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EU and gender-security sector reform in Ukraine and Mali: a picture is worth dozens of policies!

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ABSTRACT

This article is a contribution to critical International Relations scholarship on European Union foreign and security policy and to the debates on “Normative Europe”. It focuses on the ways in which the EU engages with their own gender equality policies in external Security Sector Reform (SSR) missions. By analysing visual materials of the European Union Advisory Mission-Ukraine (EUAM Ukraine) and European Union Capacity Building Mission in Sahel Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali) missions, this article identifies the discrepancies between EU’s proclaimed policy goals about gender equality and visual representations of women and men in the missions’ newsletter photos. These representations reflect a lacklustre approach and suggest a lack of commitment to practices of gender equality and positive role modelling in SSR’s day-to-day activities. This article suggests the EU-SSR missions overhaul their public communication strategies to focus first on “how” to communicate gender equality norms and only then on “what” to communicate. This study shows one concrete opportunity and space where this can be achieved.

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Introduction

This article is concerned with how the European Union (EU) projects its foreign and security policy in relation to gender, through the images in its public communication materials. The main aim is to broaden the focus of scholarship on the EU’s external security interventions to include images and their interpretation. In this way, the hope is to contribute to scholarly debates on the policy-practice gap in normatively driven institutions in the realm of security (Mobekk 2010, Gordon 2014, Kunz 2014, Guerrina and Wright 2016, Kronsell 2016, Guerrina *et al.* 2018, Chappell and Guerrina 2020, Hoijtink and Muehlenhoff 2020, Wright and Guerrina 2020). Given the centrality of the equality – and gender equality – narrative to the EU’s internal and external identity (McRae 2010), this article hopes to contribute to critical EU security studies, inspired by Manners’ work on “normative Europe” (2002) and equally by critical feminist security studies in IR (Cohn and Enloe 2003, Cockburn 2013, Kronsell 2016, Guerrina *et al.* 2018, Chappell and Guerrina 2020). The main focus is on the EU’s gender equality practices at the institutional level and on

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the ground, and this is mainly explored by conducting a visual inquiry. Hence, this article focuses on the ways the EU engages with gender equality policies and the norms and values underpinning such policies, in the setting of EU security sector reform (SSR) programmes in Ukraine and Mali. Using visual material – photography from the EU’s SSR mission newsletters in those two countries – it examines discrepancies between the EU’s proclaimed policy goals of gender equality on the one hand, and the visual representations of women and men selected in mission newsletter photos, on the other.

Gender equality is an important norm both within the European Union (EU) and in the EU’s engagement abroad (European Commission 2016a). Recently, the EU High Commissioner for Foreign Affairs reiterated the EU’s commitment to promoting gender equality in the following terms:

Gender equality is also at the core of our continuous engagement with partner countries worldwide. The EU is striving to accelerate the efforts towards gender equality in the different fields of its external action, as part of the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. All around the world, we remain strongly committed to implement actions fighting all forms of violence against women and girls, including those affected by war, poverty or displacement, for example through our Global Spotlight Initiative together with the United Nations. (EEAS)

External promotion of gender equality is a matter of human rights, a foundation of democratic societies, good governance, and the cornerstone of inclusive sustainable development (EC 2015, p. 2). Gender equality is a fundamental, normative criteria for European integration, despite the marginal progress it has made within the EU (European Institute for Gender Equality 2017, p. 5). However, the EU’s practices and the promotion of gender norms in its external policies are under scrutiny by both norm and feminist security scholars in IR (Manners 2002, 2006, Kronsell 2016, Chappell and Guerrina 2020, Wright and Guerrina 2020). As these scholars have noted, despite the crucial contribution made by feminist actors in formulating the EU’s equality framework, effective implementation of gender equality norms in the EU’s foreign, common security and defence policies is found to be disappointing (Chappell and Guerrina 2020, Wright and Guerrina 2020). One crucial reason identified for these outcomes is the side-lining of feminist actors during the processes of developing the EU’s security policy (Kronsell 2016, p. 115, Chappell and Guerrina 2020). Another issue is the ad-hoc creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) in 2010, which is argued to lead to producing “pockets” of gender-related actions in the EU’s recent external relations, whilst comprehensive rolling out of the EU’s gender mainstreaming policies has been limited in external relations (Chappell and Guerrina 2020, pp. 267–268). Such structural-institutional constraints are not surprising given the overall background of traditional understandings of EU security and defence policies as gender-neutral and the eagerness to assign priority to pragmatic political and economic policies and interests over proclaimed normative agendas, in gender and human rights (Chappell and Guerrina 2020, p. 277). Some scholars have noted that EU implementation of gender policies is also constrained at a broader level by the neo-liberal logic underpinning overall gender approaches, in which women are identified as agents rather than as victims in the realms of peace and security (Guerrina and Wright 2016, p. 309).

Even so, and in spite of these limitations, SSR remains a flagship of the external assistance programme through which the EU endeavours to promote and transfer gender

equality norms, especially in fragile, violent and conflict-ridden post-war contexts (European Commission 2016b). EU policy documents highlight women's exclusion from security institutions and from decision-making processes as leading to increased risks of social instability and violence in conflict and post-conflict societies (Caprioli 2000, 2005, Caprioli and Boyer 2001). Therefore, the EU recognises gender equality as a key condition of sustainable peacebuilding, conflict prevention and as a critical predictor of stability and security (Crespo-Sancho 2017). It is the assumption that patriarchal values prevail in security sector institutions in fragile and conflict-affected areas that informs the EU's motivation to promote gender equality norms through its external support for SSR programmes (True 2013, p. 5, DCAF 2015, p. 2, Ansorg and Gordon 2019, p. 2) and to build gender equality norms-based security institutions (Council of the European Union 2017, p. 14). Meanwhile, some researchers have raised concerns over the EU's instrumental use of gender norms to buy-in support from local allies for its programmes (Jayasundara-Smiths 2018, p. 10). This point will be addressed later in this article. Meanwhile, as feminist security scholars and critical SSR scholars have rightly observed (Guerrina and Wright 2016, Muehlenhoff 2017, Guerrina *et al.* 2018, Chappell and Gurrerina 2020), CSDP (EU Common Security and Defence Policy) missions suffer from limited understanding of what gender equality means (Ansorg and Haastrup 2018, p. 1138). Taken together, these observations suggest that the EU's security institutions may be finding it difficult to implement their own gender equality policies, making it less likely they will know how to achieve their goal of gender mainstreaming all external security programmes and activities, including SSR.

The EU's overall approach to Gender Security Sector Reform (GSSR) is inspired by global normative frameworks such as the United Nations' (UN) Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (Villelas *et al.* 2016, p. 5, Mobekk 2010, p. 276). So far, outcomes of these two often draw criticism as examples of masculinised militarisation of foreign interventions involving more women (Santos *et al.* 2013, p. 6, Nikoghosyan 2018, p. 11) and associating gender with "women in need of protection" which lends justifications to foreign militarist interventions and the promotion of enhanced forms of military protection (Enloe 2000). As rightly observed by Coomaraswamy, former UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict has also noted "[w]omen, peace and security is about preventing war, not about making war safer for women" (2015, p. 191). As feminist security scholars contend, among other factors, the EU's implementation of UN resolution 1325 is hampered by supporting EU frameworks that in most cases predate the eight UN Security Council resolutions on the WPS' agenda. This makes it unlikely that without further measures, EU gender policies can fully align with UN resolutions (Guerrina and Wright 2016, p. 292).

In spite of the constraints already mentioned, to operationalise its normative commitment to gender equality and gender mainstreaming in third countries, EU missions use several strategies, such as "gender balancing" (promotion of equal participation of men and women in security institutions), "gender inclusion" (via creating oversight bodies with equal gender representation) and "gender mainstreaming" (assessing the gendered impact of all SSR measures) (Ansorg and Haastrup 2018, p. 6). However, these efforts have not resulted in the expected impacts overall (Ansorg and Haastrup 2018), in part because of the widespread tendency to equate "gender" with "women" (Kunz 2014, p. 604) and a lack of a strategic approach to gender mainstreaming (Olsson *et al.* 2014). There are also practical resource constraints (Martinelli 2015, p. 2), insufficient support from Brussels and

mission leaderships, and the problem of the EU's diminishing reputation as a normative actor, given their prioritisation of strictly technical approaches to security overall (Jayasundara-Smits 2016, p. 1). The recent resurgence of right-wing and anti-feminist populist politics that marginalises women, migrants and other vulnerable groups in some European member states has been identified as an obstacle to the credibility of the EU's internal and external promotion of gender equality norms (Verloo 2018, p. 4). Traditional patriarchal norms are reasserted as local patriarchal and nationalist elites defend existing gender hierarchies and unequal gender power relations, resisting gender equality norms within the EU itself. In external partner states, there may be superficial acceptance of gender equality norms, alongside their highly selective application (Schroeder and Chappius 2014, p. 214). Another factor explored in this paper is the EU's own ways of dealing with gender equality within its SSR missions.

Given the large body of literature currently available on EU gender equality policies and programmes,¹ by engaging with both norm literature and the works of critical feminist security scholars in International Relations (IR), this article sees its contribution to both bodies of literature by conducting an investigation into how the EU SSR missions actually practice gender equality norms, in particular the ways in which the EU missions practice gender equality visually. Given the increasing visual turn in politics and life, this article is an invitation to take the old adage "a picture is worth a thousand words" more seriously. By resorting to a visual investigation, I hope to overcome some of the current limitations in the literature. By combining, SSR, media, visual methods, and photography, gender and feminist security scholarship, and paying close attention to visual representational practices, I intend to unpack the broader gendered regimes of representations in SSR and their consequences for overall gender goals of the EU. Following Hansen, I treat the visual as an "ontological-political condition rather than a variable to be counted", therefore to exploit the visuals for deconstructing the represented reality (in Kirkpatrick 2015, p. 208). By so doing, I want to make the EU's underlying representative politics of gender equality in the visual imagery explicit. The visual imagery can help to understand the producers of this reality as much as other policy outcomes (Kirkpatrick 2015, p. 208). Drawing attention to visual practice should be one way to test the EU's commitment to gender equality norm from a critical GSSR perspective. By undertaking a systematic and comprehensive visual enquiry, the idea is to throw light on the gendered nature of EU's external security practices and identify gaps in the EU's commitment to gender equality, as reproduced in the practices of images and representations.

Main questions and data

The main questions this article asks are: (1) How do EU SSR missions engage in representations of gender during mission operations? (2) How do those representations relate to gender equality norms and values as stated in EU gender policies?

To answer these questions, I chose to analyse two ongoing EU-SSR missions: the European Union Advisory Mission in Ukraine (EUAM) and the European Union Capacity Building Mission Sahel-Mali (EUCAP Sahel-Mali). These two missions are treated as qualitative case studies (Yin 2014) and as "similar cases" based on the following characteristics: (1) both are defined as civilian missions under the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), and (2) both were launched following an external threat to state

sovereignty. While there are substantial differences in the socio-political histories of the two countries and the nature of external threats they face, both missions were launched at approximately the same time (2015). This means both have (3) been subject to same policy and operational frameworks related to EU-SSR mission planning. Finally, (4) both missions were underpinned by the same set of EU gender equality norms, whilst assuming similarities in their wider environments.

While it is reasonable to assume that there are many differences in gender relations between Ukraine and Mali, the ubiquity of gender inequalities globally permits an assumption of some levels of similarity. Rather than examining the actual gender hierarchies in the two countries, the focus *here* is on how EU mission newsletters represent gender equality in their visual materials. Similarities alongside obvious differences, allow for a meaningful analysis of the representation in the two selected cases and helps to draw out subsequent lessons.

This article relies on secondary visual data in the form of photographs. Following Hall (2003), I assign photographic images a central role in both communicating and creating the world in which we live. From this perspective, visual data can be seen as crucial for unpacking unacknowledged biases and relations of power among the local women and men, as well as between Western EU male and female staff, and local male and female staff (Hall 1997). In this study photography is treated as a powerful tool, communicating relations of power and a purveyor of visual stories told from a particular angle and by particular actors (Levi-Strauss in Bleiker 2018, p. 14). It might be objected that the photographs used by the EU mission newsletters are chosen by particular individuals and are not directly selected by EU institutions. However, in line with Brothers' work (1997, p. 27), I argue that the selection and use of particular visual images in the EU's public outreach strategies and in digital diplomacy can be analysed to expose some of the collective unconscious biases and attitudes of EU institutions. From this perspective, photographs are treated not just as visual images that *document* reality, but as tools that help to *produce* – for the viewing audience – the meanings of that reality. As such, photographs could be seen as having agency to assert certain perspectives, or to mobilise viewers towards a certain goal – in this case, gender equality. This visual data could strengthen or undermine the politically correct answers often given by EU officials and mission beneficiaries during qualitative data gathering processes, such as interviews. As asserted in other recent studies (Kronsell 2016, Hoijtink and Muehlenhoof 2020), visual data is very useful in capturing the gender dimensions of specific policies and practices, which can otherwise become obscured in the formal language of official texts.

The choice of missions' online public outreach material is guided by an understanding among SSR scholars and practitioners of the importance of regular interaction with the public and information sharing as critical for achieving SSR goals (Gordon 2014, p. 132, Schirch 2016, p. 175). In the eight issues of the two mission newsletters I reviewed, there were in total more than 100 photographs, all with captions and accompanying headlines. Only those within the main focus of this article, on gender equality, were selected by applying a purposive sampling technique, and using the criterion of "perceived salience". I selected 30 photographs – 15 from each mission. All were related to the theme of gender equality. The criteria of "perceived salience" to further privilege the phenomenological and semiotic nature and the value underlying this study,

which is derived from the sensory experiences of the researcher and the viewers in understanding what is depicted in the photographs (Patton 2002, p. 104). Also, the sample size helped slim down the amount of visual data that needs to be analysed, as well as avoiding into a thinner level of analysis that would result from choosing more photos (Bernard 2000, p. 176). From the Mali Mission, these photographs were chosen from four editions (January 2016, May 2016, January 2017 and May 2017) of *La Gazelle*, the main newsletter of EUCAP Sahel Mali mission (EEAS 2016a, 2016b, 2017a, 2017b). *La Gazelle* is considered to be the flagship publication communicating the mission's activities. It is only published in French, issued quarterly. The target readership is mission partners: internal security forces, (local) civil society organisations, embassies and international organisations and anyone who reads French and interested in mission activities. It is also accessible to the general public via the internet. It is produced by the Brussels based press team of the European External Action Services (EEAS), which also acts as the key contact point for the journalists interested in the European Union's foreign affairs and security policy.

From the EUAM mission, I chose the September 2017, October 2017, November and December 2017 editions of its monthly web-based newsletter with interactive features (EUAM Ukraine 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d). It is issued in English with online option to translate content into Ukrainian. Copyright of the website is held by EUCAP Ukrainian mission. Given the newsletters' accessibility in Ukrainian, the website seems designed to be directly accessible to Ukrainian citizens, making it an integral part of EU digital diplomacy. Most of the news items in the newsletter are directly connected to the mission's Facebook page, which is currently "liked" by 32,535 people and followed by 33,442. Based on the opinion of 76 visitors who gave feedback, the Facebook page of the mission is ranked 4.6 out of 5.

The next section of the article discusses concepts and theoretical perspectives: the politics of representation, framing, gender and security. This is followed by an overview of some relevant historical and contemporary aspects of gender norms and relations in Ukraine and Mali, drawing on local and international feminist research. Using local feminist research is intended to avoid the "orientalist gaze" promoted by Western feminist scholarship of non-western contexts and subjects (Naples 2017). The next section offers a nuanced understanding of how visual material of the EU mission newsletters represents and frames gender power relations of women and men in Ukraine and Mali. It also reflects on how Western EU mission staff (men and women) relate with local "beneficiaries" of SSR projects, and on the gendered meanings of how Malian and Ukrainian societies are constructed, represented and communicated to viewers, through the lens of feminist research on gendered realities in the two countries. Race and geo-political relations are pertinent in both Ukraine and Mali, and also form part of the analysis. The concluding section reflects on the EU missions' representational practices, assessing the degree to which they actually correspond to the norms of the EU's own gender equality policies.

Theoretical framework

Politics of representation: a constructivist approach

The approach to theorising visual representation draws from Stuart Hall's work, where representation connects meaning and language, including words, images and signs, to

culture (Hall 1997, p. 15). This article adopts Hall's constructivist approach, which acknowledges that neither objects in themselves nor the individual users of language can fix meanings in language but rather suggests that humans construct meaning using representational systems – concepts and signs (1997, p. 25). Further, representation is understood as an active, creative and relational process, through which people think about the world and their place within it by “giving meaning” to objects, including visual objects (Hall 1997, p. 25). Hall contends that members of a society or group constantly produce and exchange meanings, within specific cultural contexts. The culture offers mutually comprehensible, shared cultural codes, which allow those who live within the same cultural context to see the world through shared conceptual maps (Hall 1997, p. 22). These cultural codes are context-specific and subject to historical and contemporary specificities of social relation of power, including gender.

A dynamic concept of representation helps unpack processes of meaning-making through visual objects as a form of social practice that in turn shapes people and societies. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), every visual sign of communication is coded, and societies choose to speak of or pay attention to coded signs that they appreciate and value and which carry a specific significance in their everyday lives, culture and manner of conduct. People look at representations and social interactions within specific historical, cultural and institutional contexts (Van Leeuwen 2005).

This is a useful, critical approach to interpreting photographs, treating visual communication as a complex affair connected to power relations and cultural norms of a given society. These power relations intersect with knowledge generation and, in our case, with gender norms, relations, subjects and subjectivities. This implies certain “effects and affects” in terms of behaviours. As Evans remarked

If [visual communications] have an influence on “behaviour” it is more likely to be indirectly, because knowledge is always implicated in power and power implies limits on what can be seen and shown, thought and said. (in Evans and Hall 1999, p. 311)

This places the process of representation inside the moment captured in photographs, as constitutive of that moment, as it were. The photographs used by the EU missions for everyday communication with the missions' partners and beneficiaries are not viewed as simple communication tools, but as a set of complex representational practices, as any photograph used for communication can be analysed to convey several different sets of meanings. For these reasons, photographs used in newsletters may not work in the way the EU intended, being subject to layers of interpretation, mediation and understanding by viewers situated in multiple relations of power, across space, time, histories and epistemes. Writing of practices, Eveline and Bacchi (2005, p. 506) contend that gender identities – i.e. masculinities and femininities – should always be understood as incomplete; as something that “... people-as-bodies ‘do’ through their practices” in relation to others. This makes such an approach relevant for understanding the gender dimension of EU visual representational practices. As another study notes: “doing and the practice follows a gendered logic of appropriateness which “prescribes” (as well as proscribes) “acceptable” masculine and feminine forms of behaviour, rules and values for men and women within institutions” (Chappell and Waylen 2013, p. 601).

Framing gender and security

Drawing from broader feminist scholarship, gender is viewed as relational, implying that masculinities and femininities are embodied in men and women, who do not exist as independent categories, but always in relation one to the other. Gender is also understood as a key social category that finds expression in material or economic conditions, and as an organising principle of social and political systems at macro, meso and micro levels (Kronsell 2016, p. 106). Concept of masculinities similarly refer to social construction of differences in gender regimes (Connell 2005), by drawing differences between masculinities and femininities, and by construction of difference within the two categories. When distinct cultural norms and institutions support specific forms of masculinity, these can be considered as dominant or hegemonic masculinity (Connell cited in Kronsell 2016, p. 107). Such notions of masculinity and femininity, to be hegemonic, need to be constructed on the basis of commonly perceived gender binaries that are broadly accepted in society, even if contested at the margins (Kronsell 2016, p. 108). Gendered masculinities and femininities are thus understood as sets of practices, dominant or contested, which draws specific attention to how gender norms are conceptualised and practiced in the realm of security (Tickner 1992, Sylvester 2010, Wibben 2010). Such norms are often (re)produced through processes of militarisation, which can inform underlying assumptions of security policies, amplified by nationalist ideology (Guerrina *et al.* 2018, pp. 1038–1039). These specific understanding of gender could help reveal how frames used in the newsletters (re)produce gendered and gendering frames, including both desired and inadvertent messages concerning men and women in the realms of security, and in relation to EU external intervention in SSR and the gendered assumptions of EU institutions, as well as how those norms are being projected through foreign and security EU policies (Chappell and Guerrina 2020, p. 262).

The analysis of photos relies mainly on a framing technique (Entman 1993, p. 52, Schwalbe 2006, p. 269). Framing is to “select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman 1993, p. 52). Framing is used to identify the patterns emerging as a result of choices made during selection, organising, emphasising, presenting, and sometimes ignoring, certain aspects of photographic images. Frames have many sources (Schwalbe 2006, p. 269), and of particular interest here is the exploration and analysis of identity frames, namely gender-based identities, including gender-based stereotyping, differentiating, and gendered and gendering roles. Framing is applied as an active process that passes through several stages of selecting (therefore simultaneously omitting) certain aspects of a perceived reality of gender power relations and subjects and subjectivities, making some actors, agencies and power relations more salient to the viewer than others (Schwalbe 2006, p. 269). The selection process involved in framing reveals cognitive structures through which the photographs convey to viewers what is most salient and important. This can be with regard to gender equality norms, practices and relations between local women and men, and local and international staff. A process-oriented approach to framing can help understand the frame-building process, or how the frames emerge, as well as frame-setting, the interplay between media frames and audience predispositions. Frame-setting, Entman (1993) notes, takes place in several locations,

including the communicator, the text or visual, the receiver and the wider culture (d'Angelo 2002; de Vreese 2005).

In my visual analysis, I use framing as a theory and a technique to trace the presence or absence of certain actors, stereotyped images, sources of information, captions of the visuals and corresponding news titles that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments on gender relations (Entman 1993, p. 52). This makes framing an active and intentional exercise in generating information on gender equality topic and functions as a screening device or interpretative package (Ferree 2003, p. 307). As Gamson and Modigliani (1989) have contended, visual images are key “framing devices” that can condense information and offer a “media package” of an issue; in this case, of gender equality.

In this article I apply two main types of frames – issue specific and generic frames (de Vreese 2005). Issue-specific frames allow for “great specificity and detail whereas generic frames offer a systematic platform for comparison across issues, frames, and topics” (de Vreese *et al.* 2001, p. 108). I use issue-specific frames to situate the issue of gender equality and generic frames to situate gender equality within broader themes of colonialism, security and external intervention. This helps capture varying time spans and different cultural contexts across the two countries (de Vreese 2005). Given the recent history of liberal interventions in both Ukraine and Mali, both types of frames are needed to analyse relations of gender security and SSR. Gender framing in the newsletters is identified using a poststructuralist and postcolonial feminist theoretical understanding of gender as socially constructed, with specific meanings in specific contexts due to historical, cultural and geographical realities (Butler 1999), where gender always intersects with race, ethnicity, class, sex, culture and so on (Crenshaw 1989).

Case analysis: EUAM-Ukraine

After the European Neighbourhood Policy was agreed in 2004, the EU gradually began to sponsor a number of state reforms in Ukraine (EEAS a, b).² Given the long-standing geopolitical tensions in the region, these EU-sponsored reforms are believed by some to have triggered adverse reactions, especially from Russia (Mearsheimer 2014, p. 77). Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in March 2014 epitomised these tensions, and triggered the 2015 launch of EUAM (Nováky 2015, p. 244).

Using the EUAM framework, the EU launched a number of reforms in the Ukrainian security sector (Litra *et al.* 2016). The main beneficiaries of these reforms were law enforcement and rule of law institutions such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the National Anti-Corruption Bureau, the National Police, the Security Service of Ukraine, the Border Guard Service, and the judiciary among others (EUAM website). Before the immediate events that provoked the launch of the EUAM mission, many Ukrainians already believed that Ukrainian security institutions needed radical reforms capable of addressing problems of endemic corruption, nepotism and bureaucratic inefficiency (Aslund 2015, p. 22, Zarembko 2015, p. 10, Bhulak 2018, p. 2).

Similar to EU sponsored SSR missions elsewhere,³ EUAM is built on a mixture of functional and normative criteria. Among the normative criteria, gender equality is an important element the EU claims needs to be achieved in Ukrainian security institutions. The prevalence of huge gender imbalances and inequalities in Ukrainian security institutions seems to represent a good case for addressing normative-gender issues via the EUAM

(Ansorg and Haastrup 2018, p. 1135, Horst and Schevchuk 2019). Interestingly, the recent rising proportion of women in civilian security institution is credited not to gender equality measures, but to men's reluctance to perform the poorly paid jobs in the security sector. A lack of attention for gender equality in the Ukrainian security sector goes hand in hand with Ukraine's deep-seated gender power relations and masculine norms that consider men as "natural" leaders, soldiers, protectors, and providers (Kutova 2003, p. 1, OSCE 2016, p. 8). These conservative gender norms limit Ukrainian women's role to two things: being beautiful and becoming mothers and housewives (Martsenyuk 2015, p. 74). This is captured in a locally popular slogan; "women are to give birth, not to take life" (Fellin 2015, p. 15).

These cultural values and norms about men and women were somewhat challenged in the 2014 Maidan revolution,⁴ when Ukrainian women played a pivotal role in frontline protests and campaigning. Their increased participation was mainly valued in terms of the contribution of their sexualised "beauty" as a contribution to the revolution, however (Fellin 2015, p. 8), and evidence suggests continued discrimination against women in the post-Maidan armed forces (Lucas *et al.* 2017, p. 1)

In such conditions of generalised societal conflict and militarisation, promoting gender equality in the Ukrainian security sector would appear to be an uphill battle. Even though the EUAM mission does not have an explicit GSSR lens to its activities, in 2016, the mission appointed a Gender Advisor, who publicly opted for a reactive approach to gender equality, sending a strong signal that in Ukraine, the EU preferred to deal with gender issues at arm's length (Ansorg and Haastrup 2018, p. 9).

Given Ukraine's geo-political significance to the EU, one could see how EU's strategic security approach is preceding its promised normative approach to SSR (Chappell and Guerrina 2020, p. 277, Hoijtink and Muehlenhoff 2020). However, considering the EU's overall approach to GSSR, it is reasonable to expect the EU to at least make an effort to practice its own gender equality norms and present model behaviour.

Framing Ukrainian women security actors: marginal and decorative

In general, in the selected images, the newsletter frames local female security staff as a type of sexualised add-on to various security scenarios. The images of young female officers (17 December 2017 edition⁵), taken when a bicycle patrol scheme was introduced in the Lviv region, to enhance the regional presence of Odesa. For any viewer, immediate key attributes this photograph presents are "beauty and prettiness" of the female officers. In these photographs, female officers are placed beside male officers, and invariably a male officer occupies the centre of the frame. This specific physical arrangement of male and female officers in the photograph renders female officers as subordinate and represents them as accompaniments – side shows – to the central heroic male soldier. Female officers appear in a supporting role as "decorative elements" or as some other studies have identified, even as objects of dominant "protective masculinities" (Kronsell 2016, p. 114, Hoijtink and Muehlenhoff 2020, p. 371). Hall's dynamic view of representation suggests the complex ways in which social power relations create interaction between the viewers and what is viewed. These photographs have the effect – in the context of the Ukraine – of reinforcing and reproducing existing social and institutional gender inequalities and dominant images of masculinity and femininity.

Ukrainian female security officers are usually pictured performing civilian roles or in the role of spectators, photographed gazing at “men in action”. This kind of representation of the female subject recurs in images connected with several news items. One is a report of an event coordinating donor reporting of best practices across the security sector (September 2017 edition). In the few examples of where female officers have a strong presence, this usually involves them in the performance of menial or physically undemanding tasks. Thus, for example, in the September 2017 and December 2017 editions, women are shown sitting behind computers. This contrasts with representations of male officers, most often captured in uniform and in action-oriented poses. Taken together, these specific visual representations reproduce the gendered image of men as superior, physically more powerful, more important and more able, action-oriented subjects.

Also notable is the EUAM newsletter’s keenness to depict women in news items in relation to civil society action, for example, or when reporting on the themes of victimhood and vulnerability (20 October 2017, November 2017). In the realm of security and international security interventions, these specific forms of representations endorse and naturalise women’s belonging to the civilian domain, rather than to the political, technical and military domains. In this way, the mission’s newsletter effectively marginalises and erases women’s agentic power in specifically security-related issues.

Framing Ukrainian male security actors: “boys will be boys”

Similar visual representational strategies were used in other news items. For instance, one of the main news items in the 14 December 2017 edition of the newsletter reported that 30 off-road vehicles were donated to the Ukrainian security forces to serve in remote communities. Several photographs of this event emphasised the physically strong, well-built, uniformed male security actors. The angle from which these photographs were taken served to highlight the physical strength of the male officers; their stature as well as their close proximity to a long row of seemingly high-tech security vehicles. These particular images evoke familiar societal stereotypes of men and women, where men (but not women) are identified as interested in and competent with “gadgets” and cars, with women outside the frame. This elevated focus on hard military and security equipment projects the EU’s support in relation to a distinctly masculine portrayal of military power. These particular images speak volumes of what feminist scholars have identified as hegemonic masculinity, and how it produces, and is produced by subordinating and excluding femininity and images of non-hegemonic masculinities. Only the militarised characteristics of men are made salient in these photos (Hojtink and Muehlenhoff 2020, p. 367), implying EU identification with hegemonic masculinity in Ukraine. Overall, Ukrainian male security officers rate much better in visibility, but are mostly presented in classical military fashion: uniform-wearing, physically fit. This equates security with military masculinity, ignoring non-military aspects of security or rendering them feminine.

The visual analysis of EUAM’s public outreach materials provides evidence of the mission’s own underlying gender biases and specific institutional understandings of gender and gender equality. To some extent, these contradict the EU’s stated gender equality policies and goals; in other ways they correspond to these stated goals of quantitatively

promoting women in the security sector without changing the militarism of the norms or values of that sector. My analysis shows that mission representations are normalised and reproduce images of the unequal gender power relations in Ukrainian security institutions and in the wider society. Although one could argue that this is due to EU's lack of awareness of forms of gender representation, it is more likely that the cause is a lack of self-reflection and serious ethical commitment to EU gender norms on the part of EU institutions involved in SSR. As some scholars have succinctly put it, the EU is gender blind in its security policies and its supporting institutional structures, or lack of them (Guerrina *et al.* 2018, p. 1040). The presence and visibility of men and male security actors in the selected newsletters lends credence to such claims. Repetitive appearance of male security actors as central in images within the newsletter assigns them an importance and prominence that women lack in these pages. These representations, presences and absences, tend to underscore the absence and marginalisation of female security actors in Ukraine.

These visibilities and invisibilities expose an implicit bias in terms of more favourable attitudes towards male security actors and the marginalisation of how female security actors are framed. This gives the impression that female officers are less credible as state security actors, where they play supporting rather than leading roles. Collectively, these visual representations make women and female security actors unworthy as the main subjects in these "news items". The unequal gender power relations represented in the mission's newsletter reinforces existing dominant gender biases and stereotypes in Ukrainian society, and in this way, EU intervention in Ukraine can be said to add legitimacy to the grand logic underlying external security interventions, in which women are framed as referent objects of such interventions by manly men (Mobekk 2010, p. 280, Kunz 2014, p. 605). This observation is echoed by the findings of several other recent studies which used both textual and visual data to examine the dominance of military masculinities in representations of the EU's security and military missions (Krosnell 2016, p. 113, Hoijtink and Muehlenhoff 2020, p. 364, Wright and Guerrina 2020, p. 535).

Framing EU women officers: "able other women and high-ranking experts"

As the intersectional view of gender reiterates, gender can never be seen in isolation: it comes with race, sexuality, geo-politics, class and other identities, hence with social relations of power. One such power relation clearly represented in the photographs is a superiority–inferiority relationship between EU female officers and their Ukrainian female counterparts, hence construction of different femininities and hierarchies among them, where the Ukrainian female staff is assigned a subordinate position in relations to the dominant EU female staff. In the newsletter, this relationship is often represented by depicting EU female officers in the centre stage of action and in-action mode. In all the photographs their serious looking facial expressions and higher position of power are emphasised via short range shots and oblique angles. They often appear looking or listening intensely, focused and busy, doing something seemingly important—such as taking down notes, and speaking to an audience (19 October 2017, 17 and 22 November 2017 editions). Contrastingly, the Ukrainian female staff or participants of EU organised events are represented as less serious, unenthusiastic or uninterested subjects. In the photograph they seem to be "doing other things", interestingly including in/directly posing for the camera in the midst of an ongoing public event. Further, a photo taken during a Ukrainian police training mission to

the INTERPOL Headquarters in Lyon, a female officer who is standing in the middle of two Ukrainian male officers is even striking a perfect professional modelling pose (31 August 2017 edition). Also in another news item reporting of a Web summit held for senior Ukrainian law enforcement officers in IT, again a Ukrainian female officer is posing like a model in the centre (24 November 2017 edition). On 22nd December 2017 newsletter, a perplexed looking female Ukrainian regional parliamentarian from Kharkiv region is depicted among male figures who are looking more engaged and serious. Most strikingly, a photograph documenting an event related to compensation for victims of violent crimes (October 2017) the presence of a blurry figure of a Ukrainian female participant in the far end of the table who looks totally disinterested, (or distressed due to the topic discussed) is marked. Sitting next to her, is an EU female officer who is engaged and seems to be taking down notes on her laptop, while another female participant is addressing the audience.

I traced this superior-inferior relationship as established through the photographs to historical geo-political relations between the West and the East, in which the Western subject is assuming the superior, presumably modern political subject position against the presumably backward, traditional, Eastern, non-political subject. I identify this superior position as stemming from the West's claimed modern-liberal-advanced form of democratic governance. The political inferiority of the Eastern subject is tied to their socialist past, which turns them into targets of intervention to save them from being duped zombies still living under the influence of their past totalitarian-communist regimes.⁶ This power relation is represented through "othering" strategies employed when framing the EU female staff and their Ukrainian counterparts. The repetitive visual prominence given to the EU female officials is also gained using extra-large images of them and highlighting the presences of high ranked female EU officials, such as Ms. Rosalyn Sheehan, Deputy Head of Operations (August 2017) and the EUAM deputy Head of Mission, Joelle Vatcher (22 November 2017). From the perspective of representation, these specific framing strategies appear to be reinforcing historical, hierarchical and superior-inferior political power relations and as other scholars have observed, can be even damaging to the EU's efforts at painting a normative and egalitarian image for itself which they now hope to achieve via quick digital diplomacy that reaches beyond the EU territory (Wright and Guerrina 2020). This particular gender framing re-establishes the power of the modern-white-Western European-female subject vis-à-vis their not so powerful or even helpless local counterparts, including Eastern European men and women, thus legitimising and reproducing the West's agentic power (i.e. knowledge, bureaucratic, controlling and regulatory power). This is a familiar critique often heard from places where international security interventions are taking place (Kunz 2014, Hudson 2015). The continued *othering* effect of these photographs reinforces the image of Ukrainian women as "non-subjects" against the egalitarian, modern, European subject positions (Gržinić 2012, p. 6). By re-enacting these unequal gender-political power relations via the visuals in the newsletter, the mission indicates its inability to be a transformative gender equality force in Ukraine.

Case analysis: EUCAP Sahel-Mali

From 2012, with a heightened security crisis in Mali, the EU started to increase its development assistance to the country via the Comprehensive Regional Approach (2013) and

Action Plan (2015) (Gowan 2017, p. 4). Both these initiatives interlinked security, development and governance reforms. The EUCAP Sahel-Mali mission was introduced as a complementary measure to the ongoing European Union Training Mission (EUTM) launched in 2013.⁷ The main mandate of the EUCAP was to provide strategic advice and training to three Malian internal security forces: the police, the Gendarmerie and the National Guard, and to relevant ministries in the justice and security sector. The main goal was to “modernise” Mali’s security sector (EUCAP website). EUCAP advisors’ role has been to “help” their Malian security counterparts improve their national strategy for human resources, modernise their management institutional practices and services. The EUCAP mission was also able to advise on recruitment and training of new Police officers, and recruits to the Gendarmerie and National Guard. A cursory look at these objectives suggests the mission is largely a technical and bureaucratic effort to achieve organisational and bureaucratic conformity with “Western” standards of efficiency and performance (Jayasundara-Smits 2018, p. 10).

As the security crisis in Mali began to deteriorate, the mission’s initial mandate was extended several times, running until January 2021 (EUCAP website). The second and third phase of activities focused on improving combat capabilities of Malian security forces, notably by strengthening their capacity to counter terrorism and organised crime in the country and the wider Sahel region (EUCAP website). By any measure, one cannot but conclude that the mission’s activities have become closely aligned with “securitisation measures”⁸ which are part of the West’s discourse of “war against terrorism” and “illegal migration”, even allowing local security actors to by-pass established norms and rules in the interests of securing EU borders (Bigo 2002, p. 64, Barbulescu 2017, p. 308). Following Bigo’s work on security and immigration and the “politics of unease” (2002, p. 64), it seems that the EUCAP’s new activities (specialised training for Malian security forces for managing and detecting risks of terrorism, criminal activities and irregular or illegal migration) are premised on the idea that problems are caused by Malian security forces being ill-trained, incompetent or unaware of risks.

In the meantime, Mali’s historically and contextually rooted societal attitudes towards gender norms and power relations also act as a serious impediment to realising gender equality norms within EUCAP’s programmes (Triquet and Serrano 2011, p. 6, Sleggh *et al.* 2013, Calix *et al.* 2018). Historically, Malian security institutions have been under male authority (UNDP 2011, p. 15), and the continued highly gendered and patriarchal security institutions are one notable legacy of this history. This situation is unlikely to improve sooner, as the Malian security institutions remain deeply embedded in traditional power relations that reproduce and reinforce both cultural and religious patriarchal gender norms and orders (Grosz-Ngaté 2000, p. 13). The dominance of Bamabara group who makes up 40% of the population and their culture is established using traditional ideas of male superiority and male “natural” endowment with abilities tied to the legal–political domain (Gottlieb 2016, p. 104). Despite the new measures introduced by the Malian government to promote gender equality in public office, they are struggling to materialise in real life. Strong asymmetric social gender norms continue to prevent women from enjoying and participating in public life (Gottlieb 2016, p. 95).

Consistent with EU-sponsored SSR missions in armed conflict settings (Gordon *et al.* 2015, p. 7), Mali’s strategic importance in the West’s fight against terrorism and irregular

migration seems to impose limits on the extent to which the EUCAP mission prioritises a stronger emphasis on the norms of promoting gender equality. Any potential backlash from such gender equality promotion interventions could alienate Malian political and military elites; this can be considered a real risk. Given that support from local security-related and government elites in achieving EU's larger strategic objectives in the Sahel region is a vital consideration, a subtle approach to promoting gender equality norm via SSR has been adopted. The mission's current explicit approach to gender equality via capacity building efforts has little impact due to its heavy focus on technical aspects over norms and values (Jayasundara-Smits 2018, p. 10). Even so, to not make any explicit effort to promote gender equality is not seen as an option for the EU, given what are believed to be the potentially adverse consequences of such a move for the promotion of EU sponsored security institutions and potential damage to the EU's external image and the mission's overall success.

Framing local men and women: culture bearing civilian women and uniformed, violent men

Visual analysis of the mission's outreach materials shows the mission's current, explicit, technical and programmatic efforts to promote gender equality norms in the Malian security sector to be limited. The mission's images appear not to role-model gender equality norms via visual representations of daily activities in *La Gazelle*. Instead, the photographs used in the newsletter tend to reinforce existing institutional and society-wide patriarchal gender norms and roles. Analysis of selected photographs captured specific instances where local men are present and how in these images, relationships between local men and women are framed. The local male security actors often appear in news items related to training activities, importantly during combat-type training sessions (*Newsletter 1* – pages 2, 4, 6, 10 and 11, *Newsletter 4* – pages 5 and 11, *Newsletter 3* – pages 4, 8, 9). The choice made by producers of the newsletter was to focus almost entirely on local male security actors, depicted with guns whilst engaging in combative action. This reinforces the dominant social stereotypes that equate manliness with soldiering. In the same photographs, women are completely absent, which makes one wonder: what happened to them? Are they being excluded from the EU training, or only from photographs of the training? Whilst many women in African contexts have been actively engaged in armed combat as soldiers in paramilitaries, the complete absence of women in uniforms or at military training seems to reflect a European sense of being ill-at-ease with depicting female soldiers. It thus reinforces local – as well as EU – notions of the male protective role via soldiering, and by excluding women soldiers, reinforces dominant notions of femininity that view women in the military as “not natural”. These findings reconfirm what some other recent studies analysing EU promotional videos of operation Sophia⁹ have conclude, namely that EU framings of “protector masculinity” remain dominant, and are articulated in relation to local non-Western women whose femininities are marked by motherhood, victimhood and weakness and in urgent need of protection from local other men, such as human traffickers and smugglers (Hojtink and Muelenhoff 2020, p. 371).

Meanwhile, the absence of local female security providers reproduces traditional images of Malian women as passive subjects, rendering their agency invisible. However, there are instances where their presences is marked in the photos, in a

signifying manner. These are instances related to reporting on specific news items – often related to civil society activities, human rights and gender-related trainings (i.e. *Newsletter 4* – pages 2, 3, 6, 7 and 9). In these images, women are either posing for pictures or talking. These specific representations correspond to traditional notion of “women’s belonging to private and civilian spaces”, where dialogue rather than action is the preferred mode of communication. Moreover, in the same new items, female Malian actors are captured dressed in civilian or traditional clothing. The traditional female dress code (in contrast with uniformed men) tends to reinforce traditional societal narratives, stereotypes and expectations about women’s role as “culture bearers” for the wider society (Shulz 2012, pp. 36–37). Such specific gender representations resonate with the feminist critique of patriarchal preoccupation with women’s morality, and with the universal double standard that burdens women with overall responsibility for protecting their own feminine virtue and the norms and values of the nation (Grosz-Ngaté 2000, p. 12). The gender representational strategies traced in the newsletter are reminiscent of Ferdinand de Saussure’s take on “clothes”, as never innocent or straightforwardly functional, but as items that “signify” and have their own semiotic value in communication (in Wickramasinghe 2003, p. 2).

Kunz claims that such racial-gender representations are functional in creating a new female subject: “willing, endorsing partners or accomplices of the outside Western interventions” (2014, p. 608). Compared to these historical racial-colonial relations of power, the specific gender representation strategies used in the newsletter seems to have many implications in how they project the norms of EU gender equality policy aims. With regard to the visual representational strategies in *La Gazelle*, there are some similarities with visual representational strategies already identified in the EUAM-Ukraine newsletter. The recurring and enhanced presences of the local male security actors endorse them as “desired and able security subjects”. Undoubtedly this image represented of the Malian male security actors is resonant of what Kimberly Hutchings calls “military masculinity” which emphasises the attributes of bravery, violence and service before self (2008, p. 390). This visual analysis confirms that these “masculine” and “military” attributes play an important role in marginalising military images of women as actors in security or combat, including in training. By highlighting the presences of local male security subjects, the mission newsletter paints a reductionist and lesser role for Malian women in mission activities, hence keeping out of focus women’s place in security institutions more generally. The relative absence of local Malian women in the roles of security actor and security provider reinforces, for readers, the traditional notion of Malian women as a domesticated subject under the authority of men.

First of all, the subordinate racialised-gendered power relations that these photographs produce with the local female subjects assign an exclusive role for local women in the normative sphere of SSR. This emphatically normative role, by implication, could reinforce gender inequalities, and even create new forms of the gendered division of labour, fragmenting security institutions. At the same time, security is framed as exclusively military affair, again, denying its non-military aspects.

Framing west and the rest: racialised knowledge subjects and the civilisation mission V.02

This analysis identified several visual representations and framing strategies used in *La Gazelle*, through which specific ideas and practices of gender power relations between

foreign mission staff and local counterparts, were reproduced. The newsletter highlighted specific forms of presence of foreign male staff, whose representations can be contrasted with local male staff. White Western women tended to be assimilated with local women as bearers of “culture”, and smiling participants in non-threatening civil society activities. Surprisingly, photographs taken during the mission’s anniversary celebrations in 2015 and 2017 depict jovial-looking, uniformed, foreign male mission staff without any local counterparts (*Newsletter 3* – pages 3 and 4). The exclusion of local male staff from these photographs appears to be a signifying practice that can hint at the unequal power relations between foreign and local male staff, implying an intra-gender hierarchy between hegemonic and more subordinate masculinities. The framing strategies of separation, othering and differentiation in these photos appear to hark back to social and colonial histories of gender-racial power relations. Exclusion and literal invisibility of local Malian men in two prominently featured photographs does raise questions concerning how equal the sense of partnership is between local and Western actors, a critique often leveraged against EU actors and their external development interventions (Kunz 2014, p. 607). Setting aside for a moment the gendered aspect of this relationship, the complete absence of local Malian men and women does evoke racialised forms of hierarchical power that date back to the era of French colonialism in Mali. Following Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), who paid attention to specific inclusions and exclusions in terms of actors, roles, relationships, such exclusions can powerfully convey assumed mental-epistemological boundaries and knowledge-power hierarchical relations, as established by France’s former “mission civilisatrice” (Paris 2002, p. 638).

Compared to the foreign male security actors who often appear in active roles (as trainers), local security actors appear mostly as recipients of the instructions and expertise of Westerners. These specific, visualised representations imply a set of relations of superiority and inferiority, with implied relations of dominance and submission, between mostly white EU foreign staff, and local security sector staff. This hierarchical intra-gender order is depicted repeatedly in other photographs in the newsletter as well. In those photographs, local male security staff are depicted in the roles especially in events reporting seminars and training activities – such as knowledge absorbers: sitting down, taking notes and listening to a foreign trainer. Such depiction are very visible in several editions of the newsletter, specially, May 2017 edition of the newsletter reporting of a seminar on decentralisation activities, first training course for female gendarmerie and IP force and in the January 2017 newsletter photos corresponding to a training session for local mobile task force development and many similar images in May 2016 newsletter where the EU trainer’s active, instructing and overseeing role is enhanced depicting them next to the Malian male security actors in “receiving roles”. These images correspond with what is captured in the accompanying titles, such as. “know how to transmit one’s knowledge – an art that can be learned with EUCAP”¹⁰ and “Border security: A concern for all”¹¹ (May 2016). These specific photographic representations, set against the backdrop of French colonial history in West Africa and in Mali, make it hard not to see a reproducing effect on continuing unequal and neo-colonial power relations today between former coloniser and former colonised. Such framings of local mission staff are reminiscent of popular master narratives of the “white man’s burden” and the West’s civilising mission of disciplining and reforming reluctant colonial subjects.¹² As Kronsell claimed in one of her studies on the EUTM mission,¹³ these representational strategies help

establish the “EU masculinity” by relying of images of “protector masculinity”, one hand by protecting the EU homeland femininity and on the other hand, “vulnerable other femininity” from the “Other masculinity”. As she noted, however “The Other masculinity” has to learn how to act appropriately toward the “vulnerable other femininity” (2016, p. 114), also as my analysis found evidences for.

Visual representation strategies of local women and foreign female staff are a little different. Like Western male security actors, foreign female mission staff are mostly depicted in direct and active roles (talking to groups of locals, who are listening, or instructing others), to highlight their quality of being “training and knowledge providers” (*Newsletter 1* – pages 4, 8 and 9, *Newsletter 3* – pages 1, 11 and 12, *Newsletter 4* – page 12). Next to Malian women, and most often dressed in traditional clothes, we find white-Western-female mission staff often depicted as happily smiling while posing in traditional Malian clothes. From the vantage point of Said’s thesis on orientalism, these images are reminiscing of the Occidental fascination with the “Orient” and its “subjects”, as reflected in processes of signifying the coloniser–colonised “difference” and “othering” through mimicry (1978, p. 68). These kinds of inter- and intra-gender representations are uncovered through looking at dress and gender, and the analysis resonates with the findings of other recent studies conducted in the ex-colonies, where liberal Western external interventions take place and are claimed to have reproducing effects on historical racialised-gendered subjects and orders (Kunz 2014, p. 606).

In contrast to white, Western men, Western women are framed as having “gone native” and local women as West-friendly, morally superior, rights protectors and observers (rather than actors) of security, against the repeated representation of local men in stereotypical images as military and militant, implies a natural alliance between the local and Western women, alienating local women from their communities, and elevates local men as true protectors of the state.

By portraying white, Western and male security actors in superior positions, in realms of knowledge and action, these photographs seem to brush aside the knowledge of local personnel, ignoring all but their physical military action in EU trainings. Against these findings, it is unlikely that the mission’s recent technical efforts geared to add more women to the Malian security sector by creating a gender focal point for The Malian National Police and giving celebrity status to the newly appointed female Divisional Commissioner, Ms. Célestine Dombwa (*Newsletter 3* – page 9, *Newsletter 4* – page 9) – will do enough to role-model gender equality norm. Unfortunately, these endeavours rather comes across as a practice of “adding women and stir” and nothing of transformative quality, as the rest of the existing policies and past and current practices have shown (Chappell and Guerrina 2020, p. 277). My finding in the case of Mali further suggest that hegemonic EU masculinities and femininities are shaped through their relation with other, as Kronsell (2016) observed, through subordinated masculinities and femininities, especially non-liberal non-western ones.

Conclusions

Situating in the debates of normative Europe and feminist security scholarship in IR, this article set out to find out how the EU SSR missions represent gender in their mission communications, and how those representations relate to gender (in)equality norms and

values, including those stated in EU gender policies. Visual gendered representations in the newsletters of the two missions appear to share some similarities, with most representations in the newsletters barely moving beyond existing social and cultural gender norms in both the Ukrainian and Malian society. The EU missions' gendered and stereotypical representations of men and women, Western and non-Western signals a lacklustre approach and appears to give credence to the lack of serious ethical commitment to pursuing gender equality norms within the SSR activities in these two countries. To some extent, these findings come as no great surprise, since they do tally with findings of some other studies that showed gaps in the EU's internal policies and practices on gender equality (Kronsell 2016, Martinelli 2015, Guerrina *et al.* 2018, Chappell and Guerrina 2020, Wright and Guerrina 2020). The specific gender representations identified in the selected newsletter photos convey the EU's own rather uncritical and unreflective, even reluctant, embrace of feminist norms and practices of gender equality, in relation to their integration into external SSR operational environments. It is at least concerning that one of the consequences of such representations is that prevailing gender inequalities and militarised notions of masculinities, alongside vulnerable, passive femininities are reinforced for the security sector and in the wider cultural and social norms of the EU's "partner" countries. The EU's repetitive application of frames depicting local men as desirable security actors and local women as marginal or insignificant security actors is problematic, since it contradicts the promise that gender equality matters in SSR processes. As feminist security scholars have noted, the way in which the EU represents gender relations exposes the dissonances between the EU self-image as a normative actor in the international system and the neglect of such these supposedly fundamental values when it comes to external security-related reforms (Wright and Guerrina 2020, p. 531). Perhaps since member states have high levels of influence and control over the EU's overall external security and defence affairs, their priorities are grounded in geopolitical and geostrategic concerns of sovereignty, which leave little room for other normative goals in the implementation of policy agendas (Hojtink and Muehlenhoff 2020).

The missions' visual representations are thus not only gendered, but also conditioned by geo-political relations and racialised, inadvertently exposing continuities in historically entrenched biases and prejudices about "Eastern" and "Southern" local partner communities and actors, both men and women. In line with critical feminist security scholarship (Kunz 2014), these gendered, geo-politicised and racialised power relationships are instrumental to normalising hierarchical relationships between EU mission staff and local beneficiaries. To aim to achieve simple gender equality via SSR, in either the Ukraine or Mali, working through and translating gender equality norms into local practices in the security sector, will not be enough. Any policy for the promotion of gender equality must also address other forms of hierarchical power relations, especially geopolitical and racial power relations between EU missions and local actors, in the security sector and more widely in society. Moving in this direction requires, first, a more self-critical and reflective approach on the part of the EU towards its own policies and practices. Second, it will require a transition from current strategic deployment of gendered equality norms (i.e. EU policies that strategically deploy gender narratives without internalising their norms) towards the EU as an active normative gender actor (i.e. one which actively promotes equality principles and mainstreaming across the board, and not only in relation to gender in "partner" societies) (Chappell and Guerrina 2020, p. 263). As a simple first step,

mission staff could overhaul and reflect on their own communication strategies and focus on the “how” of communicating gender equality norms in a more holistic way, rather than simply focusing on “what” to communicate. This mainly visual analysis has shown at least one concrete way in which the move towards EU-articulated goals around gender equality role modelling can be achieved via the example of communication around EU SSR projects in the Ukraine and Mali.

Notes

1. To name a few, Woodward and Van der Vlueten (2014), Mobekk (2010), Valenius (2007) Ansorg and Haastrup (2018), Kantola (2010), Muehlenhoff (2017), Debusscher and Van der Vlueten (2012), Debusscher (2011).
2. For a comprehensive overview, see European Union (EU) official web portal and Hanssen, Måns (2016) International Support to Security Sector Reform in Ukraine. A Mapping Study of SSR Projects, Folke Bernadotte Academy.
3. To date, EU has undertaken 22 SSR missions in total (EEAS website)
4. A wave of civilian protests began in November 2013 in Kiev’s Maidan Nezalezhnosti- Independence Square demonstrating against the abrupt halting of Ukraine’s integration process with EU by President Yanukovich.
5. No page numbers, interactive online form.
6. Personal communication with Feminist Scholar Dubravka Zarkov.
7. The main objective of the mission is to train the Malian Armed Forces, under EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).
8. Refers to a process by which securitized subjects receive disproportionate amounts of attention and resources compared to other subjects.
9. Operation Sophia is one element of a broader EU comprehensive response to the migration crisis in 2015, specially focusing on the Mediterranean Sea (High seas and the Libyan coast). It is also known as EUNAVFOR MED.
10. Original French caption is “*Savoir transmettre son savoir-un art qui s’apprend avec*” (EUCAP, p. 2).
11. Original French caption is “*La Sécurité des frontières:une préoccupation pour tous*”, p. 4.
12. French colony from 1892–1960, known then as French Sudan.
13. EUTM runs parallel to EUCAP-Sahel Mali mission.

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