A ROLE THEORETIC APPROACH TO INTERNATIONAL RECIPROCITY:

The importance of agency and ruling narratives

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A ROLE-THEORETIC APPROACH TO INTERNATIONAL RECIPROCITY: THE IMPORTANCE OF AGENCY AND RULING NARRATIVES

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Abstract

International Relations scholars have long been interested in the study of interstate reciprocity and its ability to foster cooperation in conflict-prone settings. Traditional models of reciprocity remain limited to rational-actor and/or institutionalist explanations which not only lack empirical support, but also fail to account for the role of agency. Therefore, this paper asks: what conditions may explain the failure of a stable norm of reciprocity to emerge in the international system? and to what extent do foreign policy leaders influence their country's likelihood to reciprocate the cooperative behavior of another state? Recent efforts to incorporate principles of social exchange theory into the existing scholarship on reciprocity can be viewed as a step in the right direction, since they shed light on the impact of actors' expectations in shaping reciprocal exchange patterns. Yet, despite moving beyond the rationalist assumptions of traditional models, the explanatory value of agency continued to be largely unexplored in this literature. My aim is to demonstrate that adopting an agent-focused point of view, notably by drawing on role theory, is essential in order to complete our understanding of international reciprocity. This paper, thus, presents a critical review of the limitations associated with the

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emphasis on structural factors, which seems to be taken for granted within reciprocity and standard role theories alike. Alternatively, I suggest that a symbolic-interactionist model of role theory can remedy such shortcomings, especially one that involves interpretive narrative analysis. Using this theoretical framework in an illustrative case study, I connect the weakening of American reciprocity towards the Soviet Union in the 1980s with Ronald Reagan's introduction of a new ruling narrative that defines the United States' role as a moral leader in world politics. Based on this analysis and the literature review, this thesis demonstrates that the set of norms of expected behavior that underpin interstate reciprocity are primarily embedded in national role narratives.

Keywords: agency, foreign policy analysis, international reciprocity, role theory, symbolic-interactionism

Introduction

The signing of the 1972 Basic Principles Agreement between the United States (US) and the Soviet Union (USSR) represented a major breakthrough in the superpowers' relations. In this document, both parties set the foundation for Cold War détente by expressing their commitment to cooperation, reciprocity and mutual restraint. Only two years later, however, the Soviets decided to intervene in the Angolan civil war by providing military and material support to the national liberation movement. Whereas this decision sparked outrage within the US for its violation of détente norms, the USSR insisted that its "support for a national liberation struggle was consistent with the interpretation of peaceful coexistence" that had been agreed upon (Littke 1991, 75). This incongruence between each side's interpretation of mutual rights and obligations essentially capture the complex nature of reciprocal exchange in international politics.

One of the fundamental questions in the field of International Relations (IR) concerns the possibility of achieving interstate cooperation in an anarchic

system. As it does not require the presence of a central authority, reciprocity has been theorized by various scholars as a viable strategy for inducing cooperation. In fact, neoliberal institutionalists consider it to be an integral mechanism to the sustainable operation of international institutions. According to Axelrod (1984), rational actors adopt a form of specific reciprocity solely on the basis of self- interest and utility-maximization. In game-theoretic terms, players engage in a series of tit-for-tat interactions over a given period of time. Through processes of 'trial and error', he argues, actors with mixed interests come to learn that cooperating results in better outcomes than does defecting. As such, a norm of reciprocity develops, which enables cooperation to take place without the need for players to trust one another. Drawing on both social exchange and game theories, Keohane (1986) elaborated a typology of reciprocity which highlights the shortcomings of specific reciprocal exchanges in the complex reality of world politics. Indeed, he maintains that improving the scope of international cooperation requires a form of diffuse reciprocity, whereby a broad sense of social obligation urges a state to behave well toward another regardless of expected rewards. In this respect, so the argument goes, international regimes contribute significantly by establishing a favorable context for the adoption of successful cooperation strategies. From an offensive realist's perspective, this claim holds no validity once the constraining effects of relative gains are brought into the picture. In Mearsheimer's (1990) words, states with mixed interests are unlikely to engage in cooperative agreements which "result in asymmetrical payoffs that shift the balance of power against them" (45). Rather than being driven by a standard of reciprocity, the neorealist school sees international regimes as merely reflecting the system's distribution of power capabilities.

Overall, a common assumption in classic paradigms concerns the tendency of the reciprocity norm to emerge over time, either through the rational process of learning from repeated interaction or via institutional arrangements. Nevertheless, research on strategic interactions between the US and the USSR during the Cold War indicates otherwise. Empirical studies have revealed an

inconsistent pattern of bilateral reciprocity linkage between the superpowers, most notably a sharp decrease in the propensity of the US to reciprocate accommodative Soviet actions during the 1980s (Goldstein 1991; Ward and Rajmaira 1992). In light of this, I try to address the following questions: (1) what factors contribute to the failure of the norm of reciprocity to emerge and (2) to what extent do foreign policy leaders influence their states' likelihood to reciprocate cooperative behavior.

Interestingly, many scholars referred (albeit in a tangential manner) to the importance of agents' expectations and their perception of the legitimacy of reciprocal relations. In fact, they often acknowledged the need to develop our understanding of the factors that may shape a state's interpretation of and reactions to its adversary's behavior. This is especially relevant because, unlike economic transactions, exchanges in international politics lack a standard measure of value and, as such, their conduct depends largely on subjective assessment. On that account, this thesis seeks to incorporate identity and role theoretic explanations into the social exchange approach of reciprocity. The most recent contribution to this literature is Lepgold and Shambaugh's (2002) theoretical framework which establishes a four-part typology of reciprocity patterns and outlines the set of independent variables that determine actors' expectations regarding equivalence and contingency in social exchanges. For the purpose of my dissertation, I will focus on their argument on the effect of actors' belief about the nature of the relationship and the political significance they attribute to its legitimacy. What their model fails to capture, however, is the active role of agents in defining the normative context in which they operate. In fact, this overemphasis on structural variables is not uncommon within the constructivist scholarship on norms either. Although the notion of reciprocity in particular does not figure extensively in constructivist foreign policy analysis (FPA), the latter tends to study norms as exclusively rooted in international structures. This feature of standard constructivist theory entails the downplaying of the role of agency in constructing identity, which in turn defines the set of appropriate foreign policy options available.

While operationalizing identity remains challenging, a central claim of this thesis is that role theory in its symbolic-interactionist (as opposed to structural) version greatly extends our knowledge of bilateral reciprocity, especially in the absence of institutional linkages. More specifically, my proposed theoretical framework incorporates Leslie Wehner's (2018) agent-centered model of national role conception and change, as well as role relationships. His approach effectively highlights the influence of ruling narrations in framing a nation's interactions with other actors. With regards to the methodology, Wehner promotes the use of interpretive narrative analysis to identify the adoption and enactment of a role by ruling elites and decision makers. One of his main arguments is that foreign policy leaders capitalize on key political events in a strategic manner, by choosing to narrate and perform one national role over others. For instance, his account of the Venezuelan case explains how the 2002 coup attempt constituted a turning point for Hugo Chavez to introduce the country's new revolutionary role. His narrative was further legitimized by assigning simplified role relationships to external actors: whereas the US and Colombia were portrayed as antagonistic characters, Fidel Castro's Cuba represented a role model and friend. The interplay of these forces along with strategically selected references from Venezuela's historical repertoire continuously reinforced this rhetoric (Wehner 2018, 13-21). Ultimately, adopting this approach reveals the ability of leaders to challenge traditional foreign policy orientations by provoking shifts in national role narrations.

Overall, I maintain that Wehner's insights can enrich the established knowledge on reciprocity in two ways: firstly, it demonstrates states' ability to socialize each other and secondly, it explains how this process of mutual socialization shapes a state's set of expectations in relation to external actors. As an illustrative case, I apply Wehner's method of interpretive narrative analysis in order to reconstruct President Ronald Reagan's ruling narrative that positions the US as a *moral leader*, and assess its contribution to the weakness of reciprocal behavior towards the USSR in the early 1980s. By identifying key events, locations, times, actors and points of view, I compile the narrative

fragments and systematize them into a coherent interpretation of the dominant ruling narrative advanced by the Reagan administration. This exercise not only unveils the underlying beliefs about the role-taking actor's identity, but also on role relationships with significant others which represent integral elements in the process of role conception. Overall, the US – Soviet relationship is of special interest, since it has become a central paradigm for the study of reciprocity as an evolving norm. In fact, this dynamic is relevant to my thesis in that it depicts the operation of highly competitive great-power interactions beyond institutional boundaries. Moreover, Reagan's rise to power in particular led to one of the most remarkable shifts in American foreign policy vis-à-vis the USSR. Following this change in leadership, as Ward and Rajmaira's (1992) empirical findings suggest, the United States tended to adopt a cautious and less responsive policy than its Soviet counterpart.

Based on the assumption that the exercise of bilateral reciprocity is contingent on actors' expectations and beliefs about the nature of the relationship, I argue that the set of norms and expectations that guide reciprocal exchange are essentially embedded in national role narratives. Chapter 1 of this dissertation provides a critical overview of the various theoretical approaches to reciprocity in IR. It covers early game-theoretic and neoliberal institutionalist literature, but places greater emphasis on social exchange theory which is fundamental to my main argument. In Chapter 2, I explain the relevance of integrating an agent-oriented approach to our understanding of the norm of reciprocity, specifically through national role conceptions (NRCs). This section begins with a general discussion of role theory developments in FPA, including its conceptual and analytical overlap with the constructivist IR tradition. Next, it presents Wehner's symbolic-interactionist model of ruling narratives and highlights its ability to enhance existing theories on reciprocal exchange between states. In the final chapter, Wehner's narrative analysis method is used in a case study to examine the role of the United States as a moral leader during Ronald Reagan's first years in office.

Chapter 1: Conceptualizing Reciprocity: An Overview

This chapter covers the most prominent theoretical frameworks that have been applied to the study of reciprocity in international politics. Firstly, it introduces earlier experimental works based on game theory, which sought to evaluate the efficacy of reciprocal strategies at eliciting cooperation, typically in mixed-interest contexts. Next, it presents empirical studies that focus on identifying the occurrence and patterns of reciprocal interactions among state actors, including both dyadic and triangular models. The final section of this review turns to conceptions of reciprocity as a generalized norm, as opposed to early researchers' emphasis on short-term reactivity. In particular, contributions of neoliberal and social exchange literature are examined, emphasizing notions such as obligation, legitimacy and normative structure. This section seeks to provide a critical viewpoint concerning the existing models' ability to specify the conditions that affect reciprocity patterns.

Despite representing one of the elementary principles of international politics, the definition of reciprocity tends to cause a great deal of confusion. While it may simply be assessed through action-and-reaction patterns, some analysts are more concerned with the normative weight of reciprocity as a shared standard of behavior. In his seminal work titled *Evolution of Cooperation*, Robert Axelrod (1984) conducts a series of computer-based experiments in order to evaluate the potential of reciprocal strategies to foster mutual cooperation. In a game of Prisoner's Dilemma (PD), players are assumed to be rational, self- interested and driven by utility-maximization. Although both actors achieve the second best outcome from mutual cooperation, the winning strategy for each player is to defect provided his counterpart cooperates. In his study, Axelrod focuses not on the results of a single play but an indefinite sequence of interactions which, he suggests, renders cooperative moves more rational over time. According to this logic he refers to as 'the shadow of the future', immediate payoffs are likely to be dismissed for the sake of future positive outcomes. Among the set of strategies in this simulation, reciprocity is presented as a Tit-for-Tat (TFT) strategy in which one cooperates in the initial play, then

replicates the opponent's previous move in subsequent interactions. The findings demonstrate that this combination of reciprocity and cooperative initiative ultimately generates the highest payoff and outperforms all other strategies at fostering collaborative relations between self-interested actors. Although reciprocation strategies have received significant support within experimental research on conflict prevention, I found that these studies often remained limited in scope to PD and similar mixed-motive games. Evidently, such conditions do not necessarily resemble all highly competitive and potentially conflictual situations in the international system.

Based on this series of game-theoretic analyses, empirical approaches were applied to great power interactions in order to examine the occurrence of reciprocity among states in terms of its frequency and patterns. This body of literature varies greatly with regard to the definition of time frames and number of actors involved, which results in rather inconsistent findings on the subject. Depending on the conceptual framework adopted, some authors suggest strong patterns of great-power reciprocity, while others insist that such propensities remain relatively contingent and irregular. To overcome this confusion, Goldstein (1991) proposes a model that combines multiple event data sets to investigate the qualitative nature of bilateral responses (reciprocal or inverse) as they evolve over time. Reciprocity here is defined as the "degree of change one nation's actions induce in those of another […] in a positive or coincident direction" (Goldstein 1991, 196). Next, he applies this approach to the case of US – Soviet relations between 1950 and 1990. The results indicate the superpowers' tendency to reciprocate one another's actions within a time period of up to two months, as well as the absence of inverse reaction (i.e. cooperation following a hostile move by the adversary). Furthermore, the study concludes that in the 1950s and 1960s, US reciprocity to Soviet conciliatory initiatives was more consistent whereas in the 1970s and 1980s, it became less significant (Goldstein 1991).

In a similar vein, Goldstein's (1995) formal empirical analysis of Sino-American relations explores the potential of cooperation to evolve from great-

power rivalry. This question holds great importance to American foreign policy makers who often disagree on the approach to implement towards China, whether in commerce, technological transfer, or fundamental human rights. Whereas one side argues that a tough stance will induce a cooperative attitude from China, the other contends that hostility can only generate more hostile behavior in return (Goldstein 1995, 454). His findings confirm the prevalence of a limited reciprocity pattern (i.e. partial tit-for-tat) between the US and China which proves strongly effective in rendering cooperative strategies rational in the context of mixed-interest settings. The success of weak reciprocity, Goldstein (1995) maintains, can be attributed to the effect of a long shadow of the future of great-power relations. In line with Axelrod's view, these relations generally "resemble an *iterated* game— a long sequence of interactions, of uncertain duration— in which policy makers care strongly about future outcomes" (ibid., 455). Accordingly, noncooperative behavior may be deterred using only partial reciprocity when states expect to engage in a large (indefinite) number of future interactions with their counterpart.

As previously mentioned, there exists a different current of reciprocity theory which calls into question the widespread emphasis on short time scales to explain variance in major powers' foreign policy behavior. Among others, Rajmaira and Ward (1990) posit that reciprocity understood as a set of norms of expected behavior, defines the overall pattern of mutually accommodative or conflictual interactions. Most notably, their study suggests that US, Chinese and Soviet actions between the 1950s and 1970s, were likely informed by their past behavioral tendencies toward rival nations rather than being immediate responses in kind. I find this approach to be more nuanced, since it brings to light the impact of behavioral histories, as well as the complexity of contemporary foreign policy decision making. As they rightly point out, "foreign policy bureaucracies are so large and often so cumbersome that day-to-day response is virtually impossible..." (Rajmaira and Ward 1990, 459). Thus, it appears that the effect of reciprocity is likely to be observed from a different standpoint, and on a more extended time frame than previously

assumed. This confusion regarding the conceptualization of international reciprocity is addressed otherwise by neoliberal theorists.

Robert Keohane (1986) attributes the ambiguities associated with this term to the contradictory purposes for which it has been invoked, since it is "both a symbol in politics and a concept for scholars" (3). For instance, the history of US debates on foreign trade policy shows that both advocates of liberalization and of protectionism have claimed reciprocity to be their guiding principle, but disagreed entirely on its meaning. Moreover, Keohane (1986) distinguishes between two separate forms of reciprocal relations: (i) specific reciprocity consists in transactions of strictly equivalent value, governed by a clear set of rights and duties; (ii) diffuse reciprocity operates over an indefinite time frame under more loosely specified terms. Whereas the former understanding is predominant in game theory and economics, the latter reflects situations which require compliance with shared standards of conduct, particularly among a group of actors. In this sense, diffuse reciprocal relations are contingent on a broad sense of obligation to contribute to the general well-being of the group one belongs to, regardless of direct rewards (Keohane 1986, 20). On that account, the conclusion is that, in practice, simple quid pro quos remain insufficient for creating sustainable international cooperation. Most importantly, and considering its reliance on norms of obligation, diffuse reciprocity necessitates powerful international regimes. Indeed, neoliberal scholars contend that such institutions are capable of establishing collective norms, as well as shaping the context for and enhancing the legitimacy of reciprocal behavior (Axelrod and Keohane 1985, 250).

From a sociological point of view, diffuse reciprocity is commonly seen as a principle that solidifies and maintains cohesion in social systems. Considering the uncertainty of outcomes that this generalized form of exchange entails, participants develop a sense of trust across time through continuous risk-taking (Cook et al. 2013, 74-75). According to Alvin Gouldner (1960), an analytic distinction must be drawn between the interrelated connotations of reciprocity as a pattern of contingent social transactions and as an internalized

moral norm. In fact, he believes that a universal norm of reciprocity exists, based on the belief that "(i) people should help those who have helped them, and (ii) people should not injure those who have helped them" (Gouldner 1960, 171). This argument does not necessarily imply the transcendence of self-interest, rather it stipulates that a moral obligation to return arises between the parties involved. Ultimately, as Gouldner (1960) asserts, the resulting chronic mutual indebtedness becomes a basis for the stability of social relations (174).

Although the level of analysis here is the 'society' as such, there is a growing interest among scholars to incorporate exchange theory into the discipline of IR, since it has the potential to explain interstate dynamics also (Baldwin 1998). Notably, Larson (1998) emphasizes the advantages of analyzing international relations as a sequence of exchanges. With regard to the exercise of power, she posits that beyond coercive tactics, a commonly neglected but important instrument of influence among states is the accumulation of unreturned benefits. We can observe this, for example, when great powers grant favors to smaller states for which they expect to be compensated through other means over the long run. That being said, Larson (1998) acknowledges that the 'normative obligation' to reciprocate that arises in clearly regulated social relations, may not be equally present between nations. Since the anarchic international system comprises "heterogeneous actors, having different ideologies, languages, customs, and cultures" (ibid., 125), a state's decision to reciprocate is likely to be driven by prospective benefits rather than shared normative prescriptions.

Along the same lines, Lepgold and Shambaugh (2002) adopt a social-exchange approach that examines international relations as contingent mutual exchanges of various goods. Conscious of the scarce scholarly knowledge on *how* interstate reciprocity works, they argue that its dynamics in practice are more diverse than previously assumed. Contrary to the conventional emphasis on concessions of matching value and sequence, Lepgold and Shambaugh (2002)

find that stable cooperation may successfully emerge from unbalanced yet mutually satisfactory reciprocity patterns (230).

At this point, we must address a fundamental question on the standards by which actors measure and compare the value of the concessions they make, and what they receive in return. In the neoliberal tradition, international regimes play a crucial role, because they "embody, and affect, actors' expectations" (Axelrod and Keohane 1985, 234) regarding the perception of payoffs and length of the shadow of the future. This is achieved, not through a hierarchical enforcement of rules, but by ensuring the flow of information and the modification of transaction cost patterns, in the aim of limiting uncertainty. Furthermore, international institutions "specify what reciprocity means in the relevant issue area" (ibid., 250), and in this sense, they do not replace the practice of reciprocity but instead legitimize and enable its effective institutionalization as a norm. Overall, the neoliberal perspective emphasizes that such regimes implement various mechanisms to define the structure and contextual variables that inform state behavior.

Theorists from various schools agree that, given the lack of a standard measure of value in the political realm, it remains difficult to objectively compare the worth of traded goods. In treating this question, Larson (1998) places strong emphasis on mutual perceptions of fairness which she considers vital to the stability of international exchanges. In IR, as in social collectives, different actors have different but complementary needs and goods to offer (e.g. military assistance in return for market access). Thus, what may be described as a fair deal, with regard to reciprocity, is largely dependent on each state's perceptions. Inspired by social psychologists, however, Larson (1998) indicates that negotiators are guided in their judgments by a vague yet strong, intuitive sense of fairness. On that account, it appears that the determining factors of fairness are found in customary expectations and social norms which "function as media of exchange, analogous to money in economic transactions" (ibid., 130).

Unfortunately, I maintain that this viewpoint fails to provide a satisfactory answer to the issue of incompatible, often biased, interpretations of international reciprocity which result in situations of deadlock. As a case in point, when the United States suddenly declared a trade war with China in 2018, the Trump administration invoked various arguments to justify its decision. Aside from accusing China of intellectual-property theft, illicit commercial practices and other actions that harm the interests of American citizens (Office of the US Trade Representative 2018), the US perceived the issue to be far more than a trade dispute. Government officials and congressional leaders alike expressed their concern that the Chinese were planning, notably through technological transfer, to eliminate the US national security advantage.

Similarly, Peter Navarro, then Director of the White House National Trade Council, supported Donald Trump's firm stand against China "in the name of fair, reciprocal and ultimately free and prosperous trade". More importantly, Navarro (2018) reaffirmed this 'national security threat' narrative by claiming that China was ultimately driven by military and strategic motives, rather than economic ones.

In terms of the theoretical development of international reciprocity, Lepgold

Table 1. *Actor expectations of reciprocated exchange concession in four strategic contexts.*

	Contingency	
Equivalence	IMMEDIATE	LESS IMMEDIATE
PRECISE	#1 SPECIFIC RECIPROCITY PATTERN: Narrow, Quickly Contingent Exchange EXAMPLES: Extradition, Expulsion of Diplomats	#2 MIXED PATTERN OF RECIPROCITY PATTERN: Narrow, Longer-term Exchange EXAMPLES: Water Rights
IMPRECISE	#4 MIXED PATTERN OF RECIPROCITY PATTERN: Broad, Quick-Return Exchange EXAMPLES: US-PRC human rights, US-Mexico drugs	#3 DIFFUSE RECIPROCITY PATTERN: Broad, Longer-term Exchanges EXAMPLES: MFN, Compliance with International Norms and Law, Guanxi

and Shambaugh (2002) have thus far made the most substantive contribution from social exchange studies. Their model outlines two fundamental dimensions of reciprocal exchange: equivalence and contingency. The former consists in "a comparison of the perceived values of goods given and received" which are not inherent to the goods themselves but depend on the actor, context, issue area, etc.; the latter, on the other hand, reflects "the sequence and timing of an action taken by one actor in response to an action taken by another" (ibid., 232). Depending on actors' expectations over these two criteria, a four-part typology of reciprocity patterns is identified: the traditional specific and diffuse modes, as well as two additional mixed patterns (Table 1).

Source: Lepgold and Shambaugh (2002)

Among the primary factors that influence states' preferences over reciprocal exchange, according to this theory, is the political value that actors attach to the relationship based on the perceived legitimacy of its outcomes and relevant procedures. In other words, the higher this value becomes, the more likely it is that a diffuse reciprocity will develop which often indicates a friendlier dynamic. As specified by Lepgold and Shambaugh (2002), this argument is consistent with the constructivist scholarship on the significance of legitimacy for state compliance with international norms. Thus, it appears that in tandem with "the actor- or agent-centred factors that affect political leaders' bargaining

behaviour, the normative structure in which they operate can affect their strategic calculations, if not their basic objectives" (ibid., 240). Yet while they shed light on the impact that the normative context has on the evolution of reciprocity patterns, I maintain that the authors fail to elaborate a complete framework to assess such an impact.

Overall, the empirical and theoretical contributions discussed thus far offer a wide variety of approaches to the study of reciprocity, yet they all point to a similar conclusion: the need for an improved understanding of the conditions that shape actors' expectations. Indeed, important questions are left unanswered with respect to the factors that guide a state's choices in terms of reciprocity policy. More specifically, no significant effort has been made to depict an agent-driven viewpoint of reciprocal exchange which, as I will demonstrate in the following chapter, can provide valuable insights on the potential of reciprocity to foster cooperative relations among states.

Chapter 2: International Reciprocity and National Role Conceptions

Based on the previous chapter, it appears that existing theories of international reciprocity are not sufficiently equipped to explain the variation in state behavior, particularly in terms of the likelihood to reciprocate cooperative moves. While the social exchange strand of this literature has developed a more substantive paradigm of reciprocity than its predecessors, its authors remain unclear about the determining variables of actors' preferences and normative expectations in this regard. On that account, this paper contends that an analysis conducted solely within the standard social exchange framework cannot provide a comprehensive picture of the reciprocity norm. Instead, it proposes to incorporate a constructivist account that will not compromise the role of agency. Foreign policy role theory, in particular, has the potential to fill this gap in the literature while bringing together different levels of analysis.

In the first section of this chapter, I review the evolution of role theory in FPA and compare earlier approaches to more recent ones. This comparison is meant to highlight their commonalities and contrasting assumptions about the sources of national role conceptions (NRCs). Next, I discuss the strong connection between role theory and constructivist IR, especially with reference to the definition of identity-related concepts. More importantly, I make the case that both social constructivism and the predominant structural role theory approach are not ideal for a complete understanding of international reciprocity. The main argument here is that a structural focus does not adequately account for: (1) the process of role change, and (2) the impact of decision makers' subjective assessments of national role positions. Accordingly, this critique suggests that the centrality of structural imperatives must be downgraded to allow for an agent-centered explanation of NRCs and, by extension, of reciprocal exchange patterns.

Based on this argument, the second section of this chapter proposes the use of a symbolic-interactionist variant of role theory as a theoretical framework for the study of reciprocity. It begins with a general examination of this perspective, including its explanatory value and the difficulties associated with its application. Next, it places special emphasis on Wehner's model of interpretive narrative analysis, which effectively demonstrates the role of foreign policy leaders in strategically shaping role conceptions via ruling narratives. With this proposal, I seek to highlight the impact of decision-makers, notably through political discourse, on expectations of appropriate behavior and perceived normative obligations, such as the obligation to reciprocate.

2.1: Role Theory in Foreign Policy Analysis

Role theory was first introduced to the discipline of IR, and particularly within the subfield of FPA, through the influential work of K. J. Holsti (1970) on national role conceptions. By then, role theory had already been in development among anthropologists, sociologists and social psychologists for

several decades. Nonetheless, Holsti's arguments do not draw heavily on these older analytical and conceptual frameworks. This is because early research in role- theoretical FPA emphasized the self-conceptualization of the state, as opposed to the relational or social dimensions of the subject, such as external recognition. More specifically, Holsti (1970) sought to investigate how the idea of 'Self' held by national leaders carried various beliefs and perceptions with respect to the identity of the state. From this viewpoint, it is argued that NRCs direct and shape the state's behavior within the international system (ibid.). Firstly, his study analyzes the content of various statements made by heads of state and foreign ministers between 1965 and 1967. Based on inductive analysis, the author identifies a set of major roles which tend to be embodied by national leaders on the international scene. These role categories, which entail distinct regular behavioral patterns, include but are not limited to: the regional leader, the liberation supporter, the mediator, the non-aligned, the faithful ally, the example, etc.

It is also worth noting that one state may or may not express more than one role during a given time period, except for certain role types which are highly incompatible. In fact, we can observe various cases, in international politics, of inter-role conflicts wherein a country is caught between contradictory role enactments. For example, Henning Tewes (1998) illustrates this issue by tracing the evolution of Germany's struggle to reconcile two foreign policy roles: its original self-conception as a promoter of deeper integration among existing European Union (EU) members and its newly evolving role as a 'widener' of EU membership.

From the 1980s onward, considerable advances were achieved in the application of role theory in foreign policy and IR. Most notably, Stephen G. Walker (1987) initiated a wave of empirical studies which sought to update and enrich the analytical toolbox of this novel approach, in the aim of enhancing its descriptive and explanatory value. Nowadays, role theorists make different assumptions with respect to the factors and sources that inform national roles. According to the originators of role theory and their followers, NRCs ought to

be studied as stable social positions or, in other words, structural variables whose definition depends largely on a state's material power. Naturally, this approach has been heavily criticized by a new generation of scholars who reject its static take on expectations of appropriate behavior, as well as its deterministic portrayal of world politics. As Breuning (2011) puts it, "early research often focused primarily on the way in which the international system *compelled* states to adopt a specific role or roles" (17, emphasis added).

Generally, this latter strand of the literature maintains that role positions do not stem from the inherent properties of a state. Thus, it proposes a sociological theory of foreign policy roles instead, which can be articulated through the study of language and discourse. In his comparative analysis of the French and German cases, Krotz (2002) argues that despite having much in common, the two countries display profound differences in foreign policies which can be explained in terms of diverging conceptions of their national roles. Interestingly, this variation can be identified in their NRC vocabulary: whereas the French, expressing the ambitions of a residual great power, tend to invoke norms of glory, greatness and rank, German politicians are more inclined to speak of an international responsibility, continuity and predictability (ibid., 12-16). In contrast to previous research, Krotz (2002) theorizes NRCs as products of intersubjective understandings that emerge from historical reference points, memory and socialization processes. Hence, they encompass the collective notions of "what we want and what we do as a result of who we think we are, want to be, and should be", as a nation (ibid., 4).

As for the influence of NRCs on foreign policy, it manifests across three dimensions (Krotz 2002, 9): firstly, their prescriptive effect not only motivates a set of policy objectives and actions, but also excludes certain options by framing them as 'unthinkable' or off-limits.

Second, as reference systems, their prospective impact is to facilitate the prediction of a state's likelihood to take actions of a particular kind. Third,

NRCs induce preferences for distinct decision making and foreign policy-making styles, both within national and international settings.

Given FPA role theory's use of norms- and identity-related concepts, its connection (or lack thereof) with the social constructivist IR tradition has been vigorously debated by scholars in recent years. On some level, we can argue that both camps share a similar purpose, namely transcending those understandings of the state that overemphasize material traits such as military and economic capabilities. Yet despite the seemingly common terminology, different authors disagree considerably in their definition of these interrelated notions. For instance, Browning (2007) places national role conceptions under the wider umbrella of identity, which he considers to be "intersubjectively negotiated in interactions with others. To be able to act, selves need to construct narratives that locate themselves in time and space and in relation to other actors" (29). Some constructivist accounts, on the other hand, insist on separating the concepts of identity and role performance; the latter being associated with the exercise of agency. Most prominently, Alexander Wendt holds that the former represents an independent and intrinsic characteristic of the actor, while the latter is more socially interactive and contingent in nature (Breuning 2011, 21).

Both in the constructivist and role theoretic paradigms, there exists a myriad of conflicting ideas pertaining to the concepts of identity, roles, and the nature of their connection. Since a full review of that debate is beyond the scope of this paper, I will assume for the remainder of the discussion that national role conceptions provide a useful basis, among others, for assessing the effective exercise of identity by agents. For as Wehner and Thies (2014) rightly explain, "identity lacks agency since it is not a concept that has an action-driven meaning at its heart. Thus, the way to link identity and action through motivational dispositions is through roles" (418).

One recurrent problematic feature of earlier works on foreign-policy role analysis is the interpretation of NRCs exclusively or primarily as a structural

variable, defined in material terms. Initially, writers such as Holsti and Walker assumed that the role played by a state in the international system was assigned to it, in accordance with its relative size (geographic, economic, military, etc.). On this basis, they conceptualize NRCs as fixed social positions, carrying normative expectations that frame actors' preferences. Surely, size and the distribution of power in the global structure have a strong impact on the set of roles a state may possibly adopt, but I argue that it is simply one element of a bigger picture. Indeed, rather than solely investigating the objective imperatives of structural positions, an adequate study of roles must also look into decision makers' subjective beliefs about such positions (Nabers 2011,79).

In one of the most notable contributions to this debate, Hollis and Smith (1990) outline the limitations of the traditional rational models, especially with respect to their assumptions of universal information processing. According to their analysis, foreign-policy decision making and role-playing are not limited to a rational calculation of externally derived inputs. Instead, the conception of roles requires judgement, whereby "actors interpret information, monitor their performance, reassess their goals" (ibid., 165). On that basis, the authors emphasize that decision making should not be viewed as instantaneous, since actors carry with them various perceptions of the past into present interactions. This being said, structural factors cannot be entirely dismissed if the aim is to conduct a systematic analysis of roles in international politics. In fact, Hollis and Smith's (1990) theory acknowledges the function of the prevailing internal language to which decision makers must subscribe if they are to present legitimate and 'reasoned' policy proposals (166).

To sum up, proponents of normatively deterministic approaches seem to overlook the ability of role theory to demonstrate "that agency involves vision and interpretation – as well as behavior – that has the potential to transform structures" (Breuning 2011, 18). Thus, this paper suggests that an actor-focused perspective is needed to envision how ruling elites construct NRCs informed both by domestic and external sources, on the basis of their

perceptions of the country's material and ideational attributes (e.g. identity, historical experiences).

Another weakness of structuralist role theory lies in its inability to account for role change. If national role conceptions manifest in the form of decision regimes in the process of policy making, then we can assume that changes in these conceptions will be reflected in the foreign policies pursued by the state. Notably, Michael Grossman is among the first authors to put this assumption to the test in his case study of Russia's foreign policy transformation during the 1990s. Based on a content analysis of policy statements made by top Russian officials, he identifies a set of NRCs whose evolution is then compared to the pattern of Russian voting behavior in the United Nations. Overall, the findings of Grossman's (2005) investigation indicate that, indeed, changes in the expression of certain NRCs were strongly connected to shifts in Russia's international behavior. This particularly manifested with respect to the question of cooperative and non-cooperative attitudes toward the US and the Western world (ibid., 349). As of yet, not enough evidence suggests that the application of these findings may be generalized to other countries, especially in the case of more decentralized and diffused decision-making systems. Nonetheless, it is worth recalling Allison and Halperin's (1972) argument on policy makers' perceptions of the state, namely that "those in the bureaucracy who do not share some or all of these values and images are inclined to act and to argue as if they believe them" (56). Hence, it is likely that these foundational perceptions will converge in the conception of national roles. In any case, further empirical research must be conducted on national role change to address this issue of generalizability.

The phenomenon of role change commonly refers to "a change in the shared conception and execution of typical role performance and role boundaries" (Turner 1990, 88). According to Nabers (2011), a substantial and swift transformation in the NRC is often triggered by a disintegration in the social (political) structure or a crisis situation. More specifically, such conditions tend to provide a favorable environment to challenge traditional foreign policy

frameworks. Notably, and in line with the discourse-theoretic approach, formative events can present windows of opportunity for decision makers to weaken dominant discourses on state and world politics (Nabers 2009). As I will discuss further in the next section of this paper, these arguments share a similar focus withWehner's model of ruling narratives, on the performative function of language. However, Naber's (2011) theoretical efforts are directed towards understanding the conditions through which the (ultimately) dominant "discourse produces and reproduces specific roles by institutionalizing them into principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures" (87). From this perspective, I find that the emphasis on structural explanations persists, since the aim is to address questions such as: "how are new dominant interpretative frameworks translated into new institutional frameworks?" (Nabers 2009, 201). Therefore, while the element of agency has been partially incorporated into this role theory model, its explanatory value is not fully demonstrated.

Whether it is interpreted in material or normative terms, structure seems to be prioritized as a determining factor of role selection and enactment. Indeed, constructivist and sociological paradigms of role theory also reiterate the predominant focus on structure but assess its impact within institutional settings instead. In other words, "the institutional settings in these approaches often appear to completely determine the expectations of role behavior" (Wehner and Thies 2014, 415). Nonetheless, it must be noted that states' role behavior does not always align with these expectations. And while this paper does not present such an incongruence as an argument against the importance of structural analysis to role theorists, it surely points to the need for an agent-centered take on role-based behavior. This proposal is clearly reflected in McCourt's (2012) argument that state actors' "ability to violate expectations creatively is difficult to explain from a role-as-duty perspective" (378).

To highlight the relevance of this critique to the study of interstate reciprocity, we should consider Terhalle's (2011) insights on the phenomenon of 'reciprocal socialization'. Generally speaking, the term 'socialization' refers to the contested process by means of which broad consensus is achieved among

states on a range of issues (ibid., 345). In his investigation of the dynamics between rising powers and the West, Terhalle (2011) demonstrates that the rise of the BASIC states (Brazil, South Africa, India, China) has prompted a two-way process of socialization, rather than the predominant unidirectional socialization assumed by various IR thinkers. In his view, rising powers are not only being passively socialized into the prevailing international order but are actively attempting to reshape it as well. Thus, despite its effort to integrate the agent into the discipline of IR, social constructivism's presupposition of relatively stable identities and rigid collective norms cannot adequately capture change in national roles and its subsequent impact on interstate reciprocal exchange. In fact, Terhalle (2011) finds that "in terms of reciprocity, constructivism's focus on the socializee is too narrow in that it assumes, largely speaking, that some states are already socialized while others need to be adopted into the club of socialized members" (349). Alternatively, I suggest that a symbolic interactionist approach to role theory minimizes the focus on institutional imperatives, and thus reveals the extent to which national leaders' embodiment of new role conceptions alters the patterns of international reciprocity.

2.2:Wehner's Interpretive Narrative Approach

To begin with, engaging in a micro-interactionist constructivist approach to state action inevitably raises a fundamental question regarding the nature of the state. In a way, assigning particular 'roles' to states from this standpoint implies their personification, which can be problematic analytically speaking. In an effort to address this contentious point, McCourt (2014) suggests that, when conceptualized as corporate agents, states can indeed be considered to be role-playing actors (34). In fact, it all ultimately boils down to the activity of "certain individuals with the power to make authoritative decisions on behalf of the state, a power others in society do not have" (ibid.). Given that authority, national leaders and decision makers are in a position to engage in the formulation and performance of NRCs on behalf of their nations. In addition,

a micro-interactionist approach contributes significant explanatory value to the study of identity in IR, by describing the continuous process of identity construction in terms of practices and uses. To achieve that, social interaction ought to be viewed as more than an objective scene for the enactment of pre-defined identities. On the contrary, states' interpretation of what is deemed "appropriate and necessary is tied to the relational roles they play, roles that emerge within and structure their interactions in international affairs" (McCourt 2014, 42).

Within this theoretical framework, it is also crucial to examine the use of discourse by national leaders as a means of articulating, as well as (re)defining their countries' roles in the international system. Notably, Nabers (2011) points out that states, as role-beholders, locate themselves within the structure by 'naming' one another (86). And in doing that, their structural positions are filled with meanings that manifest in terms of expectations of action. For example, Baert, Langenhove, and James (2019) indicate that this dynamic can be observed in the dispute over nuclear power between Iran and the West. On the one hand, the Iranian

discourse seeks to portray the country's concessions not as an obligation but as a voluntary, supererogatory act for which it should be applauded and admired in the international community. But on the other hand, the narrative pushed by the US and its allies positions "Iran as the 'black sheep' of the 'family of nations' which cannot be trusted with technology that could serve to make dangerous weapons and therefore not entitled to have its actions understood as fulfilling supererogatory duties" (Baert, Langenhove, and James 2019, 4.10-4.11).

In essence, the symbolic-interactionist variant of role theory understands prevalent patterns and structures as products of the mutual interaction among agents. Wehner's conceptual framework, in particular, places individuals on center stage in the aim of highlighting their ability to "modify inherited norms and languages following their own reasoning and their inherent creativity"

(Wehner and Thies 2014, 416). Typically, the capacity of foreign policy elites to improvise and generate new decision-making scripts becomes more evident when the traditional frame of reference is faced with a dilemma. Given its focus on interpretive methodology, his approach tends to resemble the work of historians. National role change is thus identified through the interpretation of past events and considered to be part of a ruling narrative. In a broad sense, ruling narratives are defined as the set of framing stories and beliefs that help governing elites make sense of the world in which they interact, hence forming a background for their decision making (Bevir, Daddow, and Hall 2013, 13). As such, they not only inform foreign policy preferences but also shape national leaders' understanding of where their country stands in relation to other actors of the international community. On the one hand, narratives serve as tools for comprehending the present; on the other hand, they contribute to the creation of blueprints for future policy making. More importantly, as Wehner (2018) maintains, when political actors exercise the former function, they "rely on a constant

reinterpretation of their past as they confront dilemmas that challenge existing traditions" (2). In turn, this framing of historical events and their associated meanings becomes central in order to justify and sustain the selection of a specific national role over others.

In line with the above, an integral element of this analytical framework is its emphasis on the agent's intentionality in the process of generating narratives. In fact, the latter are viewed as strategies devised by foreign policy leaders to frame and project selected NRCs, and thus attain particular interests and goals (Wehner and Thies 2014, 421). We must acknowledge, however, that this process is not without limitations; decision makers are constrained in terms of the cultural resources from which their narrations are derived. In other words, they must ensure that the contextual elements of their proposed role conception are likely to resonate within their society and, to some extent, within external audiences as well. If they fail to do so, their strategy may not be effective at bringing about national role change in the long term. In that regard,

Wehner (2018) explains that ruling elites never provoke a clean break with the past when attempting to advance novel role conceptions. Rather, they are likely to "refer selectively to other parts of their existing cultural and historical repertoire to construct new narrations" (ibid., 7).

Finally, symbolic-interactionist role theory places strong emphasis on the notion of the *significant other*, which stands in contrast with the *general other* that symbolizes the demands and expectations of the social system as a whole. In fact, different role relationships between states tend to vary in terms of the degree of power and dependency they carry. Consequently, not all external actors of the international system will be equally influential in the formulation of national roles. Beneš and Harnisch (2015) define the significant other as "a primary socializing agent" and, more specifically in international relations, "another state (or another actor) most frequently represented in the domestic political discourse" (150). Therefore, when forming their image of national identity, political elites often make references to such actors by comparing and relating them to their own country. The nation's *self* thus becomes strongly shaped by its positive identification with particular relevant others (e.g. the regional ally), on the one hand, and by its negative differentiation against them (e.g. the imperialist state), on the other (Beneš and Harnisch, 2015). Furthermore, as I will exemplify in the case study below, these dynamics may involve various actors at the domestic, regional and international levels.

To sum up, the role-theoretic paradigm outlined in this section illuminates the influence that political agents exert on the behavioral patterns of international relations. It is thus capable of contributing to scholars' understanding of interstate reciprocity, especially as part of the social exchange approach. Most importantly, this proposed framework supports the argument that expectations of appropriate behavior, including the normative obligation to reciprocate, can be significantly altered in accordance with the perceptions and motivational dispositions of foreign policy leaders. As Wehner and Thies (2014) put it, national role conceptions "already contain expectations of the Self and Other that provide an agreed upon set of interests and a normative justification for

action" (420). Correspondingly, in order to investigate the sources of these sets of expectations, it is essential to look into the ruling narratives in which they are embedded, and that are meant to provide them with cohesion and legitimacy.

Chapter 3: Case Study of the United States under Ronald Reagan

Several empirical studies have shown that the period of the early 1980s, which coincided with former president Ronald Reagan's rise to power, constituted a historical break point in Soviet-American relations (Goldstein, 1991; Goldstein and Freeman, 1991). In fact, researchers found that the nature of underlying norms in these interactions experienced significant change, especially in terms of reciprocal foreign policy behavior. Notably, it appears that during the first 4 years of Reagan's presidency (1981-1985), the United States remained cautious and less responsive to Soviet cooperative initiatives than before. At times, its tendency to cooperate with the USSR would even decline, as a response to an increase in Soviet conciliatory moves (Ward and Rajmaira 1992). In light of these data, this chapter explores the connection between the decrease in US reciprocity towards its counterpart, and the introduction of a new ruling narrative and national role conception by Reagan.

In this illustrative case, I build upon Wehner's aforementioned conceptual framework and his method of interpretive narrative analysis to sketch out Ronald Reagan's ruling narrative, particularly during his first years in office. This examination seeks to assemble and connect the main elements of his narrations, in order to reveal the conception of the United States' role as a *moral leader* in the international system. Among its key advantages is that it sheds light on the nature of different role relationships that frame the nation's behavioral tendencies towards specific external actors. On that basis, it demonstrates that Reagan's induced national role change can be viewed as a strong, if not the most central, contributing factor to the decline in reciprocal behavior towards the USSR.

According to Wehner (2018), the reconstruction of a ruling narrative should begin with the identification of 'narration fragments'; such key components of the story include the *locations, actors, events, times* and *points of view*. Essentially, these are used as reference points to determine the main narrator(s) of the role, turning points, role expectations emerging from this process, the locations (i.e. domestic, international) in which role relationships are enacted, as well as strategic references to the past that the narrator resorts to. On that basis, it is possible to highlight the foundational beliefs which guide foreign policy elites in their interactions with external actors.

The introduction of Ronald Reagan's new role conception for the US can be traced back to the 1980 presidential elections. At the time, the American people shared a general sense of loss and despair which could be attributed to a weak national economy, US international involvement, and a series of failed attempts to end the Cold War. When Reagan stepped in, armed with his unique communication skills, he embodied an optimistic vision of the country which was entirely different from his electoral opponent Jimmy Carter's skeptic outlook. Therefore, this vision spoke deeply to the masses and succeeded at reviving their sense of national confidence and security.

When telling the United States' story, Reagan consistently portrayed it as a chosen nation, set apart by God and gifted with a special mission to lead the rest of the world toward freedom. In contrast with other presidents, his narrative was characterized by an explicit moral orientation that sought to shift the focus toward ends rather than means. In other words, the technicalities of his policy choices did not seem to matter as much as the overall good for which they were (presumably) intended. Notably, in his speech at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, Reagan expressed his disapproval of the idea of 'value-neutral strategies', and then emphasized how important it was "to examine the issues of today in light of timeless moral principles, principles rooted in the Judeo-Christian ethic" (Reagan 1986).

Generally, one of the distinctive features of his discourse was frequent storytelling. This method allowed him to depict vivid images regarding the origins of the world and of America's position in it. In this sense, Reagan continuously sought to promote and legitimize his strategic vision, by selectively assigning certain meanings to American history. Most notably, his references to the past often involved a recurrent underlying theme: the heritage of the Founding Fathers. In particular, his narrations tended to portray the core ideals that guided him in policy making as a reflection of the nation's founding principles. He was thus widely known for quoting historical figures such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison to support his beliefs concerning freedom, government, and American moral exceptionalism (The Heritage Foundation 2011).

In line with this narrative, the United States' role relationship with the antagonistic Soviet Union positions the former as a representative of good, whereas the latter represents evil. This symbolic dichotomy became especially prominent when Reagan delivered his famous *Evil Empire* speech to the National Association of Evangelicals on March 8, 1983, in which he described the USSR as being the 'the focus of evil in the modern world'. In an earlier instance, Reagan had expressed his deep mistrust in the Soviets, since he believed their lack of moral standards meant that they were capable of lying, deceiving and committing any crime for the sake of advancing their expansionist cause, hence justifying his reluctance to cooperate (Peterson 2010, 53). From Reagan's point of view, the struggle between West and East was, at its root, a spiritual one and a test of faith and moral will. On this account, he framed some of his major foreign policy decisions in this issue area by appealing to the rationale of an American moral imperative (Rowland and Jones 2016, 453).

In the domestic scene, the former president was experiencing significant pressure from political actors that were critical of his rhetoric and policy orientation, for being overly provocative. In fact, prominent conservative

leaders opposed his offensive stance, especially from the Christian community that represented a key target audience for the success of

Reagan's Soviet strategy. Furthermore, even White House officials expressed their opposition to his verbal attacks on the Soviet government and warned that his accusations were only aggravating the existing tensions between the superpowers. Overall, the freeze movement— a domestic alliance advocating for a freeze of nuclear weapons production— eventually became a major obstacle to the maintenance of Reagan's ruling narrative. Indeed, by his third year in office, Ronald Reagan was faced with the difficult task of counteracting his perception in the public as a dangerous warmonger (Rowland and Jones 2016, 442).

As for the positive role relationships in this narrative, the United Kingdom in particular stands out as a special supporting character. In fact, it seemed to reinforce Reagan's narration, both domestically and internationally, by reflecting role expectations that go in line with the United States' position in the world which he sought to advance. The relationship between the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan was famously characterized by a strong complicity, mainly grounded in the two leaders' shared economic interests and collaboration in foreign policy matters. Indeed, Thatcher made a clear effort to establish herself as Reagan's primary ally in the international scene. In that respect, the State Department's briefings to the former president emphasized that he should capitalize on her pro-American, anti-Soviet instincts by demonstrating "publicly and privately that Thatcher is the major Western leader most attuned to your views on East-West and security issues" (Cooper 2014,

13). Thatcher also reiterated Reagan's viewpoint on the policy of détente, namely that it was used by Communist forces as a cover for covert aggression, and to weaken Western defenses (Thatcher 1993, 65). Overall, despite the lack of total agreement in substantive policy questions, their shared view of the

world provided a solid basis for the development of a UK-US partnership that played a key role in reinforcing Reagan's strategy.

To conclude, this case study sought to outline the main constituting elements of Ronald Reagan's ruling narrative, following his rise to power in 1980. On that basis, it described the purposive act of his formulation and performance of America's role as a moral leader. More importantly, using Wehner's role-theoretic narrative analysis revealed the ways in which significant others, such as the UK, the Soviet Union, and domestic forces represented reference points and socializing agents that influenced the ways in which this national role was expressed. Overall, this illustrative case shows that expectations of foreign policy behavior, including interstate reciprocity, can change substantially through the process of mutual socialization between states— a process mostly driven by national elites' creative exercise of agency in domestic and international politics.

Conclusion

Regardless of their theoretical approach, international relations scholars commonly assumed that a norm of reciprocity would develop over time between states, in an almost linear fashion. Nonetheless, empirical findings on this subject have generally contradicted such claims. This paper aimed to explore the conditions that may preclude the emergence of a stable reciprocity norm between states, as well as the impact of foreign policy leaders on their country's likelihood to reciprocate cooperative behavior from another state. Investigating the role of agents is especially important because, contrary to economic transactions, international politics lacks a standard measure of value, thus rendering the agent's subjective input a central variable. To explore these research questions, I began by providing a critical assessment of the existing literature on interstate reciprocity. Special emphasis was given to the most recently introduced social exchange approach, which draws on sociological principles to explain reciprocal exchange in the international system. Indeed, this strand of the literature can be viewed as a significant step towards a deeper

understanding of reciprocity, particularly since it shows that the type and pattern of reciprocity are affected by actors' expectations and beliefs about the nature of relations with other states. However, social exchange theorists have not given this question sufficient consideration and while they rightly highlight the impact of the normative context, they fail to provide a thorough explanation of the sources that inform actors' expectations in this context.

In this dissertation, I tried to emphasize the role of agents in actively (re)defining the normative context within which they operate. While this can be achieved by engaging in a constructivist approach, both standard IR constructivist and role theoretic paradigms were found to be inadequate, largely due to their static overemphasis on structural explanations of state behavior. Based on this critique, I suggested the use of a symbolic-interactionist role theory as a more suitable framework for the research aims of this paper. More specifically, Wehner's model of ruling narratives provided valuable insights on foreign policy leaders' tendency to strategically introduce and perform specific national role conceptions, notably through the use of discursive tools. These role conceptions are studied as part of narratives advanced by the ruling elite and carry a set of beliefs and values that form an essential background for policy preferences and decision making. In this sense, adopting Wehner's theoretical framework highlighted national leaders' ability to challenge their country's traditional foreign policy frame of reference and, in doing so, to alter behavioral patterns of international relations. This paper thus sought to demonstrate the relevance of this model to the study of international reciprocity in particular.

To that end, it proceeded first by identifying the problematic features of predominant approaches to reciprocity and second, by presenting a case study of Ronald Reagan's role conception for the United States during his presidency. In this study, I applied Wehner's method and conceptual framework to examine the primary components of Reagan's ruling narrative and explained how the latter was strategically used as a justification for foreign policy decisions. The analysis thereby revealed the importance of an agent-

centered viewpoint for understanding the weakness of US reciprocal behavior towards the Soviet Union during the early 1980s.

Overall, this paper mainly argued that the set of norms and expectations that inform state actors in reciprocal exchanges with other states are embedded in national role narratives.By taking this proposal into account and considering its implications on interstate reciprocity dynamics, our understanding of cooperation in international relations as a whole can be improved. In recent years, the literature on reciprocity has predominantly shifted from a focus on great power interaction toward empirical investigations of regional conflicts and the behavioral tendencies of smaller states. Yet, I suggest there remain significant gaps in terms of its theoretical foundations that must be addressed, notably by integrating role-based explanations into the social exchange models of reciprocity.

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