

The myth of German hegemony: assessing international leadership roles of the Merkel governments

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Abstract:

International leadership is a widely used concept today when describing Germany's foreign policy in various crises of the European Union. Current usage of the term or the related term "German hegemony" suggests that respective policy results hinge upon Germany's enhanced capacity to press for or bargain towards Berlin's preferred solution. These approaches, however, fail to take into account the social character of the relationship between leaders and followers. I present a role theoretical model of international leadership that improves our understanding of the role interaction processes leading towards leadership failure or success. I present three recent German leadership episodes under Angela Merkel as plausibility tests for the model. I find that there is strong evidence to suggest that German leadership comes in different and evolving patterns and that its success hinges on followership and support by state and non-state actors. Policy makers and analysts must be more aware of the social character of leadership and its domestic underpinnings to improve their crisis resolution performance or effective contestation.

Keywords: Role theory, leadership role, follower, hegemony; German Foreign Policy, Eurocrisis, Ukraine conflict, migration crisis

1. Introduction

Following the global financial crisis, Germany took the helm of leadership in the Eurozone. During the so-called ‘Eurocrisis’, however, it shared this leadership, first, with France to set up the European Solidarity Mechanism (ESM), and then with the European Central Bank to couch the negative effects of its own austerity policy. Germany’s diplomatic leadership in the dispute in Ukraine and between Ukraine and Russia has been more stable if cooperative, teaming up from the beginning with France, again, the United States and the OSCE. In contrast, Germany’s leadership during the ongoing migration crisis has been more unilateral, hierarchic and unsuccessful. Not only did the Federal Republic receive single-handedly tens of thousands of refugees stuck on the Balkan route in the summer of 2015 but it also called off the European Union’s (EU) Dublin Regulation, thereby deeply challenging other member states’ governments about their own migration preferences.

It is argued here that traditional realist theories of hegemony, and their English school descendants, cannot explain this variance in German leadership behavior. One country occupying the same structural position in the international system should adopt a coherent strategy to exercise leadership. Also, one country facing the same great power peers and international society should not adopt widely diverging strategies that are both commensurate and conflicting with external expectations by its peers. The changing characteristics of German domestic politics provide only a partial explanation. EU-sceptic newspaper editorials and the ascent of the anti-Euro and anti-migrant “Alternative für Deutschland” (AFD) cannot explain sustained leadership in supporting Greece and other troubled economies and the willingness to welcome nearly one million battered people from various civil war regions in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Nor are English school approaches – or other cultural variants – particularly persuasive alternatives because they rely upon hegemony as an “institutionalized practice [of leadership] which is conferred by international society or a constituency within it” (Clark 2011:4). The English school is thus ambivalent about agency, both assuming a drive for great power rank and a respect for equilibrium within the international society as a whole (Clark 2011: 5). The variance in the paths chosen by Germany in different policy areas remains a puzzle.

This paper draws upon interactionist role theory, first developed in social philosophy and American pragmatism to examine alternative leadership role conceptions available to all leading states. Role theory may be described by a central metaphor that states are actors on the world stage, performing functional roles that are expected from them by domestic and

foreign audiences. It follows that whenever a government chooses to perform a role in association with others – ranging from leading itself to following the leader of a group – it must choose between domestic and foreign expectations to inform its role play vis-à-vis its partners, rivals and enemies. In this metaphor, roles are not first encounters – as Alexander Wendt has put it – in a theater before an audience. In the interactionist perspective, they are analogous to family celebrations where each member brings his or her own understanding of past events, strength and weaknesses of other family members to the table. This social contextual perspective includes that functional roles may shift over time and space when family members adopt or are ascribed conflicting roles in the family or other social groups.

Henceforth, I posit that the choice between role allegiances is a product of two processes of social structuration: the domestically expected role of a government in upholding a specific sense of physical and ontological wellbeing of people (domestic order/structure) and the international role of a country in upholding the physical and ontological security of a group of states (international order/structure) (Harnisch 2014). In contrast to functional theories of roles, where roles exist prior to interaction between agents, this paper conceptualizes roles as “emergent social phenomena” (Harnisch 2011; McCourt 2012, 2014). In this particular reading, agents do not only take on roles – preconceived. They also make roles and try to alter cast others into commensurate roles during interaction. In doing so, they can actually fail. As a result, role taking and role making does not always or necessarily result in a stable social structure – as envisioned in Wendt’s idealized Hobbesian, Lockean and Kantian cultures. Role taking and making may lead to anomy or substantial structural changes, such as at the end of the Cold War, the BREXIT or the current transition towards an “era of embedded nationalism”.

It follows that international roles, such as leadership roles, are not great power attributes, as they are not merely ascribed to an agent and then stick to it (eternally). They are “social” all the way down in that they emerge from the interaction of agents. As Martin Hollis and Steve Smith put it:

“No role could possibly be specified in enough detail to make all decisions automatic... There are some specific duties of a role, some dos and dont’s which set limits to what may be attempted. But there is also an area of indeterminacy, governed only by a broad duty to act so as to be able to justify oneself afterwards (Hollis/Smith 1991: 155).”

To make my case for a dynamic interpretation of leadership roles, this paper proceeds as follows. After a brief overview of where to locate this role theoretical approach of leadership in the pertinent IR literature, I define different types of a leadership role and the components thereof. Role theory is general and designed to apply to role relationships over time and political realms. To demonstrate the logic and plausibility of role theory, I examine three episodes of German leadership in order to clear up the analytical puzzle of variance in leadership roles.

2. The logic of leadership roles vs. hegemony

Hegemony by Germany has become the topic of considerable scholarly debate lately (Crawford 2006, 2014, Kleine-Brockhoff/Maull 2011; Schönberger 2011; Kundnani 2012, 2014). As defined by Kindleberger, “a hegemonic leader is the state powerful enough to pay the costs required for cooperation and shape the rules of multilateral institutions”. In such a reading, followed upon by Beverly Crawford and others in their studies on Germany, hegemony is almost synonymous with a leadership role (see Crawford 2014: 329, 330, 331, 332, 340, 341, 345; see also Kaelberer 1997; Morisse-Schilbach 2011; Blyth/Matthijs 2011; Kundnani 2012, 2014; Paterson 2011, 2014; Bulmer/Paterson 2013, 2016).¹

Theoretically and historically, however, hegemony and leadership are two distinct theoretical concepts. As David Lake (1993) has pointed out, originally, leadership theory in International Political economy explains the production of international economic infrastructure, i.e. market access for distressed goods, producing a countercyclical flow of capital, managing a rediscount mechanism for providing liquidity, managing the structure of foreign exchange rates and providing policy coordination of domestic monetary policies. In this rationalist account of international leadership, followers do follow their leaders out of self-interest, if haltingly, and not because they attribute authority, i.e. rightful rule, to them. As a consequence, legitimacy plays no role in this rationalist reading of leadership.

In contrast, as Lake insists, hegemony theory explains the change of economic preferences by states through hegemonic power that would otherwise opt for competing economic strategies (Lake 1993). It follows that whereas leadership theory is concerned with public goods production in the face of free-riding by lesser states that accept and want a public

¹ Charles Kindleberger himself complained that political science “has transmuted the concept of leadership into ‘hegemony’, a word that makes me uncomfortable because of its overtones of force, threat, pressure. I think it is possible to lead without arm-twisting, to act responsibly without pushing and shoving other countries” (Kindelberger 1986b: 841f.).

good, hegemony theory is about hegemonic coercion vis-à-vis states that, for various reasons, seek protectionist strategies while the hegemon prefers economic openness (Lake 1993; Snidal 1985: 588). In conclusion, it is fair to suggest that the direction and means of achievement of hegemony and leadership do set these two concepts apart in the rationalist tradition. As Charles Kindleberger notes succinctly:

A hegemonic power [S.H.] „presumably wants to do it in his own behalf. A leader, one who is responsible or responds to needs, who is answer-able or answers the demands of others, is forced to ‚do it‘ by ethical training and by the circumstance of position“ (Kindleberger 1986: 845).

Over the past two decades differences between the two concepts have become even more blurred in what has been described as “interpretative approaches” of hegemony (Lake 1993: 461). In the Marxian, but particularly Gramscian tradition of studying hegemony, a commanding social class, being it the working class or the bourgeoisie, may dominate all other classes either through force or through directing allied classes, e.g. peasantry, through consent (Cox 1983: 163; see also Gill 1990; Rupert 1995). Brute force and dissent over outcomes as well as reasoning and consent over common goals become closely intertwined in this concept. As Augelli and Murphy (1993: 130) note, we may speak of hegemony only when legitimacy is present in some measure, because hegemony pertains to a social group’s ability to exercise a function of political and moral direction in society (see below).

Central to the latter Gramscian concept of hegemony then is the ability of an avant-garde, often intellectuals or the commanding party, to form a historic bloc (*blocco storico*) with lesser classes. In the movement to establish such a historic bloc, Gramsci distinguishes three phases of consciousness the avant-garde passages through: the economic corporative, encompassing only the particular interests of the group; the class consciousness, extending the group to the whole class beyond the avant-garde; and the hegemonic phase, in which the directing class harmonizes its interests with those of subordinate classes (Gramsci 1971: 180-195). Hegemony, then, is a complex phenomenon, the domestic and international emergence, mutual agreement and followership of which remains a research desiderata (Cox/Schechter 2002: 33)

In turn, the now prevalent English school interpretation of hegemony focuses on legitimate dominance by one great power or a group of great powers in the international society (Clark 2007, 2011). The conceptual trouble for this particular reading, however, is that at least two of its key institutions, the Balance-of-Power and the directorial role of the great

powers collectively, militate against a single hegemon playing the managerial role. This is so because for the other institutions of the international society to surrender to a single hegemon, the other members of the society would ultimately have to rely on the “self-restraint” of the dominant power (Clark 2011: 4-5, 38-39). To solve the problem, Clark comes up with a new institution of the international society, legitimate hegemony even by a single power. But while Clark goes to great length to situate hegemony into the fractious English school,² his main empirical-analytical concern remains why and under what conditions the international society (and/or a subgroup of it) will forego balance of power behavior as a natural reaction towards a single dominant pole.

This leaves at least two related theoretical problems for the English school’s model open. First, while Clark gives much attention to the different historical instances, in which the international society (and/or a part thereof) has ascribed the managerial role of leadership to one or a few great powers, he typically fails to consider the interaction between the societal expectations within the leading states and the social conditions under which great and lesser powers may be willing to confer legitimacy upon the hegemon. For example, he fails to ask, how, why and in what way is legitimacy bestowed upon the hegemon’s government to extract significant resources and exercise international leadership, which may involve significant costs in blood and treasure for their own society. Today, one may thus ask why the Trump administration fails to lead as a benign hegemon despite prevalent expectations by large parts of the international society and several great powers? It follows that any full explanation of hegemony, or leadership roles, must consider the agential underpinnings of this particular agent-structure problematique.

Second, English school analysts continue to work within the interstate “high politics realm” (Clark 2011: 57) and fail to appreciate that, depending upon the policy arena, changes in the significant others of roles, that is of those actors who co-constitute leadership roles by taking commensurate roles, i.e. follower roles. In contrast to the English school’s focus on Great Power peers, these role taking actors may be states but also non-state actors, such as transnational financial markets or rating agencies, or supranational actors, such as the European Commission or the European Central Bank. Without seeking to maximize the differences in the theoretical models explaining hegemony and leadership, this article argues that the English school of hegemony refers more to a social status than a functional role. A social

² Most founding fathers despised of hegemony as an institution of international society as Clark (2011) readily acknowledges.

status is a rank within the international order, arguably determined by material and immaterial power. It follows that the English school fails to “understand” leadership as a social role, that is a functional position of an actor in a group performing specific tasks for the group, emerging from interaction.

2.1 A role theoretical conception of leadership

An international role is often undefined, and when it is defined, as in the case of leadership, it is usually tailored to the idiosyncratic preferences of the author (for an overview of the rationalist leadership literature see Hausken/Plümper 1996).³ I define “international roles” here as social positions constituted by ego- and alter expectations regarding the purpose of an actor in an organized group (cf. Thies 2010a: 6336; Harnisch 2011a: 8). In other words, a role is a set of social tasks in a given group bestowed upon an actor by that group and the actor itself. In an interactionist reading, role expectations, both domestic and foreign, pertain to verbal expressions and practices because both interactions are symbolic: “vocal or other kind of gesture [are symbolic when they arouse, S.H.] in the one using it the same response as it arouses in those to whom it is directed (Hewitt 1997:29).”

It follows from this definition that a role taking or role making government is concerned with two sets of expectations: first, the ego-expectations of their respective society (or subgroups of it) about that nation’s role in world politics, traditionally associated but not synonymous with the self-conception of an actor, i.e. identity (McCourt 2012: 373).⁴ Central to a country identity’s coherence and the respective societal acceptability is then whether a government over time strikes a legitimate balance between the domestic well-being of the society (and a fair distribution thereof) and the obligations and benefits of its international role. We may assume that countries and their governments have different ideas on how to alleviate the tensions between the historical and current role aspirations of their societies in world politics, because the resulting balance is crucial for the coherence of the countries’

³ Ian Clark’s, otherwise praiseworthy, work on hegemony is a case in point: Clark uses the term „Role” more than 110 times in 25 different contexts without ever defining it. He speaks of the great powers’ role to manage the world order (13x); the international society has bestowed a special role on the great powers (16x), a leadership role (3x); a hegemonic (or as Clark calls it directorial) role (10x), which involves a horizontal ‘concert’ dimension towards other great powers and a hierarchical dimension towards the international society; the US central role in world politics (20x) including stabilizing role in East Asia (5x) and a brokerage role (2x), leading role of Great Britain in World Politics (16x) and so forth.

⁴ As Friedrich Kratochwil has noted perceptively, “identity” is best understood as that notion of sameness that gives an agency coherence over time, i.e. its ontological security, despite the many roles it plays over the course of time (Kratochwil 2006: 19).

identity and their relations with external others (Benes/Harnisch 2014). Governments and opposition parties may offer different historical self-conceptualization of their respective domestic role and the country's external role in this respect. They situate their country (or another actor) positively or negatively vis-à-vis other members of the international society, thereby shaping the country's present role aspirations (Harnisch 2015: 8-9).⁵

Second, role theory is concerned with external expectations shaping a country's role. So far, interactionist role theory has offered three social mechanisms to account for change and continuity in the role's internal composure and resulting external behavior: First, role taking, by which is meant that decision makers "take the role of others", anticipating what these others expect and positioning their own country in the resulting range of expectations (see also Harnisch 2011a). Depending on who those "significant others" are and where domestic expectations situate the country's international role, role taking is a recurring "imaginative act", which does not simply resemble compliant behavior to overwhelming international norms or socialized membership identities (Hewitt 1997: 63-65). Recurring role taking by a government may be rejected suddenly, as the Brexit teaches us after decades of British Europeanization. Substantial role changes are, then, most likely if and when a majority or plurality in a society regards the international role as detrimental to domestic material or immaterial well-being.

Role making, in turn, refers to the "creation of a new role" in a situation of role indeterminacy, a situation which does not (in the view of the decision maker) prescribe a particular role or which corresponds to several different contradictory roles. By making a new role, its acceptance by other countries becomes a primary concern since their expectations have not been taken into account (as they could not have been anticipated at the time) (Harnisch 2012). As such, role making requires a lot more "mutual adjustment" by others to result in a new and stable social structure. However, often it does not.⁶ Nevertheless, role making does not only result from "new external situations", because the interpretation of external events is shaped by prevailing domestic social discourses over "self-other relations". Change in leadership role aspirations may thus result from domestic contestations whether that role has been beneficial to the country or particular domestic groups (Kaarbo/Cantir 2015).

⁵ In a first approximation, we may call a hyper-prioritization of domestic concerns and coherence a "nationalistic role profile", a balanced prioritization a "mindful role profile" and a prioritization of external expectation an "other-directed role profile".

⁶ Leadership roles are prone to role making because they contain, by definition, pro-active roles, such as agenda-setter and initiator (see below).

The third mechanism, alter casting, refers in cognitivist role theory to the conscious manipulation of one's own role taking behavior to (re)shape the role of another actor (Malici 2006), presumably a counter or commensurate role, in a preferred direction. In a strict interactionist understanding, such a conscious manipulation is impossible because the "self of an actor" is conceptualized as a constant stream of consciousness, which cannot claim ontological priority to the interaction.⁷ In sum, international roles are complex social phenomena, dependent upon a state's expectations of itself and expectations by others towards a shared group purpose.

In turn, the behavior of other states is a function of their own mix of internal and external role expectations, which are assumed here – for reasons of simplicity – to be either commensurate or conflicting with the former role taking. A state's role taking is influenced by many additional factors, including its actual and potential capacities, its risk propensities and the (a-)symmetry of relationships towards significant and organized others. The mix of these diverse factors is captured, first, in the trade-off between self- and other directedness, which reflects the willingness of a polity to choose, if necessary, domestically valued relationships over international relationships or vice versa. Secondly, the mix is captured in the generic composition of the role, which pertains to the functional complexity, the range of tasks and the number of group member's expectations covered by the role (set).

Role relations, hence, vary along several continua, a temporal, a functional and a commitment dimensions. The temporal dimension describes the period of time in which an actor has aspired to/and or enacted a role. The longer an international role is enacted, the more likely it is that domestic relations have been shaped accordingly, that is in support or contestation of the international purposeful commitment. The functional dimension pertains to the functional scope of a role or a role set (a composition of several roles). The broader an international role (set) is, the more complex is the management of diverse internal and external role expectations, implying that only materially and immaterially powerful actors may take on such roles as leaders, great powers and the like. The third dimension, obligation, refers to the degree to which an actor is bound politically or legally to perform a certain role, i.e. to grant most-favored nation treatment as a WTO member. The degree of self or other-directedness is defined by the locus of primary definition of expectation (Harnisch 2012).

International leadership roles, then, are functionally specified expectations of a group of states towards one or more group members to enhance the group's goals by means at the

⁷ Cf. Mead 1934: 77: "The mechanism of meaning is thus present in the social act before the emergence of consciousness or meaning occurs."

leader's disposal and through the compliance by following states. International leadership regularly includes the partial (and temporal) transfer of national policy competences and power resources to the group leader. As Table 1 illustrates, the range of role relationships under leadership is more diverse than under hegemony because the latter refers to a social order that is primarily determined between great powers themselves and between great powers as such and the international society.

Table 1: Comparing leadership as a social role and hegemony as a social status

	International Leadership	Hegemony
Temporality	Variant	Continuous
Functionality	Specified	Unspecified
Obligation	Informal	Formalized
Orientation	Group-oriented	Status preserving
Divisibility	High/temporal/functional	Low

Theories of hegemony, theoretically speaking, therefore regularly lie at the structural end of the theoretical continuum of IR theories. Role theory, in contrast, as envisioned here, is an interactionist approach, positioned in the mid-range of the spectrum, neither privileging agency over structure nor favoring the status of great powers over other forms of heterarchical international order (Donnelly 2012).

2.2 Taxonomy of leadership roles

To explain the choice of specific leadership roles, I build on interactionist role theory. American social theoreticians, such as George H. Mead, Herbert Blumer and Ervin Goffman, first used these theories to explain individual role taking behavior, e.g. in early processes of self-identification during childhood, but Mead also transferred them to examine the international behavior of states (Harnisch 2011, 2012; McCourt 2012, 2014). The key insights of interactionist role theory are, first, that interactions are the unit of analysis – the convergence or divergence of domestic and foreign role expectations – and second, that these interactions co-create commensurate or contesting roles (in the case of leaders, followers or opponents) by others. In other words, leadership roles and counter-roles are social structures that are variable and endogenous.

Interactions manifest themselves in symmetrical or asymmetrical role relationships. As noted above, roles vary in their temporality, functionality and the respective domestic and external actors they include or exclude from the respective group; indeed, the inclusivity or exclusivity of the leadership role taking and their obligatory nature are the defining features, which determine the persistence of the respective structuration process: the more inclusive and the more obligatory role expectations are, the stronger their relative persistence.

International leadership roles are role sets, that is compositions of several roles. The mix of specific role does not only define the kind of leadership; it also conditions the probability of taking up of counter roles, as a follower or an opponent. It follows that countries may seek to take on a leadership role, but fail, because others deny taking on a commensurate roles. In brief: in the German case, Berlin's leadership was not only opposed in the Eurocrisis and the migration crisis; its character was temporally and functionally limited, so that – when systematically and fairly assessed – no persisting and comprehensive hegemony could ensue.

In light of the foregoing discussion, leadership roles then, in a directional sense, may be first described as attempts to overcome situations of indeterminacy, i.e. situations in which actors do not know which role they should play, given that their identity allows for several different responses (Rathbun 2007: 549). In this instance, the interaction is patterned through an agenda-setter role that first determines what kind of situation occurred and how this relates to the group's (shared) goals. More generally, the agenda-setter offers (role) orientation to the group as he/she proposes which of the valued goals is under threat or could be advanced through joint action by a distribution of labor. It follows: the bigger the number of followers, the more difficult it is to select and prioritize the group's goals (Harnisch 2015: 25).

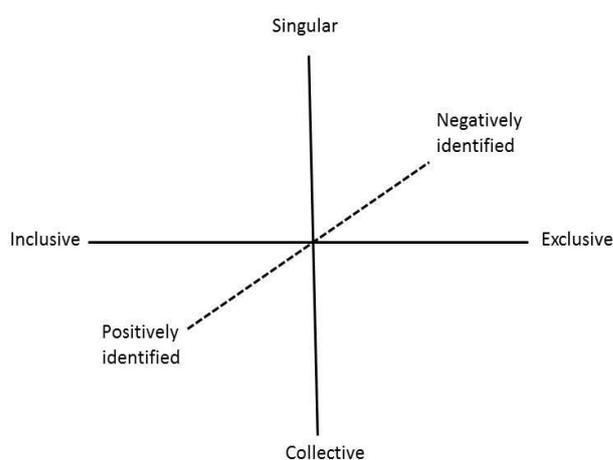
The leadership role, then, secondly includes the representation of the followership. From a role theoretical perspective, this representation implies two distinct but intertwined operations: On the one hand, the leader has to be able to take on the (role) perspective of the follower in order to be able to integrate the follower's aims with the group's goals. On the other hand, the leader, by setting the agenda, also suggests which members may be in- or excluded from the group. The follower might exclude himself, i.e. by no longer identifying with the group's goals or by losing his or her function for the group.

Last but not least, leadership role sets include a “mediator” or “broker/facilitator” role (Maull 2008). The mediator role is a hybrid role. It combines functions of agenda-setting and representation, integrating both diverse sets of aspirations of goals, and inclusion which

need to be integrated for the leader to steer the group into a common future.⁸ While facilitating compromise often involves providing common resources, the mediator role should not be reduced to “public goods production”. Mediating also includes trustworthiness and a sense of whether the new role distribution in the group may be acceptable in the group’s member countries, by their parliaments, societies or other potential veto players. Thus, from an interactionist perspective, every taking on of a leadership role also implies to cast an alter into a specific follower role, thereby at least partially defining *who that country is* in relation to the leader and in relation to the country’s own historical self-understanding. By taking up an opponent’s role, followers, their governments and/or societies may resist those role ascriptions by leaders (Kellermann 2008). As the cases of German leadership in the Eurocrisis and the migration crisis show, German agenda-setting resulted in resistance and even resentment, so that no stable social structure emerged.

As Figure 1 illustrates, the range of leadership role relations is continuous in principle. Because roles pertain to *functional* social position in groups, the remit of those functions in terms of the groups’ size, how inclusive or exclusive, is central to differentiate leadership roles. Since roles are *social* positions, i.e. they emerge as the result of interaction between initial role taking and a counter-role taking, they rely on input- and output legitimacy.

Figure 1: Dimensions of international leadership roles



⁸ In formal models of negotiations leadership, roles are therefore treated as “moderators of equilibria” (only), cf. Fiorina/Shepsle 1989.

Because roles vary in the remit of their legitimacy, the number of role holders is important. We may hypothesize that as the number of role holders increases, the input legitimacy increases as the role holders represent more members of the group; however, as the input legitimacy increases, the output legitimacy decreases as the increase of role holders makes compromising more difficult. Moreover, roles and their performance constitute identities over time and vice versa. Historical self-identifications with or against specific others, groups or the international society at large shape the remit of current role taking.

3. Exploring three episodes of German leadership

Methodologically, I use the three (causal) mechanisms, role-taking, role-making and alter-casting to discern commonalities and differences in a within-case variance study of German leadership role behavior. The three mechanisms will be traced in an interpretive historical reconstruction of the German governments' role taking and making, the domestic discourse concerning that role taking and the interaction with significant others so as to fairly assess the resulting social structuration effect. In tracing which role the Merkel governments took vis-à-vis which significant others, I emphasize the plausibility and persuasiveness of the interpretation as the epistemological standard (Friedrich/Kratochwil 2009) rather than the relative analytical purchase in comparison to other approaches, such as the English schools take on hegemony.

3.1 The Eurocrisis, 2010-2015: Germany's collective leadership contested

The so-called Eurocrisis was sparked in fall 2009 by a sudden reassessment of the Greek public debt, resulting in both a loss of trust and spark in interest rates for Greek treasury bonds, which brought the country to the brink of public bankruptcy in early 2010.⁹ Germany, as a key protagonist of the Common European currency and subsequent rules, relied heavily on the stability of Eurozone for its export-oriented economic model, transferring more than half of all exports to the area with German industry and banking giants heavily

⁹ While other Euro member states subsequently came under considerable economic pressure as well, i.e. Ireland, Spain, Cyprus, this article will focus upon Greece for several reasons, the most important of which is that Germany played a disproportionate bigger role here than elsewhere, cf. Shambaugh 2012; Illing 2013b; Pepino 2015.

enmeshed and exposed in the zone. Despite the EU Commission insistence at the time that the “Greek crisis” might spread easily to other €-Countries, the Merkel government early on insisted that this was a “national problem” to be dealt with by responsible fiscal behavior. As a consequence, Germany supported a declaration by the ECOFIN Council in February 2010 that, under Art. 126, 9 (TFEU), the Greek government was responsible for balancing the budget deficit to reduce the risk for the functioning of the Euro (Featherstone 2011: 202).

At the time, Germany’s role behavior rested on the stability-based “German ordoliberal model”, which also had informed the institutions and guidelines of both the Euro and the European Central Bank system (McNamara 1998-159-178, James 2012). In what is often called a “Stability Community”, an independent Central Bank guarantees currency stability, while other European mechanisms, such as the Stability Pact (1997) control for excessive budgetary policies (Enderlein 2016). In this way, fiscal and economic policy autonomy of Euro member states would be preserved but a national bailout for individual members also prohibited (Art. 125, TFEU).

The Greek government under Prime Minister Papandreou sought to stabilize the fiscal position and economy by introducing several reform measures and budgetary cuts, thereby setting in motion dramatic changes in the Greek party system by the end of which the radical leftist party “Syriza” became the leading party in a coalition government. While Athens hesitated to call for bilateral support until March 2010, the German government openly discussed two policy options: first, rewriting the Eurozone’s treaty rules so as to allow for the expulsion of individual members; second, a mix of short-term IMF support and mid-term establishment of a “European Monetary Fund” (Illing 2013: 82). However, France and other Southern members of the Eurozone were sharply critical of this early German positioning, arguing for a much lesser stringent conditionality between rule compliance and membership (Katsioulis 2015, Schild 2015).

In late March 2010, the Merkel government repositioned for the first time and declared its general willingness for bilateral support. However, under substantial domestic pressure, especially with a view of a potential complaint with the Federal Constitutional Court (FCC), it put several stringent conditions to the offer: 1) the envisioned programs could only figure as an “ultima ratio”, i.e. in a situation when a Greek collapse would endanger the stability of the Eurozone as such; 2) bilateral aid would have to be international, not European only, including the IMF and administered by it; 3) the financial support would use market-based interest rates so as to facilitate early re-entry of Greece to the financial markets. More far-

reaching plans by the EU Commission, seeking the supranational coordination of economic and fiscal policies, were rejected (Jones 2011: 343; Zaharardis 2012: 106).

In May 2010, a concurrence of incidences escalated the situation. Parts of the Greek government opposed an IMF inclusion, fearing stringent demands and control while the Greece failed to restructure its debt through new bond offerings, thereby pushing its international credit rating with several agencies to “junk status” (Illing 2013: 84). Focusing on the actions of the Greek government, it is interesting to see how the role positioning of “weaker” state actors and non-state actors, financial markets and rating agencies, pushed the Merkel government into the next stage of its leadership role.

In mid-May and then in June 2010, the German government turned towards France to put forward the first comprehensive plan for the “solution” of the Greek and troubled economies (Schild 2013). It first offered a substantial bilateral credit framework (80 Bio. €) plus an additional 30 Bio from the IMF in exchange for stringent budget cuts and a reform of the Greek tax collecting system. In a second step, it promoted the establishment of the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) as an intergovernmental arrangement under Luxembourg law, thereby excluding the European Parliament and the European Commission. In doing so, the German government accommodated the French concerns about the stability of the Eurozone as a whole and the French banking industry in particular. But, as Merkel made clear, through her early insistence that “if the Euro fails, then Europe will fail”, Germany’s own banking industry was heavily exposed in Southern European markets and in France, so that any failure of the Greek or Italian banking system would have threatened the stability of the German banking system as well.

To shield the (potentially) massive transfer of German taxpayer’s money against domestic opponents, the Merkel government insisted on several conditions: to forego a European rescue mechanism, the IMF had to be involved with its stringent conditionality; to ensure compliance with German constitutional provisions for the EMU (Art. 88, GG and the Maastricht ruling of the Federal Constitutional Court, FCC), Berlin insisted on a reinforcement of the Stability and Growth Pact and a commitment to a “European financial stability culture”, including a national debt brake. Moreover, Chancellor Merkel and Finance Minister Schäuble reasserted that Germany would not accept the establishment of common bonds by all Eurozone members, so-called Eurobonds, because they would violate German and European rules prohibiting financial bail-outs of individual Eurozone member states (Harnisch 2014: 35).

The second phase of the German-French leadership came to an end in late 2011 with the establishment of the European Fiscal Pact (EFP). Based on the German model of a national debt brake, the pact commits its member states to a debt brake, incorporated into national law, a balanced budget (the structural deficit must not exceed 0.5% of annual GDP) and an automatic sanctioning mechanism (which can be stopped only by a qualified majority). The pact also transformed the temporary EFSF into the permanent European Stability Mechanism (ESM). Upon German insistence, any further financial support for EU members was based now on ratification of the European Fiscal Pact, which was subsequently accepted by all EU-27 members except for the UK and the Czech Republic.

While the ESM is characterized by many (German) “ordoliberal policy concepts”, it did not establish a German hegemony in a structural sense. To begin with, not only the UK and the Czech Republic opted out of the Fiscal Pact but also Italy and Spain negotiated special clauses to shield their fiscal sovereignty, which were subsequently not sanctioned by financial markets through higher bond interest rates. In the ESM, Germany and France hold a 20% capital share, which allows them to veto any significant decisions in the ESM structure, most notably when the ESM buys national bonds on primary and secondary markets. It follows that the ESM, if at all, establishes a duopoly. Moreover, the ESM rules foresee that private investors must share the risk in future bail-out schemes, that the banking sector does not get direct access to the ESM and that the ESM itself does not hold a banking license which may have given it direct access to credit facilities of the ECB system (Harnisch 2014: 44).

The third phase emerged in the wake of two crucial policy developments in the summer 2011, both of which can be traced back to collective decisions of private investors and financial markets: first, under a scheme developed by the German Finance Ministry, the EFSF tried to leverage its current capital stock of € 250 billion up to 1 trillion by reducing the governmental coverage ratio of respective deposits. The EFSF leveraging failed. Secondly, in November 2011, the German Finance Ministry itself tried to sell a charge of 6 billion German ten-year bonds, called “bunds”, and fell short of expectation by selling only 4 billion. Moreover, it became clear that the Greece situation more and more affected other Southern economies, such as Italy, Spain and Portugal, finally culminating in the crisis of the Cyprus in the spring 2013.

In the third phase, the German-French intergovernmental leadership was supplemented by the European Central Bank (ECB). During this period, the ECB transformed its earlier role – before the crisis – as a guardian of price stability towards that of a guardian of

the currency, the Euro itself. The ECB did so by expanding its purchases of national bonds within the framework of the Security Markets Programme, which started in 2010, and the OMT programme – which Mario Draghi introduced in 2012 with his bold claim that the ECB will do “whatever it takes to uphold the Euro” (Draghi 2012). As a consequence of this reinterpretation of the ECB’s mandate, two German senior officials, Axel Weber, the head of the Bundesbank, and Jürgen Stark, the Chief Economist of the ECB, left the ECB (council). But the German government, first haltingly and then openly, came to defend the ECB’s supplementary role as a true “lender of resort” (Enderlein et al. 2016: 9).

The ECB’s interventionist policies, and the growing exposure of the Bundesbank as part of the ECB system going along with it, came under strong scrutiny in the German domestic debate. The Bundesbank itself, several members of the governing coalition and conservative media sources all criticized the ECB for overstepping its mandate. Subsequently, some conservative economists and parliamentarians sued the government for the participation in the ESM and European Fiscal Pact. While the controversy led to the establishment of the first openly conservative EU-critical party in Germany, the “Alternative for Germany” (AFD), the Federal Constitutional Court supported the government’s position that, under certain conditions, Germany through the Bundesbank could continue to participate in the ECB system and the ESM and European Stability Pact (Steen 2013).

In sum, German leadership substantially shifted over the course of the Eurocrisis from unilateral hesitation to trilateral leadership, including a substantial shift towards interventionist policies by the ECB. These changes towards collective leadership occurred despite the substantial improvement of the German fiscal and financial position during the crisis that can be traced back to decision by investors and markets to a “flight into safety” (Grany et al. 2015). Thus, when measured against the English school’s concept of hegemony or the even more stringent standard of benevolent leadership by Kindleberger (Schieder 2014), the German leadership during the Eurocrisis can be characterized as being more ego-oriented, more multilateral and more influenced by non-state actors than the former two approaches would have it.

3.2 The Ukrainian Crisis, 2013-2017: German leadership deflated

The Ukrainian conflict ensued in late 2013 after the Ukrainian President Yanukovych decided, upon strong Russian intervention, not to sign a long-negotiated Association Agreement with the EU. The subsequent Euromaidan protest movement escalated in February

2014, triggering a trilateral German-Franco-Polish initiative for a negotiated agreement on February 21. While President Yanukovich fled to Russia before the implementation of the agreement, Russian troops started taking strategic positions in Crimea and Russia annexed the peninsula, after a fraud referendum, as a federal subject into the Russian federation (Menon/Rumer 2015; Rącz 2015; Wilson 2015).

Over the course of the conflict, Germany has not exerted effective leadership to quell the conflict, which turned to open violence in 2017. And yet, it has built and sustained effective leadership roles in three areas: diplomatic negotiations, sanctions policy and politico-military crisis management. In pursuit of that leadership, the Merkel government has used a great variety of multilateral fora, minilateral groups such as the “Normandy format” and the Weimar triangle, as well as formal international institutions, such as the OSCE and NATO to forge a political agreement between the Ukrainian and Russian governments as well as local insurgent forces on the ground. Despite some critique about Germany’s recent energy dealings with Russia, during the conflict, the German leadership has been supported by both respective domestic and international expectations (Janning/Möller 2016; Pond 2015).

The leadership wielded by Berlin has been as much a matter of will as of circumstances (Steinmeier 2016). The leading powers in the EU, France and the UK, were distracted or unable to lead, whereas the Obama administration showed no inclination to forge ahead (Bunde 2015). As a result, most analysts tend to overrate German leadership successes, especially its effectiveness, as they measure its existence either against the assumption that Berlin’s course would be determined by its business interests vis-à-vis Russia or against the absence of leadership by others (Fix 2015; Seibel 2015; Speck 2015; Szabo 2015). When measured, however, by its effect on the mitigation of the underlying conflict over competing sovereignty claims between Russia and Ukraine, German leadership may have moderated respective conflict behaviors but certainly not resolved the conflict.

German leadership and engagement in Ukraine was never all encompassing. Rather it varied considerably over time and functional areas. German engagement in Ukraine was active before the outbreak of the crisis, e.g. resisting Ukrainian demands for a concrete EU membership perspective in the Association Agreement, which was finalized in 2011 but then postponed because of EU concerns about the rule of law and human rights in the country. Also in September 2013, when Russia pressed the Ukrainian government to resist the EU’s offers and join the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Community (EEC), Chancellor Merkel openly warned the Russian government from interfering with the EU’s Eastern Neighborhood Policy. And yet, the German government was surprised, as almost anyone else in the

EU, when Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovich called off the Association Agreement just days before the Vilnius summit (November 28/29, 2013).

During the subsequent Euromaidan protests then, Berlin first took a detached position, arguing that direct involvement with the protests, such as by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton, were weakening a potential mediation between both sides (Fix 2015: 113). But this reservation soon ended, when Foreign Minister Steinmeier, together with his colleagues from the Weimar triangle, Laurent Fabius (France) and Radoslaw Sikorski (Poland), negotiated an agreement between the Ukrainian President Yanukovich and the opposition. After Yanukovich's flight to Russia and subsequent moves by Russian troops on Crimea, Berlin also backed up the EU's suspension of talks with Russia on visa issues and a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA).

Following the annexation of Crimea on 18 March 2014, Berlin first backed the diplomatic talks in Geneva, bringing together Ukraine, Russia, the United States and the EU High Representative. In mid-April, the Geneva-format produced an agreement to disarm and withdraw separatists from Eastern Ukraine but no implementation was forthcoming. At the time, the German foreign minister engaged in heavy shuttle-diplomacy to hold a second meeting. After the talks failed, the Merkel administration joined the so-called "Normandy format" (France, Germany, Ukraine, Russia), which notably excluded both the EU High Representative and Poland but proved effective in negotiating the Minsk I (September 2014) and Minsk II (February 2015) agreements. Moreover, the direct involvement of Chancellor Merkel secured Russia's approval of an OSCE fact-finding mission in March 2014. Reportedly she also tried to broker a direct Russian-Ukrainian agreement, exchanging the acceptance of Ukraine's EU Association Agreement and Russian delivery of gas for refraining from offering Ukraine NATO membership and lifting the sanctions on Russia (Forsberg 2016: 29).

At the time, Germany's diplomatic efforts were inclusive and rules-based to the point that they engaged with the Swiss OSCE-Presidency to monitor the situation in Eastern Ukraine and assist the election processes rather than relying on the EU as the natural political forum for the biggest and/or most committed big member state. Inclusiveness, the willingness to go an extra mile for a negotiated solution also distinguished Chancellor Merkel's interaction with Russian President V. Putin. In the end, to Merkel's credit, her persistence bore fruit in the Minsk II-agreement, which still forms the basis for any conflict resolution today. In the words of the then Foreign Minister Steinmeier, Germany aspired the role of Europe's "Chief facilitating officer" (Steinmeier 2015).

Economically, Germany pursued a strategy of sequenced economic sanctions. In doing so, the resulting three-tiered sanction regime, which was agreed upon during the March 16 EU summit meeting, recognized but also integrated the diverse positions within the Union: on the one side, sceptical nations, such as the oil dependent Central European countries (Slovakia, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic) and Southern European members (Austria, Italy and Greece), which feared that sanctions might have impact on the business or energy interests with Russia; on the other side, protagonists members, mainly Eastern European countries, such as the Baltic States and Poland, which were eager to strongly contain and rebuke Russian advances (House of Commons 2015). Since it was well-known that economic sanctions would hurt Germany's economy and business interests substantially, the Merkel government was able to group both sceptics and protagonists behind the German leadership. In this way, she was able to set the agenda by upholding the European taboo on forcible change of borders in exchange for tolerating economic pains (Pond 2015). Moreover, Germany and France repeatedly insisted that all sanctions would remain in place as long as Russia had not fulfilled all commitments under the Minsk II agreement, despite the fact that considerable parts of the German business community lobbied strongly for lifting some or all sanctions (Forsberg 2016: 34).

In the politico-military arena, German leadership relied on a two-pronged strategy: on the hand, Chancellor Merkel, Foreign Minister Steinmeier and Defense Minister von der Leyen insisted that there was no military solution, albeit not ruling out the introduction of military elements, such as rotating reinforcements of NATO's Eastern flank. On the other hand, however, while opposing permanent stationing of NATO troops in Central European member states and the provision of lethal weapons to the Ukrainian Armed Forces, Germany took a leading role in establishing and furnishing NATO's "Very High Readiness Joint Task Force" (VJTF), which was agreed upon at the Wales NATO summit meeting (September 2014). Moreover, Berlin in close coordination with the Obama administration, established a Transatlantic Capability and Enhancement initiative (TACET), which was subsequently joined by the UK to coordinate military activities, training and exercise in Poland and the Baltic states to reassure unsettled Eastern NATO members (Fix 2015: 126).

In sum, Germany's engagement shifted from early engagement with Ukraine to detachment and then back to leadership in facilitating diplomatic negotiations. Chancellor Merkel and her team engaged with various multilateral fora, the Weimar triangle, the Normandy format and the OSCE, to end military action and start a political process for reinstating the

territorial status-quo. While partially successful with the former task, German leadership could not undo Russian revisionism.

3.3 The Migration Crisis, 2015-2017: German leadership role making rejected

Migratory flows have been a constant, but more often slow burning challenge for the EU and Germany (Mayer 2016). The most recent crisis, however, has laid bare the deficits of the EU's common border, migration and refugee management system. In part, Germany's leadership and its unintended consequences have to be understood as direct result of the dysfunctional Schengen system under the Dublin III rules, which put the burden of refugee/migrant management squarely on the Southern member states of the Union.¹⁰ During the (ongoing) crisis, the EU thus temporarily drowned in a situation of competitive moral blackmailing and physically using refugee tracks as an instrument of strategic bargaining between member states. As a consequence, by the end of 2015, half a dozen members of the Schengen Zone had unilaterally reinstated internal border controls, while other EU member states, such as Hungary, had erected physical barriers to block borders with non-Schengen states (Greenhill 2016).

In numerical terms, the European refugee crisis of 2015 escalated when more than 1, 5 million refugees and migrants, half of whom were from Syria and a third of whom sought political asylum, entered the EU. Compared with the 60 Mio. displaced persons globally and compared with the 509 Mio. EU citizens, these numbers may appear both substantial and moderate. When compared on a per capita basis with countries neighboring Syria, such as Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, they are moderate only. Politically, however, differences both in the distribution of the migrants and their classification in the EU, have led to deep conflicts over the self-identification of respective governments and people as "European". Therefore, the debate about the reform of the dysfunctional Dublin system has often been framed as a test of "European solidarity", a code word for the mix of material and immaterial benefits and obligations that are held (and constantly renegotiated) to be constitutive for being a member in good standing of the EU (Sangiovani 2013; Mitsilegas 2014).

¹⁰ It was well-known in policy circles in all EU member states before 2015 that the negligence of the dire situation in Southern member states have led (some of) their authorities to ignore Dublin regulations. Migrants and refugees were allowed to transit unregistered and unimpeded to countries further north. De facto these practices already revoked the Dublin rules. But more importantly, they established a practice of using migrant flows as a policy tool to pressure other member states to renegotiate the Dublin system, cf. Greenhill 2016.

During the crisis, Chancellor Merkel has not followed her distinctly unassuming leadership style from the middle. Rather than waiting and sensing where the majority of smaller and bigger EU member states would fall, Merkel pro-actively set a policy course for Germany – with severe consequences for others – without prior consultation. Moreover, she has insisted upon a policy course that committed German society to welcome and host a disproportionate number of those migrants/refugees entering the EU in 2015 (and following years) despite clear and growing indications of domestic opposition and outright resistance, which contest her position today and undermine her chancellorship in the future.

In the first phase of the crisis, until mid-August 2014, the German government held fast to the Dublin-III regulations, which foresee that refugees would be transferred back to the country of initial reception. During this period, no public announcement was made so as to differentiate between the countries of origin. In practice, however, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) clearly distinguished between countries and regions. Moreover, despite the increasing numbers and heated diplomatic exchanges, the Merkel government did not care to initiate additional national or EU support measures for Southern frontline states, such as Italy and Greece, or to take preventive measures along the much preferred Balkan route.

The second phase started with a tweet by the BAMF, which simply stated: “We are at present largely no longer enforcing Dublin procedures for Syrian citizens” (Der Spiegel 2016). Neither the Chancellor, nor the Minister of the Chancellery in charge of coordinating the refugee policy, Peter Altmaier, were informed about the announcement. The statement set in motion two related movements: on the one hand, refugees from other countries of origin than Syria, which were still processed under the Dublin rules, were incentivized to obscure their origin; on the other hand, authorities along the Balkan route were also incentivized to forward these refugees further north.

In this situation, with Hungarian authorities starting to build a hardened fence to prevent further entry, and other countries following suite, the German Chancellor single-handedly, and without consultation with her governing coalition, negotiated an agreement with the Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán and the Austrian Chancellor Faymann (Der Spiegel 2016). The agreement foresaw that refugees from Hungary would be transferred through Austria to Germany without being threatened to be brought back to the EU country of initial reception. A deal that was officially confirmed on 15 September 15 2015 (Sölter 2016).

In doing so, the Chancellor re-set the agenda and thereby recast Germany’s leadership role in the crisis: first, she redefined the existing German asylum law (§18), which holds that

the entry of refugees/migrants from secure third countries is unlawful; second, by accepting refugees from secure EU countries, she formally dispensed with the Dublin-III regulation on the rightful transfers to the country of initial reception. Moreover, Berlin also failed to initiate emergency procedures under EU law for cases of mass immigration, so that it unilaterally gave away the chance to redistribute incoming refugees under existing rules (Schmidt 2015).

Against this background, the German Chancellor chose a leadership strategy, which could be described as “leading by example or else”: first, Germany preemptively taking up the burden, then asking followers to share it voluntarily and, only if cooperation was not forthcoming, then applying coercive measures to ensure “solidarity”.¹¹ While the strategy was faithfully implemented, it did not produce the expected domestic or international outcomes. To be sure, the chancellor’s willingness to welcome refugees while ruling out any numerical limits aroused a wide array of praise, verbal support and popularity in Germany and beyond.

Still, the chancellor’s strong rhetoric to legitimize her wide-ranging actions alienated critics at home and abroad. It clearly excluded substantial parts of German society, who were (and are) fearful of further migration, and it excluded significant numbers of EU member states as “non-solidaristic”. As a consequence, Merkel failed to initiate a legitimate scheme to distribute refugees and migrants in the EU, so that she had to (frantically) negotiate an agreement with Turkey to (at least) substantially reduce the number of incoming refugees.

Chancellor Merkel and her ministers used two complementing narratives to garner support for Germany’s welcoming stances. On the one hand, Economics Minister Gabriel (SPD) has held that if Germany manages “to train those that come to us and get them into work, then we will solve one of the biggest problems for the economic future of our country: the shortage of skilled labor” (cited in Reuters 2015). On the other hand, Chancellor Merkel used strong moral overtones to persuade her own countrymen and resisting European governments to support her reading of the situation:

”[...] We have to accept large numbers of people and given they have a right to stay, we should integrate them in our countries. We should here remind us of our fundamental values, guided by the Article 1 of our Basic Law: human dignity shall be inviolable.” (Merkel 2015b)

But even friendly EU officials, such as EU President Tusk reminded the chancellor that “the EU’s security needs may be different from Germany’s”. Thus, while understandable

¹¹ In her central speech to the German Parliament on 9 September 2015, while acknowledging that the EU may fail, she exclaimed: “If we show courage and lead the way, a common European approach is more likely” (Merkel 2015a).

for historical reasons, German leadership had to take into account “to protect the external European borders decisively if necessary, in accordance with pan-European unity” (Deutsche Welle 2015).

Potential followers, both at home and abroad, were far more critical. They resisted being cast into the role of being less “humane” or less “law abiding” than the German chancellor would have it. Therefore, Germany’s pitch for moral leadership, right or wrong, failed to represent most Eastern and Central European member states’ governments. More importantly, it also failed to mediate a stable compromise between those Northern members willing to accept substantial numbers of refugees and those who either offered to take in Christian refugees only (Poland) or those who rejected to take any refugees at all under a mandatory resettlement plan, such as the one proposed at a Council meeting on 22 September 2015 (Bulmer/Paterson 2016: 7). As subsequent reports by the EU Commission on the implementation of the voluntary resettlement (40.000) and the mandatory scheme (120.000) showed, most member states were not complying with the agreed measures while some even chose to legally challenge the majority decisions in court.

In the third phase then, German leadership changed course, literally, by engaging with Turkey in reducing the number of refugees fleeing from Syria via Turkey to the EU. To do so, Germany, together with a group of willing and like-minded states, devised a plan under which Syrian refugees would register within Turkish authorities to be later transferred to a predetermined EU country, while Turkey would be prepared to take back not-registered refugees after a date to be specified (Toygür/Benvenuti 2016: 6).

During the negotiations, Turkey’s officials made clear in no uncertain terms that cooperation would require the EU to accept all Turkish conditions. In one heated exchange, President Erdogan reportedly said:

“We can open the doors to Greece and Bulgaria anytime... So how will you deal with refugees if you don’t get a deal? Kill the refugees?” (as cited in Greenhill 2016: 327)

It is no wonder then that the subsequent arrangement cast the EU, and Germany in particular, in a very uncomfortable position (if not role): In exchange for permitting Greece to return to Turkey ‘all new irregular migrants’ arriving after 20 March, the EU agreed to assist Turkey with some six billion Euros to manage the burden of hosting three million refugees and increased resettlement of Syrian refugees residing in Turkey. Under this scheme, EU member states will accept one Syrian refugee from Turkey for every one sent

back up to a total of 72.000 per annum. Moreover, the EU agreed to visa liberalizations and to the reinstatement of some of the chapters in the (otherwise) suspended EU-Turkish membership talks (European Council 2016).

In effect, the deal declared Turkey a “safe third country” and a potential EU member state at a time when Turkey’s human rights record and compliance with international standards suffered serious setbacks. The situation deteriorated further after the aborted coup d’état in Turkey in mid-July 2016.

On the domestic level, the chancellor’s leadership has aroused a mix of pride, citizen engagement, tactical resistance and open hostility. While thousands of citizen volunteers organized and managed the initial phase to accommodate and welcome refugees – public authorities were sheer overwhelmed with the administrative tasks for several month – the ruling party’s sister party, the Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU) abandoned its initial support and started to demand stronger border controls both for Germany and the EU as well as a cap of 200.000 refugees per annum. More significantly, the former Anti-Euro party AFD transformed itself into an anti-immigrant, in parts xenophobic, party, which exerted strong electoral pressure on the state level, especially in former East Germany (Greenstein/Tensley 2016; Mayer 2016).

Altogether, German leadership in the migration crisis represents a clear case of role making that can neither be explained by role expectations from great power peers nor from domestic demands of societal interest groups. Rather, role making emerged from the interaction effects of refugees rationally seeking the “best option” in the EU member states and the BAMF, the German migration office, inadvertently changing the rules of acceptance, which were then later sanctioned by Chancellor Merkel. Moreover, the direction of Germany’s leadership cannot be understood without considering Germany’s past, including the Chancellor’s own past as a former citizen in a repressive dictatorship. Nor can one comprehend the acerbity of resentment towards German leadership without taking the history of the dysfunctional Dublin-system and the contentious settlements of the Eurocrisis into account.

4. Conclusion

Many current accounts about German foreign policy appear to detect Germany’s hegemony as it is certain to provoke political, if not academic debate as it is certain to arouse emotions. The findings here suggest that using different conceptualizations of hegemony – being they Realist, Gramscian or English school – are not particularly helpful in dissecting

the complex dynamics of today's global leadership politics. Instead, a role theoretical account, which is open to identify non-state actors, such as financial markets, insurgents or refugees, as key actors in shaping a country's leadership role behavior, has proven to produce new insights. Although the three episodes of German leadership could not comprehensively cover the interactive nature of German behavior, it is clear by now that leadership roles do not emerge first or even foremost from material capacity or peer ascription or class support for that matter. Historical experience, through role identities, and expectations by domestic and external others are key to understand the variation in emphasis between internal and external expectations.

In the Eurocrisis, strong domestic expectations and institutionalized policy experiences have led the Merkel government to pursue an increasingly collective leadership based on the German ordoliberal model. As the leadership got more collective, it included more Keynesian policy ideas and new role for the ECB – lender of last resort - which were both subsequently challenged before the German Constitutional Court.

In the case of the Ukraine conflict, German leadership did not set the agenda. Rather it facilitated a moderation of conflict behavior, as Russia and the insurgents in Eastern Ukraine sought to exploit the territorial ambiguity to destabilize the Ukrainian government seeking integration within Western institutions. Other than in the case of the Iranian nuclear conflict, the Eurocrisis or the migration crisis, Germany did not use the EU-format preferentially in this case. This has to do with the Russian violation of systemic norms – territorial integrity, but also with “role prodding” – a reinforced form of alter casting, I suggest – by the absence or insistence of others: After all, the OSCE is still Russia's preferred forum in Europe because she believes she can garner more followers there than in alternative formats.

The migration crisis presents a particularly interesting case because it includes role making by Chancellor Merkel herself and it amounts to a clear case of failed alter casting and therefore also leadership. While this is not meant to criticize Germany for becoming some sort of “last refuge” for many (not all) migrants in 2015, it is clear by now how fragile the domestic and external tolerance for that role is.

Analytically, the findings indicate no clear pattern of either intrinsically conceived or materially induced leadership role taking by Germany (see Chart below). Support for Greece and the other struggling Eurozone members is the strongest case of deliberate leadership. Germany's ordoliberal economic model, reinforced by respective rulings of the Federal Constitutional Court and Financial Market actions, facilitated the Merkel government's role tak-

ing. Germany’s leadership became more collective over time: Some of which was a deliberate policy choice – aligning with France – and some of which was alter casting by a supranational actor, the European Central Bank. While there was constant prodding by the Obama administration for Chancellor Merkel to take the helm, German leadership behavior is hard to reconcile with “peer pressure” by follow Great Powers to explain some kind of Germany hegemony.

Table 2. Comparing cases: social mechanisms explaining role behavior

	Eurocrisis	Ukraine Conflict	Migration crisis
Role taking	Yes, domestically contested; increasingly collective	Yes, externally challenged (Insurgents) Selectively collective	No
Role making	No	No	Yes, unilateral; strongly contested
Alter casting	Strong: Federal Constitutional Court, Financial Markets	Absence of GP; Insurgents	Strong: Absence of Dublin compliance; migrants

The findings of the Ukraine case also show that the absence of other presumed Great Powers, such as France and the UK, incentivized German initiatives. German leadership is generally associated with using EU institutions, but not in this case, where context – Russia’s violation of the territorial order in Europe – and Germany’s preference for an inclusive approach towards Russia led to a focus on the OSCE as a partner and forum for German leadership. Realists insist in this case that Germany’s preference for civilian means stems from the lack of military capacities whereas role theoreticians claim that German government’s (still) have difficulties to conceive a stable order in which German military dominance results in sustainable relationships.

The migration crisis contributes as much as any of the other cases to our understanding of German leadership, i.e. the functionally and temporarily limited direction of a group. Chancellor Merkel’s role making in this case was leadership by default. Lurking behind her courageous actions in the summer 2015 was that Germany and other Northern states had led the frontline states in the South down for a long time so that they started to use migration flows as a strategy of coercion. When Balkan EU member states started to stem the flow with hardened fences, thereby creating various humanitarian hotspots, the Dublin-III system was already in utter disarray, before Merkel single-handedly suspended it. Understanding the moral leadership in this situation means to recognize how actions by Southern and Balkan EU states as well as those migrants pressing North casted the German Chancellor into

the role of a “samaritan”. This leadership was clearly not a strategic choice but rather a courageous acceptance of the inevitable, including the foreseeable domestic and international consequences.

Future works that explore German leadership should therefore be able to avoid to mistake vulnerability for strength. German leadership in all three cases, arguably also including the Iranian case, have not resulted in stable social structures yet, left alone institutional orders that may underpin a persistent hegemony of Germany across policy areas. Rather, as the United States retracts from decades of benign leadership, various forms of collective leadership including Germany appear likely, if not preferable, in these and other crisis.

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