 498). This method may be understood as the next step of narrative presentation: having presented a thematic story line, the researcher then moves to break the narrative into specific time periods, each with its own characteristics. Since providing a periodization is one of the goals of this thesis, this method will be employed on top of thematic analysis and narrative presentation.

Thus, to summarize and link to the discussion on general research strategy and objectives (part 2.1), in Part 1 of the analysis, where the goals are to explore and describe the extant neoclassical realist literature and provide a retold history thereof, the exploration will be carried out via thematic analysis and the description via narrative presentation and periodization. In Part 2, first, thematic analysis will be used to distill the views of the critics of neoclassical realism, and second, a thematic synthesis, roughly following the logic of Hegelian dialectic – that is, the juxtaposition of the thesis and the anti-thesis – will be employed, contrasting the critics' views with the findings from Part 1 with the view to providing an original answer to the research question.

The **data** used in this thesis, both in Part 1 and Part 2, fall largely under two categories: primary and secondary sources. In Part 1, primary sources will consist primarily of works (articles, books) by neoclassical realists, both theoretical and empirical, as well as those not explicitly linked to the school (e.g. those referred to by neoclassical realists or those sharing major characteristics with neoclassical realism). Secondary sources, for their part, will include the critics of neoclassical realism, as well as other academic works on this and related topics (e.g. works on other theories of IR). When it comes to sampling and data collection, both primary and secondary sources in Part 1 will be guided by a number of nonprobability sampling methods – namely sequential (sampling until the point of saturation), snowball (using case referrals from the existing sample to collect further data), and deviant case sampling (collecting

data that differ from the dominant pattern) (see Neuman 2014, pp. 272-279).

In Part 2, the critics of neoclassical realism will again be used; this time, however, as a primary source. Secondary sources, on the other hand will be limited to responses to the critics and other pertinent sources. In this case, the primary sources come closer to a population than a sample, as they are generally very few in existence. The sample of secondary sources, on the other hand, may again be collected via the sequential and snowballing methods. Finally, in the thematic synthesis, mostly primary data will be used – that is, the findings of the first two parts; secondary sources may be used mostly for the purposes of reference. The whole research strategy, with the inclusion of methods and data used can be found in Table 6.

	PART 1	**PART 2**	
Research question	What is, and is not, neoclassical realism as opposed to what it claims to be?	2.1	2.2
		What is neoclassical realism?	What is neoclassical realism?
Research strategy	Exploration, description	Double reading (first reading)	Double reading (second reading), synthesis with findings
Objective	A retold history of neoclassical realism	The critics' view on neoclassical realism	An original answer to the research question
Methods	Thematic analysis + narrative presentation, periodization	Thematic analysis	Thematic synthesis
Data	Primary (neoclassical realist works), secondary (e.g. critiques)	Primary (critiques), secondary (e.g. responses)	Primary (findings form Parts 1 and 2)

Table 6: Research design (full). Source: author's own work.

3. ANALYTICAL CHAPTER

3.1 Part 1: The history of neoclassical realism retold

In this part of the analysis, the thesis seeks to reexplore and retell the 'official' history of neoclassical realism (as presented in the introductory chapter). In this endeavor, it is guided by a conceptual framework, derived from the works of neoclassical realism's critics, and a refined version of the original research question that seeks to find out: *What is neoclassical realism, and what is it not, as opposed to what it claims to be?* However, before it can begin its exploration, it logically follows that it must be defined what exactly is meant by the official history – what it is that neoclassical realism claims to be. The introductory chapter already hinted at this, suggesting that Gideon Rose's 1998 article is used as the primary point of reference for the official history. In this view, neoclassical realism is a novel approach to explaining foreign policy that, dissatisfied with existing approaches, seeks to combine structural and classical realism to produce a better alternative. This much is clear. For the purposes of the analysis, however, it is necessary that what neoclassical realism claims to be is specified and elaborated on in greater detail and in a way that corresponds to the present lens.

To that end, the analytical chapter is prefaced by a dissection of Rosean neoclassical realism in accordance with the four conceptual categories defined by this thesis' conceptual framework. Instead of providing a narrative exposition, the dissection is presented in a table (Table 7, over the two following pages). This is so for two reasons: first, a tabular characterization of a phenomenon, as opposed to a narrative one, has the advantage of being highly systematic, facilitating the orientation of both the researcher and the reader; second, though minute detail is necessarily lost, this does not constitute a major issue, as Rose's article will, in addition to serving as a point of reference, also feature as subject of further analysis below, mainly when it comes to re-reviewing the works that Rose posited to constitute the nascent school of neoclassical realism.

Internal theoretical boundaries *What is the relationship of neoclassical realism vis-à-vis structural and classical realism?*	*Structural realism*	**Relative material power** establishes the basic parameters of a country's foreign policy [but] there is no immediate of perfect transmission belt linking material capabilities to foreign policy behavior. Theoretically, it retains **abstraction** and **parsimony**.	
	Classical realism	Neoclassical realism updates and systematizes certain insights from **classical realist** thought. But there is no one straightforward classical realism. It is implicitly suggested that classical realists are distinguished by their focus on domestic-level variables. Thucydides' model of theoretically informed narratives of how material power translates into concrete political decision making.	
	Combination	Explicitly incorporating both **external** and **internal** variables	
External theoretical boundaries *How does neoclassical realism relate to, and differ from other major theories of IR?*	*Difference*	**Innenpolitik** (liberalism): foreign policy analysis must begin with external, not internal factors	
	Inspiration	**Innenpolitik** (liberalism): internal factors to be included, but be relegated to second place analytically **Constructivism**: there is a material reality but it is not always accurately apprehended or assessed	
	Why realist	Adherence to the assumption that the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the **international system** and specifically by its relative **material capabilities.**	
Methodological and ontological boundaries *What variables does neoclassical realism use and how?*	*Intervening variables*	*What variables*	perception of political leaders, (extractive) strength and structure of state and domestic society
		What kind	mostly material, the role of ideational variables to be explored
		Rationale	more care should be taken to systematize, instead of merely claiming that 'everything matters'
		Logic of deployment	to be better specified, namely the relationship between objective and psychological, ideational, and cultural variables

	Independent variables	*Power vs motives*	**Relative power** capabilities. States do not seek security but seek to **control and shape** their external environment. Generally, they want more influence than less. State ambition rises as its power rises, and vice versa.
		Additive or interactive	Systemic pressures must be translated through **intervening variables** at the unit level, **primacy of the external**. But acknowledging that though there is an objective reality of relative power, states do not always apprehend it accurately.
	Dependent variables	Foreign policy	
Empirical and geographical boundaries *What is neoclassical realism about empirically and geographically?*	*Puzzles*	Case studies concerning the foreign policy of **great powers**, usually in respect to their responses to relative material rise or decline. Also, **alliance formation.**	
	Geography (puzzle)	USA (historically and contemporarily), Great Britain (mostly historically), USSR and Russia (historically and contemporarily), powers of World War II (thus also Germany, Japan, and Italy), China (contemporarily).	
	Geography (researcher)	Not specifically tackled, but all reviewed works from **USA**.	

Table 7: Rosean neoclassical realism through the perspective of the present thesis' analytical framework. Source: Rose 1998, many passages quoted verbatim).

Having reviewed what neoclassical realism claims to be, the following sections can now begin to unravel what the history of neoclassical realism *actually* is, and is not, about. As providing an alternative periodization of this history is a major component of this task, the following analysis is presented in the form of three rough consecutive periods in the historical development of neoclassical realism: 1950s-1979, 1980s-2000s, 1998-today. Importantly, the following periodization challenges the usual conjecture that neoclassical realism presents a radically new approach originating only in the 1990s. In fact, as will become clear from the following pages, there is a long pedigree in the realist tradition of doing what neoclassical realists do, especially in relation to combining external and internal variables. In a sense, therefore, neoclassical realism may be seen to be less about resuscitating parts of classical realism and dressing them up in structural realist cloth than actually about taking up where certain realist thinkers left off before Waltzian realism appeared and stole the show for itself.

3.1.1 Precursors to neoclassical realism (1950s – 1979)

In his song *12 Things I Forgot*, the British singer Steven Wilson laments: *I forgot what it was that I was. There was a time when I had some ambition, now I just seem to have inhibitions*. Though the song is largely autobiographical, with a little stretch of the imagination, Wilson could equally well be singing about the realist tradition. Neoclassical realism, it is commonly held, began in part as a rection to structural realism's inability to explain increasingly complex phenomena as the Cold War came to its end. Such view, though holding some water (as detailed in section 3.1.2), however, runs the risk of being misconstrued as suggesting that neoclassical realism brought something radically new. To be sure, in light of Waltz' structural realist paradigm – which had dominated the field since 1980s – many aspects of the neoclassical realist approach, including the combination of external and internal factors, may be seen as innovative. Such view, however, ignores the fact that before Waltz redefined realism as a parsimonious approach that rules out the possibility of considering most internal (and also external) factors, realism was an academic tradition that explored the realm of international politics in a much richer way. Most importantly, what is now called classical realism amounts to more than just a heterogeneous collection of insights on domestic politics that may now be implemented by neoclassical realists in a more scientific and systematic fashion (see Rose 1998, p. 153). Rather, before Waltz came along and discarded much of hitherto realism as 'unscientific', there were scholars in the tradition that, in many respects, sought to do exactly what neoclassical realism does. Put simply, before it had *inhibitions*, realism had *ambition*.

From this perspective, neoclassical realism may thus appear to be more about rediscovering what realism used to be about than forging a completely new approach – reinventing the wheel, as it were. This is not necessarily so: many so-called classical realists did *not* pursue the directions identified by neoclassical realists, and those that did fall short of modern-day scientific standards. So, as will become clearer in subsequent sections, there *is* certain novelty to neoclassical realism. That said, the purpose of this section is not to suggest that what neoclassical realists do has already been done; rather, it is to show that there is a certain *continuity*, going beyond mere inspiration, in the works of pre- and post-Waltzian realists. It is to help remember *what it was that realism was*.

In this task, the thesis considers the works of a number of prominent so-called classical realists, including Aron (1966), Carr (1946), Fox (1959), Herz (1959), Kennan (1956; 1957), Kissinger (1994), Morgenthau (1948; 1985), Niebuhr (1932), Spykman (1942), Thompson (1955), Wolfers (1959; 1962), or Wright (1942). Of these, however, only a few make the final

cut. This is because this section is interested in showcasing realists whose works resemble the contours of the neoclassical realist approach, not cherry picking isolated pieces of classical realist thought that feature also in neoclassical realism. For illustration, a work seeking to incorporate the effects of both external and internal effects on foreign policy is likelier to be judged a 'precursor' to neoclassical realism than, say, a work merely including ideational variables. By the same token, not all conceptual questions are afforded the same amount of attention in this section: for example, the relationship of classical realists vis-à-vis constructivism, a yet non-existent school of thought, is essentially mute, as is engaging in long discussion about whether the works under consideration can be seen as realist (although, occasional references and comparisons to other theoretical schools of international relations are made). Essentially, however, the primary prism adopted throughout the following subsection amounts to asking if some of the classical realist works under scrutiny systematically combine external and internal variables, and, if so, how exactly.

3.1.1.1 Internal theoretical boundaries

Logically, it makes little sense to speak of the combination of structural and classical realism at a time when neither existed – there was only one realism to speak of. However, it is possible to consider the internal theoretical boundaries of pre-Waltzian realism by tracing the combination of internal and external factors, the method underlying neoclassical realism's method of combining the two. To reiterate, Rosean neoclassical realism explicitly builds on the idea that state foreign policy behavior can best be explained by considering, first, the external (structural, systemic) effects on the state (usually in the form of relative power dynamics) and, second, by considering internal (unit-level, domestic) factors or characteristics of the state (see Zakaria 1992, pp. 197-198). To be sure, this idea is quite foreign to some classical realists, especially those focusing almost exclusively on individual-level explanations (notably Kennan, Kissinger, or Niebuhr).[13] However, it would be inaccurate to think that the external-internal logic came only as structural realism's exclusive preference of the former proved inadequate (focus of section 3.1.2). On the contrary, many pre-Waltzian realists actually espoused this logic in a way that resembles that of modern-day neoclassical realists.

There is a common tendency to view *all* classical realists as essentially 'reductionist' in the Waltzian sense – that is, they seek to explain international politics by focusing on

[13] This is not to say that these authors have no appreciation for external factors; on the contrary, most, at least implicitly, make references or nods to the importance of the international anarchy, relative power, and the like. What sets these authors apart, however, is their almost exclusively preference for seeking explanations at the level of the individual, not – as neoclassical realists do – by systematically incorporating external and internal factors.

individual- and state-level factors (see Waltz 1979, ch. 2; cf. Parent and Baron 2011). However, it is less known that a number so-called classical realists actually prioritize third-image, external variables as the 'primary' influence on state behavior. John Herz, for example, writes – in an almost Waltzian manner – that in international politics

> "it is relationships among basic units of international affairs, rather than behavior patterns of agents, that lend themselves most properly to theoretical investigation. I suggest, therefore, that the primary method of studying international politics should be one that deals with the 'structures' and 'systems' of international relations as the basic data" (1959, p. 7).

This may seem an aberration, yet Herz is certainly not alone stressing the primacy of external – if not always systemic – factors. Quincy Wright makes the point clearly when he asserts that "[f]oreign policies have been influenced more by the external situation, especially the political and economic activities of other nations, than by society's internal constitution" (1942b, p. 824). Similarly, Nicholas Spykman places a premium on the external when he proclaims that it is the anarchic nature of the international system that explains "why the *basic objective* of the foreign policy of all states is the preservation of territorial integrity and political independence" (1942, p. 16-17, italics not in the original). Without knowing the author, one could easily make the inference that such a sentence may be found in Waltz' 1979 *Theory.*

Parent and Baron (2011, pp. 197-198) take this point further, effectively arguing that prioritizing external factors, especially anarchy, is at least as typical for classical realists as it is for the structural kind. Quoting Morgenthau, they argue that though human nature is the root of all evil for classical realists, the primary determinants of state behavior are often located at the level of the system:

> "And since no nation can foresee how large its miscalculation will turn out to be, all nations must ultimately seek the maximum of power obtainable under the circumstances. Only thus can they hope to attain the maximum margin of safety commensurate with the maximum errors they might commit. The limitless aspiration for power, potentially always present…in the power drives of nations, finds in the balance of power a mighty incentive to transform itself into an actuality" (Morgenthau 1967, pp. 201-202, quoted in Parent and Byron 2011, p. 197).

Again, an almost identical line of argumentation can be found in the works of structural realists, in this case Mearsheimer's 2001 *Tragedy*. Moreover, as Parent and Byron (2011, p. 198) also emphasize, even the more historically-minded classical realists like Carr, Meinecke, or Taylor, often locate the causes of war and other state behavior at the level of structure or state interaction, not necessarily with individual leaders or regime types. Finally, even Raymond

Aron – the quintessential target of Waltz' reductionist charges – can be said to take an essentially third-image view of international politics. Battistella (2012, p. 126), for example, illustrates this by pointing out that Aron's conception of the international system found in his 1966 *Peace & War* is reminiscent of Rousseau's stag-hunt metaphor, used also by Waltz, by

> "writing that 'political units…are rivals by the very fact that they are autonomous', by stressing that each political unit, 'in the last analysis, can count only on itself', and by underlining that the international game is 'a struggle in which the player who abides by the rules runs the risk of being victimized by his – relative – mortality'" (Aron 1966, pp. 138, 434; as reproduced in Battistella 2012, p. 126).

Parent and Baron (2011, p. 198), for their part, find evidence in a quote from an article titled, suggestively, "The Anarchical Order of Power", where Aron effectively anticipates and combines both Gilpin' hegemonic stability and Waltz' balance of power theses by writing that

> "the conditions, constant throughout history, of the political organization of mankind suffice to explain the precariousness of peace and the frequency of wars. Peace could be safeguarded only, and always temporarily, by the balance of rival powers or the victory of the strongest and the establishment of an empire" (Aron 1985, p. 256).

Certainly, therefore, the importance of external factors and the international anarchy affecting aspects of state behavior is *not* lost on Aron – far from it. However, as will be seen below, what sets Aron apart from structural realists, modern-day neoclassical realists, as well as his contemporaries, is his unwillingness to take a resolute position on whether it is these, external, or rather internal factors that play the *primary* role in influencing state behavior.

That said, it can be seen that far from eschewing external factors, many classical realists not only acknowledge their importance, but actually consider them to be the primary influence on state behavior. However, just like neoclassical realists decades later, they also realize that external factors alone cannot sufficiently account for concrete foreign policy choices states make. Rather, to produce a complete picture, they must be combined with internal factors. In neoclassical realist literature, this move has sometimes the air of novelty and innovation; for so-called classical realists, however, it seems only logical. As Wright (1942b, p. 824-825) succinctly puts it, though external factors are of major importance, internal ones are not negligible: in fact, foreign policy results "from the interaction of internal and external conditions". Herz, too, develops his essentially structuralist argument, warning about putting too much weight on the third image. In his view, the structure may be the primary determinant of state behavior, but conditions such as "the general character and structure of…political

regimes at home and their relevance to the respective foreign policies" should also be considered to avoid making mistaken inferences one may arrive at through observing exclusively the third image (Herz 1959, pp. 8-10). The way Herz understands it, the international structure may be thought of as a "framework" that puts constraints on certain forms of state behavior and privileges others; however, without considering internal constellations of the state actors, it is difficult to understand why specific (and not other) actions take place (1959, p. 8).

This, of course, is one of the dominant ideas in the neoclassical realist tradition. Paradoxically, it is also one that was at a certain time sported by neorealism's own Kenneth Waltz, specifically in his 1959 book *Man, the State, and War*. Although in 1979 Waltz made his powerful argument that the patterns of state behavior in the international system may best be accounted for by considering exclusively the external, systemic factors of anarchy and relative distribution of power, in this book, Waltz argued that it is necessary to consider more than simply the third image.[14] In fact, in seeking to explain why wars happen, Waltz argued that while the international anarchy may be thought of as "permissive or underlying cause of war", individual- and state-level variables are ultimately necessary for understanding why concrete wars happened (Waltz 1959, p. 232; Weber 2020, p. 19). As a result, it is worthwhile to quote Waltz at length:

> "[T]he structure of the state system does not directly cause state A to attack state B. Whether or not that attack will occur will depend on a number of special circumstances – location, size, power, interest, type of government, past history and tradition – each of which will influence the actions of both states. If they fight against each other it will be for reasons especially defined for the occasion by each of them. These special reasons become the immediate, or efficient, causes of war. These immediate cause of war are contained in the first and second images. States are motivate to attack each other and to defend themselves by the reason and/or passion of the comparatively few who make policies for states and of the many more who influence the few. Some states, by virtue of their internal conditions, are both more proficient in war and more inclined to put their proficiency to the test. Variations in the factors included in the first and second images are important" (Waltz 1959, p. 232)

In other words, before reneging on it twenty years later, in 1959 Waltz was effectively advocating the neoclassical realist approach to understanding foreign policy: beginning with a structural baseline and then descending to lower levels of analysis (see Rathbun 2008, p. 309).

[14] In the book, Waltz pilots his three-image approach to explaining international politics.

Moreover, the idea that anarchy is a "permissive condition" for – not the sole determinant of – state behavior is an oft-repeated mantra in the neoclassical realist literature (see for example Taliaferro, Lobell, and Ripsman 2009, pp. 4-7; Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016, p. 44).

Most redolent of modern-day neoclassical realists, however, is the approach suggested by Arnold Wolfers, first in a 1959 article and later more fully in his 1962 *Discord and Collaboration*. In common with other above reviewed works, Wolfers argued that neither external nor internal factors alone were enough for understanding international politics;

> "[i]nstead, all the events occurring in the international arena must be conceived and understood from two angles simultaneously: one calling for concentration on the behavior of states as organized bodies of men, the other calling for concentration on human beings upon whose psychological reactions the behavior credited ultimately rests" (1959, p. 89).

Contra later Waltz (1979; 1996), Wolfers was of the idea that a true theory of international politics *had to* consider both the external and the internal at the same time (1959, p. 89). As if anticipating neorealism, he argued that, to work, a purely systemic theory has to make sweeping assumptions about the nature of the system, as well as its main actors – the states – including about how they function and what they want – i.e. it must postulate

> "a limited number of such traits which…all states are assumed to have in common. States [may be] presumed to possess a will to survive and a will to power; they [may be assumed to] live in fear of losing their possessions to others and are tempted by opportunities of acquiring new possessions…Little attention need by given to [these] traits…because they are constants or invariants, [and thus] are incapable of helping explain any difference in state behavior (Wolfers 1959, pp. 88-96, 91). [15]

As such, it "may come up with a relatively accurate analysis of national behavior in a period when [domestic conditions] remain static" – that is, the assumptions come close to reflecting reality – but is unlikely to be of much help when those conditions change (Wolfers 1959, p. 87). In other words, a purely systemic theory is likely to be inaccurate except in unchanging settings. Of course, such is the conclusion also of pioneers of neoclassical realism when it comes to structural realism: "a theory of foreign policy limited to systemic factors alone is bound to be inaccurate much of the time" (Rose 1998, p. 152; see also Zakaria 1992). It is little

[15] To be sure, Wolfers does not explicitly use the term systemic or third-image theory, using rather the label of state-as-actors theory, which considers "the acts that accounted for changes in the distribution of power, for alignments and counter-alignments and counter-alignments, for expansion and colonial conquest, for war and peace – the chief events in international affairs" to be the outcome of state interaction in the international system. As such, it can be said to denote a third-image, systemic view of international politics (1959, p. 84).

wonder then that the solution Wolfers suggests is exactly the same as the one promulgated almost 40 years later: bring internal factors in to play.

It is, however, not just the logic, but also the execution that is highly evocative of the neoclassical realist approach. As Wolfers suggests, while it is possible to expect that unit-level (psychological) factors have an impact, "it is by no means useless or misleading to take [a] relatively simple and very abstract…model as an initial working hypothesis…When an exception to this general proposition is encountered, it calls for special analysis" (1959, p. 98). In other words, an analysis of state behavior should follow the logic of deductively inferring expected standards of state behavior and inductively explaining cases where the standards do not hold. To that end, it must

> "descend below the high level of abstraction at which only 'states' are the actors, in order to give consideration to such significant factors as the inclination of dictators to overestimate their nation's power, the ability of demagogues to arouse and make use of popular dissatisfactions, or the reluctance of democratic leaders to initiate war" (Wolfers 1959, p. 100).

By this point of thesis, it should come as no surprise that this is almost word-for-word the approach of contemporary neoclassical realists, albeit the specific choice of additional unit-level variables may differ. Again, to quote Zakaria (1992, p. 197; 1998): "a good theory of foreign policy [should] first examine the effect of the international system on foreign policy [and then] be layered successively with additional causes from different levels of analysis focusing domestic regimes types, bureaucracies, and statesmen." Rathbun (2008, p. 309), though drawing on Waltz, advocates the identical logic for neoclassical realism:

> "Neorealism provides in many cases a baseline understanding of the behavior best suited to a state's systemic circumstances if the guidelines of the system are followed, but we only expect this to occur if states come together as unitary actors that perceive their situation objectively and accurately. If that is not the foreign policy chosen, Waltz advises us to look to domestic politics and ideas."

Thus, had it been articulated in the 1990s, Wolfers' approach to explaining state behavior through combining external and internal factors in a sequential, deductive-inductive, logic may well have been labeled neoclassical. This comes to show, in line with the argument of Parent and Baron (2011), that the work of the so-called classical realists is often grossly misrepresented in modern realist literature despite the two – as has just been shown – having much in common.

When it comes to Raymond Aron, the case is somewhat more complicated. Though

Battistella (2012, p. 127) evocatively argues that Aron may be considered "the forgotten founding father of neoclassical realism", at least as far as the internal theoretical boundaries are concerned, his approach may still be 'too ambitious' even for contemporary neoclassical realists. This is so mostly due to the fact that Aron, although certainly sharing an interest in analyzing state behavior at the systems level, stays shy of ascribing the ultimate causal power on state behavior to either external (as in structural, neoclassical, and some classical realism) or internal factors (Battistella 2012, p. 126). In fact, Aron (1966, pp. 95-99) writes that though the "distribution of forces in the diplomatic field is *one* of the causes that determine the grouping of states…[t]he conduct of states towards each other is not controlled by the relation of forces alone." Rather, as he continues, it is equally necessary to "also grasp the determinants of the behavior of the principal actors – in other words, the nature of the states and the objectives sought by those in power (Aron 1966, p. 99). This is an important difference from both classical realists like Wolfers and contemporary neoclassical realists. Whereas these accept, at least as necessary starting point, the primacy of the external, Aron essentially argues that the effects of external factors cannot be logically divorced from internal ones, as the latter co-determine the former: a "theory of international relations does not entail, even in the abstract, a discrimination between endogenous and exogenous variables" (Aron 1972, p. 371, quoted in Hoffman 1985, p. 16). In other words, Aron proposes the use of the *interactive* model over the *additive* one (as suggested by Fordham; see section 2.3.3).

In the next subsection, which concerns itself with discussing the methodological boundaries, this point will be explored in greater detail. For the present purposes, it suffices to say that Aron understands the combination of external and internal factors in a way that is more nuanced than that employed by modern neoclassical realists. This is perhaps an inevitable consequence of how Aron sought to approach studying international relations in the first place. In contrast to most realist scholars – both within his peers and subsequent generations – Aron was skeptical about the idea of developing such a theory of international relations that would lay out universal laws and causal mechanisms governing state behavior (Battistella 2012, p. 120). In his view, a theory of international relations may serve as a "conceptual analysis" of the international system, the objective of which being the definition of its "essential features…a list of the main variables…[or] certain hypotheses about [its] operation" (Aron 1967, pp. 192-193; Hoffman 1985, pp. 14-15). However, in Aron's view, such theory alone cannot explain why states behave the way they do: rather, only

> "the concrete study can help make the behavior of the actors, their calculations of forces, and the stakes they give to their conflict intelligible. In order to understand an international system one cannot simply grasp the rules of the game among abstract entities or variables called *x*, *y*, or z; one must know what the distinctive features of well-differentiated national states are" (Hoffman 1985, p. 15).

In other words, the international system is simply *too* complex for it to be grasped through the prism of objective laws, as in natural science or economics (Battistella 2012, p. 120). On the contrary: in Aron's view

> "[t]he course of international relations is eminently historical, in all senses of the term: its changes are incessant; its systems are diverse and fragile; it is affected by all economic, technical, and moral transformations; decisions made by one man or several men put millions of men into action and launch irreversible changes, whose consequences are carried out indefinitely; and the actors, citizens or rulers, are forever subjected to apparently contradictory obligations" (Aron 1967, p. 205).

Thus, to be of help in understanding the problematique of international relations, a theory cannot stand abstractly on its own, but must always be 'plunged', inserted into history – an approach Aron dubbed 'historical sociology' (Hoffman 1985, p. 16; Battistella 2012, p. 120). This goes some way towards explaining why it makes, in Aron's view, little sense to speak of any a priori deduced hierarchy of determinants of state behavior – something modern neoclassical realists are often guilty of when they start their explanations with the effects of relative distribution of power (Rose 1998). Therefore, though it is tempting to paint Aron as the neoclassical realism's 'forgotten father', a deeper exploration reveals that Aron's logic of combing external and internal factors *differs* from the one identified by Rose four decades later. Perhaps, the case could be made that present-day neoclassical realists might learn a thing or two from Aron's historical sociology; however, as things stand, neoclassical realism's approach is far more reminiscent of that of Wolfers, Herz, or even 1959 Waltz.

3.1.1.2 Methodological and ontological boundaries

The previous subsection has shown that systematic combination of external and internal variables is not as germane to classical realists as it is sometimes portrayed to be. This subsection, concerning itself with the methodological and ontological boundaries, takes this discussion a step further, asking *what exactly* the internal and external variables in question are. In Rosean neoclassical realism, the case is as follows: external factors, usually the relative distribution of power, constitute the independent variable; internal factors – such as leader

perception, state extractive ability, or domestic state structure – constitute the intervening variable(s); and the dependent variable is a state's foreign policy. With classical realism, as will now be seen, the case is not strikingly dissimilar, albeit significant nuances exist.

Although in the conceptual part, intervening variables deserved the first spot, in light of the preceding discussion, it seems apposite to begin with **independent variables**. The main question in this regard is whether the classical realists under discussion resemble neoclassical realists in treating relative power as an independent variable that is both objective and that takes precedence before all other influences on state behavior. Although it may not be dressed in such clear-cut or mechanistic manner, generally speaking, this seems to be the case. Wolfers, for instance, mentions that "factors external to the actor can become determinants only as they affect the mind, heart, and will of the decision-maker" or that such factors "can affect the behavior of a nation only as specific persons perceive and interpret these conditions", seemingly suggesting that there is no objective reality and that external and internal factors co-determine each other (1962, p. 42). However, elsewhere, Wolfers is quite specific that such external factors are, indeed, objective and thus take causal precedence before how they are perceived. As he writes,

> "The psychology of the actors in the international arena, instead of operating in limitless space, is confined in its impact on policy by the limitations that external conditions the distribution of power, geographical location, demography, and economic conditions place on the choices open to governments in the conduct of foreign relations. Moreover, the international position of the country goes far in defining its interests and in determining, thereby, the outcome of the rational calculus of interest by which statesmen may generally be assumed to be guided" (1962, p. 42).

There is quite a lot to unpack here. For one thing, Wolfers clearly states that both state behavior and interests are largely affected by its international position, i.e. not, as constructivists would have it, that interests co-determine how a state perceives its international position. Moreover, Wolfers provides a list of external variables that have influence over state behavior; most of these, however, would fall under a broad definition of relative power (following the elements-of-power approach advocated by most neoclassical realists; see Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016, p. 44). In this sense, therefore, Wolfers does not much deviate from modern-day neoclassical realism. Finally, and importantly, it is clear that for Wolfers, there is an objective external reality that takes causal precedence before how this reality is perceived by individual leaders. He enunciates it even more clearly when he writes that "[e]nvironmental factors…operate through a prism, represented by the personal traits of the actor, that may

deflect or *distort*, *transform,* or *reflect*, these environmental factors in a variety of ways, depending on the internal structure of the prism" and that national policy makers can, on balance, be expected to rationally respond to "existing and fairly correctly external conditions" (Wolfers 1962, pp. 42-44; italics not in the original). In other words, not only is there an objective external reality having primary influence on state behavior, but also the role of leaders perceiving this reality should not be expected to distort it to any large extent.

Waltz takes a similar approach. Although positing it in less deterministic terms than in his 1979 book, it is the spirit of his 1959 book that "only international anarchy has the power to explain why wars *may* occur", the individual and state levels are incomplete on their own Weber 2020, p. 19). Waltz does not specifically mention the variable of perception, but is quite clear that there is an external reality that individual leaders must reckon with: "[n]o matter how good their intentions, policy makers must bear in mind the implications of the third image" – including the facts of anarchy, relative power, and self-interested pursuit of interests by all actors (Waltz 1959, p. 238). Further suggesting that there is an objective external reality, Waltz writes that a foreign policy based on external, third-image factors "embodies…a reasoned response to the world around us" or that the external constitutes a "framework of world politics" without which unit-level variables are of little importance (1959, p. 238). Here Waltz is in an almost complete accord with Herz, who, similarly to Wolfers, writes that

> "[p]olicy makers do not act in a void; they are confronted with conditions (partly man-made, to be sure, but once made, *faits acomplis*) which form the framework in which they have to place their activities, even though they may wish to change the conditions" (1959, p. 8).

Moreover, when he concerns himself with the impacts of bipolarity, as well as the impact of nuclear weapons, it is clear that Herz puts a premium on the objective dynamics of relative power, with perception – though an important component of his deterrence model – playing only a secondary role (1959, pp. 111-223).

As alluded to above, things become more complicated with Aron. In common with Wolfers, Waltz, and Herz, Aron acknowledges the importance of the impact of relative distribution of power (forces) on state behavior; however, he refuses to grant this factor – or any, for that matter – causal primacy. As Battistella (2012, p. 126) puts it, Aron appreciates the "difficulty of establishing univocal causality from systemic factors to unit-level behavior precisely because major actors as much shape the system as they are determined by it." This co-constitution and co-determination is clear from Aron's discussion concerning the problematique of so-called 'homogeneous' and 'heterogeneous' systems. Here, in an almost

constructivist manner, Aron argues that the effects of the international system on state behavior can be grasped only in light of grasping also "the nature of the states and the objectives sought by those in power" (1966, p. 99). In other words, without denying the possible existence of an external reality, Aron posits that this reality has not objective, automatic effect on state behavior, because the effect, in part, depends on the motives of the states in question. The difference between homogeneous and heterogeneous systems is telling: whereas the former, thanks to the similarity of its main actors, may lead to greater stability, the latter – where "states are organized according to different principles and appeal to contradictory values" – often produce the exact opposite (Aron 1966, pp. 99-101; see also Hoffman 1985, p. 16). As a result, it is impossible to deduce the effects of the international system without first understanding who the system's main actors are and what they want.[16] In other words, in Aron's view, domestic and international variables should not be treated additively, but rather, as Fordham suggests more than four decades later, interactively: "[t]he nature of international threats is determined to a great extent by the interests of the domestic coalition that governs the state" (2009, p. 251).

Despite this similarity, however, it should be noted that Aron's approach does not constitute the perfect archetype for Fordham's model: whereas the latter restricts itself to using the interaction between external and internal factors to explain foreign policy, Aron uses it rather to make claims about international politics (see discussion in Fordham 2009, p. 279). This notion will be taken up further below, as both dependent variables of classical realists and later also Fordham's own work, are discussed. For now, it suffices to say that Aron once again deviates from his classical realist peers by ruling out the possibility of one, primary and objective independent variable.

That said, the picture should now be clearer regarding how the classical realists in question, on balance, position their independent, systemic variables vis-à-vis other, domestic and internal variables. It logically follows that the next analytical step should entail discussing what these so-called **intervening variables** – as they are referred to by modern neoclassical realists – are about in themselves. In his article, Rose (1998) posits that neoclassical realists concern themselves mostly with the perception of political leaders, extractive strength of state apparatuses, and the structure of state and domestic society. In this, pre-Waltzian realists are not drastically dissimilar. In fact, from the authors here reviewed, two similar 'intervening

[16] A similar concept is actually found also in Wolfers, who speaks of so-called 'amity' and 'enmity' between a system's main actors (1962, ch. 2). The difference is, however, that Wolfers takes these concept to merely 'reflect' and otherwise objective external reality in the international system.

variables' stand out: the perception and personality of individual leaders, and types of regimes.

Begin with the individual level. Here, two authors are of importance: Waltz and, especially, Wolfers, who frames his approach in a 'more neoclassical' fashion. In fact, Waltz' discussion regarding individual leaders does not have as much to do with the leaders' perceptions as it does with their nature. In a statement that could easily be found in the works of Morgenthau or Niebuhr, Waltz argues that when it comes to locating the causes of war at the individual level, one should look to factors like "selfishness…misdirected aggressive impulses…[or] stupidity" (1959, p. 16). In other words, one should consider an individual leader's "moral-intellectual outlook or…psychic-social behavior" (Waltz 1959, p. 18). Though it could probably be inferred that such traits or aspects of human existence somehow interact with factors at the international level – after all, Waltz posits that human activities exist within such a framework (see above) – he is not specific as to how exactly they should be factored in an analysis combining external and internal factors. In other words, though the rationale for employing such variable is understandable – quoting not only Niebuhr and Morgenthau, but also St. Augustine or Spinoza, Waltz draws on a long tradition of such approaches (see 1959, ch. 2) – the logic of deployment of the individual variable is not really clear.

Wolfers, on the other hand, offers a more refined model. Like Waltz, he places the premium on the individual, but focuses rather on how individual leaders and policy makers experience and perceive external stimuli, on the basis of which they tailor their policies. In fact, Wolfers suggests an approach very much like that of neoclassical realists, acknowledging the primacy of the external but eschewing external determinism:

> "Every decision or choice of policy is the necessary result of all its antecedents. But this proposition in no way implies that the decisionmakers were not 'free' to act as they did. The elements internal to the actor that went into the process of 'making up his mind' – his preferences and prejudices, his will power and determination, his assessment of risks and opportunities – are included among the factors. As a result the actor's choice among alternative courses of action…becomes merged with the determinants external to him" (1962, p. 38).

In other words, external determinants of foreign policy impact on state behavior through the perception of those in charge; though they are objectively out there, it is how they are understood by individual policy makers – through their experience, biases, and personalities – that has the real bearing on states' foreign policy decisions. Be it in Rose's (1998) rudimentary treatment or Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell (2016) – arguably the most comprehensive take at neoclassical realism to date – this exact idea features in much of the extant neoclassical

literature. That is, however, not the only similarity: on top of including the variable of leader perception, Wolfers also presents a logic of deployment of this variable – that is, specifying when and how it exerts more, and when less, influence – that bears resemblance with the modern approach. In his view, differences in the personalities of individual state leaders across a number of states are likely to have the most impact on state behavior when "less than national survival is at stake" – i.e. when there is less 'compulsion' from the external pressures or opportunities (Wolfers 1959, p. 96). In contrast, when there is a lot of such compulsion – as in the case of war – the impact of differing leader personalities are expected to play a more diminished role, resulting in greater conformity and likeness across states (Wolfers 1959, pp. 96-97). In other words, the stronger the external determinant, the less scope there is for the individual, and the more states are likely to act in accordance with deductions from a purely systemic theory – and vice versa (Wolfers 1959, p. 97). Wright expresses this logic similarly when he argues that "in time of peace governments tend to pursue policies, springing from the domestic public opinion, which neglect the balance of power" (1942b, p. 827). Finally, the logic roughly corresponds to the distinction between restrictive and permissive strategic environments employed in Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell (2016).

The other intervening variable featuring, to a varying degree of specificity, in the pre-Waltzian realist literature is that of regime types. Herz (1959, p. 10), for example, suggests that the different character and structure of domestic political regimes – such as fascist or communist – may have relevance for the states' foreign policies, but does not elaborate on how exactly that might be the case. Similarly, Wolfers (1962, pp. 17-18) opines that research into the "behavioral peculiarities of such types of countries as those with dictatorial or democratic governments, with Asian or Western, Bolshevik or bourgeois elites, with predominantly military or civilian regimes, with a fanatical or complacent public" might prove a fruitful approach for building a theory of state behavior. Moreover, Wright's two volumes (1942a; 1942b) are full of allusions to a variety of regimes – usually totalitarian – but stay shy of conceptually developing, or integrating, them into a general model.

Waltz (1959) develops the idea of regime type at more length, reserving two chapters (3 and 4) in his book for considerations regarding "the internal organization of states". Here, again citing numerous theoretical lineages (from liberalism to Marxism), Waltz provides a solid conceptual understanding of how the state as such may function as an intervening variable. As possible factors, he includes, for example, types of government (e.g. despotic), internal mechanism of domestic governments (e.g. checks and balances), or claims of the individual states, like irredentism (Waltz 1959, pp. 82-83). As with the individual level, however, Waltz

does not indicate how exactly his state-level variables should interact with external factors.

Finally, although – as has been established – he does not discriminate between independent and intervening variables per se, Aron also operates with regime type as a factor. In fact, according to Hoffman (1985, p. 16), considerations regarding the nature of a state's regime were of the utmost importance for Aron, something that set him apart from his peers at the time.[17] This is because, in Aron's view, the importance of domestic regimes resides not only in that they determine both the objectives and behavior of states themselves, but also the nature of the international system as a whole (1966, p. 95). In other words, it is the "similarity or, on the contrary, the hostile of the regimes" between the great powers of any given system that serve as the basis for whether the system is either homogeneous or heterogeneous (Aron 1983, p. 452, quoted in Hoffman 1985, p. 16). However, as his discussion concerning the nature of regimes and the system of the 19th century Europe attests, Aron did not see this feature of international politics in simple or mechanistic terms, as homogeneity may have existed also among regimes that, at the face of it, appear quite heterogeneous, and vice versa (1966, pp. 99-104). Thus, it should be of little surprise that Aron did not provide many specifics as to how the regime variable should be deployed, when it exerts the most influence, or how exactly it interacts with external variables.

That said, a couple of words to summarize the so-called intervening variables in the works of the classical realists under scrutiny are in order. First, these works feature two main intervening variables – individual leaders personalities and perceptions, and regime types. Second, as a logical consequence, the intervening variables can be said to be *both* material and ideational: though material conditions are always present in classical realist literature, as much is derived from relative power, individual ideas about international relations, as well as regime ideologies – both crucial components of the two intervening variables – clearly fall under the ideational category.[18] Finally, though the choice (rationale) of given intervening variables can be seen as historically justified (see below, empirical and geographical boundaries), the logic of deployment is, bar minor exceptions, mostly unspecified or missing altogether – something similar to the common charge against contemporary neoclassical realists that they use their intervening variables haphazardly.

[17] As Hoffman further explains, Aron was one of the few 'realists' at the time who argued that the foreign policy of the Soviet Union significantly differed from that of the Tsarist Russia – a point worth heeding perhaps also at the time of writing of this thesis.

[18] Aron puts this clearly when he writes that "ideas and emotions influence the decisions of the actors" (1966, p. 99) or when Wolfers (1962, pp. 88-89) talks of human "desires and intentions, preferences and feelings of friendship or hatred" and that men "can be tempted or provoked, can overestimate or underestimate their own country's relative to the power of other states".

Before closing the variables discussion, it is necessary to also mention the **dependent variable** – that is, what it is that the realists in question seek to explain. As elaborated on in the conceptual part, modern neoclassical realism began as a theoretical approach to explaining foreign policy, with some works suggesting that it be used as a theory of international politics / outcomes only recently. When it comes to pre-Waltzian realists, however, it seems that their objective as a theory of international politics all along. For example, it clear from both the subtitle of his 1962 book – 'Essays on International Politics' – as well as the discussions in the book's introduction and the more theoretical chapters that Wolfers' interest lay in providing the grounds for a "comprehensive theory of international politics" or a "theory of behavior in the international arena" (pp. 8-9; 44). Foreign policy, to be sure, plays a major role in the book; however, it seems secondary to, or a necessary precondition for, the broader goal of building a general theory of international politics that integrates both external and internal factors (Wolfers 1962, p. 9; ch. 3). Herz, for hist part, is even more unequivocal that his work concerns itself with the subject of "theory of international politics" (1959, p. 3;). Similarly, in the preface to a 2001 edition of his 1959 work, Waltz contends that the book "did not present a theory of international politics; it did, however, lay the foundations for one" (p. ix). Finally, although formally rejecting the possibility of a theory of international relations, it is clear from his 1966 *Peace and War* that international politics or outcomes are Aron's main concern: not only is it, somewhat ironically, in the book's subtitle, but also from the fact that the book's interest "tends toward the rational formulation of diplomatic-strategic conduct" (p. 337).

Thus, it can be seen that pre-Waltzian realists concerned themselves with developing, or at least contemplating the possibility of developing, a theory of international politics / outcomes, not foreign policy per se. Importantly, in doing so, they explicitly acknowledged the importance of both external and internal factors in developing such a theory – something Waltz would later reject as inimical to the endeavor (1979; 1996). In that sense, they constitute a valuable precedent in the realist literature, to which neoclassical realists – perhaps sobering up from the lingering influence of Waltz's distinction between theories of foreign policy and international politics (see section 2.3.3 and discussions below) – are only now returning (notably, as will be seen, Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016).

3.1.1.3 Empirical and geographical boundaries

Having reviewed the methodological and ontological boundaries of pre-Waltzian realism, it now remains for this subsection to concern itself briefly with the question of empirical and geographical boundaries. As is often the case with realist literature, the works of these realists

have as their overarching theme the problematique of war and stability. When it comes to concrete empirical and geographical focus, however, two patterns can be discerned in the works: the nascent specter of the Cold War and the lingering influence of the Second World War – each serving a different purpose in the literature. In terms of the first pattern, which includes discussions concerning the bipolar distribution of power and the role of nuclear weapons, the purpose can be dubbed *future-looking* or *policy-oriented*. This is perhaps the primary purpose of the considered literature: the works seek to develop a theory of international politics that would make sense of the 'new' post-WWII reality. Herz (1959, p. 11) makes this point clearly when he writes that the "objective of this study [is] to find out to what extent the traditional concepts of international politics are still applicable and at what points they must be reevaluated in light of changed conditions" – the conditions, of course being, the advent of the "atomic age" and the bipolar structure underlying the emergent Cold War order, including the problematique of deterrence. Likewise, even if not as explicitly, Wolfers' book is deeply concerned with the relevance of theoretical understanding of international relations for the upcoming age: "[i]n our era of cold war and nuclear deterrence the threat of force, implicit or explicitly, is a constant accompaniment of the foreign policies of the major powers" (1962, pp. 107-108). In the same vein, Aron explores the issues of bipolarity and nuclear deterrence at length in Part three of his book, titled 'The Global System in the Thermonuclear Age' (1966, pp. 369-572). Finally, although his 1959 is highly theoretical, Waltz, too, reflects on the prospects of war and stability in the light of the 'new world order' (1959, pp. 234-238). As a result, it is of little wonder that the authors' main geographical loci of interest are the two Cold War superpowers – the US and the USSR – as well as, to a lesser extent, France and Britain (sometimes also Europe as such), China, and the Non-Aligned Movement.

The second empirical-geographical pattern in the literature is more historical, focusing primarily but not exclusively, on the Second World War. The purpose of this pattern can, for the purposes of this thesis, be labelled *backward-looking* or *theory-oriented*. This pattern of focus may seem less obvious, especially compared to the first one; however, it is at least equally as important, because it informs, and serves as the basis for, developing the theoretical approaches that are used to analyze the Cold War problematique in the first place. Although the authors undoubtedly draw on a number of existing theoretical approaches and engage in, what is essentially, deductive theory-building, it can be noticed that their approach has, at least in part, also aspects of induction. This is so especially in relation to their two main intervening variables – individual leaders and regime types – where the immediate experience of the WWII may be seen as a direct inspiration for their preference. Wolfers, for example, uses the case of

pre-WWII Germany and the role of Hitler to corroborate both the importance of domestic factors in general and that of individual leader personalities and perceptions in particular:

> "Before Hitler came into power, Germany, under democratic leaders, was already demanding redress of certain grievances. Yet had the democratic leaders remained in power, they might well have refused to satisfy their demands by means of war, even if Germany had become as powerful as it did under Hitler – or as powerful as Hitler, in his megalomania, believed her to be" (Wolfers 1959, p. 100).

Similarly, Waltz (1959, p. 238) uses Hitler to illustrate both the importance of anarchy as the underlying cause of war and also the fact that one such leader may be enough for a war to start:

> "If everyone's strategy depends on everyone else's, then the Hitlers determine in part the action, or better reaction, of those whose ends are worthy and whose means are fastidious. No matter, how good their intentions, policy makers must bear in mind the implications of the third image."

The influence of the Second World War can likewise be seen in the regime variable. Here, Waltz (1959, pp. 82-83) holds that states may make territorial claims based on "geographic or economic deprivations", with states possibly arguing that they have yet to attain their "natural frontiers, that such frontiers are necessary to its security, that war to extend the state to its deserved compass is justified or even necessary" – all common themes of the Nazi Germany rhetoric.[19] In discussing the role of domestic variables vis-à-vis the systemic ones, Aron also uses the examples of fascist and Nazi regimes of pre-war Europe:

> "Beyond these calculations of force, we must take into account the intelligence of the high command and the conduct of the war by the statesmen on either side, and lastly the adherence of the people to the regime, their resolution when put to the test…Would the German and Italian people enthusiastically follow their Führer and their Duce? Were the people in democracies capable of facing the horrors of battle?" (1966, p. 66).

Finally, it is fascist and totalitarian regimes that Herz mentions when discussing the necessity of investigating unit-level variables (1959, p. 10).

Thus, it can be seen that though the Cold War and nuclear deterrence may be the primary topics of the classical realist authors here presented, the influence of the Second World War – still fresh at the time many of the works were written – features heavily in how the author's shape the aspects of their theoretical outlooks. In fact, it may not be too far-fetched to

[19] Waltz himself argues that these and other "possible variations on this theme have been made familiar by the 'have-not' arguments so popular in this [20th] century" (1959, p. 83).

assume that the elevated role of Hitler as the instigator of the whole conflict, the hitherto-unseen nature of fascist and totalitarian regimes, as well as the resulting scale of atrocities of the war, prompted these classical realists to ascribe more significance to the two intervening variables than they would have in a different context. This may be more so given the fact that many of the authors, being emigrees from Europe to the US, had experienced either the war or the run-up thereto firsthand.[20] For instance, Herz was a German Jew who fled from the Nazi regime in 1938 and subsequently found a position at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton University before moving to other institutions (Holley 2006). Wolfers, originally a Swiss academic, also moved to the US in the 1930s, where he became a professor at Yale (Martin 2008). Aron, a French Jew, did not go to the US when the war started but rather joined the French air force before eventually finding refuge in London; however, he returned to France as the war ended to teach at ENA, Sorbonne and other places (Encyclopedia Britannica 2022). Waltz, for his part, was not a European emigree; however, as a US citizen, he was drafted in 1944 and took part in the World War II as well (Martin 2013).

Though it cannot be claimed with certainty that the immediate experience of the Second World War – both historically and personally – caused these classical realists to tailor their theoretical approaches the way they did, the influence of the cataclysmic episode can certainly be discerned in the works. As a result, they come much closer to the works of modern neoclassical realists than to the tradition of structural realism which, having originated firmly in and from the setting of the Cold War, lost much of realism's initial post-WWII ambition in favor of the so-called parsimony. As will be discussed in the next section, however, it was not long before it was realized that structural realism, as a theory in itself, was of limited practical use, and that inhibitions would once again give way to more ambition.

[20] In fact, most so-called classical realists – including Kissinger, Morgenthau, Spykman – were Europeans who fled to the US before or in the wake of the Second World War, and the influence of this experience is discernable in their work as well.

3.1.2 Discontent with structural realism and the end of the Cold War (1980s-2000s)

In many ways, 1979 was a watershed year. The era of superpower détente came to an end as the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, Iran was swept away by an Islamic revolution, and Kenneth Waltz published his seminal *Theory of International Politics* – the book that, without much exaggeration, can be said to have changed realism forever (Molloy 2006, p. 121). As was explained at a great length in subsection 2.3.1.1, in the book, Waltz put forward a parsimonious theory of international outcomes based exclusively on a limited number of systemic/structural variables that disregarded the use of domestic, unit-level variables and rejected the possibility of being used to explain foreign policy. It is not necessary to review again the details of the theory. Nevertheless, it pays to underline that the logic of structural realism cannot be disentangled from the Cold War environment in which it originated, and that it was exactly this logic that – despite the approach's initial popularity ensured that Waltz' structural realism soon became a source of discontent within the field of International Relations theory, not least as the Cold War itself came to an end. As this section seeks to outline, this discontent would over time spawn a wave of theoretical refinements of structural realism, incrementally paving way for what would come to be known as neoclassical realism.

Structural realism was, in more than one way, a product of, and for, its age. The relative stability and closedness of the bipolar world order allowed Waltz to build a highly general and abstract theory that gained credence due to its alleged ability to elegantly explain, and make predictions about, the most pressing international relations issue of the day – the dynamics of the US-Soviet competition (see Wohlforth 2010, pp. 11-12; and Weber 2020, p. 15).[21] In fact, most of Waltz's central theoretical claims – including "that multipolar systems will be less stable than bipolar systems; that interdependence will be lower in bipolarity than multipolarity; and that…hegemony by any single state is unlikely or even impossible" – spoke directly to the ongoing superpower competition (Elman 2008, p. 19). To be sure, structural realism was far from unchallenged in the IR community: Ashley, for example, argued fiercely that structural realism amounted to an "orrery of errors…a self-enclosed, self-affirming joining of statist, utilitarian, positivist, and structuralist commitments" that functioned more like an ideology than a theory (1984, p. 228; for other criticism see Keohane 1986; Spegele 1987; Walker 1987; or Schroeder 1994). That said, the key point is that in the 1980s, the circumstances were

[21] In fact, as Wohlforth (2010, p. 11) writes: "No sooner had Waltz published his book than the Cold War rivalry heated up, driving the world back into intense great-power security competition and reinforcing the sense that bipolarity was indeed a powerful structural force."

perhaps favorable enough for Waltz' theory to become the field's "dominant school of thought" (Buzan, Jones and Little 1993, p. 1).

However, it was soon realized that despite its ability to provide answers to a number of general and fairly abstract questions, pure structural realism was of limited practical use: as Wohlforth aptly explains,

> "even in the 1980s, it was clear that neorealism left a great many questions about international security unanswered: why alliances form; why arms races begin and end; why states create international institutions; why the Cold War began; why the super-power rivalry waxed and waned; and many more. The overwhelming majority of scholars seeking to address those questions not surprisingly found Waltz's theory – constructed to address different and usually much more general questions – insufficient" (2010, pp. 11-12).

In other words, even those who took a favorable view of Waltz' structural realism came to the conclusion that the theory did not provide the conceptual tools needed for the analysis of a great number of real-life phenomena. [22] This was the case especially within the field of Security Studies, where structural realism proved inimical for the study of much else but the stability of the international system in general (Buzan and Hansen 2009, ch. 4-6).

Thus, it is no wonder than not long after the *Theory*'s publication there were already attempts – notably offensive and defensive realism – to turn Waltz' theory into a more usable approach (Wohlforth 2010, p. 12). This trend, slowly gathering steam, was further accelerated as the Cold War itself abruptly came to an end (Elman 2008, p. 20). For one thing, the moment did much to undermine structural realism's theoretical claims, as it turned out that the theory had neither predicted nor could satisfactorily explain the war's sudden termination: Waltz's himself, as late as in 1988 infamously wrote that the Cold War was "firmly rooted in the [bipolar] structure of postwar international politics, and will last as long as that structure endures" (1988, p. 628; see Molloy 2006, p. 124). Yet the Cold War's end meant more than simply reputational costs for structural realism. It also gave way to a world that would grow increasingly complex in terms of empirical issues, with regional and intra-state dynamics – both outside of structural realism's purview – gaining analytical significance (Buzan and Waever 2003, p. 3; Elman 2008, p. 20; see also Buzan and Hansen 2009, ch. 6-8).

[22] This view is expressed well by Randall Schweller, who writes that "Waltz brilliantly said everything that can be usefully said about neorealism…There is nothing left for neorealists to do that Waltz has not already done" (2003, p. 313). This should not be taken as to signify that no research development took place within the framework of pure structural realism. For example, the debate about the importance of relative vs absolute gains in respect to international cooperation is one example of research developing the pure structural realist program (see Powell 1991; Snidal 1991; or Grieco, Powell and Snidal 1993).

As a result, by the time the 1990s came, structural realism was a in a serious crisis. To be sure, Waltz himself opined that structural realism retained its significance even after the Cold War (see Waltz 2000; see also Gaddis 1992). However, it is hard not to notice that his call went somewhat unheeded, as many scholars opted for theoretical approaches that would, in their view, better reflect the new empirical reality: liberalism and constructivism in International Relations and a score of approaches – including constructivism, post-colonialism, human security, post-structuralism, critical security studies, and feminism – in Security Studies (Elman 2008, p. 19; Buzan and Hansen 2009, ch. 7). Yet despite that, not everyone wished to abandon realism altogether: though its shortcomings were clear, there was a group of scholars that believed that the way forward lay in advancing, not detracting from, Waltz's structural approach. Crucially, it was this fairly heterogeneous group – constisting of adherents of the already-underway offensive and defensive approaches, proponents of the Gilpinian version of structural realism, as well as those seeking to amend realism by combining it with other theoretical approaches – that laid the foundations (no less heterogeneous) for the neoclassical realist approach. Therefore, it is the objective of this section to use the prism of this thesis' four conceptual categories and shed more light on the variety of sources that pioneered such methods that would later come to be associated with the neoclassical way. It is hoped that so doing may further contribute to dispelling the simplistic Rosean mythology that neoclassical realism as an approach was somehow novel, unique, and easily separable from other existing approaches, such as defensive realism. By the same token, doing so should likewise dispel the myth that neoclassical realism equals, simply, structural plus classical realism.

3.1.2.1 Internal theoretical boundaries

Before Rose's 1998 article, there was no neoclassical realism; rather, there were various streams within the structural realist traditions that sought to refine Waltz's approach by loosening, adjusting, or further developing the school's basic assumptions, including about anarchy, the importance relative power, state motives, and the third-image primacy as such. To be sure, the fact that a number of proponents of these streams would come to be re-branded as neoclassical by Rose – and that *some* would duly internalize the brand – may create the impression that neoclassical realism was a logical or perhaps inevitable outcome of the endeavor. However, such view – on top of being dubious – would run the risk inadvertently glossing over the diversity of approaches that preceded the neoclassical one. To avoid such contingency, this subsection deploys the prism of internal theoretical boundaries to shed more light on the many ways in which realist authors sought to keep structural realism relevant after

(and before) the end of the Cold War, and that served as the stepping stones for neoclassical realism. As such, the key questions to be addressed in this subsection are what these approaches adopt from and seek to change about structural realism, and, if so, whether they do so by drawing on any of the streams of pre-Waltzian realism. Inevitably, therefore, much attention will be again devoted to discussing the issue of external and internal factors, as well as their combination.

As already alluded to, one such approach, popular within the field of International Security Studies, consisted of two outgrowths of structural realism – offensive and defensive realism – both of which, as will be seen, independently contributed to neoclassical realism's origination. Let us begin with the first of these variants. **Offensive realism** or 'aggressive realism', at least in its pure form – that is, in the works of John Mearsheimer – is perhaps the closer of the two to pure structural realism. Echoing Waltz, Mearsheimer's offensive realism also starts with the basic assumption that the "keys to war and peace lie more in the structure of the international system than in the nature of individual states" (Mearsheimer 1990, p. 12). It also assumes that the international system is anarchic in nature, a fact that means both that the survival of states is always endangered and that in seeking to ensure their survival, states - being rational actors – must depend only on themselves (Mearsheimer 1990, p. 12; and 1994, p. 10). However, Mearsheimer takes Waltz's theory further when he makes explicit assumptions about what kind of state behavior the anarchical structure conditions. Though Waltz considers the structure to be the most important variable explaining patterns of state behavior, he does not suggest any particular kind of behavior to result therefrom; on the other hand, offensive realism assumes that "the international system fosters conflict and aggression" (Lynn-Jones 1998, p. 157). This is because, in Mearsheimer's view,

> "[s]tates seek to survive under anarchy by maximizing their power relative to other states, in order to maintain the means for self-defense. Relative power, not absolute levels of power, matters most to the states. Thus, states seek opportunities to weaken potential adversaries and improve their relative power position" (1990, p. 12).

It is, however, not simply the anarchical ordering alone that causes states to behave as essentially power-maximizers: as Mearsheimer explains in his 1994 article, and later more fully in his 2001 book, states must act the way the theory predicts because they can never be certain of other state's intentions and, especially as they possess military offensive capabilities, always regard others with suspicion (1994, pp. 10-11; 2001, pp. 3, 32-35). In essence, therefore, Mearsheimer's offensive realism departs from pure structural realism by adding further

structural-level variables, including suspicion or fear and offensive capabilities. Of these, it is the latter that is of consequence for the present discussion: whereas for Waltz, it is only the relative distribution of power that operates as the primary causal factor of state behavior, in Mearsheimer's view, it is likewise the character of the (military) power in question that accounts for state actions. Arguing along the lines of the offense-defense theory (see below), Mearsheimer posits that two factors must be considered when explaining when and why states go to war: "the distribution of power between states, and the nature of the military power available to them" (1990, pp. 12-13). As he explains,

> "The distribution of power between states tells us how well-positioned states are to commit aggression, and whether other states are able to check their aggression. This distribution is a function of the number of poles in the system, and their relative power. The nature of military power directly affects the costs, risks, and benefits of going to war. If the military weaponry available guarantees that warfare will be very destructive, states are more likely to be deterred by the cost of war. If available weaponry favors the defense over the offense, aggressors are more likely to be deterred…If available weaponry tends to equalize the relative power of states, aggressors are discouraged from going to war. If military weaponry makes it easier to estimate the relative power of states, unwarranted optimism is discouraged and wars of miscalculation are less likely" (Mearsheimer 1990, p. 13).

Thus, offensive realism can be said to differ from Waltz' structural realism in that it posits more concrete assumptions about the nature of anarchy and the proclivity of state actions, as well as by putting forward two, not one, causal variables. That said, Mearsheimer's approach nevertheless remains avowedly structuralist, leaving little space for internal and unit-level factors. For one thing, though he employs the logic of offense-defense balance theory, and on occasion mentions that states may "miscalculate from time to time because they invariably make…decisions on the basis of imperfect information", he does not, in contrast to proponents of the theory, include leader perception an important factor in his analysis (Mearsheimer 2001, p. 38; see Wohlforth 2010, p. 16). For another, though he likewise makes an occasional nod to internal aspects, such as 'hyper-nationalism', he stops short of ascribing them any real independent power, often relegating them to the position of mere "consequence[s] of the international system" (see Mearsheimer 1990, p. 12).[23] Therefore, Mearsheimer's offensive

[23] He makes the point when explaining the wars of the pre-1945 era and the relative stability of the post-1945 era: "Domestic factors – most notably hyper-nationalism – also helped cause the wars of the pre-1945 era, and the domestic structures of post-1945 European states have been more conducive to peace, but these domestic factors were less important than the character and distribution of military power between states. Moreover, hyper-nationalism was caused in large part by security competition among the European states, which compelled

realism, differences notwithstanding, has still more in common with structural realism than it does with either pre-Waltzian or neoclassical realism.

Yet though Mearsheimer's offensive realism as such may not bear much resemblance to neoclassical realism, there were other theoreticians within the offensive realist tradition who, in seeking to develop the theory further, consciously chose to both further extend the external, structural level of analysis, as well as to combine it with internal factors. Among these, two in particular stand out – not least because they have since then been effectively rebranded as neoclassical realists – Randall Schweller and Fareed Zakaria. Before reviewing these two authors, it should nevertheless be noted that neither fits perfectly the offensive realist label – especially in the case of the latter, it will be seen that, despite similarities, the approach builds rather on the tradition of classical realism. For the sake of practical organization, however, the thesis chooses to keep with established practice and classify the two as offensive realists (see footnotes in Taliaferro 2000, pp. 128-130).

As will be seen in section 3.1.3, after the turn of the millennium, Schweller's work would go on to become one of the staples of the neoclassical realist program, formally combining external and internal variables. In the 1990s, however, Schweller's approach to rectifying structural realism was more modest, extending – rather than overturning – Waltz's basic assumptions. This approach entailed two main steps: first, Schweller would seek to provide a better measurement of the distribution of relative power, and second, he would introduce the dichotomy of status quo and revisionist states (1993, p. 74). For the present purposes, the latter is clearly of more importance: while the former – though modifying Waltz's approach – essentially confirmed the importance of Waltz's main variable, the second step impinges on his unitary actor assumption. As Schweller writes, Waltz's theory implicitly assumes that international systems necessarily contain states that "wish not simply to survive but to weaken and destroy other states" – otherwise it would make no sense for states to regularly balance – but decides not to include it in his analysis (1993, p. 76). In Schweller's view, however, this fact needs to be factored in, despite the risk of losing parsimony, for the theory to yield more determinate predictions and better explanations (1993, p. 74). Thus, he puts forward a dichotomous view of state interests:

European elites to mobilize publics to support national defense efforts; hence even this important domestic factor was a more remote consequence of the international system" (Mearsheimer 1990, p. 12). Further driving the point home is the fact that he mentions the importance of domestic mobilization but, again, without affording it any real value in the final analysis – something, of course, neoclassical realists have done.

> "Status quo powers are usually those states that won the last major-power war and created a new world order in accordance with their interests…As satiated powers, status quo states seek primarily to keep, not increase, their resources…By contrast, revisionist states…are those states that seek to increase, not just keep, their resources. [Since they usually do not benefit from the order] they often share a common desire to overturn the status quo" (Schweller 1993, p. 76).

In this sense, Schweller comes close to Mearsheimer, who likewise seeks to operationalize Waltz' static image by putting forward the revisionist tendency (though, of course, in Mearsheimer's view, all states are revisionists).[24] What is crucial, however, is that in drawing up his dichotomy, Schweller explicitly draws on a number of classical, like Wolfers, Morgenthau or Kissinger, forging a clear link between pre- and post-Waltzian realism (1993, p. 76). What is more, in his 1994 article, Schweller borrows from Wolfers' metaphor of house on fire to emphasize a point about compulsion (p. 84). Furthermore, Schweller also makes a point strongly reminiscent – in the logic at least – of Aron's discussion on homogeneous and heterogeneous systems, arguing that in his theory, "predictions are co-determined by the power and interests of the unit and the structures within which they are embedded" and that "changes in unit interests alone can drastically alter system dynamics and stability" (1993, pp, 76, 77). That said, it is nevertheless peculiar that Aron is mentioned nowhere in Schweller's work – a fact that may be construed as to confirm the lingering legacy of Waltz's reductionist charge against the French scholar.

Thus, inspired by some of the classical realist works, in the 1990s, Schweller sought to ameliorate structural realism by retaining the primacy of third-image explanations but diminishing the explanatory power of the structure in favor of unit-level characteristics (see Schweller 1996, p. 92; more on this also in subsection 3.1.2.3). As such, it would essentially downplay the relative importance of anarchy vis-à-vis state motives, and, as a result, it would sometimes be called 'motivational realism' (Kydd 1997, p. 115). Another such approach would be found, for example, in some of the works of Charles Glaser, especially his discussions concerning so-called 'greedy states' (see Kydd 1997; see also Glaser 1997).

While Schweller finds inspiration in the classical works, Zakaria, on the other hand, puts forward a theory that actually attempts to *combine* it with the structural variant. In his 1992 article, Zakaria makes the case for the primacy of external factors, arguing that "[d]omestic factors often seem more important than international ones…but *in general*, across

[24] Unless, perhaps, in Mearsheimer's more recent analytical-theoretical forays – notably those pertaining to Russia's invasion of Ukraine (in 2014/2015 and 2022), where it seems, strangely, that Mearsheimer understands Russia to behave as a status quo power.

time and space, states' position in the anarchic international system proves to provide the simplest, shortest guide to international relations" (p. 198). As evident, however, from his 1998 *From Wealth to Power*, this does not mean that one should accept the mechanistic determinism of structural realism. In Zakaria's view, the problem with Waltz's realism is that it, in its privileging of the system, it deliberately ignores the importance of internal state characteristics, effectively denying states any capacity to "act independently of…systemic forces" (1998, pp. 36-37). From his reading of classical realists, however, Zakaria understands that state – not to be confused with nation – should be thought of as an important factor in its own right. As he explains, for the sake of generalizability, structural realism conflates the two; for a more nuanced view, however, it is necessary to distinguish between the two, with "state…meaning the central government, and…nation…meaning that broader entity comprising the economy, society, and population that the state controls to varying degrees" (Zakaria 1998, p. 35).

This distinction, which Zakaria traces back to such classical realists as Otto Hintze or Leopold von Ranke, is crucial for how his theory expects states, as in nations, to act on their relative power. In line with his view of the primacy of the external, as well as to firmly root his approach in the realist tradition, Zakaria posits relative power to be the primary driver of state behavior; however, mindful of the state/nation distinction, he phrases his view thus: "statesmen will expand the nation's political interests abroad when they perceive a relative increase in state power, not national power" (1998, p. 35). There are two important points underlying this view. First, Zakaria clearly rejects the view that state power automatically translate into state action; it is rather how this power is perceived and analyzed by the central decision-makers that has real bearing on how states choose to act upon it. Second, he also rejects the simplistic view that it is the national power – that is, the elements of power – that motivates state behavior. Though certainly important, in Zakaria's view, national power, relative vis-à-vis other states in the system, is only part of the story: equally important is a given state's ability extract this power for its purposes (1998, p. 38). As he puts it,

> "statesmen encounter not only pressures from the international system but also constraints that are the consequence of state structure, chiefly the degree to which national power can be converted into state power" (Zakaria 1998, p. 38).

Put simply, it is not just how well the nation fares across the various indicators of relative power, such as military and economic might, but also how much power the state has vis-à-vis the nation to make use of the resources at hand. Though a specific discussion concerning the state variable is left for the methodological subsection, of importance is, for example, the

degree to which the state is cohesive and centralized, as well as the scope of responsibility it defines for itself (Zakaria 1998, pp. 38-39). However, more significant for the time being is the fact that in 1998, Zakaria put forward a theory, titled by himself 'state-centered realism', that took as its point of departure the primacy of relative power but made its effects on state behavior hinge upon internal factors drawn from classical realism, like statesmen perception and states' ability to extract and utilize their national power. It will be seen in section 3.1.3 that while Zakaria himself would go on to pursue a career as political commentator, the ideas from his 1998 book would have a lasting impact on the development of neoclassical realism.

Apart from Zakaria and Schweller, yet another interesting example of steering offensive realism closer to the neoclassical territory is Jeffery Taliaferro's 1998 article 'Quagmires in the Periphery'. In the article, Taliaferro seeks to explain why great powers decide to stay in peripheral wars in spite of rising costs and declining prospects of victory. As he argues, offensive realism

> "holds that national leaders pursue aggressive external policies at times and in places that minimize costs and risks. Elite decision making generally adheres to the norms of bounded rationality. National leaders will weigh the costs and benefits of withdrawal or a continuation of the war, update their preferences in response to new information, and are sensitive to marginal costs and diminishing returns" (Taliaferro 1998, p. 95).

In other words, according to offensive realism, staying in prolonged quagmires should not occur, at least not frequently. However, as Taliaferro shows, great powers often *do* stay in such situations, suggesting that a purely structural, offensive realist explanation is not sufficient. Thus, to rectify the shortcoming, Taliaferro puts forward an approach he labels 'cognitive realism', which builds on the idea that though structural variables are most determinative of state behavior, in high-risk situations – such as foreign policy quagmires – "the link between structural variables and states' foreign policy behavior is complex, problematic and indirect" (1998, p. 99). As a result, to explain great power behavior in such situations, "one must examine how national leaders process information about structural forces" (Taliaferro 1998, p. 99). In other words, the variable of leader perception must be fitted between the structural independent variables and state decisions to stay in prolonged, costly wars. Concretely, drawing on prospect theory and group risk literature, he deduces that "national leaders' aversion to perceived losses will cause them to persevere in peripheral wars far longer than a standard cost-benefit analysis would suggest" (Taliaferro 1998, p. 108).

In a subsequent analysis, Taliaferro tests this proposition against the offensive-realist

null hypothesis that "national leaders do not persevere in peripheral wars longer than a standard cost-benefit analysis would suggest" and finds that, in more cases than not, his cognitive rendition of offensive realism holds better (1998, pp. 108-142). As such, he essentially successfully tests a neoclassical realist hypothesis, one where the impact of structural factors on foreign policy is not mechanistically deterministic but rather "complex and problematic" (Taliferro 1998, p. 143). This is a noteworthy feat in itself; more notable still is, however, the fact that in doing so, Taliferro does *not* in the least draw on classical realism. Rather, as suggested, he draws on psychological literature – namely the work of Tversky and Kahneman or Glen Whyte – occasionally alluding also to Robert Jervis. Thus, despite Rose's claims about the classical-structural combination carrying the day for what he labels the neoclassical approach, Taliaferro's work clearly shows that attempts to refine structural / offensive realism did not consist simply in harking back to pre-Waltzian realism – instead, one alternative path lay in considering works of, or inspired by, psychology. As will now be seen, this tendency was even more pronounced in defensive realism.

In many ways, **defensive realism** may be thought of as a mirror-image of its offensive counterpart. For example, in common with the latter, they seek to refine Waltz' basic tenets by putting forward additional assumptions about the nature of the anarchy and state motives. In the defensive realist view, the anarchy is much more benign and, potentially, conducive to cooperation, because states – being security-seekers – understand that moderate, defensive strategies are the surer way towards enhancing survival (Lynn-Jones 1998, pp. 157-158; Taliaferro 2000, pp. 128-129). However, the two approaches can also be thought of as mirroring one another in terms of their development vis-à-vis structural and neoclassical realism: as will be seen in the following paragraphs, like the offensive variant, defensive realism, too, starts with slight adjustments to Waltz's theory at the level of structure before giving way to the influence of internal factors more commonly associated with neoclassical realists. In fact, it will be seen that the role of internal factors is even more pronounced in defensive realism than it is in the offensive one. Of notable difference, however, is that defensive realism – as opposed to the offspring of offensive realism – is not as much influenced by the work of classical realists. Rather, it is permeated by the work of Robert Jervis.

Although predating Waltz's *Theory* by a year, Robert Jervis' 1978 article *Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma* is usually considered the seminal defensive realist article (Wohlforth 2010, p. 13). In the article, Jervis works from the assumption of international anarchy to put forward the idea that in such a system, where no state can ever be certain of

other's intentions or the future distribution of relative power, security dilemma – thought of as a situation where one state's measures to "increase its security decrease the security of others" – is bound to repeatedly occur (Jervis 1978, p. 169; Taliaferro 2000, p. 136). The chronic uncertainty of the international anarchy, in other words, ensures that wars often take place, despite the fact that most states might well be defensively-oriented. Thus, Jervis essentially views the anarchy as an underlying cause of conflict, similarly to the understanding in Waltz's *Man, the State, and War*. However, in contrast to Waltz's works, Jervis posits two additional system-level variables that may mollify the anarchy and, as a result, make security dilemma less severe: "whether defensive weapons and policies can be distinguished from offensive ones, and whether defense of the offense has the advantage" (1978, pp. 186-187).

Begin with the latter: simply put, security dilemma is expected to be most severe – and cooperation, therefore, virtually impossible – when it appears that aggression or expansion are the only means to security: when offense has the advantage (Jervis 1978, p. 187). The opposite can be expected when defense is seen as the best way towards security: as Jervis puts it,

> "if the defense has enough of an advantage and if the states are of roughly equal size, not only will the security dilemma cease to inhibit status-quo states from cooperating, but aggression will be next to impossible, thus *rendering international anarchy relatively unimportant*" (1978, p. 178; italics not in the original).

In other words, in Jervis' view, the anarchy in an important variable but it hardly deserves the position it is afforded in Waltz' structural realism, as its impact on state behavior is contingent, in part, on the offense-defense balance. The balance, in turn, depends on two other factors: technology and geography (see Jervis 1978, pp. 194-199). These need not be discussed at length here; however, it is worth noting that they enlarge the scope of system-level variables in Jervis' theory, further differentiating it from Waltz's approach.

In addition to the offense-defense balance, the other variable influencing the severity of security dilemma has to do with the question of whether the policies and weapons that states adapt for security can also be used offensively (Jervis 1978, p. 199). Although it is not simple to distinguish between defensive and offensive weapons and stances (and the matter is more complicated still when it comes to nuclear weapons), Jervis argues that when states opt for the defensive side of the spectrum in seeking to protect themselves, they, generally, should further "ameliorate the security dilemma" – and vice versa (1978, pp. 199-206). Certainly, even so, security dilemma cannot be ever eliminated altogether, as, for example, states can never be sure that other's defensive stances will not yield to more aggressive attitudes in the future

(Jervis 1978, p. 199). That, however, only further comes to show that in Jervis' theory, other system-level variables minimize the autonomous importance of the anarchical structure, keeping it an underlying cause, not the *causa ultima*, of all state behavior.

With this notably less mechanistically deterministic view, it is little wonder that Jervis' theory served as the inspiration for one stream within the defensive realist tradition that sought to overcome the limitations of Waltz's structuralism.[25] It will be seen that it is here that many aspects of neoclassical realism's relationship vis-à-vis the structural variant began to take hold. Equally influential within the defensive realist tradition, however, is also Jervis' 1976 *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*. In this book, Jervis concerns himself, presciently, with a matter that is of major importance for neoclassical realism (as it was for classical realism) – decision-maker's (mis)perceptions. However, it can equally well be argued that, especially in the two opening chapters, the book provides a theoretical outlook that both recalls classical and foreshadows neoclassical realists.

The starting point of the book's approach is the conjecture that "it is often impossible to explain crucial decisions and policies without reference to the decision-makers' beliefs about the world and their images of others. That is to say, these cognitions are part of the proximate cause of the relevant behavior and other levels of analysis cannot immediately tell us what they will be" (Jervis 1976, p. 28). However, as Jervis adds, the beliefs and images cannot be the "first causes"; rather, they must respond to "if not reality, then at least to the information available to the actor" (1976, p. 31). Put in the vocabulary of neoclassical realism, leader images and beliefs that underline their perception may be thought of as intervening variables between deeper, causal variables, and state behavior. The deeper variables may be either external or internal – i.e. they may result either from the decision-makers' environment or their intentions. Determining which are the more important, however, is far from simple: in fact, Jervis – foreshadowing Fordham's interactive model – assumes that both may matter to a varying degree in relation to a given situation (1976, p. 35). That said, Jervis allows that a potentially fruitful starting point may lie in observing, first,

> "other's objective situation, for example by focusing on the anarchic nature of the international system and the resulting security dilemma…But when this analysis is insufficient, [analysts] must examine variables at other levels of analysis to establish some of the most important facts about the objective situation that the states faces" (1976, pp. 20-21).

[25] As Wohlforth (2010, p. 16) points out – and as evident from Mearsheimer's work – Jervis' article likewise inspired offensive realism, albeit in a different fashion (see also discussion in Glaser 1997, p. 189)

Thus, Jervis essentially advocates the approach of both the works of classical realists, like Wolfers and Herz, as well as modern-day neoclassical realists. In fact, in this context, Jervis even cites Wolfers' discussion about compulsion, generally concurring that the more compulsion there is from external factors, the less scope there will be for factors internal to the decision maker to play a role (1976, pp. 32-57). All in all, Jervis' 1976 book is valuable for the later defensive realists for two reasons: first, it makes perception one of its central concepts, and second, it presages the utilization of additional levels of analysis. It will be seen that both – in common with the addition of further system-level variables – feature heavily in defensive realist attempts to refine structural realism for the new era.

A good, if pioneering example of this approach is the work Stephen Walt. In his 1985 article and more fully in his 1987 book *The Origins of Alliances*, Walt provides the first major revision of Waltz's balance-of-power theory (see Vasquez 1997, p. 904). Through a major test, Walt arrives at a conclusion that corroborates Waltz's hypothesis that balancing is more common than bandwagoning; however, he finds out that though relative power is an important explanatory factor for the behavior, it is not the only one (Walt 1987, p. 5). Rather, as he posits, states balance against states that they consider *threat*, understood as the combination of four third-image variables: relative distribution of power, "geographic proximity, offensive capabilities, and perceived intentions" (Walt 1987, pp. 5, 21-26). Especially in respect to the latter two variables, Jervis' influence is hard to not notice. Regarding offensive capabilities, Walt writes that "states with large offensive capabilities are more likely to provoke an alliance than are those that are inescapable of attacking because of geography, military posture, or something else" (1987, p. 24). On perceived intentions, Walt contends that "states that are viewed as aggressive are likely to provoke other to balance against them…[and that] even states with rather modest capabilities may prompt others to balance if they are perceived as especially aggressive" (1987, p. 25). Thus, in line with the work of Jervis, Walt's theory – duly labelled the balance-of-threat theory – essentially constitutes an attempt to refine Waltz's approach by, merely, extending the scope system/structure-level variables and, thus, keeping it parsimonious. The latter goal, of course, is a major one for Walt: no doubt influenced by the lingering influence of Waltz's 'anti-reductionist' approach, Walt assures that his theory "improves on balance of power theory by providing greater explanatory power with equal parsimony" (1987, p. 263). As such, it is of little surprise that Walt's theory, duly labelled the balance-of-threat theory, does not wade into the territory of unit-level variables. That said, the theory is still of significance from the perspective of this thesis, not least because it adopts the perception variable.

Thomas Christensen and Jack Snyder follow a similar line of reasoning in their 1990 article, where they seek to modify structural realism to enhance its ability to explain two common balancing errors that, under multipolarity, Waltz expects to be equally likely to happen: chain-ganging, which entails states chaining "themselves unconditionally to reckless allies whose survival is seen to be indispensable to the maintenance of the balance", and buck-passing, where states may substitute balancing by "counting on third parties to bear the costs of stopping a rising hegemon" (Christensen and Snyder 1990, p. 138). They begin by arguing that though for Waltz this may not be a problem, as his theory simply predicts multipolarities to be unstable, such indeterminacy seriously hinders the usability of structural realism for more "practical research agendas" (Christensen and Snyder 1990, pp. 137, 138). Thus, to remedy this shortcoming, they advocate for a cross-fertilization between structural realism and other theories, notably those put forward by Jervis and developed by other authors (Christensen and Snyder 1990, p. 138).[26] Specifically, this is to take the form of two steps:

> "First, the variable elements of international structure must be broadened to include not only polarity but also the security dilemma variables: technology and geography. Second, perception of the strategic incentives inherent in the systemic structure must be introduced as a potentially autonomous factor" (Christensen and Snyder 1990, p. 144).

Christensen and Snyder argue that simply combining Waltz' balance-of-power theory with insights from Jervis' work on security dilemma – notably the offense-balance theory – could provide a perfectly viable and parsimonious explanation for chain-ganging and buck-passing: offensive advantage could account for the former and defensive advantage for the latter (1990, p. 144). However, they do not stop there. Rather, inductively inferring from the cases of the two world wars, they find out that prior to the two wars, the perceptions of the offense/defense advantage "were almost exactly wrong", leading them to conclude that perceptual variables

[26] Of major importance are Stephen van Evera's 1984 article 'The Cult of the Offensive and the Origins of the First World War and Barry Posen's 1984 book *The Sources of Military Doctrines*. In the former, van Evera, in essence, argues that the "principal cause of the First World War" was the cult of the offensive, mainly as it magnified many other causes often pinpointed in historical literature (p. 58). The article, which again draws on Jervis, is a significant one, and some of its insights would perhaps merit its full inclusion in a work seeking to re-tell the history of (neoclassical) realism – after all, it was one of the first realist works that moved beyond Waltz's 1979 approach. Doing so would, however, prove inimical to the present thesis: including the article would likely raise questions about the inclusion and non-inclusion of a great score of other works from the 1980s that sought to refine structural realism. Mindful of the space constraints being the primary limit of this thesis, this author must, however, be cautious when it comes to selecting the works for review: although van Evera's article would perhaps be a great illustration, it must still be remembered that the present thesis concerns itself with the history of neoclassical realism, not post-war realism as a whole (although, as is probably obvious by now, the two can hardly be separated). That said, it is the objective of this author to therefore put greater emphasis on works that come closer, both in time and essence, to the neoclassical approach, keeping works like those of van Evera's article for footnotes. The same applies to Posen's book.

must be added to account for the blunders (1990, p. 145). In other words, the authors begin by refining the structural baseline and then seek additional variables to help explain divergences from its expectations – i.e. the neoclassical approach. In this case, they put forward two factors that are said to have shaped the "soldiers' and policymakers' perceptions of international structural incentives, including the offense-defense balance": formative experience of past military conflicts and the difference between 'cult of the offensive' and 'cult of the defensive' (1990, p. 145). The first factor is purely perceptual, drawing on Jervis' 1976 book, the authors hypothesize its relevance for the first and second world wars as follows:

> "since European wars before 1914 had often been short and decisive, most people expected offensive to succeed. But after the experience of 1914-18, most people expected defensives to succeed" (Christensen and Snyder 1990, p. 145).

The second factor goes a step further. The authors explain that whereas the cult of the offensive was the likely source of chain-ganging before WWI and the cult of the defensive likely the same for the pre-WWII buck-passing (Christensen and Snyder 1990, p. 145). However, more important than this fact alone is what causes either of the two cults to dominate strategic perceptions: the degree of civilian control over state military. As Christensen and Snyder explain, before the First World War, militaries – which generally favor offensive strategies – were less under the control of the civilian sector, which prefers defensive ones; as a result, the cult of offensive dominated the perception (1990, p. 145). On the other hand, the growing civilian control over the military in the 1930s resulted in the cult of the defensive becoming dominant. Thus, it is not only that a specific cult influenced the state perception of the most desirable strategies at each given time, but also – more importantly – Christensen and Snyder effectively argue for the consideration of a unit-level variable underlying it (although, perhaps due to the author's stress on parsimony, this fact is somewhat downplayed in the article). That said, the article clearly constitutes yet another step away from structural towards neoclassical realism: not only in terms of variables, but also the overall logic.

Another good example of using insights from Jervis' work to rectify structural realism is the work of Charles Glaser. For example, in his 1994 article 'Realists as Optimists', Glaser takes up the standard structural realist argument that because of the international anarchy, cooperation among states is hard to achieve and thus infrequent: drawing on a number concepts found in Jervis' work – including the security dilemma, signaling, or cooperation under anarchy – he puts forward a theory arguing that despite "conventional wisdom, the strong general propensity for adversaries to compete is not an inevitable logical consequence of structural

realism's basic assumptions" (Glaser 1994/1995, pp. 50-52). Importantly, however, he cautions that this theory, which he labels 'contingent realism', should not be understood as a competing theory to structural realism but rather a corrective to the latter's basic assumptions (Glaser 1994/1995, p. 52). In brief, this correction rests on three moves: first, he argues that both cooperation and competition are equally valid consequences of self-help, anarchical systems; second, he contends that the relative distribution of power is an important but insufficient variable affecting state behavior, and that offense-defense variables should be incorporated into the theory; and third, given that structural realism does not rule out such possibility, Glaser advocates for the inclusion of motives and intentions into the equation influencing state actions (1994/1995, pp. 52-53).

Thus, to rectify Waltz's theory, Glaser explicitly combines it with the additional variables of offense-defense and motives or intentions (although it should be cautioned that he puts an emphasis on their signaling, not the motives as such having a causal role). Though an important step itself, more significant for the present debate, however, is the end towards he pursues this endeavor. As he explains, developing – as he does – "an improved structural-realist baseline improves our ability to explore the value of alternative explanations for competitive and cooperative policies" (Glaser 1994/1995, p. 86). In other words, Glaser seeks to rectify structural realism for the sake of making it less inaccurate but stops short of expecting that doing so will make it infallible. In fact, as he himself concedes, even with the corrections, it cannot be expected to accurately explain or predict state behavior all the time (Glaser 1994/1995, p. 86). Rather, in the cases where it obviously flounders,

> "other levels of analysis will necessarily play a more important role in explaining state behavior. Structural pressures will bound the possibilities, while leaving states with substantial choice between more cooperative and more competitive approaches. Although the levels-of-analysis debate is often viewed as a competition between different levels of explanation, this argument suggests that they are often necessarily complementary…when structural arguments do not provide clear guidance, the choice between cooperative and competitive policies could hinge on the anticipated effects of various policy options on the opponent's domestic politics" (Glaser 1994/1995, p. 86).

Such an approach, of course, is almost word-for-word reminiscent of either that of Wolfers (section 3.1.1) or that of modern-day neoclassical realists.[27] However, on top of describing an approach combining various levels of analysis, Glaser actually puts the approach to use,

[27] Oddly enough, neither does Wolfers feature in Glaser's article nor does Glaser feature in that of Rose (1998).

prominently in his 1992 article in which he seeks to improve on Jervis' deterrence and spiral models. There are two key points from the article that are pertinent for the present debate: first, elaborating on the concept of misperception, he makes the case for the consideration of domestic-level variables; second, he points the attention to changes in domestic balances of power as a potentially important factor for determining state behavior (Glaser 1992). Ad first, Glaser acknowledges that misperception may generally stem from two sources: "individual psychological biases and failures of overall national evaluative capabilities" (1992, p. 514). However, he makes the point that it is the latter, which includes "organizations dedicated to analyzing military and foreign policy – analytic units within the government, think tanks and universities", that matters more to possible national misperceptions (Glaser 1992, p. 515). Individual leader cognitive biases are, in Glaser's view, of less consequence. Thus, though diverging somewhat, Glaser essentially draws on Jervis to argue that states do not act upon clear systemic pressures but rather on how these are received, understood, and evaluated – most importantly – by state bureaucracy (1992, p. 515). Regarding the second point, Glaser argues that how states act upon external stimuli may, on top of (mis)perception, be influenced by domestic power politics. As he explains, political leaders may, for example, instrumentally use information learned from the system to "gain support for policies they already favor and to discredit positions held by their domestic opponents" (Glaser 1992, p. 520). Similarly, Glaser acknowledges that dramatic "shifts in the relative influence of competing factions" may altogether change a country's foreign policy outlook (1992, p. 520). Thus, it can be seen that, inspired by Jervis, Glaser's work in the 1990s did much in the way of re-endearing the realist tradition to domestic variables.

A yet more ambitious defensive realist work, at least as the relationship vis-à-vis neoclassical realism is concerned, must be Jack Snyder's 1991 *Myths of Empire*. In the book, which actually coins the aggressive/defensive labels, Snyder concerns himself with explaining the phenomenon of self-punishing overexpansion by great powers (see 1991, p. 12). In his defensive realist view, though it is sometimes portrayed as such, aggressive expansion, more often than not, does not result in enhanced security for the expanding state; however, despite that, states periodically *do* expand, often only to inflict self-punishing diminishment of security (Snyder 1991, pp. 9-12). In Snyder's view, to understand why, it is necessary to consult domestic-level variables.

As a defensive structural realist, Snyder logically begins with the assumption that "security is normally the strongest motivation of states in international anarchy" and that conquest is not a way to achieve it – i.e. anarchy provides incentives for defensive behavior

(1991, pp. 11-12). That said, he posits that states may still decide to act aggressively – and thus overexpand – as a result of "political and propagandistic activities of imperialist groups" (Snyder 1991, p. 17). As Snyder explains, imperialist interests – that is, those in favor of expansion – are usually the property of narrow outsider groups; however, as he continues, these narrow interests may easily "hijack state policy" (1991, p. 17). This can happen as a result of two variables: first, which Snyder labels 'coalition logrolling', shows that the narrow groups may "easily gain control over national policy by joining in logrolled coalitions, trading favors so that each group gets what it wants" (Snyder 1991, p. 17). The second variable is 'coalition ideology': once in power, the imperial groups exploit state resources and credibility for harnessing their expansionist propaganda, thus bolstering and feeding their agenda. Thus, Snyder shows how despite the fact that the international system provides incentives for defensive or cooperative behavior, domestic politics may *intervene* and cause the state to act aggressively. This is because, as he explains, the state is "not a unitary rational actor, but rather is the manager of a heterogeneous coalition" – a fact that helps explain also why states often do not change course despite rising costs of imperialism (Snyder 1991, p. 17). It should be noted that Snyder's approach was vehemently criticized by Zakaria, who accused it of being a pretext for an *Innenpolitik* explanation that, apart from its façade, had little to do with structural realism (see discussion in 1992). From the perspective of this thesis, however, the book is of major importance, as it constitutes a clear attempt to reconcile structural realism with an unabashed utilization of domestic-level variables. Paradoxically, as with much defensive realism, it does not seek much inspiration in the works of classical realists, borrowing rather from literature on public choice and political theory in general (Snyder 1991, p. 17).

In his 1996 *Useful Adversaries*, Thomas Christensen offers a similar treatment, albeit here, it should be noted, the influence of classical realism is somewhat more pronounced. Like Snyder, Christensen seeks to explain how "international and domestic factors can interact to cause more hostile foreign policies than simpler versions of realism would predict" (1996, pp. 6-7). More specifically, Christensen designs a two-level approach for explaining "cases of apparent overreaction to the international environment" where he posits the "state's ability to mobilize the public as a key intervening variable between the international challenges facing the nation and the strategies eventually adopted by the state to meet those challenges" (1996, pp. 13-14). In his – reminiscently 'neoclassical' – model, the value of this intervening variable largely influences whether the policy adopted by the state diverges from the expectations of structural realism: as he explains,

> "[i]f the political hurdles to mobilization are relatively low, then we should expect policies that are consistent with the expectations of black-box realists [i.e. optimal policies]. If the hurdles are high of prohibitively high, we should expect policies that would be considered by realists to be either overreactions [which he seeks to explain] or underreactions to the international environment facing the nation" (Christensen 1996, p. 13).

Importantly, despite dressing it up as an intervening variable, Christensen (1996, p. 16) – referencing Robert Putnam' work – goes to great lengths to emphasize that both the international environment and domestic factors "matter and they affect policy outcomes in concert", thus suggesting greater degree of interaction between the two levels of analysis than might usually be allowed by neoclassical realists. This view should, however, not be overstated, as methodologically, Christensen argues for a clear hierarchy:

> "First, we must determine which policy options the leadership would prefer if it enjoyed an ideal state-society environment. Second, we must determine what adjustments leaders make in preferred policy after they consider both international and domestic arenas" (1996, p. 24).

This issue will be taken up in greater detail in subsection 3.1.2.3 where the methodological boundaries are discussed. For now, however, it can be concluded that Christensen's approach clearly evokes that of neoclassical realists: begin with a deductive optimal baseline and then consider unit-level variables to explain why that baseline failed to obtain. At the same time, it can likewise be said to evoke liberal theorizing, showing how many so-called realist thinkers were, in their attempts to rescue structural realism, influenced by other theories (as will become more apparent in subsection 3.1.2.2).

Importantly, similar to Zakaria, Christensen operates with the notion of 'national political power': how powerful a country is and how it reacts to challenges of the international environment is less a function of its aggregate national power and more a function of the "degree of compatibility" between the state's elites ideas about how best to respond and the society's cooperation (1996, p. 20). Here, Christensen, too, explicitly draws on a number of classical realists: for example, he evokes Samuel Huntington's debate on strong vs weak states or quotes the works of E. H. Carr or Hans Morgenthau that detail how national power rests equally on its military and economic might, as well as the state's ability to put this might into use (see Christensen 1996, pp. 20-23). Thus, Christensen's 1996 work differs from other defensive realist scholars in drawing more on classical realism than the work of Jervis. That said, it constitutes a valuable addition to the literature, as it paves the path for neoclassical realism from a different perspective.

From the hitherto debate, it can be concluded that from the internal theoretical boundaries perspective, offensive and defensive realism may both be seen as possible sources or predecessors of neoclassical realism: representatives of both approaches employ variables across the levels of analysis, combining structural factors with those of perception or domestic politics, and both broach the idea of using structural realist hypotheses as a baseline for more refined explanations. However, despite the Rosean myth, the influence of classical realism in this endeavor should not be overstated: in fact, only Schweller, Zakaria, and Christensen were explicit in their inspiration in the classical literature; others, mostly those hailing from the defensive camp drew rather on the work of Robert Jervis. In light of the findings from section 3.1.1 – where it was established that pre-Waltzian, classical realism was far more reminiscent of the neoclassical variant than it is usually portrayed – it can tentatively be concluded that what eventually became neoclassical realism may be better understood as a continuation of an approach that was effectively arrested by Waltz in 1979, but not necessarily a self-conscious revival thereof. It is perhaps of little coincidence that most works that Rose reviewed as the basis for neoclassical realism in his 1998 article *did* draw explicitly on classical realism. However, as has just been shown, those works far from the only ones that effectively anticipated neoclassical realism.

That said, offensive and defensive realism were similarly not the only approaches that in the 1990s sought to bring structural realism up to speed. Rather, there was also a group of scholars that cannot be simply classified as either but that, nevertheless, made important contributions in the area. For the lack of a better term, this group may be labelled **Gilpinian realism**; however, it should not be misconstrued as to signify that all 'members' of this group drew on Robert Gilpin's work. Some certainly did – either in the vein of hegemonic stability theory or political economy, inherent to Gilpin's approach, in general. Others, however, had little to do with Gilpin, except for the occasional recognition of the latter's significance (and/or superiority) vis-à-vis Waltz's approach. That said, this thesis still chooses to review such authors as part of this section, not only for the sake of clearer organization but also because their view of Waltz's approach clearly pulls them away from the orbit of defensive and offensive realism, both of which hold, at least implicitly, Waltz in high regard.

One notable subset of this mixed bag of realists are those who concerned themselves, no doubt in light of the US unipolar moment, with the issues of hegemonic decline and adaptation. Such theorizing, of course, was nothing new at the time: there had been quite an established tradition, running all the way back to the works of Organski and Kindleberger in

the 1960s and 1970s. Nevertheless, around the time of the Cold War's end, a number of noteworthy works emerged that did a lot in the way of steering realism away from pure structuralism and, as a result, closer to neoclassical realism. A good example is Aaron Friedberg's 1988 *The Weary Titan.* In the book, Friedberg concerns himself with the questions of how states (in his case Britain), and more importantly their leaders, react to changes in relative power, and how nations adapt to such changes – i.e. "what is the relationship between changing power and changing assessments, on the one hand, and shifting assessments and evolving state policies, on the other" (1988, p. 3). The book begins by a criticism of structural realism in general and theories of hegemonic stability and decline in particular. As Friedberg notes, these theories suffer from structural determinism: they assume that "a change in the structure of the international system (i.e., in the distribution of power within it) *must* produce certain specified consequences" (1988, p. 7). More specifically, hegemonic theories predict that relative decline in a hegemon's power should lead to such consequences as the adoption of protectionist policies by the hegemon or the outbreak of major war (Friedberg 1988, pp. 7-8; see also Gilpin 1981). However, as Friedberg points out, at the turn of the twentieth, Britain – despite its objective loss of industrial and military primacy – both continued to be an advocate for free trade policies and failed to "launch preemptive attacks" against rising hegemonic powers, notably the US (1988, p. 8). This leads Friedberg to argue that changes at the structural level, though possibly a useful starting point, cannot fully explain how states adapt to declining power; rather, he continues, it is necessary to consider how the changes are processed by those in power: "[s]hifts in the distribution of power within an international system may be 'real' in some sense, but they may fail to have impact unless and until they are perceived" (1988, p. 6). It is worthwhile to quote Friedberg at length:

> "Even if one acknowledges that structures exist and are important, there is still the question of how statesmen grasp their contours from the inside, so to speak, of whether, and if so how, they are able to determine where they stand in terms of relative national power at any given point in history. It would appear that, right or wrong, such estimates will go a long way toward shaping state behavior and, in particular, toward determining national responses to structural change" (1988, p. 8).

Thus, Friedberg hypothesizes that the perception and assessment of relative distribution of power by state leaders likely constitutes a major variable affecting how states adapt to structural changes. In this respect, he consults – among other things – classical realist literature as a possible source of more insight on the difficulties of assessing national power by leaders –

however, only to conclude that though scholars like Morgenthau or Edward Gulick do, indeed, acknowledge the difficulty, they provide few cues as to how to engage with it analytically (Friedberg 1988, pp. 8-17).[28] Therefore, in the bulk of the book, Friedberg undertakes an inductive investigation – an approach more closely associated with classical than structural realism – to ascertain the intervening role of leader assessment. As such, he finds out that

> "assessment is clearly a crucial 'intervening variable' between objective changes in the structure of the international system and the behavior of individual states. Assessments are related to but not directly determined by reality. They are themselves, in turn, related to but not fully determinative of policy" (1988, p. 290).

In the methodological subsection (3.1.2.3), it will be further discussed what factors underlie and constitute the assessment variable in Friedberg's analysis. For now, it can be concluded that Friedberg's work stands out as an almost prototypical neoclassical realist work: it starts with a structural realist baseline – in this case one based on Gilpinian realism – that does not hold in reality, and then it proceeds to explain the issue at hand through thoroughgoing case-study research. As such, it marks a stronger break from structural realism than other works from the 1990s, most of which still adhered to – at least superficially – deductive theorizing.

Joseph Lepgold's 1990 book *The Declining Hegemon* considers similar issues like Friedberg. More concretely, Lepgold focuses on the question of US adaptation to its relative decline in the context of European defense and the question of hegemonic adaptation in general (1990, p. 2). Compared to Friedberg's, this book follows a deductive logic and is dramatically more complex – a fact that all but ensures that it cannot be reviewed here in detail. That said, it can still be discerned that Lepgold's book allures to much the same logic when it comes to external and internal factors.

Like Friedberg, Lepgold begins by reviewing structural theories of hegemonic decline only to conclude that since they "contain no conception of *how* external forces produces government choices" they cannot explain "most policy patterns" (1990, p. 80). However, he argues that a systemic explanation, if framed in probabilistic terms, can serve as a useful first cut: if viewed as a "theory of constraints rather than a deterministic theory of interests", structural realism may lend itself to providing "inferences about the kinds of choices made by declining hegemons" (Lepgold 1990, p. 83). By monitoring these constraints (or system-level variables) – which include the distribution of military and economic power, hegemonic

[28] He consults also, for example, the work of Robert Jervis or Karl Deutsch – again, suggesting that the influence of classical realism on neoclassical realism should not be overstated.

responsibilities, or technology – such a first-cut explanation may specify the environmental conditions to which a hegemon has to react (Lepgold 1990, pp. 84-85). However, as Lepgold contends, how the hegemon eventually acts may, in more situations than not, be "understood only with knowledge of an actor's 'inner structure and organization'" (1990, pp. 85-86). Thus, two clusters of variables must be added into the equation: cognitive and organization. Again, a more detailed discussion will be provided in subsection 3.1.2.3. In brief, however, Lepgold argues that concrete instances of hegemonic adaptation result both from how decision-makers perceive and choose to act upon the systemic constraints, and how well their chosen policies can be implemented:

> "A state's external constraints and foreign policymakers' perception of risk or opportunity reliably indicate only the executive's adjustment preferences. Its ability to implement them depends on whether it controls the necessary policy instruments. This is a function of the issue involved as well as a state's general institutional structure" (1990, pp. 85-103, 93).

In other words, Lepgold provides a rigorous model of hegemonic adaptation that systematically combines both systemic and domestic variables. By including both perceptions and implementation ability, the book is more ambitious than most its contemporaries, which tended to usually include either one or the other. As such, it is also much closer to the most comprehensive versions of neoclassical realism to date, notably Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell (2016). It is, therefore, somewhat peculiar that Lepgold's work is missing not only from Rose's 1998 article – many important pre-neoclassical works are – but also from the said 2016 book.[29]

Charles Kupchan's 1994 *The Vulnerability of Empire* is another account of hegemonic adaptation that points in a direction later adopted by neoclassical realists. Kupchan concerns himself with explaining why great powers often fail to adjust and instead pursue "overly cooperative and overly competitive policies" that often turn out to be self-defeating (1994, p. 5). Such behavior, he asserts, cannot be fully understood though structural realism for two reasons: first, although national power may be a good guide to explaining long-term behavioral trajectories, it has problems explaining state actions in a more short-term perspective, of which such self-defeating actions are often part; second, the failure to adjust as such, Kupchan charges, confuses realism because it clearly deviates from its rational-actor expectations – i.e.

[29] It should be noted, to pay homage, that partial explanation for Lepgold's conspicuous absence from neoclassical realist literature might be his premature death in 2001. According to open sources, Lepgold, as well as some members of his family, died as a result of injuries following a fire in a Paris hotel the author was staying at while taking part in a conference titled 'America, Europe and the World in the 21st century'. Even from a brief engagement with Lepgold's work, it is beyond doubt that this Georgetown government professor would have had a lot to say about that issue then and in years to come. For more information see McGrath (2001).

that great powers, simply, should not engage in behavior that costs them more power (1994, p. 7). Thus, although taking power as his central concept – an independent variable of hegemonic adjustment – he focuses rather on two variables that underlie the ways in which hegemon's react to power shifts. One, he considers so-called 'elite beliefs' – that is, "the beliefs that inform elite decisions about strategic priorities and how best to protect the states security" (Kupchan 1994, p. 5). Two, crucially, he also considers strategic culture – or the "deeply embedded conceptions and notions of national security that take root among elites and the public alike" (Kupchan 1994, p. 5). This variable will be discussed at more length in subsection 3.1.2.3. Its significance, nonetheless, is notable: not only because it clearly stands out from the present discussion but also because it effectively brings realism close to the constructivist paradigm (see subsection 3.1.2.2).[30]

Yet another innovative treatment of hegemonic decline was provided by Steven Lobell, first in his doctoral thesis and later in the 2000 article 'The grand strategy of hegemonic decline'.[31] Lobell works from the idea that a declining hegemon faces the dilemma of reconciling its "military capabilities and global commitments without undermining its fiscal strength or eroding its national security interests" (2000, p. 86). Existing structural theories predict that such a hegemon will either punish "all its competitors…to discourage potential challengers" or that the hegemon will progressively retreat from locales deemed unimportant and focus more resources on competition in important ones (Lobell 2000, p. 86). However, as Lobell argues, neither of these views is satisfactory. Rather, drawing on democratic peace literature, he maintains that the resulting form of adaptation depends on two factors: first, whether the hegemon in question is liberal or imperial, and second, whether the contender the hegemon faces is liberal or imperial (2000). Taking a differentiated view of hegemonic decline, Lobell thus proposes to understand the adaptation strategies in light of dyadic interactions: for instance, a liberal hegemon dealing with a liberal contender is likely to pursue a cooperative strategy; when dealing with a non-liberal one, however, a liberal hegemon may rather pursue a punishing one (2000, pp. 86-87).[32] Moreover, although he does not develop the idea at length,

[30] The use of strategic culture as an intervening variable, though quite extraordinary in the reviewed literature, is not an idea exclusive to Kupchan's work. In fact, the so-called third generation of strategic culture thinkers approaches the problematique from a similar angle. Reviewing such discussions at length, however, would be risk being beyond the scope of this thesis, with the possibility that doing so would tell us comparatively little about the history of neoclassical realism being high. That said, for more discussion on the issue, see, for example, Lawrence Sondhaus' *Strategic Culture and Ways of War* (2006, Routledge) or Alastair Johnston's article 'Thinking about Strategic Culture' (1995, *International Security*).

[31] This thesis reviews exclusively the article; their substance is, however, the same.

[32] Lobell also details the interaction between non-liberal hegemons and liberal contenders and non-liberal hegemons and non-liberals contenders. For illustration, however, the two above examples should be sufficient.

Lobell also suggests that such strategies may nevertheless be impaired by a number of domestic constraints, including "regime type, state-society relations, entrenched ideas (strategic culture), embedded interest groups and institutions, and coalition politics" (2000, p. 110). That said, Lobell's work is still significant, mostly as it effectively leverages an explanation from a liberal theory to help refine structural realist baseline. As such, the work could easily have been included in subsection 3.1.2.2 (external theoretical boundaries), where authors seeking to rectify structural realism by combining it with non-realist theories, most importantly liberalism and constructivism, are discussed. Given its explicit occupation with hegemonic theory, it was eventually placed in this subsection; however, its significance should be kept in mind, as neoclassical realism's borrowing from non-liberal theories is often a source of bitter criticism of the approach.

Lobell further refines his approach to studying hegemony in his 2003 book *The Challenge of Hegemony*, where he combines his hitherto approach to explaining hegemonic decline with insights from Peter Gourevitch's 'second image reversed'. In his seminal 1978 article, Gourevitch put forward his famous reversal of liberal second-image theories, arguing that the "international system is not only a consequence of domestic politics and structures but a cause of them" (p. 911). Lobell adopts Gourevitch's logic but extends it further: developing what he labels 'second image reversed plus a second image' argument, he argues that a hegemon's response to decline may best be understood through the observation of, first, the effects of the international system on the hegemon's domestic politics, and second, through the observation of the domestic politics' effects on the hegemon's grand strategy (2003, pp. 1-19).[33] In other words, Lobell seeks to refine his above reviewed work by showing how it is that the hegemon comes to prefer either liberal or imperial strategy in the first place. As he explains, "the character and changes in the commercial environment" – that is, the commercial nature of rising states – that the hegemon faces works to alter the domestic balance of power, empowering either proponents of free trade or protectionism (Lobell 2003, p. 19). Those empowered, subsequently, "lobby the government for either a more conciliatory or belligerent grand strategy to further advance their coalition's economic and political clout" (Lobell 2003, p. 19). As such, they have major influence over how the hegemon adapts to its decline – that is, until changes in the international commercial environment once again work to alter the domestic balance of power.

[33] Such approach, it should be noted, would seem in fine accord with Gourevitch's overall statement that international and domestic politics are "so interrelated that they should be analyzed simultaneously, as wholes" (1978, p. 911).

Thus, it can be seen that Lobell's approach in 2003 was, in its logic at least, very much neoclassical: in fact, it might even be asked why – given that it was written five years after Rose's article – this book is not reviewed as part of section 3.1.3, which considers the development of neoclassical realism after Rose. There are multiple reasons: first, although he would later duly internalize the label, back in 2003, Lobell did not associate his approach with neoclassical realism; second, and similarly, though it came after Rose, Lobell was essentially developing arguments he originated in the late1990s as part of his doctoral thesis; third, it also seems that in developing his argument, Lobell did not draw so much on classical realism – as he likely would have, had he been inspired by Rose's article – as he did on theories much closer associated with the liberal tradition. Thus, to classify Lobell's 2003 book as part of the post-Rosean neoclassical movement would perhaps be a major misrepresentation: rather, it neatly comes to show how naturally variegated the attempts to modify structural realism were. By the same token, it clearly shows that what Rose identified as the novel neoclassical realist approach – that is, the said combination of structural and classical realism – constituted, back then, only a small subset of such attempts (this will become even more apparent when discussing attempts to combine realism with liberal and constructivist theories in the next subsection). That Lobell would eventually become one of the strongest proponents of the neoclassical realist movement suggests, however, how powerful the label would grow over time.

Before concluding this subsection and turning to the external theoretical boundaries, it is still necessary to at least briefly review those works that do not explicitly use the hegemonic theory but also cannot be classified simply as defensive/offensive realist. A prime and important example of such work is William Wohlforth's 1993 *The Elusive Balance*. In the book, Wohlforth does not explicitly draw on Gilpin's work; however, his preference for Gilpin over Waltz is both well-known and observable in the book (see also Wohlforth 2011). As the title suggests, Wohlforth's main objective is to engage more thoroughly with the concept of power, and the balance of power, than has usually been the case with structural realism and international relations theory in general. As his starting point, Wohlforth acknowledges the key position of power in the field: since scholars and statesmen consider power to be so important, no analysis of world politics is complete if it fails to treat the question of power" (1993, p. 2). However, he is quick to add that the concept of power is inherently so 'elusive' – or intractable – that perhaps the only way to meaningfully study its impact on international politics must be "through the perceptions of the people who make decisions on behalf of states" (Wohlforth 1993, p. 2). Thus, Wohlforth problematizes the typical structural realist view that material

distribution of capabilities or resources produces automatic results on the side of stat behavior; rather, it is the leader perception that ultimately matters.

Yet Wohlforth's account of perception is not the same as those favored, for example, by defensive realists. He makes this explicit when he writes that :

> "Many authors assume that the balance of power is a real distribution of capabilities, to which states adjust or fail to adjust. The distribution of capabilities exists apart from the perceptions of statesmen, and influences…outcomes. Contemporary assessment will vary around the real distribution. Some leadership will overestimate their power, others will underestimate it. Some will get the trends wrong. Bias and misperception will occur" (Wohlforth 1993, p. 6).

These authors, however, though differing on the importance they ascribe to (mis)perception, have one thing in common:

> "most believe that a real, physical distribution of power exists out there, which people either perceive correctly or do not. The behavior of states may be affected by perceptions of power, most believe, but in the final analysis the outcomes of state interactions will be influenced by the real distribution of power" (Wohlforth 1993, p. 6).

The problem with such approach, according to Wohlforth, nevertheless is that it assumes that it is possible to establish something akin to objective or real power in the first place. Such assumption is highly problematic because determining the 'real' power is possible only in hindsight and, even so, it is always contingent on what measure one chooses – i.e. "the number of 'poles' in a system depends on how one measures power. One analyst's unipolarity can be another's bipolarity" (Wohlforth 1993, pp. 6-8). Thus, Wohlforth concludes, it is extremely difficult to ascribe the ultimate explanatory power to some "prior" structure, as the structure – real or not – is unlikely to be apparent to those making state decisions (1993, pp. 8-10). Statesmen, it seems likely, act on shifts in international power, but these shifts are indistinguishable from the statesmen' perceptions thereof, as "accurate assessment of power [by them] are impossible" (Wohlforth 1993, p. 10). To be sure, these perceptions are not divorced from the 'real' distribution of power, but it is impossible to say how close or apart these are (Wohlforth 1993, p. 10). Yet since it is, logically, not the objective reality (which, in any case, is always *established* only post fact), but rather the perceptions that statesmen act upon, it makes sense for Wohlforth to conclude that scholarly explanations should focus on "rendering of the perceptions that inform decisions" (1993, p. 10). Thus, rather than seeking to measure power, it is necessary to seek to "know more about power as it is perceived and conceptualized by historical actors in various periods" (Wohlforth 1993, p. 15).

By now it should be apparent that Wohlforth's approach radically differs from most other works here reviewed: whereas the latter at least implicitly accept the primacy of power (or other external stimuli), Wohlforth refuses to do so – although he does not specifically reject the utility of generating theories that assume the primacy (see 1993, pp. 15-17). That said, one may be left wondering why Wohlforth's approach is not more usually considered as part of the constructivist camp in international relations. Although Rose (1998, pp. 158-160) rightfully points to the valuable empirical insights of Wohlforth's study, the truth is that he is not somewhat specific about Wohlforth's inclusion in his neoclassical realist kick-off. Without a doubt, Wohlforth is not a typical realist, but his work clearly shows that he *does* seem to consider himself to be part of the tradition (see Wohlforth 1994 and 1999). Thus, also this thesis does not hesitate to include Wohlforth's work as part of its discussion regarding attempts to turn structural realism into a more usable framework – if only to show how truly heterogeneous and broad the 1990s movement was.

With that, it can be concluded that, from the perspective of internal theoretical boundaries, the discontent with structural realism, said to have eventually resulted in neoclassical realism, was actually *much* broader – both in terms of scope and inspiration – than Rose's treatment would have one believe. In the next subsection, this fact will become all the more obvious. Before closing, it should nevertheless be added that the foregoing does not amount to an exhaustive or, let alone, complete overview of works that sought to refine structural realism around the time of the 1990s. For instance, Schweller and Priess' 1997 article on realist explanations of international institutions or Mastanduno, Lake, and Ikenberry's 1989 'Toward a Realist Theory of State Actions' are two notable examples of the endeavor that did not make the final cut – as are many more. Since the overriding purpose of the section is, however, to demonstrate the heterogeneity of, what may for the lack of a better term, be described as post-Waltzian-pre-Rosean realism, the author of this thesis is positive that this section is sufficiently illustrative of the dominant trends and tendencies. Completely omitted was also any discussion concerning neoliberal institutionalism, itself a rendition of structural realism of sorts, simply because the space constraints of an MA thesis rule such contingency out of question. As a result, very few words were spent on, for example, process- or interaction-level variables, sometimes called also 'structural modifiers' (see Snyder 1996; see also Buzan, Jones, and Little 1993). These variables, to be sure, would over time become part of neoclassical realist research; however, since it would only be much later than Rose's article

(which does not mention the variables), it is expected that their role can be discussed – with due historical references – in section 3.1.3.

3.1.2.2 External theoretical boundaries

The preceding subsection hinted at a number of realist works that, in their quest to save structural realism, may have occasionally waded into non-realist – that is, liberal or constructivist – territories. In *Useful Adversaries*, for example, Christensen draws inspiration from Robert Putnam's two-level game approach, which builds on the liberal idea that the international and domestic levels are intrinsically linked and should thus be analyzed in tandem (see section 2.3.2; see also Putnam 1988). Similarly, Lobell explicitly draws on the liberal democratic peace theory to help explain why liberal hegemonies act differently from non-liberal ones (see e.g. Doyle 1983). Yet other works also come to resemble constructivist writing: some, like motivational realism, only superficially; others, however, more thoroughly, as is the case with Kupchan's use of strategic culture (see Lantis 2005). Wohlforth, as has just been reviewed, comes even closer with his discussion on perception.

Thus, without a doubt, realist work around the 1990s did at times – deliberately or not – breach, as it were, the paradigmatic boundaries of political realism, no doubt much to the chagrin of Legro and Moravcsik (1999) or Narizny (2017). This, however, is to be expected: the boundaries, after all, are neither watertight nor hard and fast, and – as will be seen in much greater detail in section 3.1.3 – many self-identified neoclassical realists do frequently borrow from non-realist theories. In the present subsection, for its part, the thesis shifts the focus somewhat: to complement the discussion from the preceding subsection, here, works that sought to remedy structural realism through consciously combining it with liberal and constructivist theories will be reviewed. Although these are not as plentiful, the inclusion of such works is, nonetheless, crucial for further illustrating the breadth of the post-Waltzian realist movement and to, once again, qualify neoclassical realism's claims to exceptionalism in this respect.

Let us begin with works inspired by **liberal theories**. A good pioneering example of a conscious attempt to combine realism with liberalism with the goal of providing a framework comparatively superior to each of the two alone is Jack Levy's 1990 article 'Preferences, Constraints, and Choices in July 1914', where he seeks to explain the origins of the First World War. Criticizing hitherto explanations, Levy (1990, pp. 152-153) calls for a theoretical approach that blends both realist and liberal assumptions and variables:

> "neither an actor-based nor a structure-based explanation is complete without the other, and it has become increasingly evident that neither actor preferences nor the constraints on their choices can be fully specified in the absence of domestic variables."

In other words, Levy assumes that both the international structure (as in structural realism) and actions and decisions of individual (state) actors (as in liberalism) can *equally well* account for international outcomes, such as the First World War – neither is ontologically or analytically prior. In the same vein, it is both their changing preferences (liberalism, fixed in realism) and the constraints they face (realism and liberalism) that help explain state behavior. Moreover, the source of preferences and constraints may come from both the international and domestic milieus (liberalism), not merely as a result of the international structure (realism).

On this basis, Levy formulates an analytical framework built on two theoretical moves: first, he assumes the existence of rational (state) actors who act on the basis of their "preferences, constraints, and choices"; second, he loosens the realist unitary-state assumption to allow for the inclusion of domestic constraints, such as internal bureaucratic and organizational variables, in addition to international ones such as "external military and diplomatic factors" (1990, p. 153). As a result, he produces a research question that puts realist and liberal variables and assumptions on an equal footing, asking "To what extent was the outbreak of World War I determined by the foreign policy preferences of the great powers and the strategic and domestic constraints on their choices?" (1990, p. 153). That said, the conclusion Levy arrives at duly reflects this dual theoretical nature:

> "The primary explanation for the outbreak of the world war, which none of the leading decision-makers…wanted, expected, or deliberately sought, lies in the irreconcilable interests defined by state officials, the structure of international power and alliances that created intractable strategic dilemmas, the particular plans for mobilization and war that were generated by these strategic constraints, decision-makers' critical assumptions regarding the likely behavior of their adversaries and the consequences of their own actions, and domestic political constraints of their freedom of action" (1990, p. 184).

The combination of realist and liberal explanations is here plain to see: from the liberal side, the emphasis is put on the irreconcilability of interests as *defined* by state leaders, as well as their assumptions and the domestic political barriers they faced; from the realist side, there is the importance of the distribution and nature of power, the resulting security dilemma, as well as military doctrines and practices. In Levy's view, therefore, the war broke out as a result of the joint effect of leader's preferences and the constraints to their action, both of which were

shaped by a mixed bag of underlying "economic, military, diplomatic, political, and social forces" (1990, p. 184). Such is not only an enlightening view on the origins of the war as such but also on the possibility of merging the two theoretical traditions to produce an approach that, like works identified as neoclassical realist, hopes to ameliorate the realist paradigm.

Barnett and Levy's 1991 article on 'Domestic sources of alliances and alignments' follows a similar path. The authors' point of departure is the assertion that alliances and alignment patterns, an exclusive domain of (structural) realism, cannot be fully explained by resorting to external, military factors alone; rather, equal consideration must be given to domestic variables. Barnett and Levy agree with the realist assumption that state survival must be the most important objective of all states, and that, by extension, external security threat may well explain a state's choice to enter into an alliance (1991, p. 373). However, they argue that since state survival as such is usually not at state, it might be worthwhile to look for more immediate causes of alignment, instead of assuming a priori the primacy of external considerations on state decisions (Barnett and Levy 1991, pp. 370-373). Rather, the authors

> "assume that state officials pursue goals of social welfare, economic development, and political stability as well as power, security, wealth, and autonomy; that the relative priority given to these goals, as well as the trade-offs made among them, varies under different conditions for different states; and that this is an empirical question to be investigated rather than a purely theoretical question to be established axiomatically" (Barnett and Levy 1991, pp. 373-374).

Consequently, the authors expect that both external, military (realist) factors, as well as domestic, socio-economic and political considerations (liberal) may have an overriding and autonomous influence over states decisions to align themselves with others. More concretely, they focus on two such possible domestic sources of alignment:

> "First, domestic political and economic constraints may limit a state's ability to mobilize internal resources for external security without adversely affecting the domestic political interests of the elite in power and thus may provide powerful incentives for leaders to prefer external alignments to internal mobilization as a strategy to provide for their security in the face of external threats. Second, internal – as opposed to solely external – threats to government rule provide additional incentives for state leaders to seek an external alliance, for they might secure material resources that can then be used to counter domestic threats to the regime" (Barnett and Levy 1991, p. 370).

In other words, states may enter into alliances not only due to external threats, but also to either make up for their lack of resources to deal with the threats on their own or to gain access to

resources from other members of the alliance that may be used for countering domestic opposition. Both of these considerations demonstrate a combination of realist and liberal thinking: in the first case, there might be an external threat to state security, but the decision to enter into alliance or rather pursue domestic arms buildup lies with the state leaders' preferences that are rooted in domestic political and socio-economic considerations; in the other case, the focus on domestic considerations may help explain why states choose to align, for example, in situations where there are no clear external threats to their security (Barnett and Levy 1991, pp. 393-395). In the authors' view, in other words, both external and domestic factors, as well as the combination of both, may equally well explain why states enter into alliances. And since it cannot be a priori presumed which prevails in a given situation, any general model of alliance choices must inevitably include both as a possible source. In that sense, Barnett and Levy's approach is one where realist and explanations have equivalent chances of being in the accurate.

Sterling-Folker alludes to an analogous logic in her 1997 article 'Realist Environment, Liberal Process, and Domestic-Level Variables' where she ponders the possibility of integrating domestic variables within the broader framework of structural realism. She begins by specifying the difference between realist and liberal theory. The former, she explains, may be thought of as an 'environment-based' theory – that is, one that assumes that "the environment in which actors exists is a primary determinant for their interests, behaviors, and outcomes" (Sterling-Folker 1997, p. 4). Liberalism, on the other hand, is a process-based theory, because it assumes such primary determinant to be the "processes in which actors are engaged" (Sterling-Folker 1997, p. 5). On this basis, Sterling-Folker argues, it has usually been expected that it is rather liberalism that may better incorporate domestic variables:

> "Domestic-level variables, such as bureaucracies, interest groups, political parties, and elections, are essentially multiple processes occurring simultaneously within states. Each of these processes produces identities, interests, and behaviors that are specific to it, and that only have meaning within its particular context. In other words, they are causal variables that reward and punish certain behaviors within states. Because liberalism is a process-based theory and domestic-level variables are process variables, the very question of which theory best incorporates [them] would seem to be biased in favor of liberalism" (1997, pp. 8-9).

However, as Sterling-Folker shows, the fit is far from a perfect one (for discussion see 1997, pp. 8-16). Rather, she makes the case that, what are essentially, liberal, process, domestic-level variables may easily be incorporated into an environment-based theory, such as structural

realism, as it may help specify the process whereby the environment causes actors to behave in specific ways: although the cause may lie in the environment, it is the "process that determines how actors react to external events and pressures" (Sterling-Folker 1997, p. 16). The anarchic structure may prompt all states in the system to seek, above all, survival; however, it is only through domestic process variables that it can be understood why different state actors attend to the goal differently, or – as the case may be through emulation – similarly. In other words, domestic processes "act as the final arbiter for state survival within the anarchic environment" (Sterlin-Folker 1997, p. 19). Moreover, not only shape how states respond to external pressures and the need to survive, domestic processes may even "become an end in itself for actors who are engaged" in them and thus effectively preclude a state's ability to respond to the pressures – that is, there might be two contradictory pressures, domestic and external, causing states to behave in ways that seemingly do not correspond to external pressures (Sterling-Folker 1997, pp. 19-20). As a result, both systemic and domestic factors

> "can act as independent variables in the realist argument. The anarchic environment remains primarily but indirectly causal, while process remains secondarily but directly causal" (Sterling-Folker 1997, p. 22).

In essence, therefore, despite approaching the topic through the possible combination of realism and liberalism, Sterling-Folker arrives at a conclusion that largely corresponds to not only neoclassical realism or to pre-structural realists, such as, paradoxically, Waltz himself (1959). This serves well to show how in the post-Cold War era, realist thinkers of various colors were slowly converging on a similar approach, albeit each in their own specific way. It will be seen in section 3.1.3 that in the years after Rose's article, when neoclassical realism would become much more self-conscious, such variety would be much less pronounced – that is, as far as the overriding theoretical logic is concerned.

Not long after arguing for realism's incorporation of liberal variables, however, Sterling-Folker came with a proposal more ambitious still: realism's combination with **constructivism**.[34] As such, she was part of yet another strand of authors who sought to modify realism through amalgamation with other IR theories. This strand, to be sure, was more modest and did not translate into a research paradigm of its own (like defensive and offensive realism),

[34] As Hynek and Teti (2010) show, the possibility of fusing constructivism with realist tradition does not originate with Sterling-Folker, but rather must be understood as the logical outgrowth of a wider and older tradition of those who argued that constructivism was, essentially, compatible with positivist epistemologies. With its focus on the development of realism, this thesis, however, starts only with Sterling-Folker's 2002, where the combination is touted explicitly.

despite notable efforts. However, it is still important to mention it for post-Rosean neoclassical realism would at times borrow from the constructivist territory, notwithstanding official discourse (see next part). Thus, in the forthcoming paragraphs, the thesis reviews what the touted amalgamation of realism and constructivism – two, on the face of it, irreconcilable traditions – was about. Given space constraints, however, the discussion is deliberately kept brief, pinpointing only the most salient points (for deeper discussions, including on viability of the approach, see for example Hynek and Teti 2010).

In her 2002 article, Sterling-Folker begins by making the case for the combination. She argues that realism and constructivism essentially need one another:

> "Without some degree of realist structuralism, constructivism is in in real danger of becoming what Fred Halliday calls 'presentism (everything is new)'; and without some degree of constructivist historicism, realism seems to have fallen prey to 'transhistorical complacency (nothing is new)'" (Sterling-Folker 2002b, p. 74).

However, she cautions that any such combination is inherently difficult to do without risking the transgression of one or the other's paradigmatic boundaries and core assumptions (Sterling-Folker 2002b, p. 74). That said, Sterling-Folker concludes that such combination is, indeed, possible because the two traditions share, what she labels, "Darwinian ontology" (2002b). As Hynek and Teti (2010, p. 187) point out, Barkin arrives at a similar conclusion, arguing also that not only are realism and constructivism essentially compatible but also that their combination is a highly desirable one, as "[n]either pure realism nor pure idealism can account for political change, only the interplay of the two" (2003, p. 337). He reiterates the case in his 2010 book, where he writes that "there are grounds for overlap between the two" (p. 166).

Sterling-Folker puts this conjectures to practice. In her 2002 book *Theories of International Cooperation and the Primacy of Anarchy*, where she, in effect, inserts constructivism within the neoclassical realist logic: "[o]ne of the ways in which neoclassical realism's analytical framework might be developed is to tie it to insights regarding social practices, identities, and interests drawn from Wendtian constructivism" (2002a, p. 29). Arguing for the retention of structural, external primacy, she borrows a number of constructivist variable – notably social practices and institutions – that, despite owing their existence to the pressures of anarchy, once in existence exert autonomous influence on state behavior (2002a, pp. 28-30). In other words, Sterling-Folker posits them to be, in the neoclassical jargon, intervening variables:

> "The presumption of groups in anarchy cannot explain or predict how particular groups will constitute their internal decisionmaking practices, why and how these practices remain unreceptive to pressures emanating from the international environment for alternative institutions, or how transgroup cooperation may be generated by and simultaneously sustain internal decisionmaking practices. It is here that neoclassical realism must turn to constructivism to complete its picture of social reality" (2002a, p. 92).

Other elaborations on the theme can be found also in a 2004 forum, edited by Patrick Jackson, titled 'Bridging the Gap: Toward a Realist-Constructivist Dialogue'. For example, Mattern (2004, p. 345) argues that the combination between realism and constructivism may lie in recognizing that power in international relations may take a number of different forms, that each of the forms "affects the conduct and dynamics of international politics differently", and that "the very conduct and dynamics of international politics are intersubjectively and culturally constituted constructs". Similarly, Barkin suggests that cross-breeding with Constructivism "would furnish Realism with a richer understanding of 'identity', 'change' and of the interplay of power and 'normative change'" (Hynek and Teti 2010, p. 188; see Barkin 2003, p. 337). That said, there are few authors in 2022 that would explicitly espouse the Constructivist Realist (or Realist Constructivist) paradigm in pursuing such ends. However, as has been suggested and will be seen, the same cannot be said for some neoclassical realists.

3.1.2.3 Methodological and ontological boundaries

Having reviewed the attempts to revive (structural) realism through combining it with non-realist theories, such as liberalism and constructivism, it can now be concluded that the era around the 1990s saw a great heterogeneity and variety in the way that realist thinkers sought to modify their paradigm in light of its theoretical-empirical inadequacies. Inevitably, this variety was duly reflected also in the variables the authors chose to employ to this end. Structural realism, in its purest form, is a third-image, mono-causal approach that deploys the independent variable of relative distribution of power in the international anarchy to explain the dependent variable of international outcomes. Though they certainly play a role, even in Waltz's view, there is no place for other independent or intervening variables in the structural realist theory, much as there is no place for other dependent variables (see Waltz 1979; 1996).

However, as the world began to grow more complex – and, before then, as it dawned on realists that Waltz's approach could not explain many empirical issues – it soon became apparent that further variables were needed. This is logical: the approach of the above-reviewed works would not be possible without extending the choice of variables – this, in part, being the

reason why the above subsections already touched upon the topic of variables. Thus, the present subsection should be understood as a brief summary, rather than an original subsection in itself, that seeks to organize and, when need be, expand upon considerations related to the variables – independent, intervening, and dependent – that were deployed by the above-reviewed works. As such, it should be understood as a *complement* to the preceding two subsections. Such treatment is made possible due to the fact that the trends in the first two subsections, as well as this and the next one (empirical and geographical boundaries) worked very much in tandem: each responded to slowly growing empirical complexity and by loosening the basis of the increasingly inadequate structural realism. While the first two subsections saw growing creativity in terms of, for example, the structural primacy, this subsection, it will be seen, saw naturally a greater variety of variables (and, as the next subsection will show, there was also a great variety in terms of empirical and geographical preoccupation). The point about the complementarity and concurrence of trends should be kept in mind: it will be seen in the section 3.1.3 that in the years following Rose's article, when neoclassical realism would assume a more self-conscious visage, the trends would over time begin to turn contradictory.

Beginning with **independent variables**, the era of 1990s simultaneously saw a trajectory of broadening and deepening. Nearly all of the works reviewed in the two subsections above begin by acknowledging the importance of the influence of relative distribution of power on state behavior; by the same token, most agree that this variable alone cannot do much explaining. Some, therefore, attempt to *broaden* the variable – that is, they *add* a number of structural or systemic variables to the variable of relative distribution of power with the view to enlarging the explanatory power whilst retaining parsimony and the exclusive third-image primacy. These variables include, for instance, the nature of military power and the offense-defense balance (Jervis 1976 and 1978; Walt 1987; Christensen and Snyder 1990; Mearsheimer 1994 and 2001; Van Evera 1998), geography (Jervis 1978; Walt 1987; Van Evera 1998; Mearsheimer 2001), technology (Jervis 1978; Lepgold 1990; Van Evera 1998), or (mis)perceptions at the level of the system (Jervis 1976 and 1978; Walt 1987; Glaser 1994/1995). In some later neoclassical realist works, some of these variables would be classified as so-called 'structural modifiers' – i.e. factors that intensify or attenuate the anarchical structure of the international system (see discussion in Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell 2016, pp. 38-43).

The other stream of refining the structural realist independent variable engaged rather in *deepening*, that is, going beyond merely adding other structural factors to making

adjustments that call into question the structural primacy as such. This is the case, for example, of Schweller's addition of revisionist states: in his view, both the relative distribution of power and the "unit-level assumption that some states seek or will seek nonsecurity expansion" are equally necessary variables for explaining state behavior (1996, p. 119). In fact, in Schweller's view, they are equally necessary for structural realism as such: power may be a crucial variable but without expecting that some states are motivated by predatory goals, the structural realist assumptions that states must seek, due to the nature of the system, security above all and that war is always possible would make no sense (1996, p. 119).[35] If all states were status-quo powers, in other words, the notions that all states must always look for ways to enhance their survival, which is always at stake, and thus be concerned with relative gains, would be superfluous (Schweller 1996, pp. 119-120). Thus, in Schweller's view, the importance of state motives is at least *as important as* the relative distribution of power: as he explains

> "War is almost always intended by someone. Throughout history it has been decided upon in cold blood for not reasons of self-preservation but for the purpose of greedy expansion at the expense of others' security, prestige, and power" (1996, p. 120).

The failure to recognize this, moreover, leads other realists to resort to 'non-rational' factors, such as the role of misperceptions, accidents, or domestic constraints to help explain why wars happen (Schweller 1996, p. 120). Yet these, Schweller has it, largely miss the point, as "decision-making blunders, mechanical accidents, situational constraints…misunderstandings [or] offensive technology" hardly ever cause wars to start on their own (1996, p. 120). Rather, it is the dual independent variable of relative power and revisionist motivations – the two of which interaction with, and feed, one another – that serves as the underlying cause.

Glaser concurs to a degree with Schweller's assertions, but stays shy of going as far. In his view, differences in state motives are an important variable "because they can lead states to choose different policies": security seekers will act differently than those Glaser labels 'greedy states' (1997, pp. 190-191). This fact, however, does not mean that structural variables, such as the relative distribution of power, the security dilemma, or the offense-defense balance do not matter on their own. They do; it is only their effect that is either intensified or attenuated by the absence or presence of the so-called greedy states in the system (Glaser 1997, pp. 190-191). Thus, in Glaser's view, state-level motives are not an equally important independent variable of state behavior, but rather a factor that interacts therewith and affects its value. As

[35] In his 2018 book, Mearsheimer makes the very same point, oddly enough quoting Alexander Wendt. See Mearsheimer (2018, p. 193).

such, it comes closer to being an intervening variable in the neoclassical realist jargon, albeit, to borrow from Fordham, an interactive, rather than additive, one.

Similarly, Snyder (1991) and Christensen (1996) both make arguments that place relative importance on unit-level factors in determining state behavior but do not go as far as to suggest that the domestic factors constitute part of the independent variable. Christensen, as alluded to above, toys with the two-level game approach; however, eventually he makes it clear that external factors come first:

> "After receiving reports from [foreign policy] advisers who are insulated from the domestic political arena, state leaders design ideal strategies and then adjust them according to the domestic political constraints on implementation" (1996, p. 24).

Snyder, too, makes it quite explicit that states react to, first and foremost, the imperative of the international anarchy and that domestic variables may only *preclude* correct reaction – although, as Zakaria makes ferociously clear, the case can be made that despite this, Snyder actually devotes most of his book to domestic-level explanation (see Snyder 1991, p. 12; cf. Zakaria 1992). In any case, Snyder's approach certainly does not represent the interactive model in which system- and domestic-level variables would jointly determine state behavior.

In Zakaria, on the other hand, the interaction is somewhat more present. On the face of it, Zakaria clearly favors external primacy: a "good theory…would first examine the effect of the international system on foreign policy, for the most important general characteristic of a state in international relations is its relative standing in the international system" (1998, p. 16). Echoing his 1992 article, Zakaria then adds that such theory may be thought of as the first cut that, if found inadequate, "can be narrowed in scope and layered successively with additional variables from different levels of analysis" (1996, p. 16). In other words, a state's relative power comes first, only then come additional, domestic-level factors.

Yet it is clear from the above discussion that Zakaria has an understanding of relative power that goes beyond that of Waltz or other structural realists, who see it as the property of the structure: for him, state power is equally a function of system-wide distribution and individual states' extractive capabilities. In other words, it is not just how a state measures up with its peers and competitors across the various indicators, but also how well it can translate this, say, potential, into actual, manifest power that determines what the state can achieve in the international arena. As a result, it pays to paraphrase the above quote that statesmen do not act upon increases in the potential, but rather the actual power, made of both system- and domestic-level factors (Zakaria 1998, p. 35). That said, it can be argued that in Zakaria's work,

the independent variable is, in fact, an *interaction* between external and internal factors. After all, Zakaria himself makes this point when he writes that "state-centered realism introduces a domestic variable that interacts with systemic forces (1998, p. 41).

Similar interactions can be found in yet other works from the era: for instance, Lobell (2003) posits such interaction to exist between domestic power politics and external state behavior; Wohlforth (1993), for his part, goes to great lengths to hammer out his argument that relative power and its perception are very much co-dependent, always interacting to produce effects (always subjective in nature) on state behavior. In the liberal and constructivist amalgamations of realism, moreover, the interaction between internal and external components of the independent variable is, logically, even more pronounced. Thus, it can be seen that in the 1990s, it was not only the objectivist, additive approach, but also the more interactive one that defined how the scholars under study though of the independent variables of state behavior – i.e. the rigidly mechanistic, linearly cascading top-to-the-bottom (or additive) model, better associated with post-Rosean neoclassical realism had not yet taken root.

When it comes to **intervening variables**, perhaps the best way to summarize the 1990s approach is to refer to its timid, yet increasing variety and scope. Whereas in later years, there would be something of an explosion of intervening variables in the neoclassical realist work, the slow additions of the 1990s were an important addendum to structural realism, mostly as it, in many cases, opened the realm of domestic variables and, as a result, loosened structural determinism. The most important intervening variables, seen as clusters, deployed by the authors were: *state capacity*, such as to extract resources, mobilize, or generally implement its policy (Christensen and Snyder 1990; Lepgold 1990; Christensen 1996; Zakaria 1998), *leader images and perceptions*, as well as their assessments thereof (Jervis 1976; Friedberg 1988; Christensen and Snyder 1990; Lepgold 1990; Glaser 1992; Wohlforth 1993; Kupchan 1994; Taliaferro 1998), *domestic power politics*, or more generally the preferences of domestic power groups (Levy 1990; Barnett and Levy 1991; Snyder 1991; Glaser 1992; Lobell 2000 and 2003), or *strategic culture*, as was the case of Kupchan 1994.

Space constraints of the present thesis do not allow for a thoroughgoing assessment of each of the variable groups in detail; however, a number of points corresponding with the points of interests defined in the conceptual part can still be distilled. For starters, although many of the works seek to be rooted in the materialist realm, it is apparent that many of the intervening variables used are of the *ideational* kind. This is obvious, for instance, from Snyder's use of such variables as ideology and 'myth-making' (1991, pp. 17-19), Christensen and Snyder's use

of the cult of the offensive/defensive, or from Kupchan's deployment of strategic culture, the "realm of national identity and national self-image (1994, p. 5). By the same token, the use images and perceptions can hardly be divorced from ideational considerations, as evident from, for example, Lepgold's deployment of US policymakers shared views of Europe as one of the causal factors of the country's behavior towards its partners (see 1990, pp. 86-92). When it comes to constructivist realism, the use of ideational variables, of course, is not in doubt (see Sterling-Folker 2002a).

Considering the *rationale* and *logic of deployment*, the dominant pattern that emerges, and simultaneously serves as one of the main separators of the post-Waltzian (and later neoclassical) realists from the pre-Waltzian kind is that the former were a great deal more systematic and meticulous in their approach to variables. It could be seen in the previous section that thinkers like Wolfers or Aron, despite their major similarities with post-Waltzian realists, were rather weak when it comes to specification and operationalization of their variables – in fact, the word variables is not even commonly used in the classical literature. A similar charge, moreover, could be brought up against Waltz himself, as evidenced by Schweller's insisting that Waltz's relative distribution of power be better quantified (see 1993). Thus, a major trend in the 1990s literature was the allocation of greater care to not only better explaining the choice of variables but also to better specifying and operationalizing them.[36] For instance, Zakaria defines his state power intervening variable along two spectrums: the breadth of the state's responsibilities and the degree of centralization; or consider Taliaferro who delves into extensive psychological literature to find support for his use of cognition-level variables along the lines of risk-aversion (1998, pp. 102-108). Snyder (1991, pp. 26-55), too, consults psychology – in addition to political science literature – to "establish a coherent theoretical basis" for the variables that, in his view, help explain overextension. Christensen (1996, pp. 25, 25-28), for his part, provides a detailed specification for his mobilization model, defining his main variable – the 'hurdle to mobilization' – along three dimensions:

> "(1) the ability of the state to raise or maintain levels of taxation before the mobilization drive; (2) the nature and immediacy of the international challenge and the expense of the leaders' preferred policies in comparison with past responses to similar challenges; (3) the novelty and salient history of policy details within the preferred grand strategy."

[36] This trend, of course, was not limited to intervening variables – as the already mentioned example of Schweller suggests, much work in this regard was devoted also to the independent variable, notably the relative power distribution (see 1993 and more fully 1998).

In the same fashion, Lepgold provides a thoroughgoing exposé of his cognitive and organizational variables, showcasing, among other things, a detailed model of organizational adjustment (see 1990, ch. 3). Hence, it can be seen that despite following much the same logic as far as the internal theoretical boundaries are concerned, classical and post-Waltzian realists differ in the degree to which their respective works are dressed up in formalistic, scientific language. This difference, of course, may be understood in the light of the broader behavioralist wave that swept the field of International Relations in the 1960s, but also – and perhaps more pertinently – in relation to the more contemporary epistemic movement in the field that advocated for great formality. This movement, best epitomized by King, Keohane, and Verba's 1994 *Designing Social Inquiry*, called for greater convergence between qualitative and quantitative research, which, in case of the former, amounted to insistence on adopting such measures as formal research design and research questions, hypotheses, or even the of the language of variables as such – which theretofore was far from common (see especially chapters 1 and 2).[37] It is notable that this formalization of sorts of the field left its mark on the nascent neoclassical realist literature that, despite its harking back to the classical works, always insisted on concurrently being more 'scientific' or 'systematic'.

Finally, a brief discussion is warranted in respect to the **dependent variables**, although given the hitherto discussion, the findings presented here may appear less surprising. It has been established that both Waltz's structural realism, as well as most of the reviewed classical works, were interested in providing a general theory of international relations, a theory of international outcomes. In the period reviewed in this part, however, this focus would shift somewhat, with most authors concerning themselves rather with theories of *foreign policy* – i.e. explaining state behavior rather than its system-wide consequences. The shift is readily evident in the works: Zakaria (1998, p. 41) seeks to provide an "accurate realist theory of foreign policy"; foreshadowing Elman, Schweller (1993, p. 74) wishes to sacrifice some parsimony to turn Waltz's theory into "one of foreign policy", as does Walt (1987, p. 1), Christensen and Snyder (1990, p. 144), or Taliaferro (1998, p. 98). This proclivity is also clear from Snyder (1991), Christensen (1996), or those, working under the Gilpinian banner, who focus on the behavior of hegemonic powers, such as the US or Britain (Friedberg 1988; Lepgold 1990; Lobell 2003). Thus, the 1990s, post-Waltzian realist wave can definitively be seen as squarely fitting within the theories of foreign policy tradition. It will be seen that for

[37] On the movement, its proponents and critics, see for example the discussion between Walt (1999) and de Mesquita and Morrow (1999).

most of its existence, neoclassical realism would follow the same path – until, that is, some relatively recent attempts would attempt to steer it back towards the Waltzian tradition.

3.1.2.4 Empirical and geographical boundaries

As the world began to emerge from the Cold War bipolarity, it was, however, not only the theoretical-methodological underpinnings of structural realism that slowly began to grow more complex but also the empirical material the theory had to reckon with. In fact, it has already been suggested that the latter was perhaps the primary driver for the latter: as the subject matter of IR and Security Studies, no longer confined to studies explaining bipolar stability, began to expand, so had to also the fields themselves. The expansion of the field was the concern of the three preceding subsections; here, the focus is thus on the empirical-geographical expansion.

At the beginning of and throughout this section, it was suggested that Waltz' realism, in its purest form, concerns itself with the most abstract patterns of stability and war in the international system, but has a hard time explaining more specific security-related puzzles. Yet it was exactly such puzzles that drove the post-Waltzian realist research agenda in the period under scrutiny (as well as in the next one). To be sure, many of the reviewed authors did concern themselves with puzzles derived from Waltz's hypotheses, as evidenced by a number of works focused on more detailed explanations of balancing / bandwagoning behavior, albeit from the perspective of foreign policy (Walt 1987; Christensen and Snyder 1990; Barnett and Levy 1991; Schweller 1993). Others, however, focused on more specific issues, reflecting the real-world developments at the time. This entailed, for example, instances of irrational and self-defeating behavior by great powers, like the USSR (Snyder 1991; Christensen 1996; Taliaferro 1998), the patterns of unipolar world order (Mearsheimer 1990; Wohlforth 1994 and 1999), as well as the challenges of the process whereby superpowers adapt to their inevitable decline, no doubt corresponding with the US 'hegemonic' position (Friedberg 1988; Lepgold 1990). In other words, the empirical focus mirrored the real-world developments.

This was duly reflect also in the geographical focus: many of the works, inevitably, focused on the protagonists of the ending Cold War. To re-use the terminology of the preceding part, these could perhaps, in this context, be labelled *forward-looking* or *policy-oriented*. However, there were at least two other empirical-geographical trends discernable in the period. First, a number of the authors, as if harking back to classical realism, concentrated on historical – not contemporary – examples, such as the First and Second World Wars (Christensen and Snyder 1990; Levy 1990; Schweller 1993 and 1998; Taliaferro 1998) or even older, citing conflicts and alliance dynamics from the 19th and 18th centuries (Schweller 1994; Mearsheimer

2001). The same would apply on the hegemonic front, where the emphasis would often be on more historical cases, such as that of Britain and the US in the 19th century (Friedberg 1988; Lobell 1998; Zakaria 1998). These could duly be labelled *backward-looking* and *theory-oriented*, as they served – much as they did for pre-Waltzian realists – as the major source of logic (although, unlike the latter, post-Waltzian realists would, at least on the face of it, subscribe to deductive reasoning, Friedberg being a notable exception). In other words, the Cold War would no longer serve as the main source of inspiration, as it had for Waltz and the like, simply because its bipolar logic had arguably little to say about the world that lay ahead, which would in more ways than not resemble those of the past.

The other trend, although still nascent in the realist tradition, entailed a shift in emphasis from the international system as a whole to a more regional-based one. There was, to be sure, a general regional turn in the fields of IR and Security Studies at the time, as perhaps best epitomized by Buzan and Waever (2003), but also for example Lake and Morgan (1997). In such light, it was thus perhaps necessary for post-Waltzian realism to mirror this trend to remain relevant, good examples being Walt's (1987) focus on the Middle East or Lobell's (2003) regionally differentiated understanding of hegemony. It will be seen in the next period that the regional focus would become the dominant prism of neoclassical realism.

Finally, a couple of words need to be spent on the geography of the researchers. While most pre-Waltzian realists, it has been shown, were European emigrees to the US, most post-Waltzian realists, on the other hand, were Americans *born and raised*. The only difference in this respect was Zakaria, who was born in India and only educated in the US. All of the authors here reviewed also worked exclusively at top American universities, such the Columbia University (Christensen, Jervis, Snyder, Zakaria), Harvard University (Walt, Zakaria), Princeton University (Friedberg), University of Chicago (Mearsheimer), Ohio State (Schweller), and other. This comes to show that in the years that intervened between the Second World War and the end of the Cold War, realism would become a de facto 'American Science', to borrow from Stanley Hoffman (see 1977). This perhaps helps explain why, despite noted differences in their works, most of the authors here reviewed still shared a number of similarities, notably their subscription to the Waltzian structural realist paradigm and the growing adoption of formalism. In the next period, it will be seen that neoclassical realist authors would hail from a greater variety of regions and countries, largely in step with neoclassical realism's own shifting regional lens. However, it will also be demonstrated that the overriding logic of neoclassical realism, growing increasingly rigid and uniform in the post-Rosean years, would continue to be dominated by American authors.

3.1.3 Self-conscious search for uniformity against the backdrop of growing complexity (1998-today)

The previous section showed that despite Rose's simplistic characterization, the precursors to neoclassical realism were actually a mixed bag of influences, each hailing from a diverse perspective, albeit all united in their quest to make Waltz's 'old horse' – increasingly limping as the Cold War came to its end – race again. It was suggested that the disintegration of the bipolar structure, a comparably closed and predictable system, opened the floodgates of challenges that, although not really new, had been muzzled in the post-World War II era. Challenges that, many authors thought, structural realism ought to be brought to bear on. Thus originated a heterogeneous movement seeking to amend Waltz's realism through loosening its basic assumptions and combining it with domestic and/or other variables. In other words, realism would seem to shed the *inhibitions* and embrace *ambition* once again. This was more so given that one of the main insights of the previous period was that this movement amounted to more than Rose's combination of structural and 'classical' realism: its scope and influence were much larger, ranging from psychology to non-realist theories. It was also more flexible and original, with each article providing a different take on how to modify structural realism.

It will be seen in this section that such diversity would no longer dominate in the post-Rosean years: although the works that paved way for neoclassical realism were far from homogeneous – there was hardly one 'neoclassical realist approach' to speak of when Rose dubbed it so in his article – there would be a growing effort in the two decades after to turn neoclassical realism, now a self-conscious phenomenon, into a truly unified and coherent theory. This effort would, however, take place against the backdrop of an unstoppably growing empirical complexity of the post-2000 world that would do much to hinder it. To be sure, in 2016, it would culminate in the *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, the most ambitious attempt to come up with something akin to a neoclassical realist grand theory to date. Yet, its Waltz-inspired name notwithstanding, it will be seen that even this effort would find it hard to mold the recalcitrant research tradition into one coherent framework.

Thus, the post-1998 period in the history of neoclassical realism may be thought of as one of two concurrent and mutually opposed trends: one the one hand, there would be disciplinary efforts to unify the school (internal and external theoretical boundaries); on the other, the increasingly complex empirical reality would constantly mar the effort by prompting self-identified neoclassical realists to modify or go beyond their adopted framework to catch up with issues to be analyzed (methodological and ontological, and empirical and geographical

boundaries). As a result, instead of re-creating the Waltzian paradigm for the new era, in the 21st century, neoclassical realism would preside over the paradigm's growing fragmentation and disintegration, showing that a neoclassical theory of foreign policy / international politics was perhaps never a viable idea in the first place; that it was perhaps just the lingering memory of the Cold War that made it seem so. In other words, the post-1998 story of neoclassical realism would come to bear eerie resemblance to the second rhyme of Wilson's song: *Forget what I said 'bout acting on all the plans that I made; now I just sit in the corner complaining, making out things were best in the 80s*.

3.1.3.1 Pushing for uniformity through mythology: internal and external theoretical boundaries, and the search for a neoclassical realist theory of international politics

Although the precursors to neoclassical realism were far from homogeneous, since 1998 there was a growing push for uniformity within the school that consisted in growing internalization and replication of Rose's basic ideas, thus contributing to the rise of what this thesis labels the Rosean myth – the basis for the 'official history'. This trend is most visible from the perspective of internal theoretical boundaries, where the structural-classical mantra was repeated, and external theoretical boundaries, by continuous insistence on neoclassical realism being both separate from and superior to other theories of IR. To be sure, this is not to say that there was no invention during this period of neoclassical realism's history – there was. The purpose of this subsection, however, is to show that this notwithstanding, the dominant pattern of the post-1998 period was the replication of the uniformity-producing mythology. To that end, the subsection reviews works from the period that deal with neoclassical realism from a more (meta)theoretical perspective, that is, such that do not primarily use neoclassical realism to explain empirical puzzles. The latter, of course, are the subject of the next subsection, so as to show how the uniformity here described was both applied and challenged at the same time.

A good case in point is the work of Schweller. The previous period saw Schweller, with his focus on revisionism, as one of the post-Waltzian innovators,. Yet, despite this, the post-1998 years would see him adopt a more uniform stance: in 2003, he would directly draw on Rose to describe the neoclassical realist approach as follows:

> "a new school of realism, variously called neoclassical or neotraditional realism [that] has attempted to place the rich but scattered ideas and untested assertions of early realist works within a more theoretically rigorous framework" (p. 316).

In other words, Schweller would replicate the structural-classical combination myth, despite the fact that, as has been shown, the precursors to neoclassical realism – whom he also cites –

drew inspiration from a much wider variety of sources. In Schweller's view, much as in Rose's, neoclassical realists do not eschew Waltzian structural theories, but acknowledge the need to complete them with first and second image factors: in fact, the structural theories should be used as first-cut baselines and, in case that they do not suffice, "unit-level variables associated with neoclassical realism be added to these theories to explain why" (2003, pp. 317, 346). Schweller effectively reiterates this understanding of neoclassical realism in his 2004 article, arguing that neoclassical realism "posits that systemic pressures are filtered through intervening domestic variables to produce foreign policy behaviors…More specifically, complex domestic political processes act as transmission belts that channel, mediate, and (re)direct policy outputs in response to external forces" (p. 164).

In 2003, Glaser would advocate the same logic for neoclassical realism: "[s]tructural realism is often a natural place to start, because it is a rational, parsimonious theory. If, however, the real world does no match with structural realism's predictions, then drawing in other assumptions about types of states and /or other levels of analysis is often a wise move" (p. 250). As such, he goes on to describe neoclassical realism as 'the necessary and natural evolution of structural realism'. Rathbun (2008), of course, paints it in much the same way, albeit in his view, the extension is 'logical and necessary'. As he writes,

> "Neoclassical realism begins with the premise that ideal state behavior is that which conforms with the unitary actor and objectivity premises of neorealism but shows that when these conditions are not met empirically, domestic politics and ideas are the culprits. Neoclassical realism is not known by what it incorporates but rather where it begins" (Rathbun 2008, p. 312).

Davidson (2006, p. 7) also echoes the Rosean mythology when he writes that neoclassical realism shares structural realism's "emphasis on the importance of power and conflict in international politics but the theory also uses individual and domestic factors to explain the complex ways in which power and conflict are manifest in foreign policy outcomes." He adds that neoclassical realists find their inspiration in the works of classical realists, but they differ from them "in that they attempt greater analytical and empirical rigor" (Davidson 2006, p. 7). Very much the same tale is told by Glenn (2009), who writes that the mid-1990s

> "witnessed the emergence of a new school of realists that sought to move beyond the basic insights of Waltzian neorealism by investigating the interaction of systemic pressures and domestic processes in the foreign policy decision making process, thus providing a much richer explanatory account of why states choose certain foreign policies over others" (p. 524).

Once again, the explanation of neoclassical realism's internal theoretical boundaries follows almost literally the standard Rosean account.

Interestingly enough, the myth was effectively replicated, without much reflection on its viability, also in works that had the explicit aim of clarifying and systematizing the emerging school, further adding to its formal uniformity. This is the case of, for example, the 2009 book *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, the first attempt to think about neoclassical realism on a larger scale. It has been suggested that the book is valuable in that it provides a good systematic account of some of the intervening variables used by neoclassical realists, here subsumed under the broad category of 'state' (see Rynning 2009). However, when it comes to explicating the school's underlying logic, the book draws directly on Rose, describing neoclassical realism to find inspiration in

> "the rigor and theoretical insights of the neorealism (or structural realism) of Kenneth N. Waltz, Robert Gilpin, and others without sacrificing the practical insights about foreign policy and the complexity of statecraft found in the classical realism of Hans J. Morgenthau, Henry Kissinger, Arnold Wolfers, and other" (Taliaferro, Lobell and Ripsman 2009, p. 4).

As such, the book goes on to say, neoclassical realism

> "posits an imperfect 'transmission belt' between systemic incentives and constraints, on the one hand, and the actual diplomatic, military, and foreign economic policies states select, on the other. Over the long term, international political outcomes generally mirror the actual distribution of power among states. In the shorter term, however, the policies states pursue are rarely objectively efficient or predictable based upon a purely systemic analysis" (Taliaferro, Lobell, and Ripsman 2009, p. 4).

Although such characterization does no disservice to the Rosean understanding – quite the contrary – it inadvertently glosses over the noted variety of neoclassical realism's precursors identified in the previous period. This is all the more surprising given that two of the book's editors, Lobell and Taliaferro, both part of the broader 1990s movement to refine structural realism, were originally much more innovative in their approaches (see previous section). One example for all: in 2003, Lobell drew heavily on liberal theories only to argue in the 2009 book that neoclassical realism was largely distinct therefrom (p. 28).

Following the 2009 book, the myth would grow in significance, making its way to an increasing number of self-described neoclassical realist works, both theoretical and practical (next subsection). From the perspective of the former, this is evident in Kitchen (2010), who draws on Rose, Schweller and Rathbun to characterize neoclassical realism as follows:

> "What makes neoclassical realist theory 'new' is its ongoing attempt to systematize the wide and varied insights of classical realists within parsimonious [structural] theory, or to put in in reverse, to identify the appropriate [unit-level] intervening variables that can imbue realism's structural variant with a great explanatory richness" (p. 118).

Much the same understanding can be found also in Coetzee and Hudson (2012), or articles that sought to explore more deeply the possibility of situation neoclassical realism more firmly within the tradition of foreign policy analysis (FPA), such as Kaarbo (2015). Most importantly, however, the mythology was effectively reproduced – although in high detail and systematically – in Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell's 2016 *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*.

In many ways, the 2016 book was a major addition to the emerging neoclassical realist tradition, not least owing to its ambitious goal of developing a "comprehensive…research program" to explain not only foreign policy, but also international politics / outcomes (Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell 2016, p. 1). To that end, the books goes to great lengths to clarify and systematize some of the most salient points of contention, namely issues pertaining to what independent, intervening and dependent variables should neoclassical realism comprise – i.e. what this thesis labels the methodological and ontological boundaries (see Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell 2016, chapters 2-4). In this respect, to be sure, the book provides some interesting insights: responding, for example, to the charges of ad hocism, it specifies not only what intervening variables may be used by neoclassical realists, as well as when and how, but also the relationships between them and their position vis-à-vis the independent variable. This point is taken up in the following subsection, where it will be seen that in spite of the book's methodical approach, it did not become the go-to reference for self-identified neoclassical realist it no doubt sought to. By the same token, the book's insistence on bridging theories of foreign policy and international politics – that is, by assuming both as its dependent variable – is discussed in the next subsection. From the perspective of internal and external theoretical boundaries, however, the crucial point is that Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell *do not* significantly depart from the Rosean myth. Quite the contrary: on neoclassical realism's relationship with classical and structural realism, the book treads a familiar line:

> "As its name suggests, neoclassical realism revives classical realism's concern for domestic politics, the statesman, and institutions, and its emphasis on the quality of diplomacy as a means of explaining the foreign security policy of states. Neoclassical realism departs from classical realis, however, by providing clearly states, testable hypotheses, aspiring to the positivistic

> scientific rigor that structural realism introduced to realism, and specifying the causal primacy of the anarchic international system" (2016, pp. 168-169).

By the same token, the book posits neoclassical realism to be clearly superior to other theories of international relations: "theories from other major international relations research programs – structural realism, liberalism, and constructivism – actually elucidate comparatively little about foreign policy or international politics" (Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell 2016, p. 2). On liberalism, the authors repeat the Rosean charge that theories that follow the *Innenpolitik* causal logic are inadequate for explaining major patterns of international relations: such theories "are never sufficient; they are most useful in explaining only a narrow range of cases" (Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell 2016, p. 2-6; 165-168). Constructivism, the authors continue, is comparably insufficient, because it largely fails to appreciate the effects of the objective, material reality on state behavior:

> "our criticism of constructivist theories is not that ideas, norms, and identities are epiphenomenal. Rather, we contend that by downplaying or even rejecting the importance of the relative distribution of material power, constructivist theories…are limited in explaining many aspects of international politics" (Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell 2016, pp. 6-7; 173-5).

As a result, neoclassical realism is superior to both liberalism and constructivism: it does not reject the importance of domestic-political or ideational factors on the conduct of state behavior; however, by placing them as secondary to the effects of the international structure, it does not lose sight of the ultimate cause of state action (Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell 2016, pp. 2-8; 16-32). Analogically, by complementing the effects of the structure with unit-level factors – said to be derived from classical realism – it overcomes the limitations of pure structural realism. In other words, *the same old story*.

Thus, it can be seen that two decades after Rose's article, the mythology it had set in train is, indeed, alive and well – if something, its dominance over the neoclassical realist literature grew in the intervening years. This has arguably done much to create the impression that neoclassical realism, despite its heterogeneous origins, constitutes a uniform research program. To be sure, not all adherents of neoclassical realism followed the myth. Toje and Kunz, for example, argue in the introduction to their 2012 edited volume *Neoclassical Realism in European Politics* that what this thesis describes as the Rosean myth applies mostly to how Americans understand the approach:

> "In the United States, neoclassical realism is essentially a research programme aimed at explaining how states filter systemic factors through domestic structures, thus explaining

> foreign policy output on the basis of both systemic and domestic variables. Neoclassical realism, as it stands, is thus some sort of 'neorealism + domestic variables'" (p.9).

Similarly, Onea criticizes the myth when he writes that

> "rather than rekindling interest in the realists of yore, [neoclassical realism's] mission was to achieve a synthesis between classical realism's alleged, but *never demonstrated*, emphasis on domestic political and neorealism's structural premises, and in the process emerge as a theory superior to both" (2012, p. 115).

Such charge, of course, is much in the spirit of the preceding sections of the thesis, where it was demonstrated both that classical realism may be largely misrepresented in contemporary neoclassical realist works and that the sources of inspiration that gave rise to neoclassical realism are much larger than the official history acknowledges. That said, other understandings of neoclassical realism from the post-1998 era may seem more apposite. In the introductory chapter to the 2009 book *Rethinking Realism in International Relations*, for example, Freyberg-Inan, Harrison and James acknowledge the heterogeneity identified in the previous section:

> "the *neo* in *neoclassical* then signifies most definitely not a return at a later date to a pre-neorealist thinking but rather an attempt to integrate some of the epistemological insights developed in our [realist] and other social science disciplines in recent decades with the actor-centric ontology so typical of classical realist thought" (p. 6).

A more befitting description of the approach is found also in Foulon (2015), who situates neoclassical realism as "a solid theoretical framework which departs from Wendtian constructivism, Moravcsik's liberal theory, and Putnam's two-level game liberalism" (p. 635). Such understanding, of course, is more in line with both the post-Waltzian precursors to neoclassical realism from the previous section, as well as the actual practice of neoclassical after 1998 that, it will be seen, is largely more eclectic than the simplistic myth suggests. Yet, despite that, it will also be seen that most self-identified neoclassical realists from this period – from and outside the US – nevertheless adhere to the Rosean myth, even if in the name only.

3.1.3.2 Growing complexity: methodological, ontological, empirical and geographical boundaries

The other trend of the post-1998 phase in neoclassical realism's history is one of increasingly growing complexity and variety: on the one hand, in terms of empirical issues and geographical preoccupation, and on the other, consequently, in terms of neoclassical realism's methodological and ontological approach. It was suggested in the previous period that the end

of the Cold War gave way to a more complex world, one that structural realism proved unable to grasp. In this vein, it can be argued that in the decades that followed, the world grew complex still, producing empirical (security) issues that were more variegated both in terms of substance – like the growth of revisionism, ethnic and civil conflict, or irregular warfare – and geography, with the regional level gaining yet more prominence (see discussion in Kerbel 2022, who argues that though the Cold War world was never as simple and predictable as it had been painted, the world today might be reaching unprecedented complexity).[38]

This complexity, of course, is duly reflected, first, in neoclassical realism's empirical and geographical boundaries which stretch in step with real-life developments, and second, subsequently, in the methodological and ontologies boundaries that necessarily stretch as well in order for neoclassical realism to provide explanations thereof. The second stretching is important, because it underlines the contradictory trend of post-1998 neoclassical realism: on the one hand, the school must constantly expand the scope of its variables to keep up to date with real-life developments; this, however, runs counter to any attempts to turn neoclassical realism into a uniform theoretical framework and a general theory. Below, this tension will be picked up. For the present purposes, however, it is necessary to trace how the empirical reality causes the school to expand in the first place. Thus, this subsection begins by mapping the empirical-geographical trajectory of post-1998 neoclassical realism.

When considering the **empirical-geographical boundaries** of neoclassical realism in the post-1998 era, a pattern emerges showing the school to move its locus of interest largely in accordance with real-life changes in security salience. In other words, the empirical-geographical focus of neoclassical realism seems to always go to the regions where the action, as it were, takes place. In the 1990s, it has been established, neoclassical realism spent a great deal effort on explaining America's decline and its adaptation thereto. This trend continued well into the first decade of the 21st century, as well exemplified by Dueck (2006) and Layne (2006), two major books that deploy neoclassical realism to explain changes and adjustments in the US grand strategy, or Marsh (2012). Similarly, a number of works from the period used neoclassical realism to shed more light on the US foreign involvement, as in the case of the Bush doctrine and the 2003 invasion of Iraq (Monten 2005; Caverley 2010), as well as the lack thereof, as for example in Libya (Marsh 2014). This predominant focus on the US, however, would be only short-lived, soon giving way to discussions related to either America's rising

[38] This complexity, to be sure, entails more than the above listed: climate-related security threats, migration, and cyber security are but a few examples of key 'new' empirical security issues that fall outside the scope of neoclassical realism.

competitors and/or regional revisionism more generally.

This shift is best exemplified by neoclassical realism's growing interest in China and the Asia-Pacific region at large. At the turn of the 21st century, when China was still not considered a major threat to the US hegemonic order, Asia did not – save for notable exceptions – feature heavily in neoclassical realist literature (cf. Cha 2000; on Chinese foreign policy trajectory see Strangio 2020; or Doshi 2021). However, as China gradually began to adopt a more assertive international stance – commonly, if not always accurately, dated around the years 2008/2009 – this, too, slowly began to change (on China's assertiveness see Johnston 2013; see also Gilsinan 2015; cf. Doshi 2021). For example, Hao and Huo (2009) used neoclassical realism to explain Chinese foreign policy making, and Sorensen (2013) employed a neoclassical realist lens to probe the very charges that China was becoming more aggressive. Since then, neoclassical realism's interest in China would only grow, as evident from works dealing with China's foreign policy interests and grand and nuclear strategies (Schweller 2014; Rosa and Foradori 2017; Rosa 2018; Ye 2019); or its relationship vis-à-vis the US (Chen 2017; He 2017; Schweller 2018; Wang 2019), other countries from the Asia-Pacific region – like Japan (Meng 2014; Sherill and Hough 2015; Zakowski 2019), Taiwan (Chen 2015), or Australia (He 2022) – or other parts of the world, like Russia (Korolev and Portyakov 2018), the Middle East (Keskin and Braun 2016; Özşahin, Donelli and Gasco 2021; Duan and Aldamer 2022), Africa (Verma 2013), or Latin America (Leiva 2020).

On top of that, neoclassical realism would in this period grow greater interests also in the Indo-Pacific region as such, focusing on places like Australia (McLean 2015), Japan (Saltzman 2015; Ichihara 2018; Watai 2019; de Oliveira 2021; Vidal 2022), India (Rahman 2017; Rajagopalan 2021), Indonesia (Sari 2018; Arif 2021), Myanmar (Peng 2018), North Korea (Nakato 2012), The Philippines (Magcamit 2019), or South Korea (Yoo 2011; Kim 2019; Yu 2021).

Since 2014, neoclassical realism would also rekindle its interest in Russia. This would happen in the wake of Russia's 2014 invasion and annexation of Crimea and its subsequent launch of irregular warfare in Ukraine's eastern territories – events that would confirm (and would be corroborated in doing so by Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine) Russia as a revisionist power in the European region. In this context, neoclassical realists would focus on explaining the causes and consequences of the 2014 invasions (Smith 2014; Becker, Cohen, Kushi and McManus 2015; Muradov 2019), as well as those of Russia's revisionism in general (Götz 2017; Smith 2020). Moreover, much as with China's knock-on effect on neoclassical realism's growing interest in its neighborhood, Russian revisionism would inspire neoclassical

realists to consider also broader questions of European security (see Dyson 2015; Wivel and Crandall 2019; cf. pre-2014 works on the issues: Haine 2012; or Romanova and Pavlova 2012).

Finally, and similar to the Russian case, the post-1998 era of neoclassical realism also saw growing focus on other rising regional hegemons, often explicitly or implicitly revisionist, such as Iran (Junaeu 2015; Bayar 2019) or Turkey (Iseri and Dilek 2011; Donelli 2020; Ovalı and Özdikmenli 2020; Alagoz 2021; Kardaş 2021; Matsumoto 2021; Yılmaz 2021).

Thus, it can be seen that over time, neoclassical realism would shift its focus considerably from an almost sole interest in the US to other regions of the world, with China becoming, for obvious reasons, the most important (though not the only one) interest of the scholars, as evidenced, inter alia, by Randall Schweller's – one of the school's founding fathers, so to speak – preoccupation with it. Closely related to this shift, it is also possible to observe a major change in the geography of the neoclassical authors: whereas, as shown above, pre-1998 'neorealists' comprised, mostly, American scholars, neoclassical realists of the 21st century are notably more geographically variegated. This is logical, as many hail from the very regions to which the neoclassical realist focus itself traveled, contributing to significantly more 'indigenous' approaches to the theory. In fact, it might be inferred that this is one of the reasons, in common with the growing complexity of the world in general, why neoclassical realism finds it hard to become a truly unified research program.

Even more important, however, than where the various authors come from is how they *use* neoclassical realism. This is a second major shift of post-1998 neoclassical realism: not only would the school become more geographically diverse, it would also shift from formal hypothesis testing, conducive to general theory building, to a more practice-oriented and practice-driven approach. This trend, to be sure, was discernable already in the 1990s; however, in the 21st century, it would grow increasingly more prevalent. Of course, this is not to say that no theory-minded works would occur under the neoclassical realist banner: apart from the above-reviewed works, there are also a couple of notable exceptions of works preoccupied with formal theory building, like the edited volume by Lobell, Ripsman and Taliaferro (2009) and, of course, Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell (2016). In the former, for example, Lobell (2009) constructs a threat identification model for explaining strategic adjustments, Dueck (2009) devises a model for explaining military interventions, Ripsman (2009) suggests how a theory explaining which domestic actors matter the most to foreign policy making and when might be built, Taliaferro (2009) outlines a general resource-extraction model, and Schweller (2009) further develops his theory of under-balancing and under-aggression. In the latter, as has been

suggested, the authors construct a wholesale neoclassical realist theory, specifying not only the general logic but also variables to be used. Yet, as will become apparent, such works do not constitute the majority of post-1998 neoclassical realist articles – quite the opposite.

Due to space constraints of a Master's thesis, it is not possible to review the above listed works in detail, as was done the two previous periods, simply as the growing complexity of the world ensures their diversity not only in terms of geography but also substance. That said, a number of commonalities can be distilled. First, as mentioned, the works tend to be problem-driven, not theory-driven – focused on explaining singular cases and phenomena rather than refining the theory through formal hypothesis testing. Second, by the same token, the works usually do not make use of existing neoclassical realist works, preferring an induction-driven approach that, although identified as neoclassical, more often than not results in *sui generis* explanations. Third, as a result, the inter-case generalizability and applicability beyond the subject at hand of the explanations tends to be largely limited. All these aspects, it will now be seen, have major bearing on the **methodological and ontological boundaries**, the second major front of the post-1998 continuous stretching of neoclassical realism.

The interrelatedness of empirical-geographical and methodological-ontological stretching is fairly logical: as the cases to be explained grow specific, so must self-identified neoclassical realists look also for increasingly specific ways to analyze them. As this usually entails the use of novel and original variables – usually labeled intervening – the methodological and ontological boundaries are constantly stretched outward, diminishing neoclassical realism's position as a general theory of international relations in turn. This is more so given that many of the variables are, contrary to the Rosean myth, derived *not* from some classical realist work but rather, paradoxically, from liberal and constructivist theories.

As a result, it may be argued that most self-identified neoclassical realists are, if one were to adapt the official understanding thereof, neoclassical realists in little but the name. Oddly enough, this is often the case: apart from (often superficial) adherence to the system-domestic explanatory sequence, where international factors are the independent and domestic factors the intervening variables, most practitioners of neoclassical realism tend to pay only lip service to the official mythology of neoclassical realism, as started by Rose and continued by the works identified in subsection 3.1.3.1. To drive this point home, what follows is a discussion aimed at illustrating how the increasingly complex and specific puzzles addressed by researchers working under the banner of neoclassical realism drive them to constantly push the school's official boundaries, in turn diminishing its pretenses to a uniform and general

theory of international relations.

This pattern is clearly visible already in the early 2000s works on the US grand strategy. In a telling example, Layne (2006, p. 10) writes that the "United States is a sui generis case of great power grand strategy, because, since the early twentieth century, the United States has been far more secure than any great power in modern history" and that "competitive pressures of the international system press the United State only weakly, [meaning that] domestic factors play a much greater role in explaining U.S. grand strategy than [those of others]". As such, the case of the US cannot be adequately explained by structural realism (Layne 2006, p. 10). Thus, Layne employs rather neoclassical realism: in doing so, he finds that three interconnected factors – "the distribution of power in the international system, economic expansions, and ideology" – best account for the US strategy (2006, p. 10). More concretely, he posits that the US, after 1945, sought to achieve hegemony not only because the international balance of power provided it such opportunity but also, more importantly, because it was motivated to do so by domestic factors: the economic and political Open Doors, or Wilsonian ideology (Layne 2006, p. 194). Hence, Layne's example perfectly illustrates an explanation of a specific empirical puzzle that has limited generalizability and that, despite explicitly subscribing to neoclassical realism, makes predominant use of variables that have no deductive grounding in the neoclassical realist myth – in fact, they are more commonly found in non-realist works (see Ninkovich 1982; Hunt 1987; Van Apeldoorn and de Graaf 2014).

Similarly, Monten (2005), seeking to explain the emergence of the Bush doctrine and the US foreign policy of democracy-promotion, argues that both the "expansion of material capabilities and the presence of a nationalist domestic ideology" may be at play: "[w]hile power is an important factor, long-term variation in the United States' democracy-promotion strategy also turns on subtle but significant ideational shifts in the doctrine of liberal exceptionalism" (p. 115). In essence, Monten finds that democracy promotion is "central to U.S. policy identity and sense of national purpose" and that whether the US decides to pursue the goals actively abroad hinges largely on its capabilities and the ideological predispositions of a given administration (2005, pp. 112-117). Moten openly subscribes to the neoclassical realist dictum, following the systemic-structural primacy in his analytical approach (2005, p. 116). That said, he borrows such constructivist concepts as identity or ideology to produce an explanation that, despite his suggestions to the contrary, does not address much but the US case.

This pattern becomes all the more obvious as neoclassical realism branches out geographically. Sorensen (2013), for example, seeks to explain the specifics of Chinese foreign policy making by focusing on the influence of "domestic political concerns about maintaining

political control and legitimacy", what she labels "state legitimacy" (p. 372). Subscribing to neoclassical realism, Sorensen begins by considering the systemic factors; then, she moves to underline the importance of domestic legitimacy, which she posits to rest on the performance of Chinese leadership and to be influenced by nationalism and "certain popular pressures" (2013, pp. 366-379). In other words, Sorensen postulates a number of sui generis variables to produce an effectively sui generis account. Similarly, seeking to explain the difference between Chinese national and core national interests, Ye (2019) explicitly adopts a neoclassical realist approach that "treats the power structure in place as an independent variable, with two intervening variables – China's strategic orientation and responses by neighboring states" (pp. 1-3). Again, what emerges is a highly informative, yet case-specific account. In this sense, Rosa (2018) follows the same path: although the author explicitly draws on the neoclassical realist model from Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell (2016) to explain the underdevelopment of Chinese nuclear doctrine, he focuses on variables that are specific to the Chinese case, thereby inductively stretching the framework without achieving greater generalizability. As he writes:

> "it is necessary to consider the international environment in which Mao's decisions concerning atomic weapons matured, Chinese policymakers' perceptions of the balance of power, and the domestic constraints within which they decided. Given the particular nature of the communist regime, which was centred on the dominant position of the Party/State, the dynamics of elite politics and the vulnerability of the regime are the most important variables between systemic factors and the reaction of the state" (Rosa 2018, p. 41).

Much the same approach is found also in He (2015), who explicitly draws on neoclassical realism only to posit another sui generis explanation, arguing that Taiwan's "mainland strategy is shaped not just by prevailing international settings…but also prescribed by the island's internal partisan struggles and competing national-building initiatives" (p. 324). It is found also in Nakato (2012), who argues that North Korea's nuclear policy may be explained through observing how systemic incentives are "filtered through North Korean internal logic, which sees a nuclear test as a necessary assertion of its status as a nuclear power when it thinks a changing international environment requires it" (p. 32). Or Watai (2019), who argues that Japan's balancing behavior may be explained by observing "both structural incentives and unit-level variables, particularly the vested interests of a number of actors and the influence of many factors, some of which are economic or bureaucratic not even related to the strategic environment" (p. 3). In all these examples, the authors explicitly invoke neoclassical realism and generally follow the external-internal logic identified in the previous subsection (3.1.3.1)

but mold the label according to the needs of their empirical-geographical subject matter, drawing up sui generis variables that, in more cases than not, have more to do with non-realist theories, like liberalism and constructivism, than classical realism per se.

The case is the same with works focusing on other parts of the world. Becker, Cohen, Kushi and McManus (2016), for example, posit a neoclassical realist explanation of Russia's 2014 invasion of Crimea along the following lines:

> "Russia intervened in Ukraine in pursuit of geopolitical national objectives, as would be predicted by general realist theory. Russia's behaviour, however, often deviated from traditional realist expectations as Russia used normative appeals, economic strategies, and indirect coercion strategies alongside military tools to attain its objectives. Russia justified its geopolitical actions in terms of norms and international law when it could, but it ignored these same norms and laws when they did not provide benefits to the pursuit of national interests" (pp. 126-127).

Similarly, despite claiming to provide a non-*sui generis* explanation, Smith (2014) explains the EU's failure to respond to the then-ensuing Ukraine crisis by invoking EU-specific variables: apart from purely structural variables, it is necessary to factor in also the "decision-makers' perceptions, the constraining impact of Member States' preferences, and the EU's normative power role identity…in order to understand the *ultimate foreign policy decision*" (p. 56). Rather than the touted structural-classical realist combination, such an approach looks a lot like a mixture of defensive realism, neoliberal institutionalism, and constructivism. In a similar vein, Wivel and Crandall (2019) posit a neoclassical realist explanation of Denmark and Estonia's prominent status, what they call 'super Atlanticism', within NATO. As they show, the two countries' decision to go beyond ordinary membership of the alliance was influenced by more than the countries' proximity to threatening Russia:

> "the decision to upgrade from Atlanticism to super Atlanticism went beyond a logic of consequence. In both countries, super Atlanticism was not only considered to be prudent but also to be morally superior. It was not only the result of a cost-benefit analysis but the choice of what the policy makers regarded the 'right' world order" (Wivel and Crandall 2019).

It should come as no surprise that in crafting this explanation, the authors explicitly draw on constructivist works concerning the so-called *logic of appropriateness* (see footnote number 3 in Wivel and Crandall 2019, where they cite March and Olsen 1998).

Finally, the pattern is clearly observable also in the works concerning Iran and Turkey. Junaeu's (2015) explanation of Iran's foreign policy, for example, posits a causal chain

consisting of such variables as "power, status, identity, and factional politics" (p. 9). As with most of the above reviewed works, Juneau, typically, begins by considering the international balance of power but then deploys variables that are pertinent for the case at hand:

> "Power *shapes* the parameters in which foreign policy operates…Status discrepancy the *shifts* the parameters toward revisionism. Regime identity *narrows* the band in which choice is possible, specifying the rejectionist nature of Iran's revisionism. As the factional balance increasingly favored conservatives and hard-liners, foreign policy further *titled* toward their preferences" (2015, p. 9).

Alagoz (2020) employs a similar approach to explain Turkey's foreign policy reorientation towards Asia, using neoclassical realism as follows:

> "along with international and regional systemic factors such as the global shift of power from West to East, the relocation of the center of the international economy, the pivot to Asia trend, and changing regional dynamics in the Middle East, domestic determinants — the AKP's pragmatic foreign policy and the role of the Turkish business community — will be used to explain Turkey's nascent "pivot to Asia."

Once again, the authors ostentatiously subscribe to neoclassical realism – after all, both have the label, as many others do, in the title – and then deploy its basic, Rose-inspired logic of focusing first on the external and then on the domestic, only to stretch the framework according to the needs of their phenomenon and explanation. Such an approach clearly works as far as empirical explanations are concerned: the works are, indeed, highly elucidating and sound. However, it will now be seen that such approach is also detrimental, if not fatal, to neoclassical realism's uniformity and generality pretenses.

3.1.3.3 Summary: the contradictory nature of post-1998 neoclassical realism and the unraveling of the Waltzian paradigm?

Above it was first suggested and subsequently demonstrated that post-1998 neoclassical realism sees the existence of two contradictory trends: disciplinary pushes for theoretical uniformity and cohesion (visible mostly through internal and external theoretical boundaries) and growing complexity of the empirical puzzles picked up by self-identified neoclassical realists that, reflecting the growing complexity of the real world, incessantly push not only the empirical and geographical, but more importantly the methodological and ontological (as well as the external) boundaries of neoclassical realism, jeopardizing any attempt to paint neoclassical realism as a single and unitary theory of international relations. This, of course, should not be surprising: the previous period showed that the immediate precursors to what

was then post hoc identified as neoclassical realism were, after all, a heterogeneous bag of approaches that drew inspiration from a broad range of traditions. Thus, it is only logical that any attempt to group any such mixture under one umbrella is, ultimately, bound to show cracks.

One example for all is the already multiple times mentioned 2016 *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*. The book, as mentioned, is by far the most ambitious attempt to turn neoclassical realism into a coherent theoretical body; it is, however, highly ambitious also in how it wishes to approach this task. Essentially, the book takes in much of what self-identified neoclassical realists had theretofore produced and inductively bases the neoclassical realist program thereon. In other words, it extracts the plethora of independent, dependent, and especially intervening variables used in the works of these authors to devise a neoclassical theory of international politics (Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell 2016, ch. 2-4). Naturally, the theory is considerably complex and intricate: it includes a wide range of variables – from relative power, systemic clarity, and systemic permissiveness (independent variables) to leader images, strategic culture, state-society relations and domestic institutions (intervening variables) to crisis decision making, foreign policy, grand strategic adjustment, systemic outcomes, structural change (dependent variable) – as well as a detailed and comprehensive discussion regarding their mutual relationships and deployment (see Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell 2016, ch. 2-5). As such, it must be added, the book does a good job generalizing and abstracting from extant neoclassical realist literature to provide a fairly elaborate model of foreign policy that may boast the ability to comprise much of what was theretofore considered neoclassical realism.

The problem is, however, that notwithstanding all this, the model eventually does not become a widely adopted tool for those wishing to work under the neoclassical realist label, save for notable exceptions. Rather, as has been seen – and as the international scholarly community is likely going to further demonstrate in the years to come – most self-described neoclassical realists opt merely for the lowest common denominator of almost all post-Rosean neoclassical realist works: that is, the myth of structural-classical combination, the primacy of the external, and the transmission belt metaphor for the inclusion of domestic variables. This, again, is logical: it has been established that much of the post-1998 neoclassical realist work is empirically-driven, with puzzles of increasing complexity and individuality. Thus, adopting a general and pre-defined conceptual model may prove for many neoclassical realist authors unduly restraining: after all, it has been seen that (with a little exaggeration) with each new neoclassical realist explanation came new variables – simply because the cases at hand necessitated such approach.

This approach, to be sure, is highly objectionable – in fact, it very well sums up the three main points of criticism against neoclassical realism: that it is ad hoc, that it is not very much classical, and that it transgresses the paradigmatic boundaries of realism. Thus, the post-1998 period identified in the present analysis in effect gives credence to the critics that provide the basis for the thesis' conceptual framework in the first place. This is good news: not only does such conclusion give validity to the present analysis, but it also reinforces the critics' contentions in turn, successfully testing their hypotheses. As a result, the fact that, in the second part of the analysis, the authors are *asked* what they, given their critiques, think neoclassical realism is, or should be, is further substantiated.

That said, the more immediate conclusion of this analytical chapter is that despite pretenses to the contrary, the post-1998 era demonstrates *no* one neoclassical realist theory of international relations to speak of, as the increasing complexity of the issues to be – and the resulting analyses – effectively precludes any attempt to satisfactorily generalize the immense heterogeneity of self-described neoclassical realists. In this sense, the laudable effort to do so by Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell (2016) was, for most part, ignored by practitioners in the field, as was, paradoxically, that of Rose (1998), who likewise put forward a number of variables to consider. Rather, the only thing that can be said to glue so-called neoclassical realists together is the continuous adherence to the Rosean myth. Such, after all is also the finding of the 2020 'Forum: Rethinking Neoclassical Realism at Theory's End', where proponents – not critics! – of the approach opine that it may best be understood as an "analytical umbrella" with a theorizing style that is "interactive and emergent" and that, recalling Rathbun (2008), it is "coherent and distinct not because of what it incorporates or not but rather because of where it begins – that is, the fact that anarchy is inescapable" (Desmaele and Sterling-Folker in Meibauer et al., pp. 7, 22).

In other words, neoclassical realism is clearly *not* a general theory of international relations or politics, especially not one that Waltz would endorse. For Waltz, a "theory has explanatory and predictive power. A theory also has elegance. Elegance in social-science theories means that explanations and predictions will be general" (1979, p. 69). Even leaving aside the fact that most neoclassical realists, with the notable exception of Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell (2016) concern themselves with explaining foreign policy, not international outcomes, it is clear that neoclassical realism significantly departs from its alleged forefather. Put differently, if neoclassical realism is the 'continuation' or 'extension' of structural realism, as some ifs proponents argue, it is one that does major disservice to the latter's original purpose. Waltz's structural realism, it was shown, was never an unproblematic paradigm, but the Cold

War world made its approach intuitively appealing and attractive. Yet what worked, questionably to be sure, in the 1980s simply, does not do the same trick in the 21st century. In that, it is much like the sequels, spin-offs or remakes of the old 80s action movies: it is increasingly more elaborate so as to cater to the increasing needs of the audience but somehow it does not do the same trick. To paraphrase Wilson, for grand theories of international relations, it seems, things really were *best in the 80s*.

Does this realization, however, mean that the 'analytical umbrella' definition provided by Meibauer et al. (2020) is a satisfactory answer to the overarching question of *what, exactly, is neoclassical realism*? The various critics of the approach certainly do not think it is. This thesis, for its part, shares this sentiment. If something, the conclusions from the 2020 Forum seem like a diagnosis of the problem, supported by the findings of this thesis, that nobody really knows what neoclassical realism is. It is a good starting point for beginning to answer the question – hardly the answer itself. Having reviewed and retold the history of neoclassical realism, it is now obvious what neoclassical realism *is not*. Trying to find answer to what it *is*, therefore, forms the remainder of this thesis.

3.2 Part 2: what is neoclassical realism?

3.2.1 A retold history of neoclassical realism: a summary

Before going on to review the views of neoclassical realism's critics and, eventually, address the overarching question of what is neoclassical realism, a brief summary of the preceding part seems apposite to bring to fore and accentuate some of the most salient findings.

In the **first time period** (1950s-1979), the thesis sought to present an alternative view of the so-called classical – or, as the thesis often called them, pre-Waltzian – realists, i.e. a view that would challenge the prevailing Rosean myth about these scholars. In line with Parent and Byron (2011), the thesis took the view that there is a lot of whitewashing in the typical narrative of classical realists in neoclassical realist literature, with the latter often painting the former just like they want them to be: a highly diverse and incoherent group of thinkers with good ideas about the conduct of foreign policy and statesmanship whose theories, although too anecdotal and unscientific on their own, may be resuscitated and reused by scholars who understand the rigor introduced by Waltz's neorealism.

As the thesis showed, however, such a view could not be further from the truth. In fact, it was demonstrated that many so-called classical realists, from Herz and Wolfers to Aron and even pre-1979 Waltz, actually followed an approach that, taking an outsider view, may easily be dubbed neoclassical. Far from being the infamous 'reductionists', these and other classical realists had major appreciation for the primacy of third-image, external explanations, as well as for the need to complete such explanations with a host of domestic-level factors – from individual leaders to regime ideologies – as both are, in the final analysis, equally important for deep understanding of international politics. It was suggested that such approach to theorizing about international relations had much to do with the thinkers' experience of the First and Second World Wars and a world that, in many ways, resembled the one in which the 'actual' neoclassical realism would emerge.

In general, therefore, it was concluded that neoclassical realism may not be thought of so much as drawing inspiration from classical realism, as taking up where the 'classics' left off when structural realism, facilitated in so doing by the Cold War, came to dominate the realist tradition. From this perspective, classical realism may be understood as an earlier stage of development of neoclassical realism, not a separate tradition, and neoclassical realism may be seen as a continuation of classical realism, rather than something radically new.

This view was further corroborated in the **second time period** (1980s-2000s), where the thesis found that, contrary to the Rosean myth that neoclassical realism seeks to improve

upon the inadequacies of structural realism through combining it with newly appreciated insights from classical realism, the attempts to save structural realism for the post-Cold War environment were actually much more complex and variegated. In the 1990s, it was obvious to many self-described realist scholars that structural realism was in a deep crisis and that measures had to be taken to keep it alive. As a result, a great number of such scholars came up with numerous new approaches – drawing on the traditions of defensive and offensive realism, Gilpinian structural realism and political economy, as well as on non-realist theories, such as liberalism and constructivism – that loosened structural realism's monocausal parsimony and third-image primacy in favor of the inclusion of a greater number of both external and internal variables that may yield better explanations. By the same token, most of these scholars also shifted from theorizing about international outcomes to explaining foreign policy. In other words, it was obvious that the post-Cold War world would necessitate more than pure structural realism could offer, despite Waltz' own charges to the contrary.

Strikingly, however, only a limited number of those seeking to remedy structural realism explicitly drew inspiration from classical realism: though many clearly followed a logic espoused also by classical realists, the period showed that the latter's influence on neoclassical realism's origins and development appears to be highly overstated. A few notable exceptions, like Zakaria or Schweller, did consult the pre-Waltzian tradition; most others, however, found their inspiration in psychology, political science, and other diverse fields. Thus, when Rose coined the term neoclassical realism, there was hardly any one discernable stream that could be placed under the single label to speak of: there was only a heterogeneous group of scholars whose only explicitly shared facet was the conviction to modify structural realism.

This reality would come to haunt neoclassical realism in the **third time period** (1998-today). Following Rose's 1998 article, this period would see neoclassical realism emerge and develop as a self-conscious research tradition that would, however, be critically undermined by two contradictory trends. On the one hand, there would be deliberate attempts to transform the emergent school into a uniform and coherent theoretical tradition through the replication of what this thesis labels the official mythology – that is, through an uncritical repetition of Rose's simplistic tenets, mainly the combination of structural and classical realism and the external-to-internal analytical logic. To be sure, the two preceding sections went to great lengths to prove this narrative to be largely inaccurate. The third period, however, showed that this notwithstanding, it would still come to be widely adopted, creating the semblance that neoclassical realism was, indeed, a reasonably coherent approach.

That said, the second trend identified in the period demonstrated that despite the

considerably broad adoption of the neoclassical realist label, there really was comparatively little common to those actually working under the label. In fact, it was shown that apart from explicit subscription to the tradition, a run-of-the-mill repetition of the official history, and some adherence to the external-to-internal analytical logic, most self-identified neoclassical realists could hardly be more diverse in their explanatory approaches. Being driven, first and foremost, by increasingly complex empirical puzzles, it can be said – with a little exaggeration – that each new 'neoclassical realist' account effectively stretched the school's hitherto imagined boundaries into new and unexpected directions so as to fit the subject at hand. This, of course, would serve to undermine the school's pretenses to uniformity and coherence.

In other words, the third period showed that despite the widely used label, and the air of unity stemming therefrom, a look beneath the surface shows quite positively that there is no one neoclassical realist theory to speak of. Thus, the first analytical part ends with a more solid and mythology-free understanding of neoclassical realism's historical development and good idea about what it, its official history to the contrary, clearly is not.

3.2.2 What is neoclassical realism pt. 1: asking the critics, criticizing the critics

At the end of the retold history, it was suggested that two decades after neoclassical realism's 'official' beginning, some of its staunchest proponents seemed to be throwing their towels in, almost indignantly conceding that perhaps neoclassical realism really was nothing but an umbrella term for a motley crew of scholars interested in international security. Such, to be sure, could also be the immediate conclusion of this thesis' first analytical part. However, as mentioned, this thesis does not want to settle for a definition that, although not exactly negative, is not a positive one either. Thus, in the pages that follow, the thesis will revert to its original research question of *what is neoclassical realism* and seek an answer thereto: first by asking the very critics of neoclassical realism and then by devising an original one.

With the exception of the *empirical and geographical boundaries*, the four questions that make up this thesis' conceptual framework were derived from a synthesis of a number of common threads within the works of the so-called neoclassical realism's critics: *internal theoretical boundaries* corresponded with the charges that neoclassical realism leans too heavily on structural realism, takes woefully little from classical realism, and does not bother reconciling the two schools' opposing logics; *external theoretical boundaries* reflected the common accusations that neoclassical realism inadvertently transgresses the paradigmatic boundaries of realism by regularly borrowing from non-realist theories; and *methodological*

and ontological boundaries derived its lens from contentions that neoclassical realists treat their explanatory variables haphazardly, in an ad-hoc fashion. Many, if not most, of the views that gave rise to the three conceptual questions were, in turn, corroborated in the thesis's ensuing analysis: indeed, there is preciously little classical about neoclassical realism, the school's practitioners regularly and seamlessly borrow from other theories of IR, and the infamous variable proliferation seems to be a fact of life in neoclassical realism. Thus, it was concluded that the analysis gave the critics' charges credence. That, to be sure, was good news, as it provided solid ground for the thesis' plan to ask the critics about their thoughts on what, given their views, should one make of neoclassical realism.

Yet, notwithstanding the soundness of the plan, a problem readily manifested itself as soon as it was put into practice: the first reading of the critics' views showed that, strange as it may seem, the critics have actually very little to say about this thesis' primary research question. The critiques are very good at spotting the various abovementioned problems with neoclassical realism. By the same token, they often also suggest a handful of solutions to ameliorate the issues, such as when Rynning (2009) calls for a greater inclusion of classical realism or when Legro and Moravcsik (1999) advise that only adherence to the paradigmatic boundaries of realism will help arrest the variable proliferation. Sometimes the criticism is vociferous and fierce, as when Vasquez (1997) calls much of post-Waltzian realism degenerative; and Narizny's (2017, p. 188) suggestion that neoclassical realism is "beyond saving; it should be abandoned" shows that so can be the solutions. The critics also differ among themselves, as best exemplified by Quinn's (2013) assertions – much to the contrary of Rynning (2009), Tang (2009), or Sears (2017) – that, since structural and classical realism are mutually exclusive, more classical realism does not invariably translates into a 'better' neoclassical realism. For all that, however, a common thread linking all the critics is that they all seem to stop short of putting forward a conclusive and authoritative statement about what – given all its problems – neoclassical may be thought of as.

Why is this? Why do the critics seem culpable of penning acute and revelatory analyses only to jump the gun before providing a good account of neoclassical realism? Why does it seem that the critics, with all the credit that is due, seem unable to see the forest for the trees? One possible answer may be a lack of ambition – after all, the works of the critics are usually 'only' review articles, where space constraints set the limits of what can be achieved. However, it is hard to imagine this being the primary reason. A more plausible one may be that the critics, despite all their objections to neoclassical realism, still come closer to providing *problem-solving*, rather than *critical theories* thereof. This famous distinction, coined by Robert Cox,

goes some way toward explaining why the critics seem unable in their works to go beyond certain, seemingly invisible limits.

In his 1981 article, Cox writes that theories can "serve two distinct purposes. One…to be a guide to help solve the problems posed within the terms of a particular perspective which was the point of departure. The other…to become clearly aware of the perspectives which give rise to theorising, and its relation to other perspectives…and to open up the possibility of choosing a different valid perspective from which the problematic becomes one of creating an alternative world" (p. 128). The first, which he labels problem-solving, "takes the world as it finds it", it does not seek to question its foundations or organizing principles; rather, it aims to make the world run "smoothly be dealing effectively with particular sources of trouble" (Cox 1981, pp. 128-129). Problem-solving theories do not deal with the edifice as such, they always consider only problems arising in specific areas while assuming relative stability of the whole (Cox 1981, p. 129). As a result, their strength lies in the "ability to fix limits or parameters to a problem area and to reduce the statement of a particular problem to a limited number of variables which are amenable to relatively close and precise examination" (Cox 1981, p. 126). In other words, problem-solving theories focus on the trees.

Critical theory, on the other hand, takes the bigger-picture view. It does not take the foundations of a given edifice for granted; rather

> "it calls them into question by concerning itself with their origins and how and whether they might be in the process of changing. It is directed towards an appraisal of the very framework for action, or problematic, which problem-solving theory accepts as its parameters. Critical theory is directed to the social and political complex as a whole rather than to separate parts" (Cox 1981, p. 129).

Critical theory, therefore, focuses on the forest: it strives for a "larger picture of the whole of which the initially contemplated part is just one component, and seeks to understand the processes of change in which both parts and whole are involved (Cox 1981, p. 129).

Imagining neoclassical realism to be one such forest, one such whole, it then transpires that while the present thesis implicitly aspires to be a critical theory of neoclassical realism, the critiques fit much better within the problem-solving category. This is readily observable not only in the critics' focus on the parts: some focus on neoclassical realism's relationships with classical realism, some on how it stands vis-à-vis other IR theories, and some on how operates with its variables. It is observable also in the, often implicit but nevertheless present, objective to offer solutions to remedy problems in a given compartment. Put differently, the critics do

not seek to understand what neoclassical realism is; rather, they seek to identify its flaws and put forward possible solutions with the view to making the whole run smoother. They want a better neoclassical realism, not a better view of neoclassical realism. The latter, of course, is what this thesis aims toward: it approaches the parts not as ends in themselves but rather as devices towards a better understanding of the whole. This can be observed in the preceding analysis: although the thesis touches upon many of the issues addressed by the critics, it does not engage with them in a substantive manner. It acknowledges that the relationships, say, between neoclassical realism and classical realism is a key battleground, but does not go into great detail on the relationship's viability because it has its sight set on the bigger picture. The critics, on the other hand, are all about the nitty-gritty, and that is why they inadvertently fall short of providing an alternative account of neoclassical realism.

If the critics do not provide any such alternative account, however, it logically follows that they must, at least implicitly, subscribe to an already existing understanding of neoclassical realism. This, of course, is a necessary trait of all problem-solving theories. That said, a second reading of their works reveals that, strange as it may seem, the critics of neoclassical realism, too, operate within the boundaries of the Rosean myth, the so-called official history of neoclassical realism. This does not mean that they accept the mythology at face value – after all, they are not labeled critics of neoclassical realism for nothing. Yet they never go far enough in their criticism to shun the Rosean narrative either. Rather, their modus operandi appears to be an implicit or explicit acceptance of the mythology as an *ideal* that neoclassical realism, as it stands, still fails to live up to. This ideal, of course, is a theory of foreign policy (or international relations). Indeed, it is taken for granted that something like a coherent neoclassical realist theory, along the lines suggested by Rose, *can* exist. As it is, however, it is still a faulty one, one that still has a number of issues that need to be tackled. Sears (2017) illustrates this point perfectly when he writes that

> "neoclassical realism's aim of bringing together unit- and structural-level causes and effects into a coherent theoretical framework is a progressive aim, but…the authors' eclectic approach to theoretical explanation and failure to develop a clear and coherent 'hard core' of premises and assumptions puts the research program at risk of being degenerative. Ultimately, neoclassical realism is missing a simple (or 'elegant') statement of the theory's core logic".

Suggesting how to better specify the core logic, of course, permeates the critiques – much in line with the goals of problem-solving theories. As already mentioned, Rynning (2009) opines that neoclassical realism, which he refers to as "theory", would benefit from deeper

understanding of motives that can stem from greater inclusion of classical realism. This, of course, serves to reinforce both the myth that neoclassical realism is or may be a theory, and that classical realism is or should be a vital part thereof. Quinn (2013, pp. 177-179) suggests that neoclassical realism may become a "generalizable theory of foreign policy" but, to that end, it would have to eventually loosen its structural primacy and move closer to classical realism. Again, much is done to give credence to the Rosean myth. Before echoing both Rynning and Quinn, Tang (2009, p. 799) effectively repeats the official narrative when he writes that although admitting

> "structural realism's notion that structure is an important factor for shaping state behavior, neoclassical realism adds a new assumption: structural impact has to be relayed to state behavior via domestic politics, especially state structure and leadership/elite's perception."

Moreover, even the more fierce critics like Legro and Moravcsik (1999) or Narizny (2017) demonstrate effectively their adherence to the Rosean myth. Though both articles are highly critical and skeptical about the existing state of neoclassical realism, to the extent that it should be abandoned, both in turn express ideas about how a better 'neoclassical' realist theory of foreign policy may be constructed. For Legro and Moravcsik,

> "It would be preferable for realists and their interlocutors to observe greater precision in stating and applying its premises…. [doing so] would provide theoretical foundations clearly distinct from other rationalist theories, generate crisper empirical predictions, and contribute to more rigorous multicausal syntheses. Such a coherent and distinct realist paradigm would be fit to assume its rightful role in the study of world" (1997, p. 55).

Narizny treads a similar line, writing that

> "realism does not preclude the use of domestic variables…there are ways that realists can refine their core concepts without overstepping their paradigmatic their paradigmatic boundaries. Most of the works originally reviewed by Rose do, in fact, meet the [realist] requirements that states are motivates by survival and are functionally undifferentiated" (2017, p. 188).

In other words, neoclassical realism – in its present form – may not be up to the task, but the ideal that Rose put forward in 1998 as such is *not* out of question. Far from challenging it, such assertion, of course, does much to reinforce the myth.

Thus, it can be seen that, for all their value-added, the critiques of neoclassical realism can only get one so far in seeking to understand what is neoclassical realism, simply because they also subscribe to the Rosean narrative. Neoclassical realism, from this perspective, aspires

to be a theory, usually of foreign policy. That it is, at the moment, faulty or degenerative, is ultimately beyond the point: what matters for the discussion in the present thesis is that the critics of neoclassical realism never stop to consider whether neoclassical realism is, or perhaps could be, something altogether different. The critics spend much time contemplating how neoclassical realism might become a better theory – or how it never will – but they never put forward an alternative view. In this sense, the findings of the proponents of neoclassical realism in Meibauer et al (2020) cited above paradoxically appear more innovative in comparison.

Then again, could the critics be right? Is neoclassical realism simply a faulty and degenerative theory? Could this be the reason the school continues to be so contested and controversial? Following the logic of Occam's razor, such would be an elegant and straightforward explanation: neoclassical realism stirs controversy and seemingly eludes solid understanding because it is a flawed and incomplete theory; yet, at its core, it is still a theory none the less. This view would be in line with Vasquez (1997) who argued that much existing post-Waltzian works ran the risk of being degenerative in the Lakatosian sense. It might also help explain the immediate conclusion of the first analytical part, namely, that neoclassical realism clearly did not amount to a coherent theory, not to mention as per the dictates of Waltz. Could this mean, simply, that neoclassical realism may best be understood as a bad theory?

Although intuitively appealing, this ultimately does not seem right: would such a theory produce as extensive a scholarship as neoclassical realism has, with scores of acute and accurate analyses that, although with limited generalizability, have valuably extended the knowledge pertaining to international security in the post-Cold War world? This paradox goes back to the thesis' original puzzle: how come a tradition so poorly understood as neoclassical realism continues to prove its analytical relevance? Is degenerative theory a good explanation of the relevance? Let us not forget that neoclassical realism is not only a popular choice but also that neoclassical realist analyses are usually analytically sound and valuable.

A simple test may help resolve the issue. Let us assume for a moment that neoclassical realism *was* a flawed, degenerative theory. At the same time, however, it is known that neoclassical realism has, this fact notwithstanding, produced numbers of brilliant analyses of international security puzzles. This may be a lucky coincidence. That said, it logically follows that the analyses and explanations should only be improved if neoclassical realism were to become *less* faulty, *less* degenerative. In other words, assuming that neoclassical realism is a theory, it should on balance benefit from the advice provided by its critics. Let us, therefore, discuss how the advice, if implemented, would impact on the school.

Begin with the first one, namely that neoclassical realism would benefit from greater

specification of domestic processes that might stem from greater embrace of classical realism. It is certainly true that neoclassical realist works tend to have shallower understanding of the domestic than, say, liberal theories, and that state motives as a variable are almost altogether missing from the works (see Rynning 2009; Tang 2009; Narizny 2017). However, it seems doubtful that much improvement in this respect could be achieved through larger inclusion of classical realism: recall that classical realism itself is well-known for its chronic lack of specification and haphazardness. The understanding of state motives and state processes that can be found in pre-Waltzian realist works is undeniably enlightening, but it hardly meets the requirements of present-day social science, to which neoclassical realism aspires to adhere. In other words, better specification cannot hurt, but invoking classical realism as the guide would seem poised to do more harm than good, especially as it would further aggravate the school's increasing heterogeneity and limited generalizability.

Thus, the first suggestion fails not so much because it would not improve neoclassical realist explanations (it might as well), but rather because the remedy it offers largely misses the mark. Strangely enough, it also seems to miss that many, especially newer, neoclassical realist works are actually highly rigorous and 'scientific' in their analyses. If something, therefore, it attests to the looming and pernicious influence of the Rosean myth: it takes for granted that neoclassical realism draws on classical realism, and, when it finds out that it really does not, it uncritically suggests that it should.

A related suggestion can be found in Quinn (2013), who writes that a wholesale combination of structural and classical realism is infeasible to begin with. In his perspective, neoclassical realism must willfully subordinate the domestic to the international, lest it find itself on a collision course with structural realism, its proclaimed theoretical forefather (Quinn 2013, pp. 177-179). Thus, he continues, neoclassical realism faces essentially two choices: either it accepts its role as a corrective to structural realism or breaks away from it to become a general theory of foreign policy (Quinn 2013, pp. 177-179). The choice Quinn posits is a salient one: it is true that structural and classical realism are theories of opposing logics, one nomothetic and parsimonious, the other idiographic and rich. Yet he errs in suggesting that it is a choice faced by neoclassical realists.

Classical and structural realism may well be incompatible. However, it has been established that there is almost nothing classical about neoclassical realism: in fact, the only thing that is generally classical about it is the combination of external and internal factors, which, paradoxically, is something that modern realists usually do not associate with their classical predecessors. Moreover, as evident from the above analysis, although it does, indeed,

lean more on structural than on classical realism, there is not so much structural realist about the school either: it is neither nomothetic nor parsimonious, it does not seek to explain international outcomes but foreign policy, and its proponents are – if not in theory then in practice – interested in deep explorations of sui generis cases, not sweeping generalizations (see Rynning 2009). In fact, it may be argued that the only thing that is structural about neoclassical realism is the latter's adherence to third-image primacy, which – as shown in the analysis – is not unique to structural realism.[39] Thus, the dilemma is true, it just does not apply to neoclassical realism, simply because practicing neoclassical realists take neither classical nor structural realism too seriously, save for when replicating the mythology. Following Quinn's advice would, therefore, do arguably little to ameliorate neoclassical realist explanations: if something, it would create the very dilemma it seeks to resolve by forcing the school to more committedly embrace either version of realism. This might benefit the school from the perspective of theory, but it is hard to escape wondering whether doing so would not amount to shooting itself in its own foot.

This dilemma becomes even more pronounced with yet another piece of advice, one that follows jointly from Legro and Moravcsik (1999) and Narizny (2017). As explained above, the two articles argue that neoclassical realism (or something akin thereto) should take care to stay within the paradigmatic boundaries of realism and not borrow from non-realist theories. Doing so will not only ensure that neoclassical realism does not inadvertently degenerate the realist paradigm, but also the variable proliferation and adhocism will abate, as the paradigm will provide guidance (Moravcsik and Legro 1997, pp. 53-55; Narizny 2017, pp. 187-190). From the point of view of theory, this is a sound piece advice: cohesion and consistency are key ingredients of a good theory, not least because they facilitate generalizability. Thus, assuming that neoclassical realism is a faulty theory, following this advice might go some way toward rectifying its state.

That said, it if far from clear whether neoclassical realism would actually benefit from doing so. This may seem counterintuitive, but it must be remembered that the question underlying this test is not whether the critics' advice would make neoclassical realism a better theory in itself but whether doing so would improve upon its ability to explain empirical puzzles. It pays to recall that neoclassical realism started out as an attempt to revive (structural) realism and transform it so that it could explain the increasingly complex post-Cold War world.

[39] This adherence is usually present in the form of the employment of the so-called structural realist baselines, where neoclassical realists pick a structural realist hypothesis – say, the balance of threat – and then go on to explain, using sui generis variables, why it does not obtain. Yet even this is not always present.

Its proponents do not seem to satisfy themselves with realism being a merge 'flashlight', as John Mearsheimer puts it, that does not explain everything but explains a couple of things well (2001, p. 11). On the contrary, it is apparent from this thesis' analysis that self-identified neoclassical realists have their sights set on explaining a great deal of thing, varied both in terms of substance and geography. Whether the approach they adopt to this end is theoretically sound and cohesive, whether it is truly realist, does not seem to weigh on their minds. If the growing complexity of the world demands borrowing from other schools of IR and drawing up sui generis explanations, most neoclassical realists seem to concede, then so be it.

It is the same with the other two suggestions: it may well be true that classical realism is almost missing from neoclassical realism and that the combination of structural and classical realism is, from a theoretical perspective, an uneasy one. But this is hardly of major importance to the practitioners: not only would the suggestions, as determined above, do neoclassical realist explanations little good, but the fact that they are almost never heeded clearly shows what really matters to the practitioners. It is solid empirical explanations, not a solid theory. Perhaps the best illustration of this view was offered in 2003 by Randall Schweller, one of the school's longest-running proponents, who outlines four criteria along which neoclassical realism's success should be judged:

> "First, does the research ask interesting and important questions, raising, for example, new theoretical or empirical puzzles? Second, are plausible and compelling answers to these questions provided, that is, are the hypotheses and the theory or research program in which they are embedded reasonably supported by the evidence? Third, is the methodology employed consistent with the broad canons of evidence and argument in the social sciences? […] And fourth, when evaluating an entire research program or body of theory, we must ask a basic Lakatosian question: is the research program producing cumulative knowledge?" (p. 315).

Nowhere in this excerpt does one find insistence on internal theoretical consistency, strict adherence to the boundaries of realism, or circumspection when it comes to variables. All that matters is that neoclassical realism be able to explain new puzzles, in a logical and scientific manner, and thus contribute to a growth of something like a neoclassical realist research tradition. It can, of course, be seen from the thesis' analysis that such view fits the current state of neoclassical realism almost perfectly.

Thus, it becomes more apparent that Legro and Moravcsik's and Narizny's advice, though understandable from a theoretical perspective, would arguably also do neoclassical realism little good. Far from improving upon its explanations, it would, at least from the

perspective of those who work under the neoclassical realist banner, serve as an undue straitjacket – one that would inadvertently limit the school's proponents ability to account for the increasing and increasingly complex empirical puzzles.

That said, it seems from the test that following the critics' advice on how to make neoclassical realism a 'better theory' would not reach any desirable results. In fact, it was demonstrated that the suggestions would either prove unsatisfactory, create unnecessary problems, or even potentially rob neoclassical realism of the very qualities that give it its power. All in all, the results of the test point to a serious case of misdiagnosis: the potentially ill effects of the suggestions seem to indicate that neoclassical realism cannot be satisfactorily conceived of as a theory of foreign policy or international relations. Sure enough, it may appear like a faulty one to the critics, but then again, so may a cat appear to be a faulty dog: it appears faulty only because it is *not* a theory in the first place.

Thus, once again, the thesis arrives at a familiar destination: it becomes obvious what neoclassical realism is not. This, however, does not necessitate a return to the square one, as the review of the critics touched upon a key issue in this respect. The first analytical part converged on the idea that except for a superficial adherence to the Rosean myth, there was actually quite little that the various neoclassical realists had in common. This was a description, rather than a substantive claim. However, whilst reviewing the critics' views, it was subsequently suggested, by way of rebuttal, that it actually *might* be more than simply a seemingly unsatisfactory state of the art. It was shown, somewhat perplexingly, that though the untamable heterogeneity of neoclassical realism would prove inimical under the assumption that it is a theory, the same heterogeneity might be a source of strength once the assumption is loosened. This reverse logic thus suggested a possibly fruitful way toward answering this thesis' research question: in seeking to understand what neoclassical *is*, one should not focus on what it *does not do well* but rather on what it *does well*.

The former, to be sure, proved invaluable for understanding what neoclassical realism is not, as a major first step for a critical theory is showing how a given order "came about" (Cox 1981, p. 129). Yet since the logical continuation is the presentation of an alternative new perspective on the order, it becomes apparent why focusing on what neoclassical realism does not do well is not enough (Cox 1981, pp. 128-129). Doing so may work from the problem-solving perspective: although, as was shown, the critics' solutions were far from watertight, they served their purpose insofar as they reinforced the myth that neoclassical realism was, or was en route to becoming, a theory of foreign policy / international relations. From the critical-theory perspective, however, if one is to move from a negative to a positive definition, focusing

on what neoclassical does not do well must necessarily be complemented by what it does well. This is almost commonsensical: a professional athlete is defined primarily by what she does best – that is, running fast; she is not defined by, say, her mediocre skiing skills. When seeking to positively define neoclassical realism, therefore, the final paragraphs of this chapter follow this logic.

3.2.3 What is neoclassical realism pt. 2: an original answer

From the hitherto discussion and analysis, three pertinent things can be distilled: neoclassical realism is not a theory of foreign policy / international relations, yet it pretends to be one through its self-replicating mythology, and a satisfactory path to understanding what it is may lie in considering what it does best. Let us, therefore, begin to answer the research question, by further extending upon the latter point.

It was already suggested that the immense heterogeneity of neoclassical realism and only a superficial adherence to formal theoretical assumptions may be the school's greatest advantage. Indeed, it became apparent that borrowing from non-realist theories, positing case-specific variables, and paying, for most part, only lip service to the official mythology works well for the school's proponents, whose ultimate goal, it appears, is the ability to explain increasingly complex and specific empirical puzzles (see the above quote by Schweller). This seems to have been the goal at least since the 1990s, with the school's gamut growing proportionally with the world's complexity. As a result, it is possible to conclude that neoclassical realism's greatest strength lies in it being able to accommodate and provide the aegis for a wide range of explanations of international security phenomena. It is both popular and analytically potent because it invites researchers to take neoclassical realism for what they want given their empirical interest, especially as that, more often than not, entails outright hijacking of clearly non-realist variables, such as strategic culture or domestic interests. In that sense, neoclassical realism does come close to resembling the "analytical umbrella" that the 2020 Forum suggested it was (Meibauer et al 2020).

It then, however, begs the question of *why all the pretense*: why does neoclassical realism, on the one hand, vehemently pretend to be a theory, and why, on the other, do analysts of various stripes and geographies continue to self-identify as neoclassical realists? These two questions, it will now be seen, are intimately interrelated, and together constitute the final piece of the present puzzle. Given all that has been discussed, the pretense does not seem to make much sense: why try and keep together something as variegated; what *purpose* does it serve? Desmaele (in Meibauer et al 2020, p. 7), as well as Rathbun (2008), argue that neoclassical

realism is coherent "because of where it begins – that is, the fact that anarchy is inescapable". In practical terms, this translates into beginning analysis with considering the external and, only then, the internal – one of the few minimums shared by almost all neoclassical realists. Might this be the reason why scholars flock to neoclassical realism: is it because it tells them *where to begin*? Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell (2016, p. 164) certainly think so: explaining why neoclassical realism is not called simply eclecticism, although it clearly shares many of the its distinctive features, they write that

> "Neoclassical realism, with its attention to variables at multiple levels of analysis and its emphasis on explanatory power over parsimony belongs to this theoretical movement. Nonetheless, it differs from eclectic theory in important ways. Most importantly, it stresses the primacy of the international system. States construct foreign policy with an eye to the external environment above all other considerations, as realists maintain. Whether and how they respond to international challenges may be affected by other variables, be they domestic political variables of the type emphasized by liberals or ideational or cultural variables advanced by constructivists. Nonetheless, neoclassical realists are still realists and privilege realist variables, incorporating variables from other paradigms in a rather regular, prespecified, and systematic manner. In this regard, neoclassical realism is a realist subset of eclectic or multiparadigmatic theories. All neoclassical realist theories are multiparadigmatic, but not all multiparadigmatic or eclectic theories are neoclassical realist."

In a word, the authors effectively corroborate the findings of both this thesis' analytical part and of Meibauer et al (2020), namely that the only thing that (nearly) all neoclassical realists avowedly share is the external-to-internal analytical logic. Is this, however, a sufficient enough reason to label oneself a neoclassical realist?

To be sure, following this so-called *Primat der Aussenpolitik* is both a legitimate and perhaps warranted approach. As Zakaria writes, at a time when neoclassical realism has yet to take hold, a good theory of states' foreign policy should begin by considering the effects that the international system has on them (1992, pp. 196-198). This view is certainly far from consensual: some argue, to the contrary, for the primacy of the domestic, the so-called *Innenpolitikers* (for example Moravcsik 1997), other still argue that any such separation is necessarily artificial and impossible (see Walker 1993). Though the latter are probably the closest to the truth, it does not mean that the primacy of either Aussen- or Innenpolitik is not viable or justifiable as an analytical approach. Beyond doubt, it is perfectly plausible to begin one's analysis with the assumption that the effects of the external should be given precedence. Does one, however, need to subscribe to neoclassical realism to figure this out? Clearly not:

even a cursory overview of existing security studies literature shows that neoclassical realists are far from the only tradition espousing the external-to-internal analytical logic – consider, for example, the works of realist liberals / constructivists from above, structural liberalism (Deudney and Ikenberry 1999), neoliberal institutionalism (Keohane 1984), or undifferentiated scholars, usually labelled eclectic or pragmatic, who follow the logic on their own accord. Neoclassical realism is not the only approach sporting the (actually very commonsensical) logic, nor does it have a monopoly on it; that one may get the impression from certain discussions has probably more to do with the official mythology than the actual state of affairs (cf. Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell 2016). That said, and given that neoclassical realism does not seem to have much else to offer to those who choose to 'employ' it, it becomes all the more doubtful that prospective scholars would do so only so that they know 'where to begin'.

Put differently, neoclassical realism does not appear to provide much analytical leverage. Actually, if something, adopting the approach may paradoxically prove unduly constraining, especially when it comes the relationship between the external and internal: as discussed at great lengths in the thesis, the mainstream version of neoclassical realism generally treats international and domestic variables additively, more or less ruling out their interaction.[40] This hindrance was encountered by this thesis' author, who, in his BA thesis that sought to analyze Great Britain's departure from the European Union (or Brexit), concluded that it was exactly the additivity of neoclassical realism that precluded a meaningful and complete analysis of the problematique (see Šenk 2020).[41] Of course, it may be argued that without this 'hindrance', there would really be virtually *nothing* common permeating the neoclassical realist tradition. That may well be. From the perspective of prospective scholars, however, it seems to be a woefully insufficient reason to subscribe to neoclassical realism.

If it does not offer much analytical leverage – certainly not such that could not be more meaningfully attained elsewhere – what is it, then, that continues to draw scholars to neoclassical realism? The answer is actually quite simple: *prestige*. Adopting neoclassical realism really serves little purpose from the theoretical point of view, but this is beside the point: scholars subscribe to neoclassical realism because doing so gives credence and legitimacy to their works, it makes them part of an esteemed research tradition. Identifying as neoclassical realist, from this perspective, is much less about theory or methodology and much

[40] Certainly not all self-proclaimed neoclassical realists adhere unequivocally to the maxim. The point is, however, that for how little leverage neoclassical realism offers, it quite starkly puts forward a major hindrance.
[41] By the same token, deploying neoclassical realism offered much leeway and freedom to analyze the departure with the use of sui generis variables. When it came to guidance, however, the school provided little.

more about identity. Its purpose is not to serve as a practical guide, it is to serve as a *legitimizing device* – a pass of sorts for scholars of diverse backgrounds and proclivities to 'do their own thing' under the aegis of something that gives their works pedigree. To be a realist, even if only in the name, carries with itself a certain reputation – both good and bad, to be sure – but a reputation none the less.[42] In the fields of IR and Security Studies, realism has a special place.

Seeing neoclassical realism as a source of identity and legitimacy has direct relevance for the other above-posed question – that is, why neoclassical realism continues to pretend to be a theory. The answer, of course, is *exactly* because of this: if realism has such a special position in the fields, it is naturally in the interest of those who benefit from the position – if only reputationally – to uphold it. This, of course, goes directly to the heart of why neoclassical realism originated in the first place: it goes back to the 1990s attempts to keep structural realism, seriously wounded in the wake of the end of the Cold War, alive. Let us recall that (structural) realism was always the target of harsh criticism from the perspective of theory but its dominance, and consequently prestige, in the fields was hardly ever disputed – to the extent that it was likened to an "ideology" (Ashley 1984). From this angle, it is not so much the assumptions or hypotheses of structural realism that suffered after the Cold War (they were always questionable), but rather the reputation as being *the* theory of international relations was at severe risk. Should the reputation be in tatters, so would a major source of legitimacy for those consciously working under the label. Although beyond the scope of this thesis, a similar argument could probably be made in respect to Waltz's resuscitation of 'classical realism' as a scientific and parsimonious theory, as per the dictates of the behavioral revolution: though realism emerged as a clear winner of the so-called realist-idealist debate, its position as *the* theory of international politics – and the reputation that went with it – was clearly at risk in the face of a broader movement within the field that increasingly saw realism as unscientific. It did not much matter that little was left of the rich insights of pre-Waltzian realism after the resuscitation – the reputation, a source of identity and legitimacy, was salvaged.

This story is, of course, analogical to that of neoclassical realism: to retain the reputation of realism, efforts were made to resuscitate Waltz's old horse so as to cater to the demands of the new era. The efforts, to be sure, were more chaotic and variegated, likely corresponding to the immensely growing complexity of the new world. Also the results may be seen as fairly poor: while Waltz went to great lengths to construct a façade of theory around structural

[42] Quinn (2013, p. 177) slightly touches upon this when he writes that there may exist "some disciplinary incentive" for neoclassical realism to claim that it is realist as doing so may "burnish the school's credentials". He, however, does not develop the point further.

realism, what eventually came to be known as neoclassical realism, the preceding analysis showed, is really little more than a hollow shell. Compared to structural realism, or other competing theories for that matter, it has no distinct heuristics. Yet despite, or better said exactly because of that, it seems to do the trick: its hollow nature, serving as an invitation to do whatever one pleases under the label, is as perfect a fit for the post-Cold War world as was structural realism seemingly for the Cold War bipolarity. It does not matter that, in its pure form, it is practically unusable – so was, as has been seen, pure structural realism. It does not matter that it is theory in nothing but the name. What matters is that the reputation of realism in the fields is retained.

Thus, it can be seen why scholars in the fields of IR and Security Studies continue to subscribe to neoclassical realism: on the one hand, doing so serves as a legitimizing device, a stamp of quality of sorts that gives credence to the scholars' works – a nonnegligible factor in a world where scholarly articles proliferate by the thousand every day. On the other, doing so is important exactly because it helps reinforce the very position of the wider tradition of realism, currently upheld by neoclassical realism, that gives scholarly works so-labelled the stamp of quality. In a word, it is in the interest of a great many academics to continue to pretend that neoclassical realism is a theory. This is the final crucial component of the present puzzle. The eclectic and laissez-faire nature of neoclassical realism, though an important part of the story, is not enough to explain the school's popularity. That alone would hardly prove reason enough for the school's popularity. When complemented, however, with the school's ability to legitimize, give credence identity and, crucially, a competitive advantage to those who subscribe to the label, the popularity becomes readily obvious. Neoclassical realism, thus viewed, is chosen by academics for the reasons of identity, not theory. By the same token, what it gets in return is not contribution to a cumulative and grand theory – that was clearly shown above – but a contribution to the mythology that keeps it alive.

That said, this section proposes in closing that neoclassical realism be most properly understood as an *anti-theory*, thought of as the antipode of theory. It is an anti-theory because it has a façade of theory but everything about it is actually atheoretical. First, it has no original or individual heuristics of its own, save for a hollowed-out appropriation of the logic of the *Primat der Aussenpolitik* or simply a watered-down version of structural realism. Second, as a result, scholars researching under its label work eclectically, with a de facto free-pass to borrow from other theories and to draw up sui generis variables. That, however, does not mean that they do so haphazardly, as is sometimes suggested: in fact, the works tend toward high analytical standards and quality, a fact that boosts the image of neoclassical realism as being a

superior approach. As such, the eclectic nature may go some way toward explaining why neoclassical realism is not only popular but also potent. Third, despite this, the sui generis nature of the works nevertheless ensures that the cumulative knowledge of neoclassical realism does not tend toward the general, quite the opposite. Importantly, neoclassical realism is an anti-theory also because it is used primarily for reasons of identity and legitimacy, not theory or methodology. It is an anti-theory, above all, because it does not exist, save for as part of its own mythology.

4. CONCLUSION

At the beginning of the present thesis stood a seemingly simple puzzle: why does neoclassical realism continue to be such a popular and potent choice for scholars of international relations and security studies despite the school's well-known shortcomings and the fact that the general understanding thereof is far from consensual. To shed more light on this apparent paradox, the thesis argued, it was key to gain a proper, sober view of what neoclassical realism actually is – that is, as opposed to what it is not, no matter what it claims to be. Thus, the bulk of the thesis' analysis concerned itself with the task of rereading the history of neoclassical realism, from the end of World War II up until today, and retelling it in a way that was free of any mythology (except for when the mythology itself was a part of the history) and thus more conducive to the understanding thereof. A summary of the findings of this endeavor is provided at the beginning of the previous chapter, so it is not necessary to reiterate them at large: it merely pays to highlight that, whatever it was, the retold history clearly showed that neoclassical realism could not be considered a single theory of foreign policy or international relations. In fact, it could hardly be considered a theory at all.

This view was further confirmed in the second analytical part, where the so-called critics of neoclassical realism were reviewed. It was found out that, despite their valuable contributions, the critics provided significantly less helpful when it came to obtaining an alternative take on neoclassical realism: far from providing a mythology-free understanding, the critics' works did actually much to reinforce the myth. In this light, and with the knowledge gained in the first analytical part, the thesis moved on to propose an original answer to the research question, positing neoclassical realism to be an *anti-theory*. This understanding was predicated on the view that although neoclassical realism, through its mythology, has the semblance of a theory, everything about it is actually inimical to it being one. It was argued that neoclassical realism amounts to little more than a hollow shell whose only purpose is to give the credentials of being realist to otherwise disparate and eclectic pieces of analytical work. By the same token, it was suggested that such a hollow shell was also the only way for the proponents of the realist tradition to keep the tradition seemingly viable in today's world. Realism, after all, is much about the prestige and legitimacy its stamp bestows on those who choose to carry it – perhaps more than it was ever about specific heuristics. This may not be a comforting view, and it is all but certain to incur fierce criticism from self-proclaimed realists. For good or ill, however, it seems to have been necessary to finally begin to understand why it is that neoclassical realism, against all the odds, remains so popular and potent a choice.

Given, as mentioned, that a summary of the analysis was effectively provided in the preceding chapter, as was a comprehensive discussion of the results, the above conclusion could enjoy the luxury of being relatively brief. This luxury, in turn, gives the thesis some scope to briefly discuss, in its very last paragraphs, also a couple of additional and important insights of the analysis that might otherwise get lost in the overall argument.

For one thing, it should be acknowledged that the conceptual framework derived, in part, from the critiques of neoclassical realism proved a great fit for the analysis. Although the critics themselves eventually turned out incapable of providing a sufficiently alternative take to satisfy the thesis' demands (which was not altogether unexpected, given that the stimuli for the thesis was a major paucity of such takes to begin with), they were indispensable for providing the lens through which the history of neoclassical realism could be retold. Absent such a lens, the retelling would have proven notedly more challenging and time consuming, with the likely result being considerably more bloated and not necessarily better. That said, it was the one conceptual category – the empirical and geographical boundaries – that was not drawn from the critiques that eventually proved key to driving the analysis, and eventually the conclusions, onward. This category enabled the thesis to appreciate the extent to which neoclassical realism is empirically driven, to appreciate that what it cares about is the ability to account for an increasingly complex world. Without this corrective, a reality check of sorts, the analysis would likely have lost track of the bigger picture: it would have got bogged down in unnecessary detail, discussing at length variables and paradigmatic boundaries, and eventually arriving at little more than yet another run-of-the-mill problem-solving critique of neoclassical realism.

Although focused on neoclassical realism, the thesis also made significant inroads into the realist tradition in IR and Security Studies at large, as it chose to begin the review of the school's history not in 1998, as would seem commonsensical, but rather in 1950s. This proved a good instinct: it was shown that the story of neoclassical realism can hardly be disentangled from its predecessors, albeit not in the sense of 'inspiration' or 'reviving' that can be found in the official mythology. Rather, owing in no small part to the empirical and geographical boundaries, it was effectively suggested that neoclassical realism, despite its own specifics, exhibits a number of characteristics and tendencies that seem to be typical for the realist tradition at large. Though a further study would be needed to substantiate the applicability of the following, neoclassical realism seems to share with realism in IR and Security Studies at large two disciplinary mechanisms – here tentatively labeled *differentiation* and *purification* – that may go some way toward explaining the tradition's development after World War II.

According to these two mechanisms, realism has evolved on the basis of periodically cleansing itself of its hitherto, allegedly insufficient, form (purification) and then positing itself to be superior, though not absolutely alien, thereto (differentiation). The case of neoclassical realism is instructive: it disavows structural realism as too parsimonious and classical realism as too heterogeneous, yet argues that there are good qualities to both (rigor and richness, respectively), and finally posits itself to draw on both in a manner that is allegedly superior to both. That much mischaracterization takes place in the process, especially with classical realism, is beside the point, as the ultimate goal of the two mechanisms is to ensure realism's viability in a given historical period, in this case the post-Cold War world. That said, the same mechanisms may equally well be spotted in relation to preceding iterations of realism. As hinted at above, Waltz's structural realism, for example, is (in)famous for its purification of the realist field by effectively proclaiming most of its predecessors 'reductionist' and presenting itself as a 'scientific' theory based on microeconomics. Again, that doing so did much to deny realism, for some time, the nuance present in the pre-Waltzian works was secondary to the tradition's survival. The perniciousness of the move can, nevertheless, be felt in the tradition to this day: though neoclassical realism invites richness, the insights of Raymond Aron, for example, continue to absent from modern-day realist works – perhaps because a greater embrace thereof might call the very works into question.

It is, however, not only Waltz and neoclassical realism to whom the two disciplinary mechanisms may apply. From Molloy (2006), for example, it seems that they may well capture the transition from E. H. Carr to Hans Morgenthau, with the latter eschewing much of the former's nuance in favor of developing a grand theory of international politics. Similarly, the mechanisms may be at play when it comes to the relationship of Waltz's structural realism vis-à-vis other contemporary so-called structural realist works, notably those of Gilpin and Jervis: though the two are often acknowledged as important, it is Waltz's approach that is always presented as *the* structural realist approach – again, much to the effect of the loss of nuance.

Thus, although future studies will have to qualify the claim, one of the present thesis' collateral achievements may reside in offering a plausible new lens for understanding the developmental trajectory of realism writ large. Correct or not, such findings would never have been possible without taking, as the thesis had, the long view: in fact, they would have probably been missed altogether, unduly painting – as many works do – neoclassical realism as a somewhat special case. Insofar as its hollowed-out nature is considered, to be sure, neoclassical realism does stand out; its modus vivendi, however, seems far from an aberration in the realist tradition.

Finally, much as the story of neoclassical realism cannot be disentangled from the wider history of realism, it also cannot be separated from the fields of IR and Security Studies at large. This goes beyond the fact that realism has for decades dominated the fields: rather, it is to suggest that the developmental trajectory of (neoclassical)realism may well apply to its theoretical peers and competitors. Though this would, too, warrant separate studies – focusing on the modern iterations of other IR traditions, such as liberalism, constructivism, or Marxism – it may be suggested here, by way of speculation, that given the world's immense complexity, the *anti-theoretical* nature of neoclassical realism may well befit other so-called theories as well. In other words, it is not entirely impossible to imagine, theoretical pretense notwithstanding, that other such theories nowadays amount to little more than hollow shells that serve as legitimizing devices for otherwise eclectic studies. That said, the thesis wishes to close by generalizing its argument about neoclassical realism, proposing a *six-factor definition of anti-theory in International Relations and Security Studies*. Such anti-theory has the following characteristics:

1. It has a façade of theory
2. It has not original heuristics of its own
3. Its proponents work eclectically, seemingly outside of its gamut
4. Its cumulative knowledge does not tend to the general
5. It is used for reasons other than theoretical, usually for legitimacy
6. It effectively does not exist as one whole

Whether this definition captures other theoretical approaches to IR and Security Studies as well, of course, remains to be seen. If it is found out, by way of similar metatheoretical critiques, that there, indeed, are other anti-theories in the two fields, it will be good news for the validity of the present thesis. What such findings will say about the two fields' state is, however, a different matter.

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