

Imagining the European Union: gender and digital diplomacy in European external relations

The EU has historically sought to project outwards its identity, values and *raison d'être* during times of uncertainty and crisis. One of the core values stated to be at the heart of the EU's identity is gender equality. Yet, whilst gender equality features more visibly in the EU's external discourse as it seeks to position itself as a global leader in equality and human rights, the internal challenge posed by crisis presents a real obstacle to future developments in this area. This article examines digital diplomacy, specifically twitter presence, as a discursive site for constituting meaning. We thus take the digital space afforded by Twitter as a site where the EU's internal and external identity is constructed in a process of articulation and contestation. Digital diplomacy is now a salient part of public diplomacy, increasingly prioritised over 'traditional' approaches. Using data gathered from Twitter on the EU's 60th anniversary and International Women's Day in 2017 this paper provides the first in-depth study of the EU's approach to digital diplomacy. We find the marginalisation of gender issues from the EU's core narratives bringing into question the place of gender equality as a core value of the EU.

Keywords: gender, digital diplomacy, EU, Normative Power Europe, crisis

Introduction

As noted in the introduction to this special issue, the EU Global Strategy opens by stating that “We live in times of existential crisis, within and beyond the European Union” (EU 2016, 7). Whether real or imagined, political and media discourse has further reinforced this notion (Muehlenhoff et al, 2019). The EU’s normative credentials were significantly shaken as a result of the 2007 financial crisis, this impact of which has been wide reaching, cutting across the full spectrum of EU policy action and competence. As a result the EU and its member states have been struggling to move from a reactive to a strategic mode of policy-making, turning what started as a financial crisis into a deep existential crisis about the very identity of the organisation. The interconnected nature of this process, though contested, can be said to include an economic (financial), social (the rise of Euroscepticism), political (Brexit), security (refugees) and rights based (LGBTQI and gender) dimension. The position of the EU as a political and economic power is therefore subject to a range of internal and external challenges for the project of European integration.

‘Crises’ are never an entirely exogenously driven phenomena. Rather they are constituted discursively by both policy actors and the researcher who study these processes (Manners and Rosamond, 2018: 28). This symbiotic relationship helps to construct dominant discourses about the impact of key policy decisions and the interests that are safeguarded, or prioritised, in the process (Cavaghan and O’Dwyer, 2018). So while the dominant narrative of the economic crisis has largely been focused on sovereign debt and the financial sector, it has almost entirely erased ‘the complex dynamics of race, class, gender and legal status that have helped to determine which groups have been hardest hit by the crisis’ (Emejulu and Bassel, 2018: 110). In this context, whereas the pathway out of the impasse positioned the interests of high earners front and centre (O’Dwyer, 2018), the impact of the crisis on women of colour has been long and drawn out but erased from mainstream accounts of crisis and recovery (Emejulu and Bassel, 2018: 110; Cavaghan and O’Dwyer, 2018). This is important for our analysis here as it defines the boundaries of inclusion, exclusion and belonging to the idea of Europe. It so doing it reproduces a specific forms of European identity, which prioritises liberal forms of equality over intersectionality.

Crises are, by their very nature, a break in the status quo. As such they can provide opportunities for renewal, rather than retrenchment (as the Global Strategy also notes). After all, the integration of Europe as a political project was born out of a political crisis that required new

ways to restructure the political economy of Europe. Sixty years after the signing of the Treaties of Rome, discussions about another or a different Europe abound, drawing specifically attention to the need to return to core values, their role in driving the process and developing a more inclusive vision of European integration (Manners and Rosamond, 2018). Much of the recent critical literature on crisis has explored how this discursive frame requires, and legitimises, extra ordinary measures to re-establish the “status quo ante” (Walby, 2015). Less attention is paid to the impact of the crisis on the EU’s identity, particularly as a norm entrepreneur and a gender actor. The EU’s ability to find a pathway through this juncture will determine the organisation’s future position in the global order. This article seeks to interrogate whether, and if so how, the EU has sought to position gender equality through its digital diplomacy in the context of crisis. In so doing, we will examine the ways in which this component of the EU’s foundational narrative is deployed as it seeks to find a way forward out of this crises.

It would seem obvious that at critical junctures the EU and its constituent parts would seeks to rearticulate and reassert foundational norms as a way to assert its common purpose or *esprit de corps* (Dingott Alkopher, 2018; Walby, 2018). As Macrae (2010: 157) pointed out, gender equality is a core component of the mythologization of the EU’s foundational values. This institutional narrative is based on the inclusion of the principle of equality between men and women in the Treaty of Rome, and reinforced by the Treaty of Amsterdam which mandated gender the inclusion of a gender perspective in all EU policy areas (Gender Mainstreaming). The key claim by European institutions and officials is that equality not only continues to be relevant to the European project today, it is something the EU is actively pursuing through a range of policy initiatives, e.g. the Gender Action Plan II and the 2018 WPS Strategy(Guerrina et al, 2018: 252). This process of mythologization, Macrae (2010:171) argues, it intended to “increase loyalty and legitimacy among European women”. However, it has proved largely unsuccessful because the reality remains that the EU is not a gender equal polity (Macrae, 2010: 171).

The EU often draws on such normative discourses as a vehicle for European security policy (Stern, 2011; Guerrina and Wright, 2016; Guerrina et al, 2018; Ansorg and Haastrup, 2018). Digital diplomacy is an important platform for articulating the EU’s identity and a tool at the disposal of the European institutions for reinforcing the core messages included in key policy documents. Perhaps more significantly, digital diplomacy has become a salient site for the

performance of international diplomacy as states and international organisations have increased their use of social media in order to project their influence and reach in managing public affairs (Crilley, 2016; Wright, 2019). This trend thus represents something of a transformation in diplomatic practice, altering not just the methods but the meaning of diplomacy, with the potential to increase transparency and accountability of both outcomes and process (Bjola 2016: 2). Digital diplomacy has changed the way in which governments and international organisations seek to share and manage messages, with social media enabling the circumnavigation of the traditional routes for information dissemination through the media and to engage directly with consumers (Crilley 2016: 55). This makes it particularly suited to supporting public diplomacy efforts.

Our focus here then is on digital diplomacy as public diplomacy. We are interested not in the EU's diplomatic relations with other states, but in how it seeks to engage with broader publics and issues. Public diplomacy has been seen as 'the Cinderella of the EU's global engagement' (Manners and Whitman 2013), however, the EEAS's recent investment in digital diplomacy requires us to reassess this claim (Mann, 2015). There is therefore considerable value in an in-depth analysis of the use of Twitter as a digital diplomacy tool. All the more so, given social media has the potential to allow the EU to engage with citizens directly, rather than through the media as a mediator (Crilley, 2016: 55). While analysing the reception of digital diplomacy by different consumers and audiences is beyond the scope of this article, what we can do is analyse the way the EU seeks to project itself in the digital sphere during a time of crisis. This will in turn allow us to explore the centrality of gender equality, as a foundational norm, to the way the EU constructs and projects its external identity.

We start from the assumption that the way we research and study the EU is inextricably linked to ontological assumptions about the very nature of the EU. In this context, the way we study the EU shapes the way we understand and determines what is deemed to be sufficiently important/significant to be the subject of enquiry (Guerrina *et al.*, 2018: 253). At a time when the very essence of the European project is coming under question, understanding how the organisation is positioning core values helps us to understand the future direction of travel for gender politics in Europe. Our focus here is on gender equality specifically because *if* it is a foundational value of the EU, then even during times of crisis it should be articulated in digital diplomacy. Moreover, as has been argued elsewhere, "gender relations are a significant dimension of the remaking of Europe in the crisis" (Walby, 2018: 318) and digital diplomacy

is a key site for the EU to articulate its response to crisis (Mann, 2015). We also know that responses to crisis often have gendered and racialised impacts (Emejulu and Bassel, 2018), with gender equality side-lined (Ahrens and Vleuten, 2019; Guerrina and Murphy, 2016), even if crisis can also offer an opportunity to reaffirm core values (Muehlenhoff et al, 2019). Other recent studies have found the marginalisation of gender equality or its absence as a strategic priority for the EU (Walby, 2018).

Our primary research question therefore asks: has gender equality been integrated into the EU's digital diplomacy during this crisis period? In order to address this question, we consider both the nature of the EU's approach to digital diplomacy and how the EU projects itself as a gender actor through International Women's Day and the EU's 60th anniversary (EU60) in 2017. We have chosen this particular year because it marked the 60th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome, an opportunity for EU to reaffirm its core values and reassert its position as a normative power in face of ongoing crises. Our case studies offer the opportunity to ascertain if, and how, gender equality is integrated into the EU's approach to digital diplomacy. We focus specifically on key narratives produced on Twitter to mark the occasions. Twitter is a discursive space for constituting meaning and as such a key site for the contestation of the EU's internal and external identity (Mann, 2015). Indeed, tweets "can provoke strong online and offline reactions, potentially inciting or exacerbating political crises" (Duncombe, 2019). The EU60 is an obvious place to explore how the EU articulates its role as a gender actor, and *whether* gender equality remains a foundational value of the EU. International Women's Day is a site where the EEAS has an obvious opportunity to articulate its role as an advocate for gender equality and allows us to assess how the EU understands itself as a gender actor.

In analysing the EU's approach to digital diplomacy, this article both draws on and contributes to the burgeoning literature on the gendered nature of EU politics and external affairs, along with the other papers forming this Special Issue. It also critically interrogates the normative underpinning of the EU and the value placed on gender equality through an interrogation how this principle is projected externally in the EEAS's digital diplomacy footprint (see also Sloomaeckers, 2019 in this special issue on LGBT Rights). The article proceeds as follows. First, we introduce our methodology and dataset before introducing twitter as a digital diplomacy tool. Next, we consider what gendering Normative Power Europe tells us about the place of gender in EU external relations, which should require an active engagement with core values (including gender equality) for the EU to project power internationally. We therefore

consider the EU's commitment to the global Women, Peace and Security agenda stemming from UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and resulting commitment to mainstream gender across the EEAS's functions. Our high-level overview of the institutional support and obstacles to the EEAS's engagement with digital diplomacy contextualises the argument we make that gender has remained siloed and separated from the core approach. Finally, we examine the two case studies of the EEAS's digital diplomacy surrounding International Women's Day and the EU60 in 2017 on Twitter. Our analysis provides a snapshot of the EEAS approach to digital diplomacy, which contributes to our understanding of the value placed on gender equality by the EU.

Methodology and dataset

This article draws on a dataset of tweets collected from February to August 2017, the period incorporating and leading up to International Women's Day on the 8th March 2017 and EU60 on the 25th March 2017. The relatively small volume of tweets available enabled us to collect them manually through each corresponding twitter account (see Table 1). We identified whether content was original or a retweet for each user, enabling us to identify how the user was approaching each event and provide further context for our analysis of the discourse of the tweets.

Our analysis focuses on the following accounts: the core EEAS account (@EU_EEAS); the centrally supported account of Vice President/High Representative Federica Mogherini (@FedericaMog) and the personally managed account of the Principal Advisor on Gender and on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, Mara Marinaki (@MaraMarinakiEU). Our analysis therefore covers both an institutional account and two individual accounts from key EEAS actors, the former centrally supported and the latter not. By comparing the way each was managed and contribute to public debates around EU60 and IWD provides a means to assess just who is speaking about gender issues in the external sphere. For the purposes of this analysis original tweets are those authored by these accounts or retweets of other user's content with a caption or comment added. Retweets are content directly retweeted without comment. We identified International Women's Day content as that referring explicitly to the day or using the '#womensday' hashtag and for EU60 we deem all content using the '#eu60' hashtag to be relevant (see Table 1). It should also be noted that tweets deleted before our collection date are not included in the dataset, and while there are

likely to be relatively few deleted tweets (if any) our sample reflects only tweets the EEAS was prepared to uphold as an integral part of its digital narrative.

Table 1: Tweets and retweets collected

Event / account	EEAS	Federica Mogherini	Mara Marinaki	Total
EU60	19	12	0	31
International Women’s Day	10	2	13	25
Total	28	14	13	56

Twitter as a digital diplomacy tool

The versatility of online media platforms has opened up space for debates on political participation and citizenship (Ferra and Nguyen, 2017: 413). Twitter has a ‘human-centric’ approach which sets it apart from other social media platforms (Porter, 2009). The platform lends itself to being much more than a one-way broadcast medium, and is premised on engagement. Twitter therefore seems to offer to opportunity to move beyond traditional engagement in areas such as diplomacy and political campaigning (Usherwood and Wright, 2017; Duncome, 2019; Fountaine et al, 2019). Both appear to be areas where the use of Twitter could have transformative potential, a tool for a engaging directly with constituents and citizens. Yet, in practice the results have been somewhat mixed. For political campaigning, Twitter has largely been used as a broadcast medium to promote established positions, rather than for engagement with citizens or other actors, which might support a more transparent democratic process (Usherwood and Wright, 2017; Kim and Park, 2012; Graham et al., 2016: 774).

Existing literature on Twitter and diplomacy appears on the surface to present a different picture. The platform has provided a space for both communication and relationship building between different actors. For example between the foreign ministers of Iran and the US to resolve a dispute over a territorial incursion in 2016 (Duncombe, 2017). Our case studies of the EU’s use of digital diplomacy for the EU60 and International Women’s Day are representative of the more ‘day-to-day’ use of digital diplomacy as public diplomacy, rather than high stakes politics or attempts to provoke a reaction. However, this provides a useful point from which to

interrogate whether the utility of Twitter as an engagement tool has carried over into other forms of digital diplomacy.

Public diplomacy, with digital diplomacy as a core part of it, is increasingly important in a world where traditional diplomacy is seen to be less effective and therefore in relative decline (Cooper, 2013: 9). The link between the digital sphere and 'soft power' (Bjola, 2016), makes the use of Twitter in public diplomacy an important site to examine. However, even more than in the case of traditional diplomacy, a clear and distinct identity is essential for an effective public diplomacy strategy (Duke 2013: 132). In which case, if the normative dimension is what makes the EU's external action unique, then this should be reflected in a consistent manner within public diplomacy. Moreover, *if* equality and social justice are key foundational narratives of European identity (MacRae, 2010; David & Guerrina, 2013), then we should also see them featured prominently in these campaigns.

Gendering Normative Power Europe

This article draws on Manners' (2002) notion of Normative Power Europe to interrogate the EU's approach to public diplomacy, and specifically its approach to digital diplomacy at a time of crisis. Interrogations into normative power start from a discussion about the EU's external identity (Manners, 2011). The idea behind Normative Power Europe is that the EU's identity normalises its foundational norms and, in so doing, it shapes the behaviour of other actors. There are a number of ways in which norm diffusion can happen, but the key point is that the process is normatively driven rather than interests based (Forsberg, 2011). The focus on the ideational element of Normative Power Europe provides an expectation that foundational values will permeate external relations, and in turn reinforce the EU's own identity (Manners 2011). Equality and social justice are amongst those foundational norms that should permeate all external actions (Manners, 2008). Our focus here is on the informational mode of diffusion of norms and values, through strategic communication, specifically digital diplomacy (Manners and Whitman, 2013: 189; Michalski, 2005: 143; Manners, 2002: 244-245).

We examine how digital diplomacy is used to articulate Europe's core identity and reassert its normative credentials. We look to the way the external aspects of digital diplomacy reflect on internal dynamics and priorities of the EU as a whole, thus creating a coherent narrative about the future direction of travel. Normative Power Europe has to be part of the way for the EU to navigate a solution to crisis; if the EU's foundational values cannot provide pathway for the

future of the project, then what is the EU's *raison d'être* beyond economics? We therefore focus on gender equality and its translation into digital diplomacy as a test of the EU's Normative Power during crisis. Discursive tensions in the way that the narrative is told and the dissonance in the way the EU is telling the story provide important insights into the work that gender is doing in the development of the organisation's external agenda.

The EU's engagement with gender mainstreaming in the external realm has been limited and has lagged behind developments in the internal sphere where a neo-functionalist logic created an opening for the development of gender equality policies. This is an example of the EU's equality paradox. Despite the public statements by High Representative/Vice President Federica Mogherini and other high-level functionaries about the importance of gender equality as a foundational norm, policy implementation has consistently lagged behind the rhetoric (Walby, 2018; Guerrina and Wright, 2016; David and Guerrina, 2013; MacRae, 2010). The EU it can be argued has struggled to consistently 'practice what it preaches' (Vleuten, 2017). This is an important point, as it highlights which values are at the core of the EU's identity and will therefore be protected at times of crises.

A number of reasons can be identified for this dissonance between rhetoric and practice. Including, the complexity of institutional structures and lack of clarity about institutional competence (Ansorg and Haastrup, 2018). It can also be attributed to the absence of an effective feminist 'velvet' triangle to work as an external and internal coalition, composed of bureaucrats, civil society and epistemic communities, to push for the inclusion of gender in policy (Woodward, 2004, 2015; Guerrina and Wright, 2016; Guerrina, Chappell and Wright, 2018). This inertia could also be the result of member states 'institution shopping' and focusing their efforts on NATO's engagement with the Women, Peace and Security agenda (Wright, 2016).

One key site where the EU has engaged with gender in the external sphere, is through the global Women, Peace and Security agenda encapsulated in UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the eight follow-up Resolutions (Guerrina and Wright, 2016; Deiana and McDonagh, 2017; Muehlenhoff, 2017; Ansorg and Haastrup, 2018; Davis, 2018; Deiana and McDonagh, 2018; Guerrina, Chappell and Wright, 2018). If the Women, Peace and Security agenda calls for better representation of women in peace and security, then this should be integrated into digital diplomacy strategies deployed by the EEAS to mark EU60 and International Women's Day.

The previous iteration of the EU's policy on Women, Peace and Security makes no mention of public or digital diplomacy (Council of the European Union, 2008). This is not to say that digital diplomacy falls outside the scope of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Indeed other actors, including NATO, have long included digital diplomacy in their approach to Women, Peace and Security (Wright, 2019). So the 2018 Council Conclusions on Women, Peace and Security offer a space for the inclusion of this agenda in digital diplomacy and represent a welcome statement bringing the EU into line with other regional organisation's approaches:

'The Council affirms that the implementation of the EU Strategic Approach to WPS [Women, Peace and Security] should be achieved through political and diplomatic engagement of EU leadership, enabling women's equitable and meaningful participation in all EU external action, not only on topics of women's rights, but all action including on peace and security.'

As Twitter and other social media platforms become sites for discursive contestation, they also become a site from which the EU's identity is constructed and projected externally. It is in the context of crisis that we expect to see a more strategic articulation of core values in making the case for the EU and its role in global politics. So *if* gender equality is a core value and the EU is committed to the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, it should form an integral part of the EEAS's approach to digital diplomacy.

The EEAS and digital diplomacy

Creating a coherent narrative is a particular challenge in the context digital diplomacy. For the EU, perhaps more so given public diplomacy is decentralised, with a number of actors assuming a responsibility for communication across the 'triangle' of trade, development and the EEAS (CFSP and CSDP) (Duke, 2013: 132). Our focus here however is on the EEAS because their role should lie in shaping the EU's public diplomacy efforts beyond institutional aspects. This includes a key role for the High Representative/Vice President in articulating 'clear, convincing, coherent, and mutually reinforcing messages' (Duke, 2013: 132).

Twitter is viewed as a core element in the EEAS's digital diplomacy. On taking office in 2014, Mogherini states that:

"Twitter has proven to be a revolutionary social network even in politics. It is an extraordinary channel of diplomacy and of communication... we have been working,

since the very beginning of my mandate, on making Twitter one of the fundamental tools of our diplomacy.”

The Global Strategy reinforces Mogherini’s statement, calling for work to be done to ‘improve the consistency and speed of messaging on our principles and actions’, both in terms of factual rebuttals of disinformation but also ‘fostering an open and inquiring media environment within and beyond the EU’ (European Union 2016: 23). The latter part of this statement is particularly useful, it speaks directly to the EU’s efforts to develop a coherent and multifaceted public diplomacy strategy.

For the EEAS, there is an increasing urgency to improve the effectiveness of its digital strategy. Social media, and Twitter in particular, provides a platform on which anti-EU sentiment has a larger footprint than pro-EU messaging. This is evident in a range of political campaigns across Europe. Anti-EU parties are an extremely vocal and overrepresented on Twitter. For example, in the UK Referendum on EU membership the ‘leave’ campaigns were able to tap into an established community of Eurosceptic users (Usherwood and Wright, 2017: 374). They therefore dominated in terms of the total volume of users tweeting ‘leave’ messages (Howard and Kollanyi 2016: 4). This contributes to understanding Twitter as a digital space in which pro-EU sentiments are disadvantaged from the outset, while anti-EU sentiment has demonstrably more traction. While this does not relate explicitly to digital diplomacy, it provides the backdrop against which European institutions construct institutional narratives about the nature and aspirations of European integration. It also highlights how Twitter has become a discursive site for contesting meaning.

Since Mogherini took office, the EEAS has established a Digital Diplomacy Task Force. Support for social media comes from two dedicated staff members within the strategic communications team. They are responsible for content on the EEAS Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Flickr, YouTube and the two Twitter accounts of senior managers, the two spokespersons and the head of strategic communication (Mann, 2015). This is no small task, especially when you consider that each social media platform has a different target audience and therefore requires a different approach or strategy. It perhaps comes as no surprise that the EEAS social media accounts show little evidence of interaction or dialogue, which is a problem because engagement is a core part of public diplomacy (Duke, 2013: 131). This is not an issue with Twitter as a tool given the platform is setup well for more interactive ‘human centred’

encounters (Porter, 2009). Rather, the issue is with the EEAS/EU's use of the platform as public diplomacy tool.

Despite these challenges, Twitter is where the EEAS has the greatest reach across all of its social media accounts. Twitter followers have grown exponentially in recent years, with the EEAS account up from 94,000 in 2015 to and 192,000 in 2017 and Mogherini's followers more than doubling since 2015, from 123,000 to 347,000 (Mann, 2015). In contrast, Principal Gender Advisor Mara Marinaki's self-managed account, which was setup shortly after she took up her post in 2015, has relatively few followers, at just 779 as of May 2017.

The contrast in digital footprint between the centrally managed accounts and that of the Principal Gender Advisor raises some fundamental questions about the place of critical gender actors as drivers of the EEAS's approach to digital diplomacy. The lack of institutional support for the Principal Gender Advisor has a twofold impact on the Ambassador Marinaki's footprint on social media. Firstly, the style of the account is less corporate; and secondly, social media communication is something that is added to the overall workload of the Principal Gender Advisor. This could also explain her absence from other social media platforms which the EEAS is active on, including Facebook and Instagram. Placing gender equality at the forefront of the EU digital diplomacy would require the inclusion of the Principal Gender Advisor as a core component of its digital diplomacy. Even more so, given that the Global Strategy states that there is a need to 'systematically mainstream human rights and gender issues across policy sectors and institutions, as well as foster closer coordination regarding digital matters' (European Union 2016: 51).

It is also pertinent to consider how social media, and twitter specifically, represent a deeply gendered space. The platform serves as a 'gendered echo chamber' with women and other under-represented groups left on the margins of political debate, but also disproportionately subjected to harassment (Armstrong and Gao, 2011; McGregor and Mourão, 2016; Veletsianos *et al.*, 2018). Twitter is not an egalitarian space. And this places a significant limitation on just who digital diplomacy can engage. Making it pertinent that the digital sphere does not come to represent the only form of public diplomacy. Moreover, social media is a space on which gender norms are debated and contested and misogyny is pervasive (KhosraviNik and Esposito, 2018). This makes it a more challenging setting for the EU to express itself as a gender actor. In addition, if, as we contend, an effective approach to digital diplomacy necessitates

engagement with consumers, then engaging on gender issues in such a hostile environment becomes more challenging. These challenges are articulated in the EU's Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security (2018) but have yet to be translated into its digital diplomacy strategy.

Our analysis of the EU60 and International Women's Day in 2017 through tweets from three key accounts provides important insights into the development of a digital strategy. It also highlights if, and how, this strategy digital diplomacy. The breakdown of tweets across the accounts gives an indication of the priorities of each account. Across the three accounts analysed, EU60 receives considerably more coverage than International Women's Day. This is unsurprising given that EU60 chiefly concerns the EU, and International Women's Day is a global event. Nevertheless, given that the purpose of public diplomacy is to engage beyond the EU, International Women's Day provided an opportunity for the EEAS to become part of a broader conversation on women's rights and gender equality. Examining each case in further detail provides evidence to support our claim that gender is siloed in the EEAS's approach to digital diplomacy.

International Women's Day: Whose celebration?

International Women's Day has become a focal point for a variety of actors – from corporations to governments to International Organisations – to acknowledge publicly their support for gender equality. The EU marks the occasion annually. For example, the EEAS released a high-level joint statement to mark International Women's Day in 2017. It stated that 'the European Union is committed, as it was 60 years ago, to ensuring equality for women around the world' (EEAS, 2017). Taking place shortly before the EU marked its 60th anniversary, International Women's Day provided an opportunity to rearticulate the myth of gender as a foundational value of the EU (MacRae, 2010). It therefore becomes a site for the performance of public diplomacy and provides a useful case study for interrogating the place of gender within EU digital diplomacy.

International Women's Day also has radical and transformative underpinnings. The first International Women's Day was organised by internationalist socialist women in the USA in 1907, led by Clara Zetkin, with the aim of publicising their fight for equality in every aspect of life (Kaplan, 1985: 166). In Europe, International Women's Day is linked to suffrage movement, with the first International Women's Day held in 1911 to draw attention to the

cause (Kaplan, 1985: 166). Yet it was the 1917 American style celebration of International Women's Day in Russia, where women were joined by men from the metal works in protests on the breadline and in factories (despite the fact that the Bolsheviks viewed women's mobilisation as dangerous) which firmly rooted International Women's Day into its socialist origins (Kaplan, 1985: 166). The protests and the response of the Czar, who ordered his generals to shoot if necessary, precipitated the February revolution.

Yet the increasing co-optation of International Women's Day is evident in the way it has been adopted by global corporations. The move to understand it as focused women's empowerment, rather than women's rights, has led to its distancing from the transnational feminist activism which has historically been at its core (Grosser and McCarthy, 2018). International Women's Day has in many senses become a public diplomacy tool for actors to use to promote a linear picture of progress and women's empowerment. It is a narrative that is far removed from the reality of women's positions within these institutions, be they global corporations or International Organisations. The prominence of women in publicity surrounding International Women's Day produced by such actors belies the reality of their marginalisation. This supports the argument that one outcome of the neoliberalisation of feminist agendas (e.g. women's empowerment) is that they lose their transformative potential (Acker, 2006: 460). In the context of a dominant narrative of crisis discussed earlier, this helps to erase the long term impact on women of colour, to assert the temporary effects for white middle and working classes, this is all the more salient (Emejulu and Bassel, 2018).

Twitter has become a key space for engagement with International Women's Day. There are several hashtags that are used to mark the occasion, the EEAS consistently uses the one favoured by the UN and UN Women, '#WomensDay', rather than '#IWD2017' or '#IWD' in their tweets. This is indicative of the conversation the EEAS seeks to be part of in respect of International Women's Day, positioning itself in line with the UN Women recognised hashtag and not engaging with the other hashtags used to mark the day. In contrast, the Principal Gender Advisor, Marinaki uses a variety of hashtags to mark International Women's Day. This indicates the lack of coordination within the EEAS on the overall narrative for International Women's Day. However, the use of a wider range of hashtags opens up the potential for a more engaged form of digital diplomacy beyond the UN-EEAS 'bubble'.

The EEAS produced only original content for International Women’s Day (see Table 2), in contrast to the Principal Gender Advisor’s account where the largest volume of tweets were retweets. This suggests that the EEAS had a strategy for marking International Women’s Day which the Principal Gender Advisor Mara Marinaki was not involved in formulating or implementing. The volume of retweets on Marinaki’s account point to the lack of capacity in her office to support social media output, despite the EU Global Strategy commitment to incorporate gender into external affairs. International Women’s Day is an occasion for the Principal Gender Advisor to articulate the link to the EU’s core values. Moreover, if gender is a core value of the EU, that the role should have appropriate institutional support to realise this.

Table 2: Tweets for International Women’s Day

	Original	Retweet	Total
EEAS	10	0	10
Mogherini	0	2	2
Marinaki	2	11	13
Total	12	13	25

The tweets from the core EEAS account on International Women’s Day are notable for a number of reasons. They focus primarily on showcasing the stories of women working within EU external relations, rather than linking to the role of the EU as a gender actor. The message is therefore women of women’s empowerment, rather than gender equality and women’s rights, separating the EEAS’s articulation of International Women’s Day from its transformative transnational feminist origins (Grosser and McCarthy, 2018).

Vice President/High Representative Federica Mogherini produced just two tweets to mark International Women’s Day, however, the narrative they support is worthy of closer examination. In an excerpt from a speech given by Mogherini in Italian the EEAS twitter account quoted her as saying that the ‘European Union is together Mars and Venus, military and humanitarian force’. This presents a particular gendered understanding of International Women’s Day incompatible with its transnational feminist origins. The EEAS produced only two original tweets promoting the role of the EU in empowering women. Marinaki in contrast retweets accounts external to the EU, positioning herself as part of a broader conversation, and in line with her use of a range of a hashtags to mark to occasion. This could be seen as an

attempt to position the EU as part of the broader global conversation and commemoration of the day.

Despite the lack of institutional support, Marinaki's account was just as active as the official EEAS account on this occasion. Unsurprising given her role as the Principal Gender Advisor. She presents a very different understanding of the core message of International Women's Day, than the EEAS or Mogherini. In one, the Principal Gender Advisor poses between two military men with the caption: 'Happy to join 1st EUMS military seminar on #Gender in operations-we also need strong male leadership 2help make #IWD redundant' [sic]. This represents a very particular and arguably depoliticised understanding of International Women's Day and one divorced from its origins as a transnational feminist movement. In calling for its redundancy, this tweet separates Marinaki's understanding of International Women's Day from that presented through the central EEAS account which uses this occasion as an opportunity to showcase the empowerment of women within the EU.

Our argument here is not that the more transformative feminist politics underpinning International Women's Day have been completely lost. For example, at the same time as the EU was marking International Women's Day in 2017, a Global Women's Strike was organised by Feminism for the 99 per cent (F99) a transnational movement with a grassroots focus underpinned by 'anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist solidarity politics' (Emejulu, 2018: 272). Rather, we argue that the EU's understanding of International Women's Day is very different from the transnational grassroots roots of the movement. The separation of the EEAS's celebration of International Women's Day from the origins of the movement in transnational feminist organising have supported its depoliticisation. As Kate Grosser and Lauren McCarthy (2018: 6) argue in respect to neoliberal corporations engagement with gender issues, the involvement of the feminist movement lead to different outcomes, other than the co-option of feminism as a neoliberal tool. The EEAS would do well to engage with the origins of International Women's Day, rather than hoping to see its abolition.

The EU at 60: Gender Power Europe?

Given our focus in this article on the informational mode of Normative Power Europe, specifically the diffusion of norms and values through strategic communication (Michalski, 2005: 143; Manners, 2002: 244-245), the public campaign in celebration of 60 years of European integration is an appropriate case study to examine. It provides a useful point of

reference as it represents a major landmark in the process of European integration. Perhaps more importantly, this is a moment for the EU to consolidate its internal identity in the context of on-going challenges to its very *raison d'être*. The relationship between the EU's internal and external identity is more important than ever, as it seeks to define the parameters for belonging and engagement. The EU60 celebrations mark a moment for the EU not only to celebrate the signing of the Treaties of Rome but to showcase the values underpinning the project of European integration. The historical and political importance of this celebration also provides an opportunity for the EEAS to contribute to norm diffusion in external affairs. This includes gender equality and the role of the EU in advancing equality outside its borders. These values should therefore be evident in the social media footprint of the EEAS and its representatives. The EU60 therefore provides a vehicle for digital diplomacy and a site for identifying the way in which the EU identifies itself. However, as noted previously, emerging institutional narratives, particularly around crises, have erased the experiences of those most impacted by it (women of colour), it thus follows that this will lead to superficial, and instrumental, engagement with gender equality in the digital space.

For EU60, more twitter content was produced than for International Women's Day (see Table 3). This despite the fact that Principal Gender Advisor's twitter account produced no tweets to commemorate the anniversary. It may be unsurprising that EU60 received considerably more attention than International Women's Day from the formal EEAS digital diplomacy channels. Yet, if gender equality is understood as a key part of the mythologising of the EU's foundational values (MacRae, 2010), then the EEAS Principal Gender Advisor to be part of the digital commemoration of EU60. We would also expect the commemoration of EU60 to acknowledge gender equality as a part of what the EU does, and in more than one tweet by the EEAS. This, along with the absence of the EEAS Senior Gender Advisor from the digital commemoration of EU60, is a significant silence.

Table 3: EU60 tweets

	Original	Retweet	Total
EEAS	10	9	19
Mogherini	4	8	12
Marinaki	0	0	0
Total	14	17	31

Of the retweets made by the EEAS account, all were of other EU entities or individuals working for the EEAS. Vice President/High Representative Federica Mogherini also retweeted EU accounts, as well as a tweet from an Italian news agency and one from an NGO. A retweet of a European Commission tweet asks followers ‘inspired by peace, democracy and solidarity’ to create a GIF for #EU60. Interestingly, this is the most engaged with Tweet, yet does not come directly from the office responsible for EU digital diplomacy. The overall EEAS represents an insular approach to digital diplomacy, focused on promotion, rather than engagement or an attempt to reach a wider audience.

The only mention of gender as an integral value of the EU is found in one of the retweets by the EEAS account. The tweet by Sabrina Bellosi, the Deputy Head of Strategic Communication at EEAS, pictures Mogherini opening an exhibition on ‘The founding mothers of the EU’. No further information is given, and the EEAS produces no original tweets of this event. Thus given only one tweet is produced around gender equality and not from a core institutional account, we argue that it remains marginalised from the EEAS digital diplomacy strategy to commemorate the 60th anniversary.

The EEAS tweets and retweets on EU60 engage with the issue of crisis and the normative values underpinning the EU. Reference is made to Brexit: ‘9 months ago we have the UK referendum. Today 27 leaders meet in Rome to confirm their yes to EU’. To the refugee crisis, as a ‘global phenomenon not just an EU crisis’ but one which requires ‘solidarity among [EU] member states’. Several tweets and retweets make explicit reference to the foundational myth of the EU as a peace project, which is also pointed to in a tweet of Mogherini’s speech highlighting her statement that ‘it would be a mistake to invest just on Defence & Security. [The] EU must do more also on economic/social integration’. And another linked to a peace project tweet on the EU’s role in Syria: ‘our role is to bring humanitarian aid and get ready to rebuild Syria’. While the EEAS articulates the crisis with reference to foundational values, it does not integrate gender equality calling into question the value the EU places upon it. As we argue, crises are never exogenously given (Manners and Rosamond, 2018: 28) and the digital diplomacy plays a role in their constitution. Here the digital diplomacy strategy is gendered in the way it does not engage with the experiences of those most impacted by the crisis, rather it seeks to promote the EU as a solution to the crisis, without an acknowledgement of the EU’s

own complicity. For example, in creating a mass graveyard in the Mediterranean (Bieberstein and Evren, 2016: 454)

Crises are constituted discursively by both policy actors and academics (Manners and Rosamond, 2018: 28). These dominant discourses can therefore serve to marginalise the reality of just who is impacted by them. So while the dominant narrative of the economic crisis has largely been represented as temporary inconvenience for the white middle and working classes this ‘erases the complex dynamics of race, class, gender and legal status that have helped to determine which groups have been hardest hit by the crisis’ (Emejulu and Bassel, 2018: 110).

Conclusions

Our study has provided insight into the EEAS’s approach to digital diplomacy on twitter. The emerging literature on digital diplomacy, and specifically its practice as a public diplomacy tool is in its infancy. Due to the nature of the study, we have drawn on two time limited case studies and therefore a limited dataset, a more comprehensive study of the EEAS’s use of twitter as a digital diplomacy over a longer time period could provide further contextualisation to our findings here. Importantly, we have drawn on a gendered approach, drawing on the Gendering EU Studies literature which has demonstrated more broadly how gender issues are often the first to fall of a priority area during crisis.

The EEAS’s approach to digital diplomacy as it pertains to the EU60 celebrations and International Women’s Day in 2017 draws attention to the challenges of a cohesive approach across multiple accounts. A lack of institutional support for those outside the core of the digital diplomacy strategy (see Mann, 2015), including the Principal Gender Advisor, has resulted in the siloing of gender equality from the EU’s digital narrative. The marginalisation of gender equality from the EEAS approach to digital diplomacy undermines the claim often repeated by EEAS and EU officials that gender equality is a foundation of the EU.

If gender equality is a foundational value of the EU then it should be mainstreamed as a core part of the EEAS digital diplomacy, particularly during crisis. Crisis offers both an opportunity and threat to gender equality as a core value of the EU. In addition, it has provided an opportunity to reaffirm a dominant narrative of crisis as exogenously given, rather than something the EU is complicit in constituting. Given the gendered and racialised impact of the current crisis, it is perhaps unsurprising that the EU has struggled to articulate a role for itself

as a gendered actor. Gender equality has yet to be fully integrated into the EEAS's digital diplomacy strategy, with it only appearing as a priority in the 2018 revision of the EU commitment to the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Instead we find just one tweet on the EU60 linking to gender issues. Rather, the tweets centralised the narrative of the EU as a peace project, and its response to crisis. The Principal Gender Advisor should also have been central to the EU60 digital commemoration.

While we do see both the EEAS and Principal Gender Advisor marking International Women's Day. Their articulation of its meaning conforms to a women's empowerment, rather than a women's rights perspective supportive of gender equality. This is perhaps unsurprising given the co-option of International Women's Day to support neoliberal outcomes against a period of intersecting crises which have had a disproportionate and longer term impact on women of colour. This limited understanding of the value of International Women's Day means the EEAS and Principal Gender Advisor miss an opportunity to engage with a wider audience and articulate the actions the EU is taking substantively to support gender equality, rather than just showcasing women as a proxy for taking action.

The siloing of gender equality to International Women's Day in the EEAS approach to digital diplomacy is problematic. It may also be reflective of the fact that the EEAS has not yet fully realised twitter as a platform for a more effective, engaged and interactive approach to public diplomacy. Since Mogherini took office in 2014, digital diplomacy has seen significant investment and is reflected in the EU Global Strategy. Yet, the team concerned with digital diplomacy in the EEAS remains small and able to support only institutional accounts and those of a limited number of leaders. This may contribute to understanding why for these two cases the EEAS has relied on twitter to project information, rather than to actively engage consumers and build relationships. If the EU is to realise live up to the claim that gender equality is at the core of what it does, then greater resourcing needs to be given to integrate this narrative across all core messaging and to support the Principal Gender Advisor to be an integral part of this digital narrative.

Digital diplomacy is an emerging field of scholarship, and insights on how a commitment to gender equality influences and is prioritised is even more scarce. There is certainly further work to be done on gender, twitter and digital diplomacy as a public diplomacy tool in both an EU

context and more broadly among states and other regional and international institutions. We look forward to engaging with this work in the future.

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