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– ABSTRACT –

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THE POSTSTRUCTURALIST THEORY IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

DECONSTRUCTING DIPLOMATIC AND SECURITY PRACTICES IN THE CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

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• General Considerations

At the center of the poststructuralist theory (PT) in International Relations (IR), we find a preoccupation for uncovering the role played by language in the production and reproduction of the world. At first glance, a concern with language might seem like a rather inadequate way to approach international relations given that – somewhere “out there” – there is a global reality which functions and produces effects independent of our explanations and interpretations. This world – comprised of states and statesmen, global flows and borders, citizens and immigrants, wars, conflicts, terrorist attacks, and arms stockpiles – is undisputably tactile and tangible, with its very own materiality and pre-set texture. Having said this, language provides the outlet for articulating this world we find ourselves in. Language is therefore a medium to interact with the world and to envelop it with meaning. While the field of International Relations has – to various degrees of success – supported theoretical diversity in place of theoretical monopolies, it is not until the postpositivist theoretical wave, in general, and the language turn, in particular, that what was once taken as a given (the external world) started to be problematized in terms of the role played by power and knowledge in the construction of certain discourses about the world.

Up until this point, the study of language per se had not been a preoccupation for IR and language was regarded as a desinterested and neutral medium, being taken for granted in terms of research. Given this premise, poststructuralism does not reject the world as we know it, nor does it set out to reinvent it or to revolutionize it. While its reputation for radical transgressions precedes it, the poststructuralist theory has been rather conservative in its outreach. After all, as David Campbell remarks, poststructuralism “is not a new paradigm or theory of IR, [but] [...] rather, a critical attitude or ethos”. In this sense, PT questions the deeply ingrained notions that provide the world with rhyme and reason. It looks at the way in which language enables certain modalities to know the world and assesses how those modalities came to be in the first place. In operating with language and analyzing discourses, poststructuralism attempts to illustrate how the world we are so familiar with results from the naturalization of a particular worldview – worldview that takes the mantle of universality.

The field of International Relations (IR) while undeniably owes part of its development as a social science to rationalist, positivist, and empiricist influences, has never let itself be captured by a single, monolithic approach. While not all theories are created equal, the fact remains that IR provides a theoretical plurality with which we can engage the world of global politics. In turn, this plurality tells us that there is an disciplinary aperture to entertain even those positions more inclined to question the orthodoxy rather than to simply embody it or adapt to it.

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The present thesis aims to analyze the poststructuralist theory in the disciplinary context of the field of IR. Because the poststructuralist theory has a meta-theoretical dimension that revolves around a theorization of the IR theoretical fabric, the research follows two main tracks of inquiry: at the level of the discipline and at the poststructuralist level. In other words, the study will include both an investigation of how the PT relates to the world of international relations as well as to how International Relations as a field of study can be researched in particular. The purpose of this research engagement aims to understand how particular contemporary meanings associated with certain concepts and practices came to be realized.

Divided in three parts, the thesis focuses in the first four chapters on an ontological, epistemological, and methodological overview of the poststructuralist theory, its place in IR, and the preferred methods to study IR (focusing specifically on discourse analysis). In the second part, chapter V and chapter VI look into how IR concepts such as “diplomacy” and “security” can be studied from a poststructuralist point of view while also looking into the way contemporary diplomatic and security practices are produced and reproduced in the post-Cold War period. Finally, the third part comprises of a discourse analysis application that illustrates the high volatility of meaning across different types of discourse.

- **Relevance of Research**

  The present subject matter attempts to illustrate how certain practices with which we operate in the study of IR and which produce policy effects, become normalized and naturalized. We see this, for example, in the way terror and the Global War on Terror have changed the way in which objects – like security, and subjects – like the current instantiation of the Other – are represented and operated with in the contemporary period. The relevance of the theme stems from the fact that this research counts among a select few number of studies that have based their analysis on innovative IR theoretical approaches. More importantly, given the scope and the breadth of issues analyzed, the study constitutes an original addition to the Romanian field of IR, in general, and of the subfield of International Relations Theories, in particular. Additionally, as can be seen from the reference list, the reader is provided with an extensive and novel IR literature that expands the way Romanian IR can be conducted by introducing the field to outside influences such as French social theory as well as to various types of discourse analysis.

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2 It represents a continuation and expansion of earlier research endeavors on poststructuralism in IR that were at the center of the author’s B.A. thesis (2011) and M.A. dissertation (2013).

3 Both aspects are covered extensively in the sections and chapters dedicated to them.
Terminological Clarifications

In the IR literature, there is a tendency to operate with poststructuralism and postmodernism in an interchangeable manner even though the theorists associated with this approach might reject such a broad generalization that erases the specific particularities of the two terms. Jill Steans et al. consider that as far as IR is concerned, there is a certain terminological overlap between the two terms. To put things in perspective, postmodernism functions as an umbrella-term for a movement that emerges after the end of the Second World War and especially after the 1950s and 1960s, centered around a critique of modernity and of the Enlightenment project. On the other hand, while the apparition of poststructuralism also dates to this period in history, it is associated with the structuralist branch of linguistics and refers specifically to a critical engagement with language — “with the nature, role and function of language.” In other words, with how language constructs (social) meaning, being more closely related with the linguistic version of (post)structuralism. While admitting that there is a certain overlap between the two notions, Ben Agger makes the following distinction and refers to poststructuralism as a “theory of knowledge and language”, while postmodernism is better understood as “a theory of society, culture, and history”. In IR, the two notions are often times indistinguishable from one another because they draw from the same heterogeneous theoretical mix comprising of linguistic, social, political, and philosophical elements associated with a critical ethos that, in particular, references the writings of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault.

The present analysis is influenced by more by the linguistic version of poststructuralism and less by the postmodernist relation to culture. In this regard, the research makes use of the poststructuralist toolbox in order to analyze de maner in which (social) language is constructed as well as the way in which discursive practices operate in practice. In this sense, the study operates with the notion of “poststructuralism” not just out of some authorial stylistic convention, but because the research employs a language based approach stemming from structural linguistics and its poststructural corollary. In this regard, the critical analysis employed

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4 For an accessible analysis distinguishing between the two terms in so far as continental philosophy and French social theory are concerned, refer to the sections on poststructuralism (111-115) and postmodernism (115-118) from Ben Agger’s article “Critical Theory, Poststructuralism, Postmodernism: Their Sociological Relevance”, *Annual Review of Sociology* 17 (1991): 105-131.
6 Ibid.
8 The two are often regarded as exponents of “French poststructuralism” though as Richard Shapcott remarks, it is debatable whether the two of them can be put in this category “without doing significant violence to either of them”. (Richard Shapcott, *Justice, Community, and Dialogue in International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 61). The notion of a French “poststructuralism” is also contested given that the term is most often associated with a second order literature that is preponderantly non-French, rather than with the alleged representatives of the movement. This issue is more closely analyzed in the third chapter, in the section dedicated to “French poststructuralism” (*sic*).
throughout the chapters – especially in relations to various contemporary IR discourses and practices – is grounded in a study of language that accounts for the properties of terms, the contexts that allow certain meanings to proliferate while silencing others, as well as for their practical impact. In support of this assessment, I linked the theory to discourse analysis – which not only serves as a method through which PT can be instrumentalized, but it is also representative of a distinct approach to the study of international relations and of foreign policy.

- **Research Context**

Theories are an intrinsic part of the field of International Relations. On the surface, this observation in itself does not seem to provide a remarkable insight on the inner workings of the field. After all, any respectable social science relies on its own array of theories in order to understand how the social world operates. From the end of the XIX\(^{th}\) century onwards, we have witnessed how social sciences have started to shed the influence of the humanities and moved towards scientific professionalization. In this sense, the field of IR is not an outlier: it too has undergone various evolutive stages as I will further elaborate in the first chapter. Yet, where IR distinguishes itself from its fellow brethrens is in the way it puts the process of self-actualization at center of the discipline. Nowhere is this aspect better witnessed then in the sub-field of IRT.

It can be argued that theories are at the forefront of IR and that the object of study occupies a secondary position. This does not deny the existence of a “real” world, outside the pages of a text, a complex world full of actors, objects, processes, and mechanisms that function irrespective of what some theoretical provision might prescribe. Placing the theories at the forefront of IR exemplifies Jacques Derrida’s notion that “there is no outside-text” with the implication being that one cannot grasp “the real” outside an “interpretive experience”.\(^{10}\) This aspect is more prominent in IR because of the way in which the development of this scientific discipline has been devised in terms of the overarching framework of the “Great Debates”. From an analytical point of view, framing a field’s disciplinary history around what is essentially a foundational myth might not be the most appropriate way to create the basis for a scientific discipline. After all, as Peter Wagner remarks, one of the main reasons for why social sciences exit the tutelage of the humanities is because of their “claim to provide valid knowledge about

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the world”\textsuperscript{11}. In IR, Yosef Lapid observes, the criticisms of the classical approach to the history of the discipline “have in no way crippled the staying power or popularity of the debate approach”\textsuperscript{12}. Renouncing the framework of the “Great Debates” would not even be possible since even though the Debates might not fully capture the breadth of the theoretical positions coexisting at different disciplinarian stages, they represent the way in which the IR discipline has been structured. The existence of such a diverse array of theories (ranging from classical realism to Green theory) is no small thing if we stop to consider that they operate next to certain theories – beginning with the influence of the American behaviorist current in IR and continuing later on, with the neorealist – neoliberal consensus – that occupy hegemonic positions in the discipline.

From a pedagogical point of view, tying the field’s developmental process to the support structure of the Great Debates acts as a convenient mnemonic device. It would not even be possible to capture the complexity of IRT without the assistance of a theoretical shortcut precisely because in a very short amount of time, the discipline was confronted with a high proliferation rate of theoretical positions. From the onset, this tells us that the field is not defined by a consensus, but by contestation and dissidence. While the theoretical challengers might not be able to topple the dominant positions and might even be pushed to the margins of the discipline, they nonetheless signify the fact that the house of IR remains open to all those that might provide an insight into the workings of international relations both as a field and as well as an object of study. The “Great Debates” might inconvenience the sensibilities of those who would like to have a well organized discipline that establishes once and for all the right way to study IR, which sets the limits on what is acceptable and unacceptable, and which insists that contestation be reduced to a minimum. It has been argued that too much internal disagreement hurts the discipline, making it therefore unstable, and potentially sending it on the road to become a failed discipline, echoing those failed states that are part of its object of study.

Today, this sentiment is shared by many who argue that the debates have lost their usefulness, that while they may have been necessary in the beginning when the discipline was still young, now, they pose a hindrance to the integrity of IR. Yet, IR is coherent because of the Great Debates and not in spite how them, they help us understand how IR works. The Debates highlight the play of power and privilege in the way some theories are readily embraced while others are treated as gratuitous spoilers of the scientific cause. As Ole Wæver remarks “[t]heories are shaped by their immediate social setting, that is, the academic scene (and only to a much


lower degree by external factors relating to political developments)”\textsuperscript{13}. The fact that the social setting is as important if not more important to the study of IR than the field’s penchant for constant self-actualization is a feature, not a bug. In terms of “market presence”, while theoretical hegemonies tend to accaparate the discipline and influence policy – as seen for example, in the American IR – the field fundamentally rejects the establishment of a “monopoly”. This is due to the fact that in IR, theories are hardly ever made redundant or replaced, but coexist next each other and evolve in order to adapt themselves both relation to new emerging social settings as well as in relation to contemporary developments in IR.

Having set the stage, the emergence of the poststructuralist theory in IR during the 1980s appears as a natural progression. By this point in time, if we look at the field’s chronology, IR had already been through three stages of development. The first one evidenced by the First Debate was concerned with the ontological aspects of the field covering the interwar years and the subsequent period post-Second Word War. It sought to ascertain the essence of the relations between states. In the 1950s and 1960s, the second stage had been preoccupied with issues related to methodology. In other words, the Second Debate revolved around an attempt to determine what was “the most reliable way to study international relations”. It pitted the traditionalists against the behavioralists\textsuperscript{14}. The first camp was in favor of interpretive historiography and historical sociology, whereas the others advocated for a science of IR grounded in objective laws. Finally, influenced by Thomas Kuhn\textsuperscript{15}, the third stage was interparadigmatic and regarded the very nature of scientific development, dividing IR into three main paradigms – realism, liberal pluralism, and structuralism (or Marxism / Neo-Marxism). These paradigms had distinct views on IR and were concerned with different issues: state power and international anarchy, interdependence and cooperation or inequality and underdevelopment. The advent of the Fourth Debate will bring into the fold of the discipline, a series of theories that distinctly position themselves in contrast to their older peers while at the same time, not having too much in common between themselves either. It is at this point that an IR poststructuralist theory begins to coalesce around a critique of realism and sets in motion a reflectivist wave that challenges the positivist order.

While PT is considered a radical theory, criticized for its tendency to be prolix and obfuscating when not outright relativistic and destructive, the theory can be easier to understand if we think of it in terms of “checks and balances”. Its critique of realism seeks precisely to

\textsuperscript{13} Ole Waever, “Still a Discipline After All These Debates”, in \textit{International Relations Theories. Discipline and Diversity (III\textsuperscript{rd} Edition), ed. Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 317.}

\textsuperscript{14} Donald J. Puchala, \textit{Theory and History in International Relations} (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2003), 217.

\textsuperscript{15} Published in 1962, Kuhn’s seminal work \textit{The Structure of Scientific Revolutions} argued that what we consider “normal science” results from a paradigmatic interplay.
denaturalize those truths that we take for granted when we think about the world. In this sense, it
looks at the ingrained minutiae that are part and parcel of IR’s most valuable concepts and
ttempts to illustrate how they are non just impenetrable objects that happen to exist in the
international system and influence reality, but how they are, first and foremost, products of
power and discourse. Framed in this way, poststructuralism stops being what some have
considered to be “the most radical or non-mainstream perspective on the terrain of IR”16 and
becomes a theory that is much more accessible to study and operate with than one might initially
think. After all, power, sovereignty, anarchy, security, diplomacy or foreign policy are notions
on which IR is built. What differs is the fact that they are approached with critical-tinted glasses
that focus on what David Campbell considers to be “the importance of representation, the
relationship of power and knowledge, and the politics of identity to the production and
understanding of global politics”17.

- Research Design, Research Questions, and Objectives

In a previous section I have noted that the Romanian study of IRT, in general, and of PT, in
particular, is rather underdeveloped. The present study attempts to fill the gap in the literature by
proposing a multi-pronged incursion into the field of International Relations theories. In terms of
research design, the present thesis comprises of seven chapters divided in three parts (field and
theory analysis, concept analysis, theory application) and structured around two main research
tracks: 1) the relation of poststructuralism to the subfield of IRT and 2) the application of PT in
the field of IR and in its underlying subfields such Security Studies, Diplomatic Studies or
Terrorism Studies. The first track concerns the relation between the poststructuralist theory and
the subdiscipline of IRT, while the second regards how the theory can be applied to the study of
IR concepts and practices. The general objective of this research endeavor has been therefore to
provide an extensive analysis of poststructuralism in International Relations divided across five
levels of analysis: 1) context (chapters one and two); 2) theoretical stance (chapter three);
3) methodology (chapter four); 4) concept analysis (chapter five and six); and 5) analiză de
discurs (chapter 7). Following this, several secondary objectives have been identified which
seek: 1) to analyze the origins of poststructuralism in IR from a disciplinary and meta-theoretical
position; 2) to analyze the theory in relation to French social theory, (post)structural linguistics,
and other IR theories, in particular neorealism; 3) to identify a potential poststructuralist research

16 See: Emanuel Adler, “Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics”, European Journal of
17 Campbell, “Poststructuralism”, 223.
framework in IR by examining the influence of French theorists (Foucault, Derrida) associated with the poststructuralist strand of continental philosophy, to the development of certain types of discourse analysis; 4) to apply PT to the study of IR concepts and practices (diplomacy and security); and 5) to design an exercise in discourse analysis in order to illustrate the poststructuralist theory’s concern with the fluidity of language and the instability of meaning. The primary research questions that address these objectives concern issues such as: 1) how is it possible for the field of IR to be so amenable to theoretical diversity?; 2) what type of theory is PT?; 3) what are its main research preoccupations?; and 4) how can IR concepts be theorized and instrumentalized in terms of the textual strategies proposed by PT?

The first track addresses the development of the field of IR, its particularities as an area of study, its engagement with multiple possibilities for knowledge. In this regard, the secondary research questions that have been entertained and which the study has sought to answer involved understanding what makes a theory, what purpose it serves, and how – depending on the answer to these questions – does theory influence both the way we perceive the field of IR and the way in which we analyze the world. Therefore, the first two chapters and several sections from the third, fifth, and sixth chapters examine the state of IR and of its subdisciplines (IRT, Security Studies, Diplomatic Studies), the relation between the field and the “outside world”, as well as how poststructuralism fits in this framework (what it stands for in the field and what it contributes to the process of knowledge).

The first track is divided in two subdivisions which concern the poststructuralist theory in terms of its place in the context of the IRT subdiscipline (first chapter) and in the context of the meta-theoretical position adopted by PT (second chapter). The objective has been to ascertain how a poststructuralist approach studies IR concepts in relation to the broader disciplinary context, how the theoretical perspective is not insulated from its peers, but instead, becomes instantiated in its critique of the orthodoxy. After all, the specificity of PT results precisely from the fact that PT is not an ordinary theory and maybe that it is not a theory at all, but more of a “critical attitude or ethos that explores the assumptions” on which IR is based by addressing the modality in which the discipline “maps the world”18.

The concern with the way in which the discipline “maps the world” ties into the second track and regards those aspects related to theoretical, methodological, and conceptual construction. PT argues that we cannot divorce the object of study from its representation, that power is involved in the process of knowledge, and that “the production and understanding”19 of international relations is tributary to the politics of identity. In other words, PT is interested in

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18 Ibid., 223.
19 Ibid.
the “map of the world” only in so far as it reveals what a theory stands for. If other theories are preoccupied with constructing a map of the world, with identifying its components, functions, and processes as well as with explaining how these elements influence the behavior of actors, the course of events or the way certain things happen a certain way, poststructuralism wants to know how the map is made possible in the first place.

As Campbell observes, poststructuralism does not set out to develop its very own paradigm or to construct a set of prescriptions comparable to other theories. Instead, it advances an entirely different set of “questions and concerns” that has to do more with understanding how theories – rather than the world – work. Having said this, the research questions on which this second track of research has been designed around concern “how things are known?”, “what confers meaning to a thing?” as well as “who dispenses the knowledge?”. In this sense, I combined the theoretical position with a broader conceptualization and operationalization of discourse. In IR, not only do PT and discourse analysis complement one another, but PT is, in part, responsible for introducing discourse analysis to the study of IR and especially to the study of foreign policy. The objective has been to establish how at both a meta-theoretical level and also at an IR level, theories and actors alike (such as states for example) seek – in Lene Hansen’s view – “to uphold particular visions of themselves” which are enabled only in and through specific discourses. Poststructuralism considers that in order to understand how “particular visions” came to be, we need to look more closely at the role played by language and at the power language wields in constructing knowledge. Since poststructuralists operated with the notion of “discourse” in order to showcase the “power of language”, the second track has been aimed at highlighting what is known about a certain practice, what can be known, and what exactly presupposes this act of knowing in a poststructuralist perspective. In this sense, the third and fourth chapters attempt to provide answers to these questions, while the fifth and sixth chapters illustrate how a poststructuralist-based analysis can be applied to the study of diplomacy and security.

The fifth and sixth chapters reproduce to a certain degree the two tracks around which the research has been designed around. As such, the chapters comprise of a part that analyzes the relation between PT and the particular subfield being analyzed as well as how PT can be applied to the study of diplomacy and security. Where diplomacy is concerned, the chapter starts from the premise that while diplomacy is a central concept in IR, it is only in recent years that the study of diplomacy has sought to develop a comprehensive body of theorization. Moreover, what

20 Ibid., 225.
21 Hansen, “Discourse Analysis, Post-structuralism, and Foreign Policy”, 95.
22 For how PT engages with discursive power, see: Roxanne Lynn Doty, Imperial Encounters. The Politics of Representation in North – South Relations (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
is particular about the issue of diplomacy and IR theory is not only that diplomacy is rather neglected when compared to other concepts such “sovereignty” or “security”, but that the poststructuralist theory is one of the firsts to provide a theoretical account of diplomacy.

In the chapter on security, the objective has been to illustrate how in the post-Cold War period, the poststructuralist theory in IR has been influential in proposing new avenues for the study of security and how it continued to do so after the post-September 11, 2001 period as well. In keeping in line with the two tracks of research, the chapter also addresses how the concept of security can be analyzed from a language-based approach. In this sense, the main research questions in support of this line of inquiry have been to ascertain whether PT can propose a different way of thinking about security, and if so, “what would these ways might look like?”, followed by: “in what way might these ways contribute to the study of security?”.

Based on the poststructuralist understanding of language in IR, the final chapter proposes an exercise in discourse analysis. In analyzing the notion of “imminence”, the objective has been to track how the meaning of imminence becomes discursively flexible depending on the particular context in which it is utilized. In this instance, the notion of “imminence” applied to a particular case study (an American unilateral intervention against a terror group accused of posing an imminent threat to the United States from its safe havens in civil war-stricken Syria) is analyzed at the policy level, at the media level, and at the scholarly level. The proposed discourse analysis answers a comprehensive array of research questions: descriptive (“What is imminence?”), interpretive, explanatory, technical, and evaluative.

Interpretive questions concern both conceptual issues surrounding the notion of “imminence” (“What does it mean?”) as well as “authority-based questions” (“What do these experts, government officials, and journalists mean when they operate with the notion of “imminence” in general, and “imminent threat” in particular?). On the issue of explanatory questions, the discourse analysis is less concerned with causal relations (“Why does the notion of “imminence” produce specific types of effects under different conditions?” or “What enables it to produce such effects?”), preferring to address instead a historical dimension (“How did the operational meaning of “imminence” evolve over time?”). Technical questions are concerned with ascertaining “How is the notion of “imminence” being used across different types of discourse?”. Finally, in terms of evaluative questions, it reviews the significance of the way in which notions are employed by different actors (“What difference is made when the meaning of a notion changes depending on the given discursive register?”).
• Structure of Research
  ○ Chapter I: IR Theory and Disciplinary History

The first and second chapters provide extensive reviews of the broader theoretical and meta-theoretical IR context in order to better understand what were the conditions that facilitated the apparition of poststructuralism as part of – what Robert Keohane refers to as – the “reflectivist” wave in IR. Since in the conduct of the present research, poststructuralism represents the entry point for engaging with IR, the first chapter locates the theory in terms of a brief, but comprehensive overview of the disciplinary history of IR and analyzes the place occupied by PT in the Great Debates framework, specifically within the Fourth Debate.

Even from these early chapters, the analysis anticipates PT’s predilection for the study of binary oppositions and illustrates how the IRT is dominated by theoretical binary frameworks and paradigmatic entrenchments as evidenced by the “Great Debates”. Traditionally, the Great Debates have been regarded as theoretical “disputes” between various theoretical positions ranging from postwar Realism and interwar Liberalism (Idealism) in the First Debate; Traditionalism and Behaviouralism (Scientism) in the Second Debate; Neorealism, Neoliberalism, and Neomarxism in the Third (interparadigmatic) Debate; and lastly, Rationalism (Positivism) and Reflectivism (or Postpositivism) in the Fourth Debate. The themes debated encompass aspects related to politics, philosophy, epistemology, ontology, and methodology.

The chapter examines background aspects regarding the field of IR as a social science, followed by a comparative analysis on what constitutes a theory in IR. After setting the scene, the chapter reviews the history of the discipline in terms of the four debates mentioned above, provides summaries of the various theoretical positions participating to these debates, and also addresses how the field of IR was impacted by them.

○ Chapter II: The Advent of Postpositivism in IR

Having located the poststructuralist theory in the context of the Fourth Debate, the second chapter concerns itself with the meta-theoretical aspects that guide IR research and theorization and introduces those stances which characterize PT, namely, postpositivism and anti-foundationalism. According to Ole Wæver, the Fourth Debate was primarily disputed along philosophical and epistemological lines. New theories challenge the established order and propose new meta-theoretical avenues for doing science. If in the first chapter, the section on the

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Fourth Debate addressed the meaning of terms such as “rationalism” and “reflectivism”, the second chapter seeks to clarify what is meant by “interpretivism”, “postpositivism” or “anti-foundationalism”. Like in the case of “reflectivism”, these terms are also associated with the Fourth Debate, and, particularly, with the poststructuralist theory. While each of these meta-theoretical stances has its own set of particularities, in IR they tend to denote a particular thing about the way research is conducted. Specifically, they refer to the idea that our analysis of international phenomena cannot be entirely divorced from our interpretation of them. In other words, they are skeptical of particular analyses being treated in universalist terms.

○ Chapter III: The Poststructuralist Theory: Challenging Disciplinary Order

Having laid the foundations for the analysis, the third chapter is dedicated exclusively to the introduction and analysis of PT. Without claiming to provide an exhaustive account of poststructuralism, the chapter is concerned with several issues: 1) origins, 2) meta-theoretical sensibilities; 3) the theory’s relation with IR and with other IRTs (in particular, with neorealism); 4) poststructuralism’s propensity for the study of language and discourse; and lastly, 5) the concepts that occupy a key position in PT’s approach to IR (power, sovereignty, identity).

By inhabiting a discursive dimension, poststructuralism has often times been misconstrued as being rather dismissive of the international reality, and of the “real” things that are affected and afflicted by tangible causes. PT’s focus on language, discourse, narratives, and, more importantly, on the relativity of language has been castigated as nihilistic. This was the case especially in the beginning when poststructuralism’s predilection for critical meta-theoretical soliloquies garnered the opprobrium of its peers. Its critics likened themselves to be far removed from the taint of power, politics, and ideology with which PT was so concerned with. Yet, as this chapter shows, the theory does not stray too far from the topics generally associated with IR and brings its contribution to the study of security, war, foreign policy, diplomacy, international institutions, conflict resolution, terrorism, etc.

○ Chapter IV: Poststructuralism’s to Discourse Analysis

The fourth chapter introduces the notion of “discourse analysis” since poststructuralism relies on discourse in order to illustrate how language is not just a medium that provides tools for communication, nor one that can be used to advance purely objective representations of the
world. Whereas positivist theories are grounded in assumptions designed to separate the studied world from the research experience, poststructuralism considers that language is political rather than utilitarian. In this sense, the fourth chapter attempts to put together a poststructuralist framework for the study of discourse that is grounded in an analysis based on the contributions of French theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. Even though the study of PT is not limited only to discourse analysis, nor are the two of them exclusively co-dependent on one another, for the present study, discourse analysis provides PT with an accessible and nuanced modality to conduct its critical endeavors. The chapter introduces several ways of approaching discourse analysis – some of which originate with Derrida (deconstruction, grammatology) and Foucault (archaeology, genealogy) while others have been proposed by IR theorists (like in the case of the textual mechanisms analyzed in the last section of the chapter that have been initially theorized by Jennifer Milliken or Roxanne Doty). Moreover, another section concerns various types of discourses analyses that, in turn, have been influenced to a greater or lesser degree by the poststructuralist theory of language (see for example: Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s discourse theory, Foucauldian Discourse Analysis).

○ Chapter V: Diplomacy: A Poststructuralist Theory for the Mediation of Estrangement

The fifth and sixth chapters are concerned with the notions of “diplomacy” and “security”. The thesis focuses on these two concepts more extensively because they occupy such an integral position in the study of world politics. In terms of “diplomacy”, the chapter points out that, curiously enough, authors associated with poststructuralism were among the first to propose a theorization of diplomacy. The chapter notes that while diplomacy occupies a central position in the conduct of foreign policy, it had been quite neglected from a theoretical perspective with research being limited to diplomatic histories or practical guides illustrating how to do diplomacy. From a poststructuralist perspective, the chapter introduces and analyzes “a genealogy of diplomacy”. James Der Derian’s On Diplomacy: A Genealogy of Western Estrangement (1987) is one of the first major contributions to the study of PT in IR as well as to the study of diplomacy from an IRT perspective. Der Derian’s argument is premised on the idea that diplomacy represents a “mediation of estrangement” not only between states, but between communities and polities alike. To understand how a poststructuralist analysis might look like in

25 Here, I am referring specifically to assumptions concerning: the existence of an external world whose essence is not dependent on the actions of the researcher (“epistemic realism”); “the existence of a universal scientific” language (meaning that the world can be described and accounted for without recourse to subjectivism, by clinical observers); and “the correspondence between theory and practice” (this refers to the fact that stated aspects of the world are considered to be true if they have a correspondent in reality) (Campbell, “Poststructuralism”, 227-228).
researching a particular notion or another, Der Derian’s genealogy locates the essence of diplomacy in this phenomenon of estrangement that goes as far back as the Judeo-Christian recollection of the Fall. In Der Derian’s view, “the form this mediation takes, [...] constitutes a theoretical and historical base for the study of the origins of diplomacy”\textsuperscript{26}.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{Chapter VI: Security: More than Just a Concept}

The sixth chapter addresses not only the notion of “security”, but also how – after the end of the Cold War – the subfield of Security Studies goes through a period of expansion. This period opened the door to various critical approaches, amidst which we can also talk about a poststructuralist approach to Security Studies. In terms of international security, studies inspired by PT have focused on the way the construction of threats, danger, and identity is dependent upon what Columba Peoples and Nick Vaughan-Williams refer to as “politics of language, interpretation and representation”\textsuperscript{27}. In this sense, the chapter provides an overview of how “security” developed in the contemporary period, from the end of the Cold War and up to the period post-September 11, 2001. Where the analysis of the concept is concerned, the chapter proposes several ways in which security and security practices can be addressed, ways that have also been tributary to the contributions of Derrida and Foucault to the study of language. Therefore, the chapter contains sections on security understood in terms of discursive practices, security as speech act or security as (thick, empty, or floating) signifier. Particular attention is given to Jef Huysmans’ article “Security! What Do You Mean? From Concept to Thick Signifier” (1998). Similar to the way Der Derian’s research opened the door to new theoretical avenues to research diplomacy, Huysmans’ study also proposed an innovative approach to security that stems from a concern with the “meaning of security”\textsuperscript{28}, independent of more traditional definitional or conceptual approaches.

\item \textbf{Chapter VII: Imminence, Terror, and Preemption: The Anatomy of a Discourse}

The sixth chapter ends on an analysis of how the terror attacks from September 11, 2001 had influenced state practice and the subfield of Security Studies and the seventh chapter further expands on this topic. More specifically, the chapter analyzes how the meaning of “imminence”

– a condition that occupies a central place (next to “necessity” and “proportionality”) in the context of a state’s use of force in self-defense – has been broadened in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks from September 11, 2001. The chapter uses discourse analysis to illustrate how this process of broadening occurred. Up until this point, we have seen how PT is preoccupied with the way in which meaning and identities are constructed and how, by extension, they play a role in the development of foreign policies and security practices. While realist theorist Stephen Walt might have described poststructuralism as “a prolix and self-indulgent discourse that is divorced from the real world”\textsuperscript{29}, a poststructuralist discourse-based approach can help us better understand how things came to be. Not „why?”, but „how was it possible?”\textsuperscript{30}. A “why?” question wants to know the reasons behind something, the causes that made a certain outcome possible. Roxanne Lynn Doty considers that a “why-question” only tries to ascertain why “a certain policy decision was predictable given a particular set of circumstances”\textsuperscript{31}. Whereas “how?” is interested in the manner in which something transpired. It refers to the process, to the “mechanics” that were conducive to a certain outcome. According to Doty, the “how-question” “examines how meanings are produced and attached to various social subjects / objects, thus constituting particular interpretive dispositions which creat certain possibilities and preclude others”\textsuperscript{32}. In other words, how something is “socially constructed” and which, in turn, enables particular interpretive practices or courses of action.

The chapter reviews the provisions on imminence specified in the U.N. Charter and in the international customary law as well as in the post-2001 National Security Strategies which starting with the Bush Administration propose and operate with a new conception of imminence, that has also been upheld and expanded on by the Obama Administration. The argument on which the new conception is premised states that given the threat posed by terrorism and rogue states, a victim state can no longer afford to wait until there is definitive proof that an attack is incoming. The current international provisions no longer meet a state’s contemporary security requirements since according to President Obama, they pertain to “a rule-book written for another century”\textsuperscript{33}.

“Imminence” represents a concept that at any one point, inhabits a plurality of meanings: a literal meaning (“imminent as in something that is about to happen”), an official meaning (used to legitimize the use of force in self-defense, it stipulates that a state has to “show a necesity of

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 298.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
self-defence, instant, overwhelming, leaving no choice of means, and no moment of deliberation”\(^{34}\), and a broad meaning advanced by the United States (which stems from the notion that there are malicious actors – constantly planning (terror) attacks – that given an opportunity would not hesitate to attack which is why states have to act as if the threat is “imminent”). The case analyzed in this chapter illustrates how – depending on the interpretive disposition used – the meaning attached to the word is relative to the target audience. Therefore, though switching between meanings might produce certain cognitive and rhetorical dissonances (“not imminence” as “imminence”), the notion maintains its semantic consistency due to the given register in which it is being used as well as to the various factors that are involved in its construction. The question asked is not “what provoked this change in meaning?”, but “how this change is being actively produced and reproduced by the discourse on terror, threat, and the state’s right to self-defense?”. To illustrate this play of meaning, the chapter analyzes the case surrounding the intervention against a terror group – Khorasan – affiliated with al Qaeda and which the U.S. regarded as an imminent threat. Members of the group were said to have moved to Syria in order to take advantage of the safe havens created in the course of the ongoing civil war in order to recruit foreign jihadists that had European and American passports, with the intent to plant an undetectable bomb in an aircraft bound for the U.S. The reason why the intervention is not seen as an arbitrary use of force as well as why it did not attract too much attention at that time or ever since, is due to the way in which “imminence” has been broadened in the context of the threat posed by terrorism.

The discourse analysis focuses on two issues. First, it tracks how the rhetoric on imminence switches from one register to another, from a threat that is about to happen – “instant and overwhelming” – to a threat located in a “future in the future”\(^{35}\). Second, it points out how the “imminent threat” was constructed initially by applying a series of textual mechanisms (predication, presupposition, and subject positioning). These textual mechanisms deconstruct the discourse in its component elements in order to see how the concept is constituted through a discursive practice that structures it into – what Doty refers to as – a “grid of intelligibility”\(^{36}\). “Taken together, these textual mechanisms, predication, presupposition, and subject positioning produce a “world” by providing positions for various kinds of subjects and endowing them with


\(^{36}\) Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction”, 306.
particular attributes”\textsuperscript{37}. In order to illustrate how meaning is constructed, the discourse analysis utilizes official statements, public addresses by government officials, and media articles.

More importantly, outside what the discourse analysis shows in terms of the various conceptions employed in the utilization of “imminence”, outside the contradictions and discursive tensions, the analysis also highlights how such a discourse influences and shapes a media discourse while also impacting upon the lawful character of the intervention. This ties into the fact that the contemporary terror and counter-terror practices – as I show in the chapter on security – create, what Giorgio Agamben describes as “a state of exception”\textsuperscript{38} – where the decision-makers inhabit a paradoxical position “by standing inside and outside the law simultaneously” and therefore being able to “suspend the normal juridical framework”\textsuperscript{39}. In practice, this leads to a suspension of the normal juridical framework especially when, as seen by this case, the operational practice contradicts the international norms.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 306-7.
\textsuperscript{38} Meaning “the singularity that defies categorization and so jams up the foundation of juridical reason” (Robin Truth Goodman, \textit{Policing Narratives and the State of Terror} (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2009), 63).
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