The Role(s) of Migration Diplomacy

*The concept of migration diplomacy from a role theory perspective and the case of Morocco’s “migration roles”*
Abstract: “Migration diplomacy” has emerged as a concept to theorize the increasingly important role of international migration and migration governance in states’ foreign policy and international relations, in an effort to bridge the gap between migration studies and international relations/foreign policy analysis. The concept has recently been more formally defined and introduced by Adamson and Tsourapas (2018), who suggest a future research agenda by proposing a structuralist, bargaining framework for analyzing states’ migration diplomacy, where states are either migrant-receiving, sending, or transit states. This thesis argues that this theoretical approach risks overlooking key aspects and challenges that characterize international migration as a foreign policy issue and contemporary developments in the field. It investigates the shortcomings of establishing migration diplomacy as a chiefly rationalist bargaining concept, and suggests introducing role theory as an alternative approach for migration diplomacy analysis. It argues that role theory’s understanding of structural positions as partly interpreted and socially enacted, and its view of the international system as a more deeply social and normative setting can be particularly suited for understanding migration diplomacy aspects that a rationalist bargaining perspective overlooks. While not developing a fully formed role typology for migration diplomacy analysis, this thesis tentatively exemplifies this general approach through the case of Morocco’s migration diplomacy in recent years.

Key words: migration diplomacy; migration governance; role theory; rationalism; constructivism; Morocco
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1. Introduction

In recent decades, international migration – a wide and complex phenomenon – has increasingly become a defining issue in international politics. Following an increase in cross-border mobility over time – in recent years particularly for displacement due to conflict and violence (IOM 2017, 2) – migration as a policy field has gained heightened attention. Both within and between states, international migration is a growing and increasingly politicized issue, with perceived wide-ranging implications for issues of security and economy as well as deeply normative issues of state sovereignty, identity, belonging and human rights. We have seen a growing political preoccupation with both so-called irregular migration\(^1\), refugee movements, and labor migration. Migration is by definition a boundary-crossing and international phenomenon, but its governance has historically been a field where each state maintains discretion (Rosenblum and Cornelius 2012). Recent decades have however seen migration issues increasingly become an issue of international politics and interstate diplomacy. As visible in the often strained state efforts to multilaterally cooperate and coordinate responses to migration flows, the multitude of regional and bilateral agreements on migration issues, and the disagreements on the responsibilities and rights of states on these issues, migration has become a more central issue of states’ foreign policy and international relations.

While international relations (IR) and foreign policy analysis (FPA) have in various ways discussed migration issues within international politics, migration has become increasingly centralized for many states as directly forming part of their foreign policy. International cooperation and negotiation on migration has proven a distinct and particularly complex area that may carry distinct characteristics, compared to related fields such as international trade, economics, security and cultural ties. Heightened prioritization and politicization of migration issues create the space for more consciously incorporating migration policy as a tool, or outcome, of interstate diplomacy. In order to contribute to distinctly conceptualizing these practices, and develop the migration studies-IR/FPA nexus theoretically, the concept of migration diplomacy has emerged, broadly used to capture how states actively use and address migration and its governance in their foreign policy. However, the migration diplomacy concept and its theorizing so far remains underdeveloped.

In a recent contribution dedicated to remedying this, Adamson and Tsourapas (2018) more formally and definitively introduce the concept of migration diplomacy and the way to theorize it going

\(^1\) "Irregular migration" has no universally established definition, but a broad working definition is "movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries" (McAuliffe et al. 2017b, 300).
Drawing heavily on structural realism and rational choice assumptions, the authors conceive of migration diplomacy from a bargaining perspective, executed through issue-linkage and negotiation on basis of each actors’ respective interests. While there are many merits to this analytical framework, international migration as an issue field is a distinctly complex issue area for states to address. Moreover migration issues and their politics often cut to the heart of social, normative and emotive issues concerning rights and responsibilities, state sovereignty, people-to-people relations, etc., and takes place against the backdrop of dynamic domestic processes in particular social and cultural contexts. It is not evident that a rationalist, instrumentalist bargaining view is sufficient for capturing these implications. There may be need for scrutinizing the theoretical underpinnings and consequences of such a framework and developing alternative conceptualizations of how states approach migration and its governance within their foreign policy.

1.1 Purpose and Research Question

This thesis aims to contribute to the discussion of the emerging concept of “migration diplomacy”, as a part in bridging IR and FPA to migration studies and theorize how migration issues factor into interstate diplomacy and foreign policy. It seeks to advance this discussion by investigating the hitherto proposed definition and theoretical framework of migration diplomacy. After discussing potential shortcomings of this perspective in terms of capturing a number of salient features of migration within international politics, I will propose an outline of an alternative theoretical approach based on role theory. This is a theoretical analysis, but will draw on contemporary empirical migration research as well as utilize a brief case, that of current-day Morocco’s migration diplomacy, to illustrate the theoretical points. For this purpose, my research question is:

- What is migration diplomacy and how can it be theorized in a way that captures the key features of contemporary migration as an issue of interstate politics?

This will be investigated through the sub-questions:

- What are the possible theoretical shortcomings of the previously proposed Adamson and Tsourapas (2018) definition and theoretical framework of migration diplomacy?
- How would a role-theory perspective alternatively conceptualize migration diplomacy?
How can Morocco’s contemporary migration diplomacy be understood from a role theory perspective?

While the migration diplomacy phenomenon is not new, it has yet to be firmly established and defined as a separate field of inquiry within IR and FPA. This thesis aims to further this goal, by analyzing the previously proposed theoretical approach to the concept and suggest a complementary view. It will discuss possible shortcomings of the bargaining framework in Adamson and Tsourapas (2018) and investigate the potential role theory approaches as a remedy. To the author’s knowledge, no previous study has explicitly discussed role theory and its concepts for theorizing “migration diplomacy” specifically, or discussed the possible emergence of “migration roles”. The aim is hence to contribute to the further development of the migration diplomacy concept and its research agenda, within the larger objective of developing the integration of migration research and different strands of IR and FPA. Concerning specific empirics, I will also utilize the case of Morocco to illustrate the theoretical argument of the potential of developing a proper role theory of migration diplomacy, by re-contextualizing existing research on Morocco in this regard.

1.2 Disposition

This thesis is primarily a concept analysis of the emerging concept and scholarly field of migration diplomacy, through a theoretical critique of the previously proposed theoretical framework to analyze it; amended with a shorter, illustrative empirical case of contemporary Morocco. In the next section, the research design and methodological considerations are discussed. In the third section, I begin by situating the emerging migration diplomacy concept against its theoretical background, before presenting and discussing the more formal definition and scope conditions of what it constitutes proposed by Adamson and Tsourapas (2018). In the fourth section, I discuss the concomitant rational bargaining framework suggested by the same authors for analyzing migration diplomacy. With reference to a number of key features of contemporary migration as an issue in international politics, The limitations of this framework and its ontological or methodological assumptions are discussed, checking these against the underlying theoretical assumptions. On the basis of these specific potential shortcomings, I then introduce role theory as a possible alternative perspective on the concept, by outlining a basic role theory framework and discussing how it may be suited to analyze states practices of migration diplomacy in ways that the bargaining framework cannot. The final section illustrates my discussion and outline how a role theory approach can look, as compared to the bargaining approach, through the case of Morocco’s migration diplomacy.
2. Research Design and Methodology

The investigation is carried out in a main theoretical section (divided in two parts), followed by a brief illustrative empirical case. The theoretical and methodological rationale behind each section is discussed below.

2.1 Concept Analysis of “Migration Diplomacy”

The method applied for this thesis is primarily a form of concept analysis (Goertz 2006; Berenskoetter 2017) of the migration diplomacy concept and its related concepts. A concept is “an abstract frame that helps generating knowledge about the world by organizing, naming and giving meaning to its features” (Berenskoetter 2017, 154). The migration diplomacy concept aims to theoretically capture and define certain practices and processes in the foreign policy-migration policy nexus in a particular way, and its definition and theorization carries implications for what can be understood as migration diplomacy and how one should analyze it. “Migration diplomacy” is so far primarily an academic term and not used widely in everyday speech, even by its supposed practitioners (e.g. diplomats or decision-makers). Hence I will not discuss a popular understanding and usage of this concept by social actors in the “real world” (cf. Berenskoetter 2017, 155-158) but rather the proposed analytical definition and theoretical framework of the concept within IR and FPA, treating it as a supposedly generalizable concept within social science theory (Ibid., 164-167). I hence focus on its theoretical dimension; how the concept is “situated in a broader ideational framework, or narrative” (Ibid., 160-161), which has consequences for how to study and interpret empirical occurrences of it.

As will be evident in the analysis, “[t]o develop a concept is more than providing a definition: it is deciding what is important about an entity” (Goertz 2006, 27). By defining the phenomena to be studied in the empirical world and what their constitutive features are, “concepts give the field of IR its ontology” (Berenskoetter 2013, 151-152). Hence, my approach rests on an understanding of concept analysis as a central form of ontological theorizing (Berenskoetter 2016; Guzzini 2013). I am interested in the “constitutive function” of theorizing (Guzzini 2013), as concepts and the theories they are part of influence how and what we study the social world. “Theory is not only the result of knowledge but also the condition for the possibility of knowledge […] not all knowledge is empirically determined” (Ibid., 531).
2.1.1 Existing migration diplomacy concept and theoretical framework

This thesis investigates how to theoretically analyze the role of migration issues in foreign policy and international relations, by reviewing previous literature on the migration diplomacy concept followed by an in-depth critical analysis of the recent formalized conceptualization proposed by Adamson and Tsourapas (2018). Following this, I discuss its central implications for what one will focus on in an empirical instance of migration diplomacy, given the underlying assumptions of the conceptualization and analytical framework that Adamson and Tsourapas introduce. I will show that these implications are due to the structuralist and rationalist ontological assumptions that this framework rests on, leading it to overlooks many salient aspects in migration diplomacy that we cannot easily exclude, owing to a number of salient aspects of migration issues that have been identified in migration research. My main critique hence concerns the bargaining framework rather than the definition of the concept, though it will be evident how the two are connected (and how a different analytical approach – role theory – can enhance our understanding of what migration diplomacy is as well).

2.1.2 Introducing role theory

Given the identified shortcomings, I introduce role theory as a potential alternative framework to the rationalist view, with different ontological assumptions and a fundamentally different conceptualization of how the practices of migration diplomacy happen, while retaining some fundamental parts of the migration diplomacy concept. For this, I rely on contemporary role theory literature to situate my understanding of the field and sketch out a fairly general framework for role theory analysis, and how it would conceive of migration diplomacy in order to show how it may better capture the nature of migration diplomacy. Here too, I discuss the underlying ontological assumptions of role theory, as this is key for the differences in the two approaches. This is also done to make sure that there is meta-theoretical consistency in this alternative view, avoiding a “shallow eclecticism” (Guzzini 2013, 532), meaning the risk that one includes a number of role theory-related, loose constructivist concepts and then apply them to an existing concept that runs counter to these. The principal aim is not to fundamentally challenge the assumptions of the rationalist bargaining framework in its essential ontology on ontological grounds, but on pragmatic grounds (Guzzini 2013, 536; Fearon and Wendt 2002). In other words, the investigation does not seek to argue that either approach’s ontological assumptions are more “true” regarding how the world actually works in general, but whether a different approach may be more useful to capture and theorize certain aspects and dynamics that are salient in migration diplomacy specifically.
2.2 Illustrative Case

As an illustration of my theoretical discussion, the potential benefits of a role theory approach to migration diplomacy, as compared to the bargaining perspective, will be exemplified through the case of Morocco’s contemporary migration diplomacy.\(^2\) This will ground the concept and its forms of theorizing in the empirical world, providing depth and context, strengthening concept validity and, hopefully, lead towards further theory development and research questions (George and Bennet 2005; Flyvbjer 2011).

Analyzing migration diplomacy (i.e. states’ migration policy actions and related practices as a form of foreign policy) remains an under-theorized endeavour – the very reason for the present investigation – and hence neither the tentative role theory perspective I will present nor the bargaining perspective constitute full theories or hypotheses that can be falsifiably “tested”. Moreover, it cannot be assumed that the approaches would necessarily contradict each other in terms of outcomes (Fearon and Wendt 2002). Hence, the case serves only to illustrate the principally (meta-)theoretical arguments in the preceding analysis, and show that a role theory perspective will capture certain crucial aspects of migration diplomacy processes in a richer, more meaningful way.

2.2.1 Case selection

This is not a case study proper, but to a limited extent the approach draws on the “case study as theory development” logic; tentatively showing a way towards further theorizing and hypothesis development (George and Bennet 2005, 20-21; Flyvbjer 2011), which has guided the selection of Morocco as a case. Situated where it is south of the Mediterranean and bordering the EU, and being a country characterized by migration both historically and today, Morocco constitutes a salient and important case for understanding the dynamics of migration as an issue of international politics. Particularly in recent years this has been heightened by Europe’s increased preoccupation with migration issues in its regional politics. As will be shown, contemporary Morocco exemplifies a number of features that are crucial in the ongoing developments of migration as an international issue; increased politicization and securitization; the complex, changing and diversified migration flows that countries experience; and the importance of norms and institutional platforms for bilateral, regional and global cooperation on migration issues. This makes it an important type of case to be able to analyze, even if it here only serves as a brief illustrative and tentative example.

\(^2\) Checkel (1997) and, within migration diplomacy literature, Tsourapas (2017) are examples of a similar approach and disposition, with a theoretical discussion and framework followed by an illustrative case.
Morocco and its treatment of migration issues in its international and regional relations have been examined by a range of scholars from various perspectives in recent years. From a practical standpoint, this makes Morocco a useful case, where I will be able to draw on existing studies and analyses that are relevant for the migration diplomacy frameworks that will be discussed, contextualizing and comparing their insights in a slightly new way and for a this specific theoretical purpose. At the same time, the practices and agency of traditionally “migrant-sending” countries in the so-called Global South still remain less studied and theorized in migration research (Tsourapas 2017, 2369; El Qadim 2017). Regarding contemporary Morocco’s migration and migration politics, many studies adopt a chiefly Euro-centric perspective. It is a conscious choice in this thesis to contribute to the shift away from a “receiving country bias“ in migration research regarding selection of perspectives and cases (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014, 55).

2.2.2 Data collection and analysis
The case relies on an array of existing, recent scholarly literature for describing the main features of what can be called Morocco's migration diplomacy. The case will be briefly described first from the perspective of the rationalist bargaining approach and then from a role theory approach, showcasing the added insights and different perspectives that role theory offers. For both accounts, largely the same literature and its insights on Morocco’s behavior and rationale, as amenable to each perspective, will be utilized. There is always a risk of bias and selectivity in the literature, both as concerns the empirical conclusions of the literature and its amenability to either a rationalist bargaining or a role theory view of migration diplomacy. I have tried to minimize this risk by drawing on a range of studies. Ultimately, while these are important considerations and I have made efforts to ensure a reliable and valid case discussion, the main purpose of this thesis is the theoretical concept analysis. The case does not definitively prove or disprove the tenability of this, but illustrates the preceding discussion.
3. Migration in IR and the Migration Diplomacy Concept

In order to contextualize my analysis, I will now briefly discuss the emergence of the term “migration diplomacy” within IR and FPA literature, leading to the in-depth analysis of its formal definition and theorizing in Adamson and Tsourapas (2018).

3.1 Migration and Migration Governance in IR/FPA

The study of international migration is an immense scholarly field spanning many disciplines of social science research, investigating the causes, effects and forms of cross-border movements of people.

Within IR theory and FPA, migration as a phenomenon and its related issues has been discussed within different perspectives and from different schools. In (neo-)realism and security studies, international migration has primarily been treated as an issue of state security, i.e. as a possible national security risk that states (should) seek to minimize and control (e.g. Weiner 1992) (Hollifield 2012). Liberal institutionalism, and the adjacent field of international political economy (IPE), has focused on international migration as a key part of globalization and increased international interdependence. The main problematiques for this school have concerned the relatively limited developments in international cooperation and institutionalization of (non-refugee) migration regimes, as compared to the more comprehensive institutionalization of the mobility of goods and capital (Hollifield 2012). Social constructivist approaches abound in different studies seeking to question and reevaluate established assumptions and concepts such as “state identity”, “state interests” and “national security” in view of international migration. Dismantling discursive processes such as the securitization of irregular migration or refugees is a key example of this (e.g. Huysmans 2006; Üstübici 2018; Devlet Karapinar 2017). Transnationalism theories emphasize how migration fundamentally defies and challenges traditional borders and state sovereignty. Under this theoretical umbrella one can also incorporate diaspora studies which investigate, often through a constructivist lens, how the state is reconceptualized and “deterritorialized” when a significant amount of its population resides outside the country while retaining a social connection to it (e.g. Adamson and Demetriou 2007).

In recent years, higher prioritization of migration issues for many states, both domestically and internationally, have highlighted its importance as a key element in many bilateral and regional
interstate relations and shown the continued difficulties of concerted international migration cooperation (Hollifield 2008; 2012; Castles de Haas and Miller 2014). By and large, migration policy (particularly immigration policy) has traditionally been regarded as an exclusively domestic policy field, given that border security and population control remain crucial elements of traditional state sovereignty (Rosenblum and Cornelius 2012; Betts and Kainz 2017) and hence, it has primarily been studied as such. The above listed examples of IR schools incorporating migration issues notwithstanding, the ways in which international migration issues and the policies governing constitute and shape interstate diplomacy and foreign policy decisions, still arguably remains under-theorized (Hollifield 2012).

3.2 Migration Diplomacy

“Migration diplomacy” has hence entered into the academic discourse as a term to capture how migration and migration policies form an intricate part of states’ foreign policy conduct and international relations. Generally understood as “the process of using migration policy for diplomatic ends” (Oyen 2015, 4) – or conversely the use of diplomatic tools for migration-related ends – the term has been used in various studies with rather different perspectives. A brief overview of key studies utilizing the concept show a diversity regarding what sort of policy behavior is studied; what types of international migration it concerns and in what direction; whether it is the state or indeed the migrants themselves who are the central actors; what other foreign policy issues the migration is linked to; and in terms of what overall theoretical perspectives are used (rationalist or constructivist, level of analysis, methodology, etc.).

One chief strand of earlier studies that closely connects immigration policy and foreign policy has done so from primarily realist perspectives, i.e. viewing international migration as potential security risks for the migrant-receiving states (Weiner 1992; Teitelbaum 1984). Against the backdrop of this state security logic, the way in which migrant-sending or transit states utilize the “threat” of increased unwanted migration flows as a coercive tool vis-à-vis migrant-receiving states has been observed as a salient form of practicing migration diplomacy (Greenhill 2010; Tsourapas 2017; İçduygu and Aksel 2014). In such studies, it is primarily refugee migration and so-called irregular migration that is put forth as the security concern in question. Maley (2013) similarly discusses “refugee diplomacy”, seemingly treating it as meaning the international cooperation and negotiation on refugee regimes to facilitate responsibility-sharing between states (or for states to avoid responsibility).
The economic effects of migration (both costs and benefits) have also been recognized as factoring into a state’s migration diplomacy, both on the sending and receiving end. For studies emphasizing economic aspects, it is often labor migration that is in focus (be it low- or high-skill, regular or irregular etc.) (Teitelbaum 1984). Some studies highlight labor migration’s economic as well as socio-cultural effects, underlining how migrant-sending states use labor emigration to strengthen their cultural standing and soft power (Choucri 1977; Tsourapas 2016, 2018a). Other studies discuss how migration policies and bilateral migration agreements are used by governments for public diplomacy, soft power and for signaling positive or negative bilateral ties and adjust regional relations (Oyen 2013; Donnely 2014; Devlet Karapinar 2017; Tsourapas 2017). The migration diplomacy of emigration countries has also been analyzed as strategies of promoting and maintaining relations with its emigrant communities (Oyen 2013; Tsourapas 2015).

Thiollet (2011), in a key contribution for establishing the concept of migration diplomacy, analyzes the regional effects of labor and refugee migration and its regulation within the Arab region. She shows how immigration policies by oil-rich Gulf states have been important for promoting regional Arab integration. Notably, in addition to the discussion of government policies, Thiollet also emphasizes the diplomatic and cultural importance of the actions of migrants themselves for integrating the region. The migrants create transnational bonds which have regional political implications beyond what the governments necessarily can foresee and control. Here, the focus is hence not only on governments but also on seeing “migrants and refugees as essential historical actors” (Ibid., 117; see also Gabaccia, 2012). In other words, “migration diplomacy” is here also taken to mean “migration as diplomacy” (Thiollet 2011, 110, emphasis added).

3.3 Migration Diplomacy: Formal Definition and Scope Conditions

Drawing on insights from many of the above cited studies, a more theoretically minded and explicit contribution to setting out “migration diplomacy” as a concept is presented in Adamson and Tsourapas (2018). The authors introduce a formalized definition of the concept, before going on to theorize it further within their structural realist typology and subsequently analyze instances of migration diplomacy from a rationalist bargaining framework. I will now set out the basic definition and scope conditions of migration diplomacy that Adamson and Tsourapas suggest, to present what practices it denotes.
3.3.1 Migration diplomacy: Definition
Migration diplomacy is defined as “states’ use of diplomatic tools, processes and procedures to manage cross-border population mobility” (Adamson and Tsourapas 2018, 3-4; see also Tsourapas 2017). Beyond this succinct definition however, the authors’ subsequent discussion and application of it outline a number of scope conditions and implications specifying what migration diplomacy is and is not, which I will now briefly discuss and comment for the sake of clarity on what practices constitute typical migration diplomacy. This will be the basis for the more in-depth examination of their view on how it may be theorized and analyzed that then follows.

3.3.2 Migration (policy) as both a foreign policy means and end
Importantly, migration diplomacy as suggested here includes viewing migration matters as both a means and an end within a state’s diplomatic strategies. In the authors’ words, “migration diplomacy can include both the strategic use of migration flows as a means to obtain other aims or the use of diplomatic methods to achieve goals related to migration” (Adamson and Tsourapas 2018, 4-5, emphasis added). This view of the migration policy-foreign policy nexus considerably widens the scope of what can constitute migration diplomacy and serves to capture that migration policy today is often an integral aspect of foreign policy of a state, both as means and end. This is also a necessary scope if one understands migration diplomacy chiefly as a bargaining practice (as the authors do), where migration diplomacy will typically consist of quid-pro-quo negotiations and issue-linkages based on one state’s pursuit of a migration-related goal and the other state’s interest in a separate, non-migration foreign policy goal.

3.3.3 Scope of practices that constitute migration diplomacy
Importantly, not all migration policy of a state has foreign policy impact or is a part of a state’s diplomatic strategies. Only when a migration-related action is taken by a state as part of its foreign policy or diplomacy is it migration diplomacy (Adamson and Tsourapas 2018, 4-5). This still leaves, however, a great number of tools and measures that potentially constitute migration diplomacy. “Immigration laws, bilateral or multilateral readmission agreements, policies of secondment and diaspora outreach, or deportation regulations” are cited as typical examples in a related study using the same conceptualization (Tsourapas 2017, 2370).

Naturally, migration diplomacy can concern both the goal of promoting a particular migration flow, or limiting it (Adamson and Tsourapas 2018). Adamson and Tsourapas discuss a wide variety of types of issue-linkages and foreign goals that migration diplomacy can entail; e.g. using migration
diplomacy for economic interests, public diplomacy, international security concerns etc.

Moreover, as long as it is used within the context of interstate negotiation or diplomacy, any category of cross-border migration can be the subject of migration diplomacy, including both forced and voluntary migration (Adamson and Tsourapas 2018).

In sum, migration diplomacy can concern all sorts of international migration, and include any government tool and instrument to address them that involves or affects the state’s diplomacy and foreign policy.

3.3.4 States as central actors
Migration diplomacy is in this case by definition concerned with states as the main actors. Hence, this retains migration diplomacy within the more traditional state-centric views in IR and FPA, and a conventional understanding of who can engage in diplomacy (Hamilton and Longhorne 2011; Cooper et al 2013). However, this understanding can fairly easily be adjusted to also incorporate certain international organizations, such as the European Union (EU), in the event that they act as a single state-like actor in an international setting on certain migration issues (Adamson and Tsourapas 2018, 4).

3.3.5 Levels of analysis
With this view of what migration diplomacy is, the concept can ostensibly be studied both at the system-level and at the unit-level; analyzing either the interactions between various states bound together by certain migration flows, or in-depth studies of one state’s use of migration policies in their diplomatic strategy, more akin to actor-specific FPA (Hudson 2005). (However, the structuralist conceptualization that the authors propose places the concept more squarely within system-level IR theory, see section 4.)

3.3.6 Diplomacy and foreign policy
Conventionally, diplomacy can be described as “the conduct of relationships, using peaceful means, by and among international actors, at least one of whom is usually governmental” (Cooper et al. 2013, 2). Such a definition distinguishes it from foreign policy, in that the latter includes the policy-making and substantive politics, including formulating the goals and interests of the government, while diplomacy is merely the implementation of that policy vis-à-vis international counterparts. Diplomacy is typically carried out by civil servants i.e. diplomats, rather than the political
leadership (Ibid.). The migration diplomacy concept as discussed above, however, treats “diplomacy” fairly broadly, and as roughly synonymous to foreign policy. For the purpose of this thesis, we can here simply note that both the conscious formulation of foreign policy using or concerning migration issues and the diplomatic execution thereof may require a concept, and that we may call it “migration diplomacy” – as has been done by Adamson and Tsourapapas (2018) and previous studies.

3.4 Theorizing Migration Diplomacy: The Bargaining Framework

After defining and outlining what practices constitute migration diplomacy, Adamson and Tsourapapas (2018) propose a theoretical framework for analyzing instances of migration diplomacy. It is not a fully formed explanatory model that they present, but rather a general typology and theorization of the concept, that is suggested as a basis for further case studies and theory development. However, this sets the frame for how to analyze migration diplomacy and state behavior, and it carries a number of implications for the subsequent empirical analyses and how one understands the phenomenon. I will now outline this view of migration diplomacy, before critically assessing its assumptions and implications.

The typology rests on two key elements: the structural position of a state concerning the migration flow in question and the bargaining logic that the state pursues vis-à-vis the other state in the subsequent negotiation.

3.4.1 Structuralism

Drawing on structural realism, a state’s migration diplomacy is said to be fundamentally characterized by the state’s structural migration position, i.e. its position as either a migration-receiving state, migration-sending state or transit state. This position is said to determine to a significant extent a state’s bargaining position, power and interests. The distinction is seen as so fundamental that the authors subsequently distinguish between immigration diplomacy, which is carried out by a receiving state (e.g. a state facilitating immigration from another state to strengthen bilateral ties); emigration diplomacy performed by sending states (e.g. a state promoting labor emigration towards a receiving state in pursuit of economic gains); and transit migration diplomacy performed by transit states (e.g. a state demanding financial compensation from a migrant-receiving state in exchange for preventing irregular transit migration). While the authors make clear that these structural positions should be seen as ideal types, and that states often will engage in several types
of migration diplomacy simultaneously, each instance of migration diplomacy is still fundamentally
treated as one of the three, playing out against the migratory counterpart(s) that a particular
migration flow constitutes (Adamson and Tsourapas 2018, 6-8).

3.4.2 Rationalist bargaining

The second key element to their analysis is a rationalist bargaining framework for conceiving of
migration diplomacy practices. This framework principally distinguishes between the opposing
logics of seeing migration diplomacy as generating either absolute gains or relative gains for the
state. In other words, a state engaging in migration diplomacy will adopt a strategy based on
viewing this as either a positive-sum or a zero-sum game (Adamson and Tsourapas 2018, 9-12).

It is not suggested that a state’s structural migration position will necessarily determine whether the
state engages in migration diplomacy from a positive-sum or zero-sum logic. Rather, the authors
argue that all combinations in this typology exists, and they give historical examples of each.
Immigration diplomacy, emigration diplomacy and transit migration diplomacy can hence all be
carried out in pursuit of either absolute gains or relative gains. The authors conclude that whether a
state will see its migration diplomacy bargaining from an absolute or relative gains perspective, and
what interests and strategic options they have in any given case, will depend on a number of
exogenous variables, including “foreign policy interests, bargaining power, the nature of the
existing bilateral relationship between two states, and so forth” (Ibid., 12).

Migration diplomacy is hence seen as a form of bargaining on a specific migration issue. A state
will act according to its position as receiving, sending or transit state (i.e. practice immigration
diplomacy, emigration diplomacy or transit diplomacy) and engage in migration diplomacy towards
its counterpart seeking a predetermined interest. It will seek either some form of relative or absolute
gains in this process, but the determinants of this vary and are exogenous. The typical migration
diplomacy case hence consists of a sending state and a receiving state, with pre-defined respective
interests concerning the migration flow in question (desired or not desired) and possibly different
views of whether the migration flow and its governance can produce a win-win situation (e.g. labor
emigration from a labor-surplus country to a country with a shortage in labor) or a win-lose
situation (e.g. high-skill labor migration resulting in “brain drain” in the migrant sending state). The
states then “bargain” through negotiating and enacting migration policy, cooperating and creating
issue-linkages of some sort. In principal, the model is readily extendable to include more complex
cases, such as reciprocal migration flows negotiated in tandem or an intermediate transit state.
4. Possible Limitations of the Bargaining Framework of Migration Diplomacy

I have set out the most recent and complete suggestion for theorizing the concept of migration diplomacy, by Adamson and Tsourapas (2018), resting on a structural view of the ‘migration position’ of a state (depending on the direction of the migration flow in question) and a bargaining framework where the state will engage in any type of migration diplomacy through issue-linkage seeking either absolute or relative gains (depending on a range of exogenous variables). This approach to migration diplomacy ostensibly makes for clear-cut and generalizable analyses, that pinpoint the principal issues at hand in a given case of interstate negotiation. Through analyzing cases along these lines, we can compare different sorts of issue-linkage, how migration diplomacy negotiations play out given various interests, etc.

However, the idea that migration diplomacy can easily be reduced to isolated bargaining instances, with predetermined interests, appears problematic given what we know of the complex, socially contingent and normative nature of migration. In this section, I will scrutinize the theoretical assumptions underpinning the Adamson and Tsourapas approach, and show that we have reason to question these assumptions on theoretical and empirical grounds, in the context of seeking to develop a theoretical approach to analyzing migration diplomacy. In short, these problematic assumptions are: the assumption of principally rationalist actors; the assumption that actors and their interests are exogenous, and not constituted by norms and institutions inherent to the migration diplomacy process; and the assumption of states as unitary actors, disregarding domestic-level processes. As will be clear, these issues are interrelated.

These theoretical problems relate to a few key characteristics of migration as a contemporary issue field that challenge these assumptions, and highlight the risk that we overlook crucial aspects of how migration functions as a political issue field. Namely: migration’s complexity as a policy area and social phenomenon which generates uncertainty, challenging clear cost-and-benefit calculi; its deeply emotive, normative and socially contingent nature; the increased spread and diversification of migration patterns globally; the dynamic institutional and normative global governance framework for migration with which migration diplomacy is performed; and the importance of domestic level-processes. I will argue that these aspects of international migration and its
governance, identified in mainstream migration research (e.g. IOM 2017; Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014; Betts and Kainz 2017; Hollifield 2012) are factors that a material-structuralist and rationalist bargaining framework largely disregards, and particularly point to the need for incorporating a more constructivist, “thick” view of what migration diplomacy entails.

4.1 The Assumption of Rational Actors

The bargaining view of migration diplomacy is principally rationalist. States are viewed as seeking to maximize their utility – however defined for each actor – and acting strategically in negotiations towards those goals. Typical interests may include economic benefits from labor immigration or emigration, security concerns or strengthened bilateral ties (Adamson and Tsourapas 2018). Importantly however, rationalism does not necessarily imply strict materialism (Fearon and Wendt 2002). In a more broad, liberal rationalist view, the traditional list of state interests such as resources, security or geopolitical interests can be amended with more abstract goals such as norm compliance (e.g. portraying the role of a responsible humanitarian power), cultural ties etc. Adamson and Tsourapas to some extent include such non-material, more abstract goals in their bargaining model (e.g. 2018, 9). The rationalist approach fundamentally remains however, in that states are assumed to have interests that are pre-determined to the interaction and which they themselves are reasonably clear about. The pursuit of these interests guide their behavior in any migration diplomacy scenario.

To be sure, migration issues often have (or are perceived as having) implications for typical core state interests, such as concerning state security, geopolitical influence or economic gains. A large inflow of migration may strain a receiving state’s capacity to manage border control and internal security, disproportionate emigration of a state’s well-educated population segments may cause “brain drain” (while benefiting the receiving state) and so on (Castles de Haas and Miller 2014; Maley 2013). However, the deeply social and indeed emotive nature of migration issues and the dynamic and widespread effects of migration – a broad social phenomenon with many implications that may be hard to predict – complicate the rationalist assumptions.

4.1.1 Migration issues as normative and emotive

Mapping out current trends in migration as an international issue, Castles, de Haas and Miller (2014) identify the growing politicization of migration as a key general tendency, both nationally and internationally. This increasing political salience of migration and its governance is not
necessarily proportionate to any increase of levels of migration or of their material impacts, but largely stem from increasing awareness and concerns over the social and cultural impacts of migration. As a defining element of globalization and interconnectivity, the mobility of people—who are active, subjective and right-bearing individuals with agency—pose distinct questions to societies and the international system that the increased mobility of goods and capital do not (Money and Lockhart 2018, 15-16). For receiving states, the arrival and settlement of migrants can often have considerable effects on the social, cultural and normative fabric of the society, for instance evident in challenges of integration of immigrants even if the economic system is structurally in need of more human capital. With ethnic and cultural changes, often come new questions around national identity, social norms and cultural unity, not seldom generating racist and anti-immigrant backlashes or new social divides (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014, 55-83). The conventional ideas of an individual’s rights, responsibilities and claims to state protection, inclusion and access to collective goods—i.e. the social contract—is redefined or put in starker light when the idea of a sovereign nation with an essentially stationary population is increasingly challenged. This can be true even when the real-world effects of a particular instance of migration is limited. Migration may redefine a society’s political and social sense of self and conceptual stability in ways that are hard to translate into set and clear state interests in promoting or restricting migration in a given instance.

A seminal example of theorizing this is Huysman’s (2006) discussion of how the idea of the “stranger”, inherent to the perception of migration for receiving states in Europe implies a certain type of threat to the security felt and experienced by the receiving states population. As an internal “stranger”, the migrant conceptually upsets the natural order and the idea of a state and a society, in a way that a traditional, wholly external “enemy” does not. Similarly, Gazit (2018) uses the concept of “ontological security” to capture this need for familiarity and conceptual order in the social world, that may be perceived as challenged by immigration. Societies experience “losing” and “re-finding” their ontological security as their familiar environment is reshaped by migration and its upsetting of existing socio-political boundaries. While Adamson and Tsourapas mention that migration diplomacy may be used by states to pursue goals related to for instance “identity” (2018, 3), it is not explained how this would be easily conceptualized as a guiding interest that fits into their bargaining framework. Arguably, the more these aspects are at the forefront, the more strained their approach may become.
4.1.2 The complex, diverse impacts of migration

The sheer complexity of migration issues also challenges the assumption of rational and clear state interests. Migration is a dynamic and diverse phenomenon. Indeed, as is noted in the International Organization for Migration’s (IOM) World Migration Report 2018, a key challenge for advancing global governance and international cooperation on migration is the fact that states are often unclear on what their underlying interests, and that of their counterpart, actually are (Martin and Weerasinghe 2017, 127). Migration, and specific migration flows, are not necessarily one thing, its effects broad, multifaceted and not obviously negative or positive for a society or states. This complicates state action towards it.

In sum, the rationale for what we may define as a state’s interest in migration issues often may stem from social, abstract and downright emotional considerations, more than many other policy fields. If we accept that international migration and its politics is in many ways “amongst the most emotive subjects in contemporary societies” (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014, 1), it is quite conceivable that the perceived “benefit” or “cost” to a state will be difficult or insufficient to identify as the clear motivation for its migration diplomacy. In his discussion of the importance of ontological security, Gazit argues for the need of a “thick” understanding of migration as a social and political issue and a theoretical approach that is “culturally nuanced, power-informed and processual” (2018, 6) rather than rationalist “realistic, utility-based explanations” (Ibid., 2). Moreover, migration is a broad social phenomenon where the benefits or costs are not very clear, rather than migration flows having any one clear positive or negative impact on a society. If uncertainty and lack of familiar calculi characterize state behavior and international engagement on migration issues, a rationalist framework with clearly defined a priori interests of the states in question may be insufficient, and we need a theory where state behavior is also explained by cultural habits and internalized norms rather than cost-benefit analyses.

4.2 The Assumption of Exogenous Identity and Interest Formation

The structural, rationalist bargaining framework also assumes that actors’ identities and interests as regards migration diplomacy are pre-determined and exogenous to the migration diplomacy process. States are defined a priori as migrant-sending, receiving or transit states by the migration flow in question, and whatever other constitutive features and preferences that they have in the matter are also ontologically prior to the migration diplomacy process. At first glance, it may not seem controversial to assume that the state’s position, identity and interests are exogenous to the
migration diplomacy process. This too, however, has potential implications for the subsequent analysis and may not be as readily defensible. This concerns whether we assume that the norms, institutions, ideas and processes that are part of the migration diplomacy process can have *constitutive* effects on the actors and the interests at play, i.e. are part in defining their very nature.

### 4.2.1 The possible constitutive effect of norms

Considering the possible constitutive effect of norms and institutions, means considering that the shared ideas, and the institutions and norms through and within which migration diplomacy takes place, may contribute to giving the actors and the material conditions their very meaning and explanatory role. Such aspects of interpretation go beyond a material structural position and fall outside of a rationalist bargaining theory. If we find it plausible that the norms and processes that migration diplomacy entails help constitute the actors, this would indicate the need for a theory that makes room for this dynamic, i.e. a *constitutive theorizing*. Constitutive theorizing does not take the social objects under study as given but rather explicitly “seeks to establish conditions of possibility for objects or events by showing what they are made of and how they are organized” (Fearon and Wendt 2002, 58). In short, such approaches would posit that states engage in migration diplomacy not only from materially determined structural positions and individual self-interests, but also with a shared understanding of their respective identities and shared expectations about what is acceptable and appropriate behavior from each side and what the possible expected outcome of the migration diplomacy is. By setting the frame for what migration diplomacy can be and what legitimate state interests and positions are, these structures, be they political, legal, social or normative, may potentially play a role in constituting the actors and their preferences. Their ongoing interaction on the basis of these constitutive norms will then serve to reify and reaffirm these shared ideas further. (Wendt 1999; Fearon and Wendt 2002).

An example hinting at this dynamic is offered by Tsourapas himself in an article (2019) discussing the effects on international refugee norms of certain state practices related to the Syrian crisis. Tsourapas observes an ongoing tendency of the “ commodification of refugees”: refugee-hosting states have started to identify economic opportunities in hosting refugees seeking financial compensation from international donors. While ostensibly a rationalist, bargaining scenario, Tsourapas discusses how this has affected the language and posturing of states and risks contributing to changing norms within migration diplomacy. In other words, the behavior hence may lead to an institutionalization of these norms and roles of different states as regards
international refugee response, as states redefine their idea of responsibilities and acceptable behavior.

This and similar processes are not endogenized within a bargaining view of migration diplomacy. Rather, new processes of bargaining would be analyzed as starting with an exogenous shift in interest of states, redefining the starting positions. With a co-constitutive understanding of the processes of migration diplomacy, we would conceptualize how the norms and institutions enacted also prescribe, reinforce and manifest behavior and interests of the actors, rather than it being determined a priori and exogenously.

4.2.2 The structural normative backdrop

I have suggested that norms and ideational structures, embedded in institutions, language, political structures etc., may help define how a state perceives its own identity and preferences, and that since these institutional environment forms part of the migration diplomacy process, there likely is a co-constitutive process where migration diplomacy practices help define and shape actors’ ideas and shared understandings of themselves and the issues. With such a view, the institutional and normative context within which migration diplomacy takes place should be more in focus when theorizing migration diplomacy.

Present-day migration diplomacy takes place in a context of increasing global dialogue and efforts towards increased global cooperation, but this is also a contested and difficult process. Alongside efforts for strengthening global migration regimes, such as the Global Forum for Migration and Development (GFMD) and the two 2018 Global Compacts for migration and refugees respectively, a wide variety of bilateral, regional and mini-multilateral arenas and platforms also abound, as states continue to find their way forward for effectively negotiating and coordinating on migration issues (Betts and Kainz 2017; Slocum 2017). It does not seem unreasonable that the different institutional setups of migration governance forms, as well as the less formalized norms, discourses and language used within migration diplomacy practices, helps shape states’ migration diplomacy approaches by defining what diplomatic tools, issue-linkages and forms of rhetoric that are available and accepted, creating norms and expectations that help define actors’ very roles and possible interests.
4.2.3 The sending-receiving-transit categories

One possible example of the constitutive role of ideas and norms can be seen in the categorization of states as migrant “sending”, “receiving” or “transit” states, as is suggested by Adamson and Tsourapas (2018). For Adamson and Tsourapas, the sending-receiving-transit structure is the one key factor that is made explicit in their framework for constituting and defining states’ positions and interests. It is determined by the direction of the migration flow in question in a given scenario. Hence, the actual movements of people are what constitute the relationship between the concerned states, i.e. it is a material structuralism.

The division of states as either receiving or sending (or transit) states is indeed well established within migration research, and is often treated as a general determinant of states’ migration interests and preferences (IOM 2017; Betts and Kainz 2017; Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014). However, while the general categorization of states along these three types makes intuitive sense and is common, the current nature of international migration complicates this notion. Contemporary developments in international migration includes the trends that Castles, de Haas and Miller call the “globalization” of migration, i.e. “the way it affects more and more countries and regions and its linkages with complex processes affecting the entire world” (2014, 317) and the “differentiation of migration”, meaning that most countries experience many different types and directions of migration simultaneously (Ibid., 16). This general increase of complexity of migration patterns poses challenges to national decision-makers (IOM 2017, 93), and will naturally complicate migration diplomacy practices as well. As states have to manage issues related to both immigration, emigration and transit migration simultaneously, the focus on states as acting from either distinct position, determined by the material migration flow, is increasingly strained. In migration research, it has been noted that this categorization might be problematic as it entrenches an overly simplistic, unidirectional view of migration flows and state interests, potentially leading to biased research and analyses. Migration studies in general have increasingly problematized the sending-receiving typology given current developments: “The old dichotomy between migrant-sending and migrant-receiving countries is being eroded – if this dichotomy was ever valid at all” (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014, 13).

Adamson and Tsourapas indeed note the difficulties of defining states along this typology themselves, describing their three structural positions as “ideal-types” and highlighting that actual migration positions are “neither singular nor static” (2018, 12). Nevertheless, they stick by this typology as fundamental for differentiating types of migration diplomacy, and solve this by
focusing on each isolated instance of migration diplomacy as concerning one of these directions. When the implications of the complexity is briefly exemplified by Adamson and Tsourapas – such as in the case of the transit country Jordan, the structural positions and concomitant types of migration diplomacy are clearly interrelated and the lines between them blurred (Adamson and Tsourapas 2018, 7-8).

Perhaps however, the utility of categorizing states as principally sending, receiving or transit state, can be more easily explained if reconceptualized as ideas, that help define a state’s perception of its role and interests, rather than as a brute material fact. Betts and Kainz for instance, discussing the general political divide between sending and receiving states, suggest that these positions are better understood as a question of state perception, connected to the overall view of the different actors of the international system and their place in it. Rather than an issue based on actual migration, “the sending-receiving divide is embedded in the broader context of a North-South divide with differing perspectives on the function of global migration governance” (2017, 3). Even as material migration flows of course matter for a state’s interests and power, the complicated and shifting directions of these flows hence underline that these positions are subject to interpretation by the state itself. In other words, “[M]aterial factors matter at the limit, but how they matter depends on ideas” (Fearon and Wendt, 58).

4.2.4 Summary: the possibility of constitutive norms and institutions

The key point here is that we cannot rule out that ideational structures and norms can be constitutive of the identities and interests from which states act in migration diplomacy and, crucially, that these are the very structures and processes through which the migration diplomacy takes place. Hence, the interests and identities of the actors cannot be assumed to be wholly exogenous and defined a priori but are in a dynamic co-constitutive process defined, given shape and meaning as a part migration diplomacy. If we believe that the processes and structures which migration diplomacy manifest help form the interest and identity of the actors, the bargaining approach may be less apt for conceptualizing migration diplomacy fully. To capture this theoretically, we would have to endogenize this interactive process of identity and interest formation.

Adamson and Tsourapas (2018) do not preclude the importance and impact of norms, ideas and structures for migration diplomacy. It is perfectly possible within the proposed framework that a state will seek a certain goal in its migration diplomacy that is to fulfill a certain norm, or that the normative structures within which migration diplomacy unfolds restricts the possible behavior of
the actors. A view of mutual constitution, on the other hand, view norms and institutions as possibly shaping the identities, interests and preferences of the state. As I have sought to illustrate, the issue concerns whether one views institutions and norms as merely *intervening* variables in a causal chain, as possible within their framework, or as having *constitutive* effects (Checkel 1997).

When constructing a theoretical framework, it can of course be legitimate, indeed necessary, to consciously keep exogenous certain processes and factors that could be important in order to have manageable theoretical tool. However, one must be mindful of the implications of this choice, since “to assume exogeneity is implicitly to make empirical claims about the world, namely that what actors want is constant within the context of the study in question” (Fearon and Wendt 2002, 64). Particularly if as noted above, this is an issue area of uncertainty and of conflicting norms, the impact of norms and structures for framing and defining the issues at hand cannot as easily be ruled out. If it is plausible that the norms and institutions through which migration diplomacy is done help define the actors ideas of their own identity and interest, as I have argued, this choice is less defensible. If we have reason to believe that ongoing institutionalization and “learning” of states in how to address migration through international cooperation in establishing practices, then we have reason to seek an approach beyond the material-structural bargaining model. This would entail a more constructivist approach in some form or other, incorporating a theory of how social objects are constituted and given meaning by the shared ideas within the international system, rather than only defined by “brute material” forces (Wendt 1999; Fearon and Wendt 2002, 57ff).

### 4.3 Black-Boxing the State

Above, I have discussed the possible shortcomings of exogenizing the dynamic processes of identity-formation and interest-formation for the actors of migration diplomacy, states, that take place on on the system level. Furthermore, however, it must also be questioned whether we can really disregard the processes that concern migration diplomacy on the national level. As previously mentioned, the processes by which migration issues have become a highly politicized and salient field largely take place *within* the affected societies, i.e. on a domestic level rather than between states on the international level. This brings us to a more fundamental theoretical assumption of the Adamson and Tsourapas approach: that their analytical framework does not include and endogenize domestic-level processes. In the structural rationalist bargaining perspective, the interests and positions of states are exogenous to the migration diplomacy. As within more classical (realist) IR, states are modeled as unitary actors, their interests and positions defined before hand and separate to
the international interaction under study. The question is then if the study of migration diplomacy should necessarily endogenize processes of identity and interest-formation on the domestic level, or whether it is defensible to simply for practical division-of-labor reasons, assume the interests as given in order to carry on with the analysis of how states then interact international level.

Incorporating the domestic level might risk an impractically large research agenda and a less clear distinction of the specific field of migration diplomacy, as separate from migration policy as a domestic issue. It is of course possible to acknowledge the importance of the domestic level processes, and yet for practical purposes “black-box” them for one’s analysis. This is indeed the argument made in Money and Lockhart’s study (2018, 29) of international migration cooperation, that is done from a theoretical perspective similar to that of Adamson and Tsourapatas (2018). The risk is that one conceptualizes states as unitary and homogenous actors, disregarding the very contingent social and societal divides and contestation processes that determine any specific society’s stance on different migration issues. Other studies instead point towards the crucial need of “unpacking” the perceived interests of states on the domestic level, and distinguish the actors at play on the national level and how they relate to processes on the international level (Reslow 2012; El Qadim 2017).

Just as with the constitutive effects of the systematic migration diplomacy structures, the more important and dynamic the domestic level, the more we lose by not including it in our analysis. The salience of the domestic level and the boundary-crossing nature of migration issues, indicates that migration diplomacy field would be served by a theoretical approach that opens up the “black box” of the state and connects the domestic level-processes more closely to the states’ international behavior and position (without losing sight of the international level).

4.4 Summary

“What is distinctive in recent years is [population movements’] global scope, their centrality to domestic and international politics, and their considerable economic and social consequences” Castles, de Haas and Miller assert (2014, 5). I have sought to situate and reframe the conditions of migration diplomacy, to underline that such key aspects of migration as an international issue, that are increasingly evident in contemporary developments, indicate and explain possible weaknesses of the structural rationalist bargaining framework proposed by Adamson and Tsourapatas (2018). The Adamson and Tsourapatas approach includes assumptions about states as essentially rationalist actors
(though not a materialist rationalism); treats the actors’ identities and interests as given and exogenous to the institutions, ideational structures and processes of migration diplomacy and its manifestations; and does not endogenize any dynamics on the national level.

For an issue such as migration and its international governance between polities, this appears problematic. The distinctly social, emotive and highly politicized nature of migration as an issue, increasingly evident in recent decades, and the complexity of migration and its effects makes it difficult to assume rational actors with certain distinct and static (within the context of the migration diplomacy scenario) preferences. On the international level, the possible constitutive effects of existing and evolving norms and institutions (in a wide sense of the word) may define state actors perceptions of their role and their preferences; including a co-constitutive dynamic where the migration diplomacy in itself (and its resulting norms, institutions and regimes) help define the issue and actors at hand. Furthermore the importance of aspects of migration as a political issue on the national level, often unique and contingent on specific social and cultural processes of the state in question, calls into question an isolated system-level view that doesn’t unpack the “black box” of the state. The approach of categorizing migration diplomacy as taking place in isolated bargaining instances between sending, receiving or transit states, where states act on predetermined self-interest grounds from a zero-sum or positive-sum logic, has more limited utility when one considers these aspects of migration as an issue in foreign policy.
5. Role Theory and Migration Diplomacy

5.1 Role Theory in IR and FPA

I have outlined how the migration diplomacy framework as proposed by Adamson and Tsourapapas (2018) risks overlooking crucial dynamics of what happens when states increasingly incorporate migration issues into their foreign policy and international relations. The socially contingent and emotive aspects of migration as a political issue as well as the overall complexity of migration and its effects challenge the rationalist view of states’ behavior. The possible constitutive effects on actors and their interests of ideational structures, institutions and norms through which migration diplomacy is enacted challenge the assumption of exogenous identity and preference formation and a brute materialist structuralism. The saliency of the domestic level and national specificities question the utility of reducing migration diplomacy to a materially-structurally determined rational bargaining scenarios with unitary state actors. How can one address these lacunae within a manageable conceptual framework of migration diplomacy, without losing all the benefits of the existing conceptualization?

Role theory is an approach that is held forward by its proponents as particularly apt for bridging ontological and methodological divides between rationalism and constructivism, materialism and idealism, and for incorporating more social and abstract aspects such as identity and belonging, ontological security, and social relations within its analysis of the international system. In many respects, it appears a promising candidate among existing theoretical approaches for developing theories of migration diplomacy, which will now be discussed. This will be done without fully developing such a theoretical framework, as this would arguably be a premature endeavor, and beyond the scope of the present thesis.

Role theory, originally carried over from sociology and psychology, was introduced to the study of international politics through the seminal article by Kai Holsti, according to which “the international system can be conceived analytically not only as patterns of interaction, but also as a particular distribution of various national role conceptions at any given time” (1970, 244). Essentially, role theory is thus a way of understanding and explaining foreign policy behavior as largely determined by what states (or individual decision-makers) perceive to be appropriate according to their role in the international community, or for system-level analyses, a way of
explaining the international system as characterized by this distribution of roles. While there are significant differences between various iterations of role theory, there are some core assumptions that role theorists agree on. Centrally, that roles include “historically informed ego and alter expectations”, that these “emerge through dense interaction and division of labor between nation-states”, and, moreover, that this differentiation between roles “allows for hierarchy as well as supranational integration in international politics” (Harnisch 2011b, 38).

5.1.1 Diversity of role theory approaches

Role theory in FPA and IR encompasses distinct approaches with as large differences regarding ontological and epistemological underpinnings as there is within IR and social science in general. Harnisch (2011b, 37-38; 2012, 48) categorizes role theory in two main groups: the “causal” and the “co-constitutive” approach. The former treats roles and role conceptions as given entities in a causal chain, typically as independent variables explaining the foreign policy behavior of a state. This view follows the tradition of Holsti (1970), a chiefly FPA approach where role conceptions are cognitive elements, ontologically prior to their enactment through the agents’ subsequent interactions (Walker 1987). It took a new generation of IR scholars and the emergence of more explicit social constructivist views, such as by Wendt (1999), to re-emphasize the social, relational and socio-psychological dynamic nature of roles, their formation and interpretation occurring continuously through interactions, enabling more analysis also on system-level. This co-constitutive approach views roles as “emerging social objects” (Harnisch 2011a, 38), a continuous outcome of social processes between actors. Similarly, Thies and Breuning (2012, 1-4) trace role theory as emerging in different waves: first within traditional FPA territory, with its focus on national role conceptions as determining foreign policy behavior on a unit level, followed by a second wave from constructivist IR, with largely system level-perspectives. In a slightly more detailed typology, Nabers (2011, 75) distinguishes at least five current schools of role theory: the two traditional approaches of “structural role theory” and “interactionist role theory”, joined by “functional”, “organizational” and “cognitive” role theory.

Role theory hence remains a rather diverse field, applied with different ontological and epistemological underpinnings and methodological preferences. The general theoretical divides include whether to view roles as cognitive elements within each agent, or as structurally determined social categories distributed in a set system; as well as whether to investigate roles as causal variables or as dynamic, ever-emerging social objects. This leads to different conceptualizations of roles’ universality, how roles are created and maintained, how they can change etc., leading Thies in
his overview of the field to say that “role theory does not refer to a single theory, but rather a family of theories, an approach, or perspective that begins with the concepts of roles as central to social life” (2009, 4). This diversity or flexibility of role theory – its placement somewhere in the middle between the endpoints of agent- and structure-focused theories; FPA and IR theory; materialism and idealism; rationalist and constructivist ontology – can be described as weakness but is also a central part of its appeal (Thies and Breuning 2012). Following a period of general neglect, the last decade has arguably seen a renewed interest in role theory (Thies 2009), with novel discussions on how to develop and utilize its qualities in more nuanced ways (Harnisch, Frank and Maull 2011; Thies and Breuning 2012; Thies and Nieman 2017).

As my aim here is to investigate the general prospects for applying a role theory perspective on the concept of migration diplomacy, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage in depth with the important meta-theoretical debates that characterize the contemporary role theory field or to fully test any existing role theory hypotheses. While recognizing these important issues and uncertainties mentioned above, I will now go on to outline a rather general role theory perspective, somewhat emphasizing a more social constructivist, co-constitutive understanding of it, and provide working definitions of key role theory concepts in order to then apply this to the issue of migration diplomacy. Contemporary applications of role theory in different case studies (e.g. Thies and Nieman 2017; Harnisch, Frank and Maull 2011; Thies and Breuning 2012; Ovalı 2013) show the utility of such an approach, even as important meta-theoretical discussions continue. The point is to bring out the strengths of role theory for conceptualizing migration diplomacy, by particularly highlighting its contrasting contributions compared to a structural bargaining framework, that does not to the same extent consider the social, normative, contingent and constitutive nature of migration diplomacy.

5.2 Role Theory: A General Framework

I will now outline a general role theory perspective, understanding role theory as essentially belonging under the social constructivist umbrella. As Thies and Nieman put it, a chief strength of role theory as an FPA approach is “that it already contains the central insight of constructivist international relations theory – the mutual co-constitution of agents and structures” (2017, 20). This view assumes and emphasizes that the international system can be analyzed as a social structure, i.e. as a culture that is at least socially “thick” enough for a sociological role theory analysis of state interaction, based on common norms and expectations, to be possible. The structure that contain
these roles has both material and ideational elements. As discussed below, a key aim of such a theory is to capture the co-constitutive nature of the international system (i.e. recognizing the importance of relational, social aspect of roles on a structural level), without disregarding the ability of agents to choose and shape their own roles through these processes (Harnisch 2011b; 2012; Wendt 1999; Nabers 2011).

### 5.2.1 Roles

*Roles* can be defined as “social positions (as well as a socially recognized category of actors) that are constituted by ego and alter expectations regarding the purpose of an actor in an organized group” (Harnisch 2011a, 8; Thies 2009, 3-4). For IR and FPA, these actors are traditionally (though not exclusively) states, and the organized group is the international system as a whole or a part thereof, such as a geographical region or a specific international institution.

A role encompasses *role conceptions*, *role expectations* and *role performance*, three interrelated and interdependent aspects (Harnisch 2011a; Nabers 2011). *Role conceptions* form the ‘ego part’ of the role, i.e. an actor’s self-understanding of their social position and what is expected of them given their role. For a state, its self-image is then its *national role conceptions* (NRCs). This aspect was in focus in much of the cognitive, ego-centred early role theory within FPA, defined by Holsti as: “the policymakers' own definitions of the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules and actions suitable to their state, and of the functions, if any, their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or in subordinate regional system” (1970, 245-246). *Role expectations* are the norms and beliefs about what a role prescribes for an actor, as viewed by the other.³ *Role performance*, or role enactment, is the foreign policy behavior (including speech acts) of the actor, in accordance with the role conception and role expectations. (Nabers 2011, 77ff).

**Types of state roles**

There are different suggestions as to what roles actually are available for states in the international system. Holsti (1970) lists 17 different NRCs, among them “Bastion of Revolution-Liberator”, “Regional Protector”, and “Mediator-Integrator” to name a few. Walker (1987, 78) suggests three basic types of roles describing a state’s relationship vis-à-vis a counterpart — *consumer, producer*

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³ A different more complex set of definitions is provided by Harnisch (2011a), where “role conceptions” and “role expectations” are not the ego and alter part of a role respectively, but each consist of distinct ego and alter elements. “Role expectations” comprise both ego and alter expectations about what a role prescribes, while “role conceptions” are an actor’s view of their own social position as well as their view of the others’ role expectations towards them. The more tidy and simple distinctions in Nabers’ (2011), however, maintain the distinction between ego and alter aspects of roles, and provide handy working definitions for our purposes.
and belligerent – and two auxiliary roles for a complex setting with more than two states; facilitator and provocateur.

While role theory studies historically have often studied states as having a singular role, the possibility of states conceiving of and enacting multiple, interrelated roles has long been established (Breuning 2011, 32); indeed, this is recognized already in the seminal article by Holsti (1970, 277). Even as certain scholars reject the notion of multiple roles, instead understanding role to denote a “superscript” which is interpreted in slightly different ways in certain contexts (Müller 2011), we here assume that states have multiple roles, making up a “role set” (Harnisch 2011a). A state’s role set may be characterized as dominated by one primary role, such as the overall power position of the state, but amended with a large number of auxiliary roles that may be of different importance, specificity, depth and level of activity (Thies and Nieman 2017; Thies 2009).

Roles in migration diplomacy
Within migration diplomacy, tentatively the quintessential positions of migrant “sending”, “receiving” or “transit” state could arguably conceived of as roles for states – if (as discussed above in section 4.4) a certain type of migration flow is the most salient one in question for a state’s international negotiation and cooperation in migration, and through this it is internalized into the state’s and people’s self-understanding. This would then be tied to the overall international or regional role of that state. For instance, a regional power can include within its NRC a position and identity regionally as a receiving state, attracting and welcoming migration from regional neighbors as part of its greater regional standing and responsibility.

More specific formulation and interpretation of roles along these lines are also conceivable. A transit role could be conceived as a state forming a facilitating geographic link between two regions or, conversely, a transit state could have the role of “guardian” or “watchdog” for a neighboring receiving state seeking to restrict the migration. A state that historically has received immigrants may build part of its national identity on being “a country of immigrants”, informing its worldview and self-image both in domestic politics and internationally. Conversely, a state seen and perceived as a sending state may have deeply embedded “cultures of migration” domestically, where its inhabitants feel a social pressure within their community to emigrate as well as their government promoting or tolerating it (McAuliffe et al. 2017a, 184-185). Needless to say, the inherently relational nature of roles is evident here, as migration flows and any international interaction thereof will include counter-roles such as the sending-receiving type.
These types of self-image of a state and society will relate to a state’s NRC as regards migration and how it should be addressed in its foreign policy. More than any distinct rational interest in a specific scenario as relates to migration diplomacy, a state can then be assumed to be largely guided by its self-image and the role expectations that come with it for migration diplomacy. It is both a constitutive factor prescribing what is possible and acceptable behavior for that state, and its continued enactment is a reaffirmation and institutionalization of these norms. Migration diplomacy would here then largely be the enactment of a migration-related role in the international system, both in specific cases and in its overall stance to international migration issues. Imagine for instance a scenario of close cultural connections and shared norms of reciprocal migration between two states. Here, a shift towards restrictive migration policies and border securitization, perhaps brought on by an exogenous shock, would at least initially appear an inappropriate and foreign concept, and hence not be as naturally initiated. Posit, moreover, a state traditionally seen as taking a large responsibility for humanitarian support and hosting of refugees, which will act on this shared understanding of its role in the face of a sudden regional crisis, other than a specific rational calculus, and so on.

5.2.2 Role complexity

Given that states may have multiple simultaneous roles (perhaps conceptualized as one super-script and specific auxiliary roles tied to it) states often have to deal with role complexity, i.e. the task of performing several roles simultaneously and maintaining congruence between them. Particularly in today’s denser international system this is evident, and recent decades have seen more analyses of state’s complex role sets (Harnisch 2011a, 7; Thies and Nieman 2017, 46-50). The most prevalent way in which multiple, specific roles occur is in regards to distinct policy fields and issues. States will typically differ in how many roles they have, and their ability to enact multiple roles (Thies 2009; Harnisch 2012). Here migration policies, particularly if conceptualized as an aspect of foreign policy, of course appears an interesting example.

Role complexity may also arise from an actor having to assume differing foreign policy roles vis-à-vis different counterparts. In other words, a prevalence of different “others” in different social settings produce distinct roles for a state within the international system (Breuning 2011, 33). This role complexity can be conceptualized using Mead’s distinction between a “significant other” and
the “generalized other” (Harnisch’s 2011b; 2012). In short, an individual defines themselves on the most basic level vis-à-vis one “significant other”, a specific counterpart in relation to which they have a distinct role. In an organized social setting, however, such as the contemporary international setting, the individual will also have to conceive of themselves vis-à-vis an abstract “generalized other”. The generalized other is no specific actual counter-part but “an abstract other encompassing and organizing the attitudes of all members of a social group” (Harnisch 2011b, 40). In the international setting, the counterparts an individual state hence has to see itself vis-à-vis encompasses significant others, which are specific counter-actors such as other states, as well as at least one generalized other i.e. the international community at large. As the number of others and the density and complexity of relationships is growing on the international, transnational and supranational level, issues of role complexity appear to increase for many modern states (Harnisch 2012, 49).

For migration diplomacy purposes, role theory would posit that a migration-related NRC would certainly evolve as migration issues gain in importance on the international agenda and migration diplomacy becomes a salient part of the state’s foreign policy. As advancements are made for global governance and more migration regimes emerge, the need for a coherent general role expectation for these areas, i.e. a state’s migration governance-role towards the generalized other, will likely have to develop further, in addition to any specific and more tangible regional and bilateral migration roles. Here, as opposed to a rationalist bargaining view where each instance of migration diplomacy is principally treated separately, the need for a certain level of congruence among these roles will be clearer.

5.2.3 Role conflict

Role conflict exists in two basic forms: inter-role conflict and intra-role conflict (Harnisch 2011a). Inter-role conflict is a consequence of the above discussed role complexity. When an actor’s distinct roles do not coexist harmoniously but appear contradictory and incompatible – a common phenomenon – inter-role conflict occurs (Harnisch 2012, 48; Breuning 2011, 33). As the policy agenda of the international community expands and institutionalization of specific roles proliferates, it is possible that the risk of inter-role conflicts in the international system increases (Harnisch 2011, 14).

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4 The entirety of Mead’s (and Harnisch’s) symbolic interactionist approach to role theory is beyond the scope of this thesis. The notion of “generalized other” and “significant other” are relevant however.
Intra-role conflict is the conflict “within one role” or regarding one role, such as between ego and alter expectations about what a certain role entails and prescribes. These role conflicts go to the heart of the fact that roles are inherently contestable owing to their relational nature; roles by definition imply counter-roles and/or complimentary roles, prescribing certain behavior and obligations for other actors as well (Harnisch 2011a, 8; Thies and Nieman 2017, 21; Thies 2009, 9).

5.2.4 Role change

If roles prescribe and institutionalize behavior and preferences, the question of how roles can change, both for an individual actor and as socially recognized categories, remains a fundamental theoretical problem. This is rooted in deep questions of how roles are constituted in the first place and the so-called agent-structure problem of IR and social sciences in general (i.e. how to assess the primacy of individual agency against the power of structure, and the relation between the two). (Thies 2003, 549; Breuning 2011, 16; Harnisch 2011a, 2). There are quite intricate theories for the different mechanisms of how and on what level role change happens. While the scope of this thesis does not permit a meaningful evaluation of these, I will outline the basic idea of how role change can happen, as driven by some type of role conflict.

Role change for actor

We may distinguish between two processes of how an actor assumes a role. Role-taking, is the act of assuming a role for oneself and then enacting it. Altercasting is the act of imposing a certain role onto another actor, by simply acting as if that role was in place and thus seeking to manifest the new relationship (Thies 2009, 8; Wendt 1999, 329-335). The effectiveness of altercasting will depend on factors such as the existing relationship and power dynamic between the actors. As roles always imply counter-roles to be meaningful, the processes of role-taking and altercasting will naturally often intertwine. In a general constructivist, co-constitutive understanding, roles are inherently relational and structurally determined. At the same time, states play a role in shaping these roles through their continuous interpretation and enactment of them, reaffirming and reconstituting the social structure that the roles make up (Harnisch 2011b; 2012; Nabers 2011; Wendt 1999). This practice opens up for reconceptualization and contestation of role expectations when in any scenario, for some reason, role expectations are not aligned. “When actors acquire a new role and act accordingly to what they hold to be appropriate role behavior, they recreate the counter-roles around them, rather than adapting to the latter.” (Harnisch 2011a, 12).
Inter- and intra-role conflict is hence an important source of role change, and the processes by which the tension is resolved will generally result in new role tensions as role expectations and behaviors are redefined (Harnisch, Frank and Maull 2011, 256; Nabers 2011, 76). Role complexity and intra- and inter-role conflicts are as central driving forces in the ever-ongoing dynamic process of contestation and redefinition of states’ roles.

These dynamics of role change may apply for the aforementioned possible roles as concerns migration diplomacy as well. If we conceive of migration diplomacy as not only rational bargaining but as role performance, on the basis of shared understandings of each actor’s place and expected behavior and preferences in migration issues, there may still be room for conscious shifts through role-taking and altercasting between the actors. Typically as the result of a intra- or inter-role conflict or role strain, one state will adjust and redefine the norms and expectations tied to its role, and through actions communicate this reinvention of its place, hoping to exert reciprocal change from counter-actors, and possibly a broader change in how the roles of for instance a “transit state” or “refugee hub” are understood by all actors.

Co-constitutive process: Change of structure

A key finesse of the role theory perspective is its emphasis on the constitutive nature of role performance, i.e. that role change can imply both a change in a specific actor’s role (changes on a unit level) and have a structural effect (changes on a system-level); as roles are ever-developing “emerging social objects” (Harnisch 2011a, 38a). Through this view, roles – understood as social position for an actor as well as a distribution of social categories – are amenable to change as they are continuously interpreted, formalized through speech and behavior, as well as subsequent institutionalization. New roles can emerge and old roles be reinterpreted. Role performance is given a more important place as we adopt a co-constitutive view on agent and structure, as agents “constitute and transform roles through their actions … [which] are also influenced by intersubjectively shared role conceptions (Nabers 2011, 79). Some of the resulting intra-role conflicts may relate to disagreement over the larger structure of international institutions, where the conflict hence may be of particularly formative importance for the institutional re-constituting of role expectations overall (Harnisch, Frank and Maull 2011, 256). Of course, institutions and the institutionalization of roles, through cooperations and interstate interaction, through international organizations or bilateral agreements, also serve to reflect as well as solidify and shape roles of states – both for the states in question and as constituting the roles and structures of the international system writ large.
**Domestic level**

The foundational reason for the shift may be due to either international dynamics or indeed domestic or cross-border developments. As alluded to throughout in this discussion, NRCs – even if principally held by individual decision-makers – reflect the collective social and cultural norms within the state in question. A complete role theory hence may have to include analyzing role formation processes on a domestic level as well. States are social structures too, with processes that help shape a state’s role conception and foreign policy behavior in dialogue with international processes. This is particularly true in democratic states, that are more open to contestation, but may also take place between factions of a decision-making elite in autocratic states (Cantir and Kaarbo 2012). Precisely when and how domestic contestation of foreign policy roles take place remains in itself an area in need of further theoretization within role theory (Harnisch 2012, 51-52) but it cannot in theory be ruled out as an important level and part of the ongoing constitutive process (Cantir and Kaarbo 2012; Harnisch 2012; Breuning 2011, 28-30).

### 5.3 Summary: Theorizing Migration Diplomacy from a Role Theory Framework

A role theory of migration diplomacy assumes the existence of migration diplomacy-related roles, or at least expectations and norms regarding migration diplomacy given a state’s general foreign policy role. As with all other foreign policy behavior, states will engage in migration diplomacy in a way that they perceive as congruent with their role. These are largely pre-determined on a social level, though not exclusively. Role conceptions and expectations are contestable ground, particularly in a field as emerging and institutionally fragmented as international migration governance and practices of migration diplomacy. Preexisting material and ideational power structures play in here, affecting the ability of different actors to prescribe their role as well as counter-roles and the norms and expectations that go with them. The co-constitutive relationship between agent and structure implies that role performance is key for (re-)defining and institutionalizing roles. Hence, migration diplomacy is not only the practice of migration-related foreign policy in accordance with one’s role of the state, but also the explicit or implicit challenging of the proposed role expectations, through enactment and steps towards institutionalization. The benefits of such a view on migration diplomacy, as compared to that of Adamson and Tsourapas (2018), will now briefly be outlined.
5.3.1 On material structuralism
Material-structurally determined migration positions, the position as primarily migration-receiving, sending or transit state, obviously factors into how a state engages in migration diplomacy. From a role theory perspective, however, one has the benefit of conceptualizing an ideational, interpretive factor to this structural position, no longer assuming a merely material structuralist view. While not rejecting the significance of de facto migration patterns for a general categorization of migration roles, we can now also see them as interpreted and performed by the actors. This opens up for more nuanced variations of these migration roles. It also retains a structural view of states engaging in migration diplomacy with shared understandings of how one acts primarily from a position of receiving, sending or transit state, which can carry with it a certain division of labor, acceptable interests and behavior and so on. This is also open to contestation, capturing the ability of each state to interpret and perform an assumed role. Hence, it underlines the foreign policy agency of each state in actively engaging in its migration diplomacy, while also theorizing the thick socially and ideationally contingent context.

5.3.2 Beyond rationalist actors
As migration issues do not particularly easily lend themselves to analyses conceiving of a clear-cut rationalist “logic of consequence”, as their politicization comes with their association to many sensitive concerns of normative and social issues and its complexity challenges cost-benefit-analyses, role theory instead assumes that states will often act in accordance with what they see as appropriate and consistent for their role. Rather than a rational, orderly idea of explicit objectives, states can here be assumed as acting on grounds of tacit, socialized understandings, “working knowledge”, of what they should do, want and have developed a habit of doing (Rosenau 1987, 54-55). Even when a state acts from a seemingly clear-cut security-driven or economically rational agenda, as certainly can also be the case, a role theory view highlights that these priorities and the framing of the issue are also guided by the norms asserted in the overall role set of a state. Acting publicly on that logic will also serve to reify and further institutionalize that perspective (such as processes of securitization of irregular migration). While the emotive side of international politics remains an elusive concept, role theory more meaningfully taps into issues like ontological security, stable sense of self on a societal level, norms, fairness and dignity than a bargaining framework.

5.3.3 Multilateral settings and institutionalization
Role theory also helps us capture and bring to the fore that migration diplomacy normally (and increasingly) takes place in a complex, multilateral system of norms and institutions, where the
foreign policy behavior of a state in each migration diplomacy scenario is not an independent
bargaining affair but form part of a whole, requiring some amount of consistency and credibility in
state behavior and alignment with the states overall NRC as well as with other states view of what is
appropriate behavior. This may indeed complicate actions, setting the stage for intra- and inter-role
conflicts and implicit negotiation of role expectations and the relations between different counter-
roles. The developments in the field of global migration governance and emerging attempts at
institutionalization and norm establishment on how states ought to interact regarding migration,
should suggest an increasing importance of roles. The role theory approach also places greater
emphasis on informal and social structures in the international system as constitutive, which will be
prevalent even when formal, explicit political or legal structures are weak or absent. Even without a
concerted global institution and regime in place for migration, various regional and bilateral
cooperation frameworks can normalize and establish certain models of division of labor and
responsibilities of states within different positions in regional or global migration flows – thus
helping to influence the self-image of a state as a whole on these issues. Hence, even when roles are
somewhat weak, unclear and lacking firm institutionalization, the politicization and salience of
migration as an international issues would imply the utility of a role theory perspective.

5.3.4 Multiple levels of analysis

The ability to theorize on both a domestic level, looking at an individual state’s behavior, and on a
and system-level, is argued to be a strength of role theory, dynamically bridging FPA and IR with
more theorizing (Thies and Breuning 2012; Thies 2009, 15). Relatedly, it can help theorize the
agent-structure problem in new, more refined ways (Thies 2009, 22). Both states internally and the
international system are interrelated social systems. Role theory implies the need for at times
investigating the domestic level in role formation processes, and agreement between internal and
external role conceptions. For the analysis of migration diplomacy, however, one must be careful
not to muddle the distinction between migration diplomacy (using migration-related tools as part of
foreign policy diplomatic tools for migration-related goals) and wholly internal, domestic migration
policy issues.
6. Migration Diplomacy as Role-Laden: The Case of Morocco

I will now exemplify my argument with a brief illustrative case of Morocco’s primary migration diplomacy practices in recent years vis-à-vis its main counterparts, namely Europe (the EU) and a number of sub-Saharan, primarily West African, states.\(^5\) I will discuss Morocco’s migration diplomacy firstly through the rationalist bargaining perspective of Adamson and Tsourapas (2018). I will then go on to sketch out a role theory analysis of the case, to illustrate the shifts in emphasis and differences in perspective and conclusions this entails. Due to the scope of this thesis, the complicated and multifaceted case is studied in rather broad strokes. The aim of this section is to corroborate, exemplify and substantiate the more general theoretical arguments above about the benefits of developing an explicit role theory of migration diplomacy, rather than a proper test of a theory. I will highlight how migration diplomacy can be seen as “role-laden” rather than as instances of bargaining. This will draw on tendencies and processes identified in existing literature, but recontextualized for this discussion.

**A note on methodology**

The process of observing role conceptions is not simple or straight-forward, even in a more proper role analysis from existing role frameworks (which in this case would be premature as regards migration diplomacy specifically, and beyond the scope of this thesis). The challenge comes from the fact that “[b]y definition, informal sources of behavior are rooted in predispositions that are both undocumented and habitual” (Rosenau 1987, 49). The methods and sources used for observing and inferring NRCs vary in the literature and do not follow a definitive methodology (Thies and Nieman 2017, 41ff). Similar to Thies and Nieman (2017), I will draw on relevant existing empirical studies to interpretatively identify these dynamics as they may be in play for Morocco. As Thies and Nieman (2017) discuss, there are distinct advantages in using secondary sources such as existing academic studies. With this approach, one’s own country-specific expertise does not (as clearly) limit the range of available cases and quality of analysis. This allows me to focus on the theoretical points to be made and the theoretical illustration the case will serve. Many studies may analyze behavior, identities and preferences in ways that imply a tacit role-like perspective, or at least

\(^5\) To simplify matters, I will not differentiate this further for the purpose of this brief analysis. As previously mentioned, an actor such as the EU can for all practical purposes be treated much like a state at least in this schematic view of migration diplomacy. Similarly, this section does not allow for a detailed discussion of the different sub-Saharan sending states in question and their different relations to Morocco.
present a view quite amenable to role theory (Thies and Nieman 2017, 45).

6.1 Background: Migration for Morocco

Throughout the second half of the 20th century, Morocco has been a country of major emigration, an emigration which over the decades has diversified in terms of destination countries and origin region within Morocco (Berriane, de Haas and Natter 2015). France stands out as the most significant European host of Moroccan nationals, where Morocco has historically functioned as a supplier of low-skilled workers (de Haas and Vezzoli 2013, 1052), and Spain and Italy are other significant host countries, but Moroccans today constitute “one of the largest and most dispersed migrant communities in Europe” (de Haas 2014).

Remaining one of the world’s leading emigration countries, since around the turn of the millennium Morocco has experienced an increasing amount of transit migration and immigration (de Haas and Vezzoli 2013; de Haas 2014). Major immigration categories include migrants from African states (notably West African countries and the Democratic Republic of the Congo) using Morocco as a transit state seeking to enter Europe (a significant number of whom settle long-term or permanently in Morocco instead) as well as workers and students, refugees and irregular migrants from the region and from other parts of Asia and the Middle East (notably Syrians) (Berriane, de Haas and Natter 2015). Emigration has remained consistently higher than the transit and immigration in net numbers, though it has been less openly welcomed from the European side since the 1970s and made more difficult since the 1990s, particularly since the 2008 recession (Natter 2013; Berriane, de Haas and Natter 2015).

Following regional unrest after the Arab uprisings of 2011 and the so-called refugee crisis from 2015, stemming irregular migration has been an increasing priority for the EU and hence a chief issue in EU-Moroccan relations (Abderrahim 2019b). Current and recent Moroccan-European negotiations and cooperation on migration issues notably include cooperation on strengthened border control, ongoing drawn-out negotiations for a readmission agreement and other proposed arrangements through which Morocco assists European countries in restricting irregular migration. On the international level, Morocco has been actively engaged in UN efforts for advancing global dialogue and governance on migration; for instance through co-chairing the 2017-2018 Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) and hosting the 2018 United Nations’ International Conference on Migration where the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration was
6.2 A Structural Bargaining View of Morocco’s Migration Diplomacy

To reiterate, the conceptualization and theoretical framework of Adamson and Tsourapas (2018) starts with the assumption that states engage in migration diplomacy from their specific material position as either sending state, receiving state or transit state, hence practicing emigration, immigration or transit migration diplomacy. Given their specific interests, the position of the counterpart and a host of other factors, they will then seek these certain benefits according to either a positive-sum or a zero-sum logic through bargaining and issue-linkage.

6.2.1 Morocco and Europe: Emigration and transit migration diplomacy

European countries and the EU are the main counterpart for Moroccos’ migration diplomacy in recent decades. Here, Morocco chiefly undertakes emigration diplomacy, as a sending state, as well as increasingly engaging transit migration diplomacy.

This migration diplomacy dynamic is characterized by an overall power asymmetry, in Europe’s favor. The EU is Morocco’s largest trading partner, both in terms of exports and foreign direct investments (Yildiz 2016, 168) and Morocco has an overall interests in maintaining good relations with the EU. Morocco applied for EU membership in 1987, which was rejected given that Morocco was geographically not seen as a European country (Natter 2013). Following the European Neighborhood Policy (EPN) adoption in 2005, bringing Morocco closer to the EU, Morocco has since 2008 however achieved a unique “advanced status”. This reflects the aim of bringing Morocco even closer to the union in terms of gradual access to the internal market, enhanced political dialogue and other forms of deepened cooperation. (Yildiz 2016, 168-169).

As the EU has experienced decreased demand for labor immigration and heightened security concerns regarding irregular migration, Moroccan immigration has in general been less welcome in recent decades (de Haas and Vezzoli 2013). European preoccupation today is mainly with strengthening cooperation from Morocco in helping to restrict irregular emigration and overall transit migration to Europe. In the “European Agenda on Migration” adopted in 2015 and subsequent initiatives, cooperation with third countries (i.e. transit states) for managing irregular migration is identified as a key priority (European Commission 2015). Morocco’s position as a “North-South ‘labour frontier’” (de Haas and Vezzoli 2013, 1054), while retaining its historic
interest of emigration itself, has hence created problems as well as opportunities for Morocco in its relation to the EU.

*Morocco’s emigration and transit migration diplomacy towards Europe*

The EU has used mainly economic incentives when seeking to diminish the volume of Moroccan immigration and transit migration through Morocco. From a bargaining perspective then, Morocco’s emigration diplomacy towards the EU can overall be seen as a preoccupation with maintaining the economic gains that emigration continues to play for Morocco, primarily for reducing poverty and generating income through remittances (which has indeed become a feature of Morocco’s political economy given its long history of labor emigration) and retaining its special status towards the EU for gradually accessing the European single market.

The EU has incentivized Moroccan cooperation on migration issues through ‘policy conditionality’ (Yildiz 2016). From the European side we can identify a combination of cooperative and coercive initiatives for attaining its stated goals from Morocco, in terms of readmission of irregular migrants, border security cooperation etc. in exchange for gradual access to the internal market, closer cooperation on other areas, increased mobility for certain Moroccan nationals such as high-skilled labor and students into the EU, and other financial and developmental incentives. This follows a “more-for-more” strategy from the EU side (Carrera et al. 2015) and an explicit strategy of “a fine balance of incentives and pressure” (European Council 2015).

A key form of cooperation has been in enhancing border control in Morocco. Particularly this has been evident at the now heavily enforced borders to Ceuta and Melilla, the Spanish enclaves on African soil, bordering Morocco and hence forming part of the external border of the EU Area (Carrera et al. 2019). Morocco has also adopted stricter national migration laws. Having historically turned a blind eye to irregular emigration and transit migration to Europe, Morocco adopted a new, very restrictive law on irregular emigration and immigration in 2003 (Natter 2013, 16).

The EU has for long also sought substantial cooperation with Morocco (among others) on a readmission agreement, concerning both readmission of Moroccan nationals residing as irregular immigrants in Europe and increased reception of third country nationals (both in terms of increased refugee-hosting and readmitting irregular migrants who have transited through Morocco) (European Commission 2015; Carrera et al. 2015; Abderrahim 2019b). The issue of a readmission agreement has been negotiated between the European Commission and Morocco since the early 2000s. With
little progress it was discontinued around 2010, but resumed following the parties’ Mobility Partnership of 2013, though without much substantial progress (Abderrahim 2019a, 22-23; Carrera et al. 2016). The efforts continue for the EU to get Morocco to agree to an agreement with readmission in exchange for visa facilitation for Moroccan nationals, an established issue-linking instrument for EU migration cooperation with its southern neighbors. These talks are still de facto stalled (Carrera et al. 2016, Abderrahim 2019b). While there has been a willingness to discuss a readmission agreement broadly regarding Moroccan nationals, the key point of disagreement regards the readmission also of third country nationals (Abderrahim 2019b, 16-20; Carrera et al. 2016).

Similarly difficult was the 2018 proposals from the EU for establishing “regional disembarkation arrangements” in North Africa, a novel border security initiative to hinder irregular maritime migration from ever reaching European shores. These were to be platforms established in Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria, which would receive and accommodate irregular migrants intercepted at sea, with the EU bearing the costs and compensating the partner states (EU 2018). This idea was starkly rejected by Morocco (and its neighbors), as an unwanted task that they did not want relegated to them. Apart from the tangible costs of accommodating such an initiative, the concern also regards the perceived lack of “sovereignty and fairness” with regards to division of responsibility and labor (Abderrahim 2019b, 17-18).

6.2.2 Morocco and Africa

The other primary counterparts for Morocco’s migration diplomacy are a number of West African and other sub-Saharan countries, where Morocco acts as the receiving and/or transit state. This relationship is in many ways dependent on the European pressure, requiring a balancing act of different preferences from Morocco’s side.

Vis-à-vis sub-Saharan states, Morocco has developed an increasing interest in ameliorating its relations, for economic as well as geopolitical reasons. Moroccan interest in investments and trade is increasing in the region, and Morocco has an interest in closer ties with African partners for increased regional support to its claim to Western Sahara (Abderrahim 2019b, 18). These relationships have been strained however by the Moroccan willingness to accommodate European priorities, thus enacting restrictive border policies vis-à-vis these countries and their nationals.
Following an increased preoccupation with its regional relations, as well as international and domestic criticism, Morocco has recently strengthened its rights-based perspective in migration policy, and communicated a more open and friendly stance towards African states. (Carrera et al. 2016, 6, 12).

Balancing these different relations, and seeking to improve its international image in this regard, Morocco has taken an active role on the multilateral stage in migration governance issues. Its co-chairing of the 2017-2018 GFMD and the 2018 International Conference for Migration, can be understood in this light.

6.2.3 Summary

From a bargaining perspective, we can easily see how the relationships in migration diplomacy are often asymmetrical, which will influence the outcomes but with Morocco also using emigration or transit migration diplomacy strategies to enhance its bargaining power (e.g. Greenhil 2010; Tsourapas 2018a). This has largely resulted in Morocco accommodating EU demands, but seeking other compensation for it. Morocco has had to perform a balancing act, being a regional hub but responding to shifting priorities of the most powerful party.

Morocco has not been willing to agree to every European suggestion. The readmission of third country nationals does not entail any large enough benefits for Morocco, and seemingly has so far not advanced substantially. In a reflection of the EU-Morocco dynamic, Morocco would risks having equal trouble in achieving readmission agreements with the (predominantly) sub-Saharan African states where these concerned people originate, potentially marring the regional relationships its currently seeks to strengthen (Abderrahim 2019b, 18; Yildiz 2016, 183).

Indeed, a bargaining analysis ostensibly can conceptualize and explain Morocco’s migration stance vis-à-vis its key counterparts quite clearly. Particularly this is true if one employs the less materialist, liberal rationalism – a “thin rationalism” (Fearon and Wendt 2002, 59-60) – that may include ideational interests, norms etc. As discussed, the Adamson and Tsourapas (2018) model includes these types of gains as well. Morocco’s migration diplomacy is a fine balancing act, weighing different interest in different bargaining instances. Evidently, the transit migration diplomacy is difficult to separate from the immigration or emigration diplomacy, as the distinction is muddled in practice.
6.3 A Role Theory View of Morocco’s Migration Diplomacy

A role theory approach would place greater emphasis on the social contexts within which it happens and is enabled. This allows to more closely examine how the migration issues are tied to a state’s overall self-image and place in the international and regional system and relates to a “logic of appropriateness”, complimentary to any “logic of consequence”. Within this frame, we can also expose how each instance of migration diplomacy has more lasting effects for the discourse and shared understandings of the roles, responsibilities, interests, and expected behavior of states and the norms surrounding migration and migrants. It may set in motion both international and domestic processes of contestation, that in a bargaining framework appear largely irrelevant to any one migration diplomacy scenario.

As one of the world’s foremost emigration countries, with emigration a structural feature of its political economy and culture, Morocco has arguably historically had a “sending state” role and mentality. This particularly characterizes its relationship to France, with deep cultural and post-colonial ties and a substantial diaspora, as well as other parts of Europe. (de Haas and Vezzoli 2013). In this regard, the shift in recent years towards becoming a country of increasing transit migration and immigration has taken place relatively quickly, challenging established views of what Morocco and its preoccupation with migration issues is. “[Sub-Saharan migrants’] presence confronts Moroccan society with an entirely new set of social and legal issues typical for immigration countries—issues that do not yet resonate with Morocco's self-image as an emigration country” (de Haas 2014). Quite symbolically, the reform of the country’s migration laws in 2013 included renaming the “Ministry Responsible of Moroccans Abroad”, the “Minsitry Responsible for Morroccans Abroad and Migration Affairs” (Üstübici 2018, 69).

Given this fairly rapid shift in internal and international dynamics, Morocco’s changing policies could be characterized as “role learning” i.e. coming to terms with its changing role in the region. This is a dynamic process that includes finding one’s way both for Morocco, in its domestic policies and diplomacy, and for all its counter-parts.

6.3.1 The altercasting process as transit state

If the 21st century has seen Morocco transitioning from a primordial migrant-sending state into increasingly being a “transit state”, what does this position or role mean? As a brief look on the evolution of Morocco’s migration diplomacy shows, the transit state is indeed the central role it has
been cast in and adapted to, and the exact implications of this role has been an area of significant contestation. In a role-theory terminology, the aggregate effect of the various pressures and conditionalities enacted by Europe towards Morocco in the 21st century have had the effect of Europe “altercasting” Morocco, and Morocco responding gradually in kind.

In the European approach, the transit state has been thought of as entailing close cooperation on European terms in managing, i.e. restricting, transit migration and externalizing European migration control; what Yildiz (2016) has called “Europeanization beyond Europe”. This altercasting of Morocco hence interpreted the transit state role as that of a “policeman”, “gendarme” or “watchdog” of Europe (Yildiz 2016, 184; de Haas 2014); enacted and manifest in the migration governance agreements, cooperations and migration policies of Morocco that were exerted, legitimized and normalized. Yildiz argues that the “transit country” as a concept has thus been “politically re-constructed” in the 21st century through EU migration diplomacy (2016, 201). Hence, here we see the role of “transit country” not only as a de facto position but a role, principally imposed by the significant other in a certain fashion. As noted by Üstübici, it is ironic that that term is now used for states whose migration policy is essentially characterized by their efforts to stop any transit migration (2018, 81).

The governance of irregular migration has hence been politicized for Morocco largely through the migration diplomacy of EU, as the significant other continuously influencing the policies, practices and role of Morocco on these issues (Üstübici 2018). Importantly, this shift in view of Morocco’s role regarding migration issues has implication for the discourse and policies within Morocco as well. In this view, the fairly draconian 2003 migration laws are not only a conditional response to any direct EU request, or an independent process, but a natural evolution of the new framing of the undesired, dangerous nature of irregular migration and the role of the state in fighting it. Üstübici (2018) sees a “international production of migrant illegality” as a result of these practices, where EU and other actors served to legitimize and implicitly propagate a certain view of irregular migrants which then came to influence Morocco’s NRC as a transit state both externally and internally. For a society and government with little history of managing the issues, Morocco then saw an immigration backlash and increasing focus on securitization and restrictive government policies (Natter 2013). This particularly befell sub-Saharan African migrant groups, often the target of increased discrimination, racist attacks as well as police round-ups and random forced deportation (de Haas 2014; Carrera et al. 2016, 9-10).
The political preoccupation with these categories, given its salience for European governments reflecting in its dealings with Morocco, has led to these groups receiving the most attention and dominating the domestic and regional image and discourse regarding Morocco’s migration position (Berrian, de Haas and Natter 2015). Natter (2013) has shown that the Moroccan government legitimized this by emphasizing its own state security concerns and sovereignty, portraying itself as chiefly a recipient of irregular migration from sub-Saharan Africa (Natter 2013). In essence then, even as Moroccan (irregular) emigration remained high, the irregular transit migration was the one most highly politicized and used as a defining issue for interpreting Morocco’s regional role in terms of migration diplomacy.

6.3.2 Role conflict

The Moroccan approach to its transit state role has subsequently softened, particularly as the more draconian security policies clashed with Morocco’s regional relationships to the African states whose nationals the policies befell (Cherti and Collyer 2015). A key step was taken in terms of immigration laws in 2013, as king Mohammed VI declared a new more rights-based immigration policy that opened up for regularization of immigrants residing in Morocco. Domestically, this may be seen as a “first-time acknowledgement on the part of the Moroccan government of the reality that Morocco is also becoming a country of settlement” (Berriane, de Haas and Natter 2015, 515). This also “took [Morocco’s] European interlocutors by surprise” in its rights-based approach (Berriane, de Haas and Natter 2015, 515).

Important processes of role contestation also took place on the domestic level. On the domestic level, Morocco has a notably active civil society that has engaged with immigration issues and the treatment of migrants (Berriane, de Haas and Natter 2015, 515). Beyond a human rights-perspective, the “gendarme” transit role has been rejected more widely within Moroccan discourse, seen as undermining Moroccan sovereignty and the equal standing of its people and state internationally (Abderrahim 2019b, 23). El Qadim also shows the importance of symbolic stances and emotions in the case of Moroccan-EU migration negotiations, with “dignity and (self-)respect as important motivations for their country’s policy in matters of migration and border control” (2017, 143). She finds in her interviews that “the dignity of the Moroccan people was repeatedly asserted, and often equated with, or used as a symbol for, the dignity of the State” (Ibid., 144). In the last few years, Morocco has been found to more consistently reject policies that overly frame them as an instrument of the EU, including the readmission agreement as currently proposed and the “regional disembarkation platforms” (Abderrahim 2019a, 12).
6.3.3 Role change and reinterpretation

The regional transit role regarding migration that Morocco has developed, has been actively translated into a role as a central migration governance interlocutor on the global level. In 2017-2018, Morocco co-chaired along with Germany the GFMD. The GFMD, an institution since 2007, is an important predecessor in enabling global interstate discussion on migration which helped pave the way for the more ambitious New York Declaration of 2016 and the Global Compacts of 2018 (Betts and Kainz 2017). Morocco’s hosting of the International Conference on Migration in December 2018 further showed its active part in performing the role of regional and globally important migration hub, assuming normative leadership in the issue. From a role theory perspective, these emerging forums of interstate migration dialogue and governance discussion provide a new stage where states perform and agree upon a general role for themselves in relation to migration governance issues, where conflicting positions of receiving, sending or transit state must be reconciled, or one given primacy. In other words, this substantiates migration role performance vis-à-vis a more abstract generalized other, the international community at large (or the issue-specific global migration governance community at large), rather than any significant other that distinct migration flows concern. Morocco has in this process, seeking visibility and leadership, emphasized its substantial emigration, immigration and transit migration.
7. Conclusion

Migration diplomacy, the use of migration policy and issues for foreign policy goals, or the use of diplomatic strategies for migration-related goals, has emerged as an interesting suggested concept for capturing the growing politicization of migration in interstate relations.

The conceptualization and theorizing as proposed by Adamson and Tsourapas (2018) provides a clear and manageable analytical framework for mapping out instances of migration diplomacy from a bargaining model, based on states structural positions as sending, receiving or transit countries and the different bargaining logics that characterize the process. However, the reductive nature of this approach risks overlooking a number of the more distinct features of migration as an issue of international politics. Its assumptions of rational actors and of exogenous identity and interest formation, both on the system-level and domestic level, are problematic for an issue field such as migration and its role on the international scene. Role theory may be an approach that can remedy this, by recognizing the constitutive effect of norms and institutions, endogenizing the identity and interest formation both on the systematic and domestic level, and placing greater emphasis on the institutional set-up, both formal and informal, within which migration diplomacy takes place.

The different ontologies carry implications not only for what aspects are in focus but also for how we conceptualize migration diplomacy practices. Even if principally analyzing the same subject, a role theory conceptualization will not as clearly distinguish between isolated instances of one state’s migration diplomacy practices, but see them as related and subsumed under the same role set. Furthermore, the bargaining approach is reductive to the point of obfuscating what makes migration issues distinct, challenging, and interesting. Through a brief illustrative case, I have showcased the differences of approach and perspective that each theorizing would entail. The limited scope of this thesis did regrettably not permit a thorough or structured comparison.

Future studies should more thoroughly develop a role theory of migration diplomacy, rather than the general outline presented here. Further comparisons will also serve to investigate the very utility of the migration diplomacy concept as a distinct field of study within IR, as this will rely on demonstrably idiosyncratic aspects of migration as a subject of foreign policy. Building theoretical approaches more tailored to its characteristics, such as role theory approaches, may contribute to this.
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