Introduction: "Becoming Madam Chancellor"

> Man is the hidden reference in language and culture; women can only aspire to be as good as a man; there is no point in trying to be as good as a woman.
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> Dale Spender (1984)[1]

On November 22, 2005, Angela Merkel made her way to the Sophie Charlottenburg Palace, where Federal President Horst Köhler presented her with a certificate of appointment for the chancellorship, after she had secured 397 of 611 parliamentary votes. The usual venue for presidential acts of state, Schloss Bellevue, was undergoing renovations; it was quite fitting, however, that modern Germany's first female leader got her start in the palace named for the first Prussian Queen (1688–1705). During her marriage to Frederick I, the well-educated Sophie Charlotte, Duchess of Braunschweig-Hannover, founded the Berlin Academy of Science. Equally committed to scientific progress as a former physicist, Dr. Merkel proceeded to the Bundestag, where she solemnly swore to dedicate herself "to the well-being of the German people." She promised further to "promote their welfare, protect them from harm, uphold and defend the Basic Law and the laws of the Federation, perform [her] duties conscientiously, and do justice to all," concluding her oath with the optional phrase, "so help me God."

In contrast to the orderly transition that usually follows Germany's mercifully short election campaigns, this one had not produced a done deal by the time the polls closed on September 18, 2005. Along with many other academics, foreign journalists, and party workers who had gathered at the North Rhine-Westphalian mission in Berlin, I was stunned by the official projections posted on the TV monitors at 6 pm sharp: it was a race

too close to call. Both the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats had lost votes to a number of smaller parties, but neither the Free Democratic Party (FDP) nor the Greens had garnered enough seats to join either major party as a junior partner in a "normal" coalition. During the traditional, post-election "Elephant Round" discussion televised later that evening, Social Democratic Party (SPD) Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (who had called for early elections), aggressively insisted that he would remain in power while hammering away at his shell-shocked CDU opponent: "Do you seriously think that my party will consider an offer to discuss [options] with Ms. Merkel when she says that *she* would like to be Chancellor?"[2] Although it would take another six weeks of fierce negotiations, the woman no one ever really expected to rise to the top achieved her goal.

Angela Merkel has accrued a long list of political "firsts," rendering her an exceptional leader worthy of investigation on many fronts. Not only does she stand out as the first postwar politician to have ascended the party ladder without having completed the traditional German *Ochsentour*.[3] Divorced and childless, she was the first Easterner to serve as the Federal Minister of Women and Youth, and later as Minister for the Environment, Nature and Nuclear Reactor Safety. She rose through the party ranks in less than a decade, becoming the national CDU Deputy-Secretary in 1991 and chair of the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern conservatives in 1993. Named CDU General-Secretary in 1998, she led the Opposition during the Red–Green government years; she was elected CDU party chief in 2000 and chaired the CDU/CSU Bundestag caucus (*Fraktion*) as of 2005.[4]

The 2005 elections secured Merkel's place in history as the first woman, Easterner, physicist, and even the first pastor's daughter to take charge of the world's fifth largest economy. As the youngest person to hold that office to date, she is also the only chancellor since 1949 to have led her party to a "normal" victory after managing a Grand Coalition (GC, *Gro-Ko*) for four years, featuring the two largest parties with opposing ideological orientations. In December 2013, she became the first person to head a *second* Grand Coalition, garnering 462 out of 621 Bundestag votes. Domestically speaking, Merkel thus provides a one-woman laboratory for comparing the special impact of GC politics on the chancellor's powers (2005–2009) with traditional limitations on her ability to rule under a conservative–liberal coalition of her own making (2009–2013), followed by another exceptional CDU–SPD government (2013–2017).

Given her preeminent role in European Union (EU) affairs, Angela Merkel's three terms as chancellor also supply a unique opportunity to assess the impact of changing international dynamics on her performance. Germany is clearly a country in which the past continues to shape the present, but unification marked a profound break with the post-1945 order. The end of the Cold War saw the restoration of its national sovereignty, coupled with significant EU enlargements, new forces of economic globalization, and major technological change. Merkel stands as the personal embodiment of demographic transformation processes that have taken root across the country and the continent since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. After forty years of national division, the sudden merger of two ideologically opposed polities would have generated major challenges for *any* post-1990 leader. This chancellor has also encountered multiple global crises, for example, the 2008 financial melt-down, the Fukushima disaster, the Euro crisis, and Russia's annexation of Crimea, all of which have allowed or, more accurately, required her to play a unique role in redirecting the course of European history.

Almost before the ink had dried on the 2005 interparty agreement, pundits began predicting that Merkel's first Grand Coalition would not last; completing her first term, she emerged as the voters' clear favorite during the next set of national elections.[5] Critics continued to insist throughout her second term, starting in 2009, that her conservative–liberal government was also likely to collapse. Opposition members regularly complained that "she just doesn't lead," while people in her own party attacked her for being "too presidential." Bombarded by new crises at every turn, Merkel continued to steer the ship of state with an unflappable, pragmatic, self-confident demeanor.

Shortly after she was re-elected for a third term in September 2013, the usual suspects predicted that Merkel would probably retire in 2014, as soon as she turned sixty. Reflecting on her first two stints as chancellor, one journalist noted that the need to address several crises in rapid succession "can wear down even a woman with an iron constitution and an inexhaustible appetite for work … She has led Germany for longer than anyone ever expected … but from the first day after re-election she would also be burdened with the knowledge that time is running out …"[6] Throughout his sixteen-year reign (1982–1998), Helmut Kohl encountered major anti-nuclear energy protests, mass mobilizations against Pershing II deployments, a collapsed East German economy necessitating average annual "transfers" of €140 billion, three years of unprecedented

xenophobic violence, and a widely critiqued *Reformstau* (gridlock). Yet no one had dared to suggest that the male chancellor might have been "worn down" by the time he left office at age sixty-eight.

As the country's first woman chancellor qua eastern physicist, it was inevitable that Merkel would be treated as an exotic species by the male-dominated political and media establishments during the early stages of her career. Her rapid rise to power and her effectiveness to date make it difficult to argue, however, that either her sex, her GDR upbringing, or her lack of a strong Land-level base have subjected her to serious discrimination. Indeed, one could argue that Merkel's unique experiences supplied some distinct advantages not available to other would-be women rulers. So what lessons, if any, might her three terms as a very powerful chancellor hold for the future of gender equality in Germany?

FROM "RESEARCH PUZZLE" TO CLEAR CASE: WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

Persuaded that generational change had already triggered a fundamental transformation of West German political culture by the mid-1980s, I decided to take closer look at the "national identities" of older, middle, and younger cohorts as they had evolved from 1949 through unification. In addition to drawing on forty years of survey research, I interviewed ninety members of the Bundestag and other elites through the mid-1980s.[7] By May 1989, I was ready to investigate identities on the other side of the Wall, but that project was soon overtaken by historical events. The collapse of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) made it possible for me to conduct interviews with over fifty members of the first, and last, freely elected *Volkskammer* during the summer of 1990. One of my discussion partners was a woman about my own age who had just decided to switch from physics to politics as deputy press speaker for the new prime minister, Lothar de Maizière. His primary task was to negotiate the conditions under which the GDR would cease to exist; her job was to explain that process to hordes of foreign and domestic journalists, an eye-opening experience for someone unacquainted with a free press and "fractious democracy."

Two days after my June 12 discussion with thirty-five-year-old Angela Merkel, I met with a former GDR pastor, Joachim Gauck, who had secured a parliamentary seat on the Bündnis 90/Greens ticket. My first interviewee moved on to become chancellor of a united Germany;

the second served as federal president, after directing the agency tasked with evaluating "100 miles of *Stasi* (secret police) files." Although I have moved from the rank of Assistant to Associate to Curators' Professor over the years, I still occasionally wonder what went wrong with my own career strategy. Had I known back then that my discussion partner would become "the World's Most Powerful Woman" ten times over, I would have asked very different questions, and maybe even pursued political office myself.

I have followed Merkel's career trajectory since 1990, reading every book written about her to date during my summer research leaves at the Humboldt University and the Bundestag Library in Berlin. Curiously, all but one of those texts have been written by journalists.[8] Most offer biographical treatments, question her leadership style, or critique her "lack of vision." Few, if any, have assessed Merkel's actual *performance* in ways that incorporate the diverging imperatives imposed by different coalition configurations, a changing party landscape, and disruptions of the global sort. Noteworthy exceptions include studies addressing broad policy changes under Merkel's first two governments.[9] This is one factor that inspired me to write a scholarly book on this fascinating political personality.

Second, I find it quite curious that no feminist scholars in Germany have taken up this book challenge, perhaps out of a reluctance to identify with a woman whose party has long espoused a gender regime limited to *Kinder, Küche und Kirche*.[10] Still waiting for a first woman president in the United States, I am less encumbered by party-political considerations. It is impossible to predict *a priori* what leadership style, mobilization strategies, or policy priorities any powerful woman is likely to pursue. Because prescribed gender norms differ from country to country, as well as from North to South and East to West, the only way to explain why some identity traits prevail over others in any woman's success is to execute detailed case studies. My qualitative approach infers that "success," by definition, is context- and policy-specific.

A third reason for this book derives from my earlier work on youth movements, generational dynamics, and political cultural change in both East and West Germany prior to 1990. My familiarity with the ideological, societal, and economic conditions that shaped Angela Merkel during the first thirty-five years of her life, renders me better equipped than many mainstream scholars to interpret the motives, values, priorities, and behaviors evinced by this particular chancellor. Having spent nearly eighteen years living in Germany as a scholar, my

peculiar insider–outsider status enables me to assess the "everyday" consequences of complex policy processes. Several of my German academic peers note, only half in jest, that I understand their West–East identities better than they do.

While my research has been informed by many conceptual frameworks utilized by comparative and gender politics experts, this will not be a theoretically driven or hypothesis-heavy work. My approach is unabashedly qualitative and eclectic, offering *thick description* and *process tracing*; I draw on interdisciplinary sources covering historical events, socioeconomic data, cultural variables, gender dynamics, and policy analysis. Those sources include Merkel's speeches, government publications, campaign materials, media reports, refereed publications, formal interviews, and hundreds of conversations with expert colleagues. With all due respect to countless scholars investigating women's paths to power, the institutional barriers they face, the stereotypical role expectations that hinder their progress, and new mechanisms equalizing their participation in politics, my primary interest lies in analyzing the ways in which *one woman has actually used her power* to improve the human condition across three terms.

My final motive for writing this book began with an ostensible paradox: having completed her first stint as Grand Coalition leader in 2009, Merkel enjoyed great popularity among voters and was well respected on the international stage, yet German pundits routinely described her as weak, faltering, and doomed to fail. I recalled the words of George W. Bush, who complained in 2000 of being regularly "misunderestimated" as president of the United States.[11] His lack of rhetorical skills aside, the term Bush used suggested an intensified form of *being underestimated*.

As a woman operating in a world historically reserved for powerful men, Merkel has encountered more than her fair share of skepticism and resistance. As an inexperienced "thirty-something" assuming a Cabinet post in 1990, she was quickly written off by established politicians as "Kohl's Girl." By the time she was sworn in as chancellor, she had accumulated eight years of ministerial experience, moved up the CDU executive ladder at warp speed, and led the conservative opposition in the Bundestag for four years. By the end of her first term as chancellor, Merkel had already been designated "the World's Most Powerful Woman" (WMPW) four times straight, yet her adversaries kept insisting that she lacked vision, charisma, and leadership skills. That was the puzzle: how could someone so successful be accused of "not leading?"

Looking back, it seems that her initial WMPW rankings had a lot to do with the fact that she was the first female chancellor, running a very big country with a very strong economy. *Forbes* selection metrics include net worth, company revenues, GDP, media presence, potential spheres of influence, and one's impact inside or outside a personal "field." Europeans awarded Barack Obama the Nobel Peace Prize shortly after he was first inaugurated, largely because they were happy to see the Bush years end, not because the new president had really stopped any wars at that point. Merkel did not evince the same leadership skills back then that we all take for granted today.

My original plan was to cover Merkel's first two terms, allowing me to compare how she performed under two governmental configurations, one involving an *exceptional* Grand Coalition (CDU/CSU–SPD), the other a *traditional* dominant party–junior partner majority (CDU/CSU–FDP). Critics continued to underestimate Merkel's popularity with voters well into her second term, as well as her uncanny ability to move hardliners to embrace societal reforms that they had vociferously resisted for decades. By 2013, however, the original puzzle had evaporated into the thin air of "polycrisis": given her tough stance on austerity policies, her response to climate change, and her willingness to chastise Vladimir Putin over the Ukraine, few could question this chancellor's leadership.[12]

The onset of her third term provided the breathing space I needed to focus on the larger "lessons" Merkel had ostensibly drawn from each crisis she encountered. As one of Europe's longest serving leaders since 1990, she has certainly juggled more than her fair share of global messes, so she has obviously learned a lot. Her third term has seen a rational, *pragmatic* Merkel taking some very *principled* human rights stances, regarding asylum seekers and Chinese dissidents, for example. These decisions have required a degree of self-confidence and international clout that she simply did not possess in 2009. She would be the first to admit, as her earlier interviews with Herlinde Koelbl attest, that she is a very different person today than when she first came to politics. At present, Angela Merkel really *is* the World's Most Powerful Woman, although given her favorite virtue – humility – she probably would not have minded ceding her title to Hillary Rodham Clinton for a few years, had the 2016 US presidential elections ended differently.

Neither *power* nor *leadership* are static components of governance, especially within democratic systems. Both require constant adjustment to changing political stakeholders, policy contexts, and environmental

conditions. This study presents Merkel's three terms as an extraordinary learning process that has allowed at least one woman to make a significant difference in a united Germany: hence, the emphasis on "becoming" Madam Chancellor. Although she refuses to label herself a feminist, I maintain that Merkel has done more to modernize gender roles in united Germany than all of her predecessors. Exposed to a very different gender regime during her "35 years in the waiting room of GDR history," the chancellor has relied on female cabinet members like Ursula von der Leyen, Annette Schavan, and Maria Böhmer to leverage EU policies in ways that have opened doors to the balanced participation of women and men in political, economic, and community life.

I argue that the secret of Chancellor Merkel's success to date rests with three factors: first, although she was initially "misunderestimated" by political elites at home, she has derived strength from the unprecedented respect she enjoys among key actors abroad. Second, she has learned how to leverage domestic and supranational developments better than any previous chancellor, largely as a function of significant political and demographic changes across Europe. My third contention is that both her eastern socialization and her training as a physicist have outfitted her with hybrid political values and a unique set of analytical skills that make it very difficult for even her sharpest rivals to out-strategize her. As a former CDU official opined over a decade ago, "she learns faster than others think."[13]

THEORETICAL FRAMING, CORE CONCEPTS, AND THE PROBLEM OF "N = 1"

Merkel's tenth year in power, 2015, marked the seventieth anniversary of Germany's unconditional surrender, the fiftieth anniversary of diplomatic relations with Israel, the twenty-fifth anniversary of unification, and various centennial commemorations linked to the First World War. As a western born, eastern educated woman, Angela Merkel appears to embody, literally and figuratively, a wide array of social modernization processes that have reshaped the nation since 1949. While her contributions to this transformation are rooted in broader processes of European integration, globalization, and generational change, I believe that one can disaggregate her personal efforts to shape policy outcomes from those external forces. In order to do so, I need to present a bigger picture of what policies prevailed before and after unification. As a result, this is not only a book about Angela

Merkel; it also amounts to a brief history of the Federal Republic of Germany since unification.

Drawing on *historical institutionalism* in a broad sense, my study incorporates postwar background, institutional detail, and policy analysis testifying to continuity and change in the united Berlin Republic. Institutional factors include the formal and informal powers of the chancellor as they have evolved under two types of coalitions, as well as the changing nature of Bund–Länder relations. Proportional representation and the rise of new parties have rendered German state governments testing sites for kaleidoscopic coalitions not seen in the United States. I moreover concentrate on substantive issues ranging from the convergence of East–West identities and changing German–Israeli relations to Merkel's role in the Eurozone crisis, her orchestration of a major energy turn-around, and her efforts to expand citizenship rights to millions held hostage to the "foreigner" label for four decades. Each of her three terms has exposed Merkel to different coalition dynamics, offering at least a few control variables for assessing the impact of her unique socialization experiences.

A second construct framing this project, *intersectionality*, raises the core question: *what difference does difference make?* Intersectionality stresses "intra-category diversity – that is, the tremendous variation within categories such as … 'woman-hood' … and their role in politics …"[14] The intersectionality paradigm uses the life experiences of "real women" to examine the ways in which gender interacts with race/ethnicity, religion, class, and other traits that shape an individual's access to, use of, and (re)presentation of power. One cannot simply take note of Merkel's sex, add her religion, her profession, and finally stir in her "eastern-ness" to theorize about her performance as a leader; for starters, "each social division has a different ontological basis, which is irreducible to other social divisions."[15] Working with a sample of one poses a further problem: counterfactuals are of little value in detailed case studies, the aim of which is to establish a significant baseline. Men are also subject to intersectionality, but, as Louise Davidson-Schmich observes, few scholars analyze the gender experiences of males.[16] The only other German to head a Grand Coalition, Kurt Georg Kiesinger (1966–1969), adopted a meditating style as chancellor that differed significantly from the "dominant leader" approach he embraced as Minister-President of Baden-Württemberg.[17]

Without attempting to review, critique, or reinvent the existing feminist–theoretical literature, my study also builds on the concept of

women's political *representation*. I focus on three types – descriptive, substantive, and transformative – each of which I associate with a different kind of "extreme makeover."[18] The first type, *descriptive representation*, goes beyond the numbers; I use it here to deconstruct the physical images and stereotypes inflicted on female candidates for high political office (Chapter 1). While she was initially reluctant to campaign as a woman, much less as a feminist, Merkel's status as Germany's first female chancellor has rendered the executive branch more representative in numerical terms. Although women had already achieved "critical mass" (over 30 percent) in the Bundestag by the time she took charge, Merkel has significantly expanded the roles available to women at the national executive level, though only five women have headed state governments to date. This raises the question as to whether, given her unusual staying power as a three-term chancellor, Merkel has helped to eliminate long-standing gender stereotypes at the highest levels of government, enhancing the prospects for parity democracy.[19]

The second mode, *substantive representation*, pertains to women's ability to reshape policy in the legislative sense. Justified or not, female politicians are expected to do a better job of advocating for conjoined *women-and-children*; male leaders are rarely expected to do special things for all men. Female executives are perceived as natural experts in matters of health, education, and family, but those who actively pursue feminist policies are often accused of favoring "special interests." The question here is whether *this* female chancellor has indeed produced better policies for women.

The evidence is positive so far: "Angie" has bridged the gap between antithetical East–West gender regimes, for example, through policies supporting the reconciliation of work and family life.[20] She gradually embraced a quota system to increase women's presence on corporate management boards, leveraging EU mandates against Germany's looming demographic deficit. Her tough approach to the Euro crisis, however, has trapped more women outside Germany in part-time or precarious work. What are the trade-offs? Should we really expect Merkel, just because she is a woman, to be more gender-sensitive to policy consequences than her predecessors?

A third type, *symbolic representation*, invokes the reconstruction of women's proper place in society, public and private. Questions here center on the extent to which Merkel's life experiences have led her to open up new spaces for women and men, even if her motives disappoint orthodox feminists. I prefer to label this *transformative representation*,