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Silences and hierarchies in European Union Public Diplomacy

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Abstract

This article analyzes the effects of European Union Public Diplomacy (EUPD) discourses, drawing on poststructuralist approaches, which emphasize the productive dimension of discourse. We argue that EUPD helps reproduce a hierarchized identity of the EU, which authorizes particular courses of action while limiting others. Through an analysis of EUPD documents, we identify three descriptors - "EU as a zone of peace, prosperity and democracy"; "United in Diversity"; and "EU as a model" - which, together, form a meaningful narrative about EU's identity, infused with moral superiority, and constitute a dominant discourse with political effects internally and externally.

Keywords: European Union foreign policy; public diplomacy; identity discourse; poststructuralist discourse analysis.

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Introduction

European Union Public Diplomacy (EUPD) is a relatively new field of research; it can be considered a sub-area of EU foreign policy (Duke 2013a, 2013b; Davis Cross 2013; Melissen 2011; Huijgh 2011, 2013; Rasmussen 2009; Gouveia and Plumridge 2005). According to the EU

[...] public diplomacy deals with the influence of public attitudes. It seeks to promote EU interests by understanding, informing and influencing. It means clearly explaining the EU's goals, policies and activities and fostering understanding of these goals through dialogue with individual citizens, groups, institutions and the media (European Commission 2007a, 13).

The declared aim is, therefore, to foster a positive image of the EU in the minds of the foreign public, so that they are receptive and supportive of EU's policies.

This article analyzes EUPD in order to explore possible effects of the narratives about the EU developed and propagated to the world. We argue that public diplomacy not only creates receptive audiences and increases EU influence; it is actually part of the effort to forge an identity to legitimize the EU among the citizens of member states, and allows the establishment of hierarchical relations abroad. These narratives, thus, do more than help people make sense of their reality: they help produce reality. The analysis of such narratives should therefore discuss the effects of these accounts as they are constitutive of reality, helping define common sense and contributing to silence and exclude alternative ways of acting and being.

Our approach can be placed among those “dissident voices” within EU studies identified by Manners and Whitman (2016), seeking to challenge the dominant set of discursive, intellectual and academic practices, which “privilege particular methodologies and approaches to analysis, and have determined a dominant set of practices in the study of Europe and in the study of the EU” (Manners and Whitman 2016, 4). In particular, we provide a contribution to the literature on EUPD, by making use of poststructuralist insights on the co-constitution between identity and foreign policy practices and their effects. We argue that the literature on EUPD does not acknowledge the productive dimension of discourse, thereby underplaying the effects of public diplomacy. Poststructuralist theorizing has the potential to address this problem by giving us the conceptual apparatus to understand how discourse produces meanings and relations of power. By incorporating such understandings, we hope to provide a better understanding of what PD is and what it can effectively do.

The article is structured as follows: the next section discusses the treatment of EUPD by the literature, identifying some of its shortcomings; the following section introduces poststructuralist theorization, which focuses on the productive dimension of discursive practices and discusses how this perspective can add to our understanding of EUPD. In the third section, we conduct a poststructuralist analysis of EUPD by focusing on key EU documents.

EU public diplomacy as identity-building

Interpretations of the relationship between PD, as a specific foreign policy practice, and identity-building vary in the literature. Gouveia (2005) states that the term public diplomacy was coined in the 1960s and has been used by many countries such as the United States and United Kingdom; he defines it as “efforts by a state to communicate to and engage with, foreign publics” (Gouveia 2005, 6). PD is often linked to strategies of information and communication, which he labels “infopolitik,” as well as education and cultural activities, such as Intercultural Dialogues. According to him, the EU, “as much as any other state or supra-state actor must reflect its own nature through the projection of free and unbiased information” (Gouveia 2005, 9). He adds that “a host of factors favour European activity in this field. These include Europe’s unique global, cultural, diasporic and colonial links, the existence of an expanding ring of friends, Europe’s unmatched contributions to overseas aid around the world” (Gouveia 2005, 10).

Davis Cross (2013) argues that PD involves:

the communication of narratives that embody key norms about a society [...]. PD narratives gain legitimacy when they derive from the *real identity* of the people involved. Narratives are defined as the story of ‘the temporal character of human experience’ and norms are defined as entrenched beliefs of what is appropriate and inappropriate behaviour [...] a legitimate and credible PD strategy is only possible if it directly *reflects the identity* of the people it represents” (Cross 2013, 5-6, emphasis added).

This conceptualization treats identity as something that exists “out there” and which can be represented and reflected in PD narratives. We find these terms (identities, narratives and norms) useful to understand what EUPD does, *i.e.*, its productive dimension, but we argue that the relationship between them should be altered. Instead of being a product of pre-existing norms and identities, narratives on PD should be understood as practices in which the EU engages in order to construct its identity, and emphasis should be given to the power relations enmeshed in these interplays.

A step beyond Cross’ (2013) constructivist view is taken by Rasmussen (2009), who adopts a discourse theory framework, and conceptualizes EUPD as being about “establishing an identity for the EU as an actor, and about influencing foreign conceptions of other discursive elements, such as democracy, human rights, climate change” (Rasmussen 2009, 2). Other works also recognize that PD is an identity-building practice. Duke (2013a, 114; 2013b, 2) conceives PD as a way for a given actor to represent a self-image it wants to project to domestic and foreign audiences. In the case of European audiences, the goals are understood to be the improvement of EU’s image in the eyes of Europeans (Gouveia and Plumridge 2005, 13), in order to try to foster and reinforce a given identity (Huijgh 2013 67; Melissen 2011, 16), to provide legitimacy to its policies internally and externally and to its very existence (Rasmussen 2009, 11; Huijgh 2011, 64). In the case of foreign audiences, the main aim would be to project a positive image in order to make foreign public opinion more receptive to the EU’s ideas (Melissen 2011, 9; Rasmussen 2009), which echoes the EU’s definition of PD initiatives, stated above. While, historically, EUPD has been primarily directed inward, as part of the process of identity construction, as it institutionalized its external relations, especially after the Treaty of Lisbon and the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS), its outward aspects became more important.

Duke (2013a, 114; 2013b, 2) argues that the domestically constructed identity is exported and employed externally. The domestic and international dimensions would mutually reinforce one another (Huijgh 2011, 71), revealing the “intermestic” nature of EU public diplomacy (Duke 2013a, 113; Duke 2013b, 3). In Duke’s words:

the legitimacy of the internal identity construction, the acceptance of norms and the consensus around narrative, will therefore do much to determine the legitimacy of external public diplomacy to both EU citizens (who wish to see reflection of

themselves) and to third parties (who wish to see the virtues of the European example reflected towards themselves) (Duke 2013b, 3).

Thus, these authors are not unaware of the co-constitutiveness of identity and foreign policy practices forwarded by poststructuralist interpretations. They do not, however, emphasize enough the effects of such identity-building processes to third countries, or how they authorize particular power relations.

What is missing from these accounts is an acknowledgement of the productive dimension of EUPD and a discussion of how such identity-building processes authorize particular power relations. We argue that there is much to be gained from the poststructuralist literature on the co-constitution of identity and foreign policy, and their effects. Discursive practices, such as those of PD, help define the subjects who are authorized to speak and act, and the audiences to whom they speak, both the public of non-EU countries and EU citizens, disciplining or marginalizing certain groups or ways of acting (Milliken 1999).

Productive effects of EU public diplomacy

The “linguistic turn” in IR theory (Holzscheiter 2014; Wodak and Mayer 2015) branched out to EU foreign policy analysis (Carta and Morin 2014; Carta 2015; Carta and Wodak 2015; Wæver 2009). Four broad approaches have been employed: interpretative constructivism, post-structuralism, discursive institutionalism (DI) and critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Carta and Morin 2014, 23). This article works within the poststructuralist approach to discourse analysis.

We conceive discourses as “historically, socially and institutionally specific structures of statements, terms, categories and beliefs” (Scott 1988, 35), an “ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations” (Epstein 2008, 2), a site where “meaning is produced and distributed” (Wæver 2009, 165). Meanings emerge from relations between signifiers, or “signs referring to signs referring to signs” (Wæver 2009, 166; 174) and from the formation of linguistic chains, which also refer to other signifying chains (Stavrakakis 1999, 57). “Meaning thus emerges not from an inherent relationship of the word and the object, or between the signifier and signified, but from a contingent relationship between the signifiers (or signs)” (Epstein 2008, 7). Since “connections between words are never given once and for all” (Hansen 2014, 173), the combination of signifiers can in principle produce an infinite number of significations. This means that it is impossible to close up meaning: “systems of signification never fully close up and fall into place - they always retain paradoxes, open ends, and impossibilities” (Wæver 2009, 173).

However, political and societal actors do attempt to fix the meaning of signifying chains through nodal points: words, terms or phrases that attempt to fasten groups of words together into meaningful narratives (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 112). Through nodal points, meanings achieve (partial) stability. We argue that, in the case of the EU, the fluidity of meaning is contained by

three descriptors, which are analyzed in the next section, namely: “EU as a zone of peace, prosperity and democracy”; “United in Diversity”; and “EU as a model” – which together form a meaningful narrative about EU’s identity and constitute a dominant discourse with political effects.

Identities are, thus, produced by linguistic resources. But they are also produced by “repertoires of action” (Aradau et al 2015, 4), or practices: “embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding” (Schatzki in Aradau et al. 2015a, 3). In this sense, discourses should not be taken as synonymous to “texts” or exclusively linguistic: they include institutions, knowledge and practices (Milliken 1999); they are embedded in actions, materiality, and institutions (Waeber 2009, 165). Discourses and practices, the linguistic and the non-linguistic, the ideational and the material, should not be thought of as strictly separate categories, but as “tightly bound up and mutually constitutive” (Epstein 2008, 5), since “every discursive structure has a material character” (Waeber 2009, 22). Materiality acquires meaning through discourse; discourses have material effects, since “what is said about [objects] is intimately tied to what is done with them” (Epstein 2008, 5); and material social practices are also “*loci* where meanings are produced” (Epstein 2008, 5). Thus, what we usually think of as “social material practices” or “policies” are also implicated in meaning-making. Therefore, we can think of discourse as ensembles of linguistic elements - representations, narratives, statements, words, terms, phrases, signs, signifiers, categories, concepts – and non-linguistic (material social) practices, which are co-constituted and historically contingent, through which “meanings are produced, identities constituted, social relations established, and political and ethical outcomes made more or less possible” (Campbell 2013, 234-235).

The EU is made possible by a wide range of discursive “texts,” or narratives, such as Treaties, Declarations, Reports, speeches by its representatives – some of which we will analyze here - and “practices” such as EUPD, Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), Common Defense and Security Policy (CDSP), European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), Enlargement, Strategic Partnerships, *etc.* EUPD discursive practices not only seek to increase EU influence (abroad) and legitimacy (domestically), they have productive power. Discourses are productive in that they define and constitute subjects, objects and the relations between them; frame objects and subjects in certain ways, limiting the possibilities for action in relation to them (Epstein 2008, 2) and normalize certain ways of being and acting (Milliken 1999). Discourses, thus, enable, authorize and guide certain courses of action and, at the same time, constrain, limit, restrict, marginalize, exclude and silence alternative understandings and policy choices, other modes of thought and action.

What we think of as natural, evident, obvious, taken for granted or common sense is produced when the never-ending flow of signification is arrested and partial fixity is achieved in nodal points. When a discourse becomes dominant, we see “a progressive sedimentation, in which particular configurations of meaning were sealed in, and others left out” (Epstein 2008, 9-10). Dominant discourses help legitimize and maintain, fortify, conserve or expand a set of power relations, positions and policies.

Next section analyzes EUPD in light of the poststructuralist discourse analysis approach here developed. In terms of methodology, this approach entails the identification of the relationships

between the elements that are part of a system of signs and the oppositions which structure discourses and establish hierarchical relations between the elements (Milliken 1999). We map the structures of meaning that guide the relationships between subject (EU) and objects (third countries), and the binary oppositions and hierarchies established by several EU texts which, we argue, contribute to EUPD efforts. We discern occurrences of repetitions, the prominence of certain themes and terms, and we also note omissions. We notice the emphasis and the silences, what is said and what is not said, what is included and what is left out, the privileging of terms, words, phrases and understandings over others, and the political implications of repetitions and omissions, grasping how certain courses of action are defined as possible, adequate and appropriate, and how others are rendered impractical and unthinkable.

As for the selection, we have chosen texts that concern EUPD directly, such as the EU strategy for international cultural relations (European Commission 2016), the New Narrative for Europe (European Commission 2014) and the Communication and Visibility Manual for European Union External Actions (European Commission 2010), as well as texts of EU foreign policy considered key by the literature (Hill et al 2017), such as the EU Global Strategy (European Union Global Strategy 2016) and the European Security Strategy (2003). The latter were included because they set the background for EUPD statements. PD efforts acquire meaning in a context comprised of texts that came before them, be they official EU texts or some of the academic literature on the EU which echoes the Union's own discursive articulations, which we have also included here. When academic discourses reiterate EU narratives, they (unintentionally) might help sediment and fix particular configurations of meaning about the EU.

Dominant discursive articulations in EU public diplomacy

In recent years, the EU has been rethinking its narrative, and launched several initiatives to make its PD more effective (European Commission 2014; 2016). In this section, we analyze several EU texts, including treaties, declarations, speeches, manuals, handbooks, strategies which, together, we argue, contribute to EUPD efforts. We propose that identifying and grouping discursive articulations that are frequently reproduced can allow us to apprehend dominant interpretations that serve as precursors to action. Despite being fragmented and sometimes contradictory, it was possible to identify three frequent discursive articulations of EUPD.

The first articulation is the “EU as a zone of peace, prosperity and democracy,” brought about by an integration process that managed to put behind Europe's past of wars, totalitarianism and human rights violations. The EU is, thus, portrayed as both the means and the end result. The second articulation is the “United in Diversity” motto. Through the integration process, shared values and norms have been developed, and now constitute a European common identity and “essence” which, however, does not erase diversity within the Union. The third articulation is a corollary of the latter, namely, that due to its history (the integration process) and its current

state (zone of peace and prosperity with shared values and norms), the “EU is a model” to other countries, regions and organizations. The EU is a different global actor because it refrains from using military force and prefers soft instruments, values and norms, to exert influence and achieve its interests. This type of behaviour is favourably compared to other international actors’ behaviours. Each of these articulations is analyzed next.

The EU as a zone of peace, prosperity and democracy

This main articulation can be thought of as the EU’s “standard general statement.” According to the Communication and Visibility Manual for European Union External Actions (European Commission, 2010), the following general statement should be used in written communications in third countries: “The European Union is made up of 27 member states who [...] together, during a period of enlargement of 50 years, have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development” (European Commission 2010, 41). We can see variations of the general statement in several texts, produced with very different objectives and in different periods of time. For example, the European Security Strategy (2003, 1) opening sentences were:

Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure nor so free. The violence of the first half of the 20th Century has given way to a period of peace and stability unprecedented in European history. The creation of the European Union has been central to this development. It has transformed the relations between our states, and the lives of our citizens.

In another context, EU delegations celebrating EU’s 50th anniversary organized events around the world to “reinforce the EU’s core messages,” *i.e.*, “the significance of EU integration,” “the benefits of integration,” “50 years of building the EU,” “the making of the EU,” “democracy, freedom and liberty” (European Commission 2007a, 7).

Similarly, the recent EU Global Strategy (European Union Global Strategy 2016, 9) states that “Our Union has enabled citizens to enjoy unprecedented security, democracy and prosperity.” During celebrations of the Union’s 60th anniversary, Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker remembered that

Our troubled past has given way to a peace spanning seven decades and to an enlarged Union of 500 million citizens living in freedom in one of the world’s most prosperous economies. The images of battles in trenches and fields in Verdun or of a continent separated by the Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall, have been replaced by a Union standing out as a beacon of peace and stability (European Commission 2017, 6).

These frequently repeated narratives reinforce one another and also resonate with previous academic discourses which described the EU mode of self-other relationship as a form of

temporal othering - the EU's other would be its own past of fragmentation and conflict between territorially-bounded nation-states - instead of the more negative form of geopolitical othering (Wæver 1998; Diez 2004).

The need for a “new narrative” of European integration - other than the EU as a peace project - has been said to be greater than ever (Barroso 2013). Kølvråa (2016), for example, attributes the current disenchantment with the EU and the weakening of Europe's mythical narrative (of a peace project) to the achievement of the promise of Europe without wars: “If peace is a fact of life, then it is no longer a utopian horizon capable of generating desires or affective attachment” (Kølvråa 2016, 179). The Nobel Peace prize awarded to the EU in 2012 would “mark the zenith of the chronicle of the EU as a peace project,” “realisation that the grand narrative of peace” (Manners and Murray 2016, 185; 190), hence the need for a new narrative.

The project “New Narrative for Europe – the Mind and Body of Europe” (European Commission 2014) was an attempt to address these issues. The project invited a few “artists, intellectuals and scientists” (European Commission 2014, n/a) to draft a new narrative for Europe, in order to restore confidence after the 2008 global financial and economic crisis. It presented Europe as a “new global model of society based on ethical, aesthetic and sustainable values” (European Commission 2014, n/a).

What these discourses imply is that new generations fail to appreciate the enormous importance of the EU, and to support it, because they do not have memories of Europe's dark past and already live in the “dream of a peaceful, shared future” (European Commission 2017, 6). A utopia has been realized, and now a new narrative must be forged to command loyalty from its citizens. Such claims of “utopia realized” can only be made if alternative readings about the disillusionment with the EU are omitted. For example, to attribute disenchantment with the EU to the realization of EU's utopia, is to ignore that the project promised not only peace, but prosperity. The Treaty of Rome (1957) promised “economic and social progress,” improved “living and working conditions,” reduced “economic and social differences between the EEC's various regions.” The Maastricht Treaty also emphasizes “economic and social progress” as a goal. The EU Global Strategy equates the European project with “peace, ‘prosperity’ and democracy”. In a time of high unemployment, particularly among the younger population, low economic growth and concentration of wealth within and among member-states, such narratives about present utopias become harder to accept.

In addition, this disconnection between EU narratives and the daily lives of EU citizens is also reflected in the growing support for Eurosceptic right-wing populist parties in several EU countries, such as the French National Rally and the Italian League Party, which criticize the EU for being a bureaucratic elitist institution, distant from the concerns of “the people,” robbing sovereignty, contributing to economic malaise and being a catalyst for migration – either because of the freedom of movement or because of refugee quotas. Matteo Salvini, Italian interior minister and leader of the League party, has said that European parliamentary elections in 2019 would be “a referendum between the Europe of the elites, banks, finance, mass migration and precariousness versus the Europe of peoples, work, tranquility, family and future” (Salvini in Heath, Baume and

Barigazzi 2018). The existence of such parties, and the discourses they convey, significantly contest the representation of the EU as a zone of peace, prosperity and democracy.

Furthermore, this discursive articulation also omits current forms of violence which, although not constituting inter-state wars, cause insecurity to segments of European and non-European populations such as Roma groups and refugees, asylum seekers and economic migrants. This general statement, thus, portrays the EU as a zone of peace, prosperity and democracy brought about by an integration process which left in its past wars and belligerent nationalisms, thereby ascribing to the EU the spatial and temporal high ground. However, it is only possible to describe the present-day EU as an “incredible place and project” (Mogherini 2016, 1), if one ignores violence and inequalities which, if acknowledged, would provide a different, more nuanced and complex picture. By forgetting events considered inappropriate, such as the role played by colonialism in the very project of European integration (Nicolaidis 2015; Hansen 2002; Hansen and Jonsson 2015) and the “echoes of colonialism in today’s EU discourse and practice” (Nicolaidis 2015, 283), this narrative makes certain ideas about Europe commonsensical, while alternative ideas are marginalized. Through the silencing of internal and external violence and inequalities and through the positioning of the EU on the top of a temporal hierarchy, this discursive articulation forecloses greater reflection on the EU’s domestic and foreign actions.

United in Diversity

EU Treaties and documents, from the 1973 “Declaration on the European Identity” to the EU Global Strategy (2016), spell out the plethora of values and norms which define European identity. The 1973 declaration identified democracy, the rule of law, market economy, social justice and respect for human rights and shared political values. The 2016 Global Strategy indicated human rights, fundamental freedoms, rule of law, justice, solidarity, equality, non-discrimination, pluralism and respect for diversity and domestic and international law (European Union Global Strategy 2016, 15). The EU’s strategy for international cultural relations (European Commission 2016, 2) cites “human rights, gender equality, democracy, freedom of expression, the rule of law as well as cultural and linguistic diversity” as EU’s “fundamental values.” EU officials and documents, however, also stress plurality and diversity. High Representative Federica Mogherini claims that “Culture in Europe is always plural – because so many different cultures belong in this continent. European culture is diversity. European culture is distinction, and it is at the same time common ground [...] this diversity is our strength” (Mogherini 2016, 1;3).

However, diversity is only valued within limits; certain cultural and religious expressions are located outside of the boundaries of valuable diversity. For example, the New Narrative for Europe (European Commission 2014) states that Europe’s foundations are Jewish, Greco-Roman and Christian, thereby alienating current citizens who do not conform to such heritages. It

traces Europe's past to Antiquity, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, thereby establishing a European "essence" which has survived through time and informs a shared and common "grammar of music and art," "body of science and philosophy," "literature" and "network of trade," hence underplaying Arab and Muslim cultural influence and encounters with European societies that have helped shape the Europe of today.

As in the previous case, it is important to also note silences: what is not said, what is left out. In order to sustain and fixate this narrative, dissident interpretations of these norms and values need to be left out. The (mis)treatment of migrants and refugees does not feature prominently in EUPD documents because it could put into question the existence of a common understanding of respect for diversity and human rights (Scipioni 2018; Rankin 2018); the dismantlement of the welfare system of many member-states is also absent, because it could indicate that values of social justice and solidarity are not unanimously signified (Palier and Hay 2017; van der Vleuten 2016).

Furthermore, we should discuss what type of actions this narrative of common values and norms, shared across a diverse continent, encourages. EU's self-declared "norms and values" constitute a yardstick against which European and other societies should be evaluated. Such discourses, then, produce binary opposites in which the first category (the EU) is always privileged over others (countries, regions). When the EU, through its PD, presents these norms as the essence of European identity, violence and inequalities within and without the Union are brushed under the mantle of righteousness, and the EU can make demands on others as an entity that has already "seen the light." Thus, EU's attempts to shape the "normal" in international relations – behaviours deemed appropriate or inappropriate - are identity-building and power projection exercises. By including "EU norms" in association agreements and Copenhagen criteria, as conditionality for a closer relationship with the Union, the EU does two things: it silences its own normative disagreements, and places itself in a superior level. Such discourses then allow the EU to dictate what others should do, since it has already "discovered" a better way of doing things, without listening to others or engaging in meaningful dialogue, and without having to acknowledge the violence and injustices taking place inside the Union or practiced by the EU abroad.

The EU as a model

This mix of values and norms shared by a diverse population would turn Europe into a pole of attraction or a model to be followed. Reflecting on PD activities promoted by EU delegations to celebrate the Union's 50th anniversary, the Commission explains that "the events portrayed the EU as a model for regional cooperation respecting national diversity and committed to democracy, human rights, the rule of law and good governance" (European Commission 2007a, 5). Likewise, another Commission document argues that:

having brought stability and prosperity to its own citizens today, the EU seeks to work with others in an interdependent world to spread the advantages of open market, economic growth and a political system based on social responsibility and democracy. The EU does not try to impose its system on others, but is not shy about its values [...] it serves as a model for cooperation and integration between countries in other regions [...] by helping others, the EU helps to make life safer within its frontiers for its own citizens (European Commission 2007b, 4).

Discourses about the EU as “attractive to many of its partners” or “a positive global force” (European Commission 2017) resonate with the discussion about EU identity and its “nature” as implied in the concepts of “civilian power” (Duchêne 1973), “normative power” (Manners 2002; Manners and Whitman 2013) and “ethical power” (Aggestam, 2008). These discourses acquire meaning in a context populated with descriptions of the EU as a different international actor; different in a positive sense. In fact, a “successor myth” to ‘Europe as a peace project’ would be “Europe as a Global Player”:

Europe would transfer its “miracle” from the domestic to the foreign space and apply its special brand of ‘normative’, ‘civilian’ or ‘transformative’ power for the benefit of non-Europeans, who were in turn consistently (and rather self-congratulatory) portrayed as gazing towards Europe in almost longing admiration (Kølvraa 2016, 179).

One can notice a more nuanced language in more recent documents. Whereas older documents included condescending expressions such as portraying the EU as a “helping hand” (European Commission 2007b, 13); and visuals, such as CSDP military personnel being happily greeted by unidentified black children (European Commission 2007b, 12) and an unidentified black toddler eating, with the caption “EU humanitarian aid feeds her and many like her” (European Commission 2007b, 15). Documents from 2016 stress “mutual respect,” “partnership, reciprocity, mutual learning and co-creation” (European Commission 2016, 4). EU Global Strategy, for example, declares the desire to engage responsibly with the world, without providing “neat recipes” or “imposing solutions elsewhere” (European Union Global Strategy 2016, 17). It supports “cooperative regional orders,” striving not “to export our model, but rather seek[ing] reciprocal inspiration from different regional experiences” (European Union Global Strategy 2016, 32).

Nonetheless, other recent documents, such as the EU strategy for international cultural relations (European Commission, 2016), place the EU in a hierarchical position with regards to its partners, “helping,” “fostering,” “providing,” “developing,” “training,” “building capacity,” “coaching,” “issuing advice”: the EU is the giver, the others are receivers. The document states that the EU “[is] build[ing] the capacities of culture sector professionals in ACP countries” (European Commission 2016, 9); “can support creative SMEs in South Korea and South-East Asia through [...] coaching and logistical and financial support” (European Commission 2016, 9); “should help partner countries incorporate culture in national policies” (European Commission 2016, 7); “can share expertise on further

developing relevant skills and a sound regulatory framework” (European Commission 2016, 8); “will further develop the cultural operators’ skills and capacities in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine” (European Commission 2016, 10-11)

Thus, although a subtle, superficial change can be observed in some discourses, the core (that the EU is a superior entity) is left unchanged:

foreground ideas can easily fluctuate with social interactions, making a discourse more nuanced and complex. [...] deepest and most general background ideas, however, are slower to change and provide an enduring logic for most policy development (Morin and Carta 2014, 7).

For instance, High Representative Federica Mogherini, when launching the EU strategy for international cultural relations at the Culture Forum in Brussels, highlighted that “dialogue among cultures is not simply about teaching our culture to the whole world. We need to learn before we teach, to listen before we talk” (Mogherini 2016). However, when providing examples of how such dialogue works in practice, it becomes clear that it is “them” who learn from Europe, and not the other way around:

When young Africans come to Europe to study, they are getting skills and expertise that will stay with them for the rest of their lives. Back home they might set up a business, or work in a hospital, or get into politics and institutions. From our side, it is an investment in the future of Africa – that is, an investment in our own future and present (Mogherini 2016).

Hence, Africans go to Europe to learn or Europeans go to Africa to teach, train and coach. The possibility that Europeans might go to Africa to learn is foreclosed.

Similar patterns of one-directional interactions can be found in other policy areas such as EU’s development policy. EU technical expertise and assistance is presented as solutions to local needs. The Report of the activities of the European Union Expert Facility for Social Protection (SOCIEUX Facility) for the period of 2013-2016 stated that: “technical assistance facility [...], is demand-driven and aims to mobilise expertise; *i.e.*, facilitating the access of partner institutions to available expertise in the EU based on the expressed needs” (SOCIEUX 2016, 58). The local agenda is portrayed as having a negative impact on desired outcomes:

The follow-up and use of the deliverables of activities is a prerogative of the partner institution, and is often driven by political agendas that the Facility or the mobilised experts cannot, or only in a very limited way, influence[...]SOCIEUX did not have the resources or leverage to counter such influence (SOCIEUX 2016, 59).

In other words, the EU is portrayed as a benevolent actor, with technical expertise, free of “agendas,” who cannot avoid local (negative) “influence.” The secondary literature (Carbone 2011;

Orbie and Verluys 2016; Mayall 2005) also points out the asymmetrical and paternalist terms of EU development policy, inherited from the process of incorporation of former colonies into the EU's foreign policy system. As stated by Mayall (2005, 307): "the long shadow cast by Empire has receded but not eclipsed altogether" from EU development policy.

In addition, in order to keep a coherent narrative, the EU cannot acknowledge events which disturb dominant significations. Duke argues, for instance, that

too little attentions was paid to the external implications of the sovereign debt crisis since it was viewed within the EU as an internal matter, but it nevertheless led to external questioning of one of the key tenets of the Union's external public diplomacy which is that the EU is first and foremost promoting its own model of integration and its achievements as exemplar (2013a, 12).

Such language and such omissions contribute to a narrative in which the EU is presented as a more advanced type of community, hence as a potential model to the rest of the world. Thus, similar to the first two discursive articulations discussed above, the "EU as a Model" narrative places the EU at the top of hierarchical scale and third countries with which the EU interacts at the bottom. By framing the EU and third countries this way, certain courses of action are encouraged: one-way "partnerships" and "cooperation" agreements in which the EU speaks, sets the standards, provides the models, and the rest of the world listens. At the same time, alternative options, such as arrangements in which the EU effectively learns from other countries, are foreclosed.

It is in this sense that we argue that EUPD discourses do more than create receptive audiences or increase EU influence: they have productive power, enabling particular understandings and policy choices and constraining others. Thus, we can say that there is no inconsistency or contradiction between EU words and actions. Such discourses, infused with a sense of moral superiority, encourage certain foreign policy practices (such as monologues) and not others (dialogues); they do not presuppose listening to and learning from others.

Conclusion

This article aims to contribute to the "dissident voices" within EU studies which challenge "EU-centrism" by bringing to the fore the effects of a particular EU foreign policy discursive practice, namely, EU public diplomacy. Drawing on poststructuralist insights, we analyzed the co-constitution of EU identity and public diplomacy, beyond those already indicated by the literature on EUPD. We argued that the reproduction of hierarchized identities can authorize the establishment of particular power relations and courses of action, limiting alternative possibilities. We identified the three main discursive articulations in EUPD documents, "EU as a zone of peace, prosperity and democracy"; "United in Diversity"; and "EU as a model." We argued that these articulations have internal and external effects: at the domestic level, they create a growing

distance between projected EU narratives and EU-citizens, who do not recognize the narrated “EU-topia” in their daily lives. At the international level, these rhetorical registers and repertoires of action enact particular power relations, and allow the reproduction of hierarchies.

The regular reproduction of these three discursive articulations constitutes attempts to fix the meaning of EU identity, and to contain alternative representations and practices. The EU is presented as a zone of peace, prosperity and democracy, with fundamental values which should be universally shared for the greater good of other regions; a model which despite crises remains a source of inspiration for others and well-being for its citizens. The repetition of these discursive practices helps establish and stabilize subjects and objects, the relations between them, ways of being and acting. The objects are portrayed as recipients of EU’s norms, values and experiences, and relations as unidirectional: the EU gives, the others receive. Through this process, violence can be forgotten or muffled, and power relations can be enacted.

The importance of dominant discourses about EU’s identity, structured around “EU as a zone of peace, prosperity and democracy,” “United in Diversity” and “EU as a model,” is not whether they are “true” or not, but which are their political effects. By stressing certain aspects to the detriment of others, certain relations between the EU and third parties are encouraged, and others discouraged. Although this was beyond the scope of our study, it would be important to study how third countries react to their subordinate positioning in these discursive practices, if and how they seize opportunities for resistance, contestation and negotiation of the terms of their relationship, if and how they make themselves heard. It would also be interesting to locate possibilities of resistance, disputes, discontinuities, ruptures and tensions within the EU’s own discursive economy. Since subjectivity is always socially produced, there are always openings for stabilization and destabilization, fixity and resistance, dominant and counter-discourses. There are, in short, “breathing spaces” for different subjectivities and relations.

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