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The Politics of Feminist Foreign Policy and Digital Diplomacy

Karin Aggestam
Annika Bergman Rosamond
Elsa Hedling

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Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt
Eichstätt, Germany

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Karin Aggestam
Lund, Sweden

Annika Bergman Rosamond
Edinburgh, UK

Elsa Hedling
Lund, Sweden

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Introduction

Abstract This chapter introduces the study of the politics of feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy. It unpacks two transformative and intersecting developments: (1) Sweden's adoption of a distinct feminist branding of its foreign policy and (2) the embrace of digitalisation in diplomacy. In 2014, Sweden made history by becoming the first country in the world to launch a feminist foreign policy. This pioneering political move demanded both visibility and global attention, prompting Sweden to explore new digital environments and social media platforms, which would offer both scale and reach. Subsequently, several other states followed suit, embracing Sweden's feminist foreign policy as a model of foreign policy conduct. This feminist shift in global politics has given rise to contestation, resistance and rejection by a range of global actors. This chapter advances a novel conceptual framework for studying the relationship between feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy. The framework employs three key concepts: (a) articulation, (b) resonance and (c) contestation. These concepts are used to analyse Sweden's feminist foreign policy leadership, nation branding and visual representation in global politics.

Keywords Feminist foreign policy • Digital diplomacy • Leadership • Branding • Visuality

1.1   Introduction

Sweden was the first country in the world to launch an explicitly feminist foreign policy in 2014. Since then, several other countries have followed suit, adopting similar feminist framings of their foreign policies. This emerging trend of feminist identification underscores the dynamics of an increasingly networked world and the accelerated diffusion of ideas and strategies in global politics. Sweden's aim was to assert its presence and position in global politics and to "become the strongest global voice for gender equality" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2018). This required both visibility and global attention that social media platforms offered in terms of scale and reach. The overarching objective of this book is to conduct a critical examination of this intricate relationship between Sweden's feminist foreign policy and its adept utilisation of digital diplomacy. A key argument in this book is that Sweden's distinctive feminist foreign policy was both reinforced and strengthened by its advanced practices of digital diplomacy. Therefore, the primary research question guiding this study is how the feminist branding of Swedish foreign policy intersects with ongoing processes of digital transformation in diplomatic practices.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that Sweden's feminist branding also sparked contestation and resistance amongst global audiences. In this book, we explore the dynamics constituting what we define as the 'politics of digital diplomacy'. Rather than treating digital diplomacy as a communicative and apolitical practice, we conceptualise it as a profoundly political activity (cf. Bjola & Holmes, 2015; Manor, 2019). Informed by this position, we seek to unpack the political dynamics and fluctuation between antagonism and agonism in global politics (Mouffe, 2013). In this chapter, we advance some key concepts to examine Sweden's political positionings in foreign policy and diplomatic practice, namely 'leadership', 'branding' and 'visuality'. These concepts enable us to analyse how and to what extent feminism and gender equality have become major fault lines and sites of contestation on digital media platforms in global politics (Aggestam & True, 2021). Specifically, we seek to demonstrate how digital diplomacy is constituted within the realm of politics, often through conflictual relations and patterns of engagement. One argument advanced here is that the Swedish government seized the opportunity to engage in state advocacy by adopting a feminist foreign policy.

Sweden's extensive use of digital communication on social media platforms facilitated the dissemination of the core objectives and principles inherent in its feminist foreign policy to a worldwide audience. Moreover, we contend that the influence of such state advocacy cannot solely be measured through online metrics such as likes, shares or duration of engagement. Instead, it needs to be analysed as an interaction between foreign policy and positionings in a digital and global information environment.

To date, the most established form of digital diplomacy involves the use of social media platforms, such as X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, all of which are employed to promote key foreign policy goals globally (Adler-Nissen et al., 2021; Bjola & Holmes, 2015). States and international organisations have embraced digital diplomacy because it offers opportunities to both amplify diplomatic communication and advance nation branding. Thus, there is a pronounced assumption amongst states and their leaders that digital diplomacy has the potential to democratise elite-oriented foreign policy institutions, making them more accessible to both domestic and international audiences (Manor & Crilley, 2019). Thus, social media enables governments to engage with diverse and global audiences directly without having to rely on traditional news media alone (Cull, 2019). In a world where forging and maintaining international relationships are no longer subject to the state's monopoly, digital outreach and influence have gained significant importance and power in global affairs (Cornago, 2013; van Ham, 2010). As a result, digital diplomacy represents a disruption of previously established roles and relationships between elites and the public in global politics. Thus, digital diplomacy is here understood as a relational practice that relies on dialogue, which can be both consensual and, at times, confrontational and antagonistic (to be discussed further in Chap. 2).

The launch and success of new foreign policy initiatives increasingly depend on navigating evolving digital media landscapes (Jackson, 2019; Postema & Melissen, 2021). In the following chapters, we examine Sweden's employment of digital diplomacy as an integral part of its foreign policy practice, pointing to the country's pioneering efforts in this distinct field. Indeed, to gain global recognition for their foreign policy positions, states must manage their strategic narratives and harness their 'communication power' (Miskimmon et al., 2014, 2018). Notably, assertive foreign policy agendas, such as those of China and Russia, have been significantly bolstered by their use of digital diplomacy (Huang, 2022;

Tsvetkova, 2020). Social media platforms also serve as an arena for resistance, contestation and articulation of state identities. Therefore, the growing convergence of digital diplomacy and foreign policy is a vital aspect of the wider digital transformation of global politics.

1.2   Feminist Foreign Policy and Digital Change

While the feminist rebranding of Sweden's foreign policy might have seemed a bold and innovative step to many observers, it also reflected a longstanding tradition of state feminism (Aggestam et al., 2021; Bergman Rosamond, 2020). This reorientation served to make pro-gender norms more visible in inter-state relations and within international institutions not least in the United Nations (UN). This transformation was made feasible by the shifts in the global and domestic digital landscape. Specifically, social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram provided favourable conditions for showcasing and aligning Sweden's foreign policy with contemporary global discourses and audiences (see also Adesina, 2017; Jackson, 2019). The role played by digital platforms was the result of both external and internal factors. In the external environment, a fourth wave of feminism, dating back to 2012, driven by the early anticipation of a digital revolution on social media (Jouët, 2018; Pruchniewska, 2016), had produced a networked audience for global struggles of feminism. At the time, digital expressions of feminist activism, amplified by the #Metoo movement in 2017, became enmeshed in global efforts to promote gender equality (Khoja-Moolji, 2015). Meanwhile, antagonist social movements, rooted in anti-gender norms, traditional family values and notions of hegemonic masculinity, also have engaged in digital activism, making social media platforms contentious and polarised spheres of political exchange (Creedon, 2018; Forchtner & Kølvraa, 2017).

The Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) embraced digital diplomacy as early as 2006 under the helm of then Foreign Minister Carl Bildt who advocated for an extensive digitalisation of Sweden's foreign policy (Pamment, 2011). During that period, the goal was for Sweden to excel in 'digital sophistication' aligned with its self-narrative and nation brand as a technologically advanced state (Christensen, 2013; Pamment, 2011). While the 'progressive Sweden' brand was emphasised at the time, feminism was absent in the country's digital footprint. However, the infrastructure and knowledge of how to conduct effective digital state

advocacy were in place when the new self-proclaimed feminist government came to power in 2014.

Sweden's decision to launch a feminist foreign policy in 2014 mirrored a broader shift towards pro-gender norms as well as gender justice and equality in global politics, set in motion by the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on the Women, Peace, Security (WPS) agenda in 2000. In many ways, Sweden's adoption of feminist foreign policy represented the former Social Democratic government's ambition to become a global leader and feminist agenda-setter, not least within the UN during its tenure as a non-permanent member of the Security Council in 2017–2019 (Olsson et al., 2021). Moreover, for Sweden, a relatively small state, this provided a strategic opportunity to assert normative leadership and deploy feminist-oriented "soft power" within global politics.

This book is firmly located within the rapidly expanding scholarship on feminist foreign policy. Feminist International Relations (IR) scholars have explored the ethical underpinning of feminist foreign policy (Aggestam et al., 2019; Robinson, 2021), its digital diplomatic projections (Aggestam et al., 2021, 2023; Bergman Rosamond & Hedling, 2022), its narration (Zhukova, 2023; Zhukova et al., 2022), the politicisation of the gender-security nexus and its close connection with the WPS agenda (Aggestam & Bergman Rosamond, 2018; Thomson, 2020), its neoliberal foundations and the role of feminist foreign policy in the reproduction of essentialist and colonial discourses and practices (Achilleos-Sarll et al., 2023; Nylund et al., 2022). Of particular significance here is the observation that Sweden's embrace of feminist foreign policy offered an opportunity to advance progressive politics beyond the conventional consensus-oriented approach of gender mainstreaming toward a more controversial and contentious political project (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016, p. 323). Informed by this position, this book analyses the conflictual political dynamics of Sweden's feminist foreign policy in the context of digital communication. The book is based on research that specifically analyses Sweden's use of digital diplomacy as a central strategy to disseminate information about global gender justice and as a strategy for mobilising support for the country's narrative and articulation of feminist foreign policy. Noteworthy here is Jezierska's intervention which highlights how the articulation of Sweden's feminist foreign policy was frequently muted or even silenced by Swedish embassies in their practices of digital diplomacy as a way to conform to local

contexts less inclined to support feminist transformative processes (Jezierska, 2022). This demonstrates the limits of Sweden's feminist foreign policy when it was faced with confrontational criticism.

Despite prolific scholarship on feminist foreign policy, few, if any studies have examined the interplay between the launch of feminist foreign policy and the practice of digital diplomacy. Hence, this book contributes to new theoretical and empirical knowledge by focusing on specific processes of articulation, resonance and contestation. First, *articulation* underscores the vital role of foreign policy leadership as a driver of foreign policy change. Political leaders are central to the articulation of a nation's external identity and foreign policy objectives. Combined with digital diplomacy the nation brand can be communicated through visual and textual language. Hence, both the rebranding of the state and the communication of its prioritised foreign policy goals require global leadership and diplomatic skills. Second, *resonance* refers to how Sweden's feminist foreign policy was diffused globally and communicated to global audiences, foreign policy elites and state actors worldwide. Third, *contestation* brings forth multiple political dynamics and ramifications whereby Sweden's feminist foreign policy elicited both positive amplifications and negative backlash across various digital platforms. This also includes contestation through affective resonance, that is, how online audiences shape and contribute to a particular political agenda by creating emotional responses (Fleig & von Scheve, 2020; Mühlhoff, 2015). In addition to state interactions, contestation occurs within attempts to challenge the status quo of global visibility structures by making marginalised actors more visible and heard on the Internet.

1.3   Digital Diplomacy in a Globalised World

Digitalisation has introduced tools and strategies that make diplomacy more effective in global politics (Bjola, 2016). The reliance on digital tools became particularly evident during the Covid-19 pandemic when diplomatic processes were largely maintained despite physical restrictions hindering face-to-face diplomacy (Eggeling & Versloot, 2022; Maurer & Wright, 2020; Naylor, 2020). However, digitalisation has also introduced new challenges and forms of contention and conflictual dialogue, which tend to blur the line between diplomacy as a peaceful activity, and as a new form of aggression (Bjola & Pamment, 2019; Golovchenko et al., 2018). In the broadest sense, digital diplomacy refers to how digitalisation and information and communication technology (ICT) intersect (Bjola &

Holmes, 2015). This definition includes much more than what is publicly observable on social media and the research field has therefore gradually moved from early attention to "twiplomacy" (diplomacy on Twitter) to a state of "hybrid diplomacy" (broader digital adaptations) (Bjola & Manor, 2022). Today, digital tools make information more accessible and help to organise diplomatic processes, such as multilateral negotiations and peace mediation (Aggestam & Hedling, 2023). It also has contributed to the stability and continuity of diplomacy by offering opportunities to keep communication channels for dialogues constantly open. These processes are deeply political, and by exploring them we can generate insights into how gendered hierarchies in diplomacy and foreign policy are contested and reproduced, and how global audiences engage and react to diplomatic messages. These processes often reward loud voices and reproduce offline hierarchies and geopolitical divides in online arenas (Bramsen & Hagemann, 2021; Duncombe, 2019; Manor & Pamment, 2019; Wright & Guerrina, 2020).

The advancements in information and communication technology (ICTs) are organic facilitators of change in speed, reach and continuity, producing both online agency and content, processes that are deeply complex to study. The adaptations to digital society, across areas of diplomacy, affect the constitutive norms and practices of diplomacy in ways that transgress the online-offline divide (Hedling & Bremberg, 2021). As a result, we can no longer separate the digitalisation of diplomacy as a process and a set of practices. Hence, to understand this entanglement we need to interrogate the politics of digital diplomacy and recognise its built-in political dynamics, not least in the inherently political and sometimes conflictual area of feminist foreign policy.

1.4 Aims and Outline of the Book

The overarching aims of this book are threefold:

1. To advance new knowledge of why, how and with what consequences power-political dynamics are produced and maintained in the intersection of feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy.
2. To generate a novel theoretical contribution to the politics of feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy by advancing an innovative theoretical framework based on the key concepts of 'articulation', 'resonance' and 'contestation'. This framework captures the inher-

ently political dynamics of feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy.
3. To advance new empirical knowledge regarding feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy. As such, the book sheds new insights into the constitutive relationship between leadership, branding and visuality within the politics of feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy.

The book contains six chapters, including the present introduction. Chapter 2 lays out the theoretical framework and approach to the study of the politics of foreign policy and digital diplomacy. Our reasoning employs an understanding of the political as a relational and dialogical site prone to fluctuations between agonism and antagonism (Mouffe, 2013). We also stay attentive to processes of politicisation, that is, processes by which social, political or cultural issues are actively being moved into the political realm, often causing debates but also at times policy change. More specifically, we are interested in the politicisation of digital diplomacy and foreign policy (Hay, 2007; Neal, 2019), which highlights the fluctuation between antagonism and agonism in digital diplomacy and Sweden's feminist foreign policy. In particular, we focus on three processes of politicisation: articulation, resonance and contestation. These processes capture the political dynamics of leadership, branding and visuality in Sweden's feminist foreign policy.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 provide empirical in-depth analyses of (a) leadership, (b) branding and (c) visuality. Chapter 3 examines the decisive role played by political leaders in the articulation, resonance and contestation of feminist foreign policy, and how social media impact these processes. Former Swedish foreign minister Margot Wallström was central to Sweden's adoption of a feminist foreign policy. In many ways, she acted as a 'norm entrepreneur' who was able to navigate and harness the political and gendered dynamics of global affairs and project them to global audiences online. Notably, the chapter unpacks how she initially articulated Sweden's feminist foreign policy as an accessible and strategically framed agenda. Moreover, the chapter explores how Sweden's feminist foreign policy generated worldwide resonance, facilitated by the perfect timing and framing of its launch and trajectory. Finally, the chapter discusses the #shedecides digital campaign to illustrate the important role of leadership in navigating gendered discursive political contestations on social media. This digital campaign highlights the global reactions to the reinstatement

of the US global gag rule in 2017, prohibiting state funding from being granted to development projects that actively seek to facilitate women's abortions worldwide.

Chapter 4 examines how Sweden's feminist foreign policy was constructed and managed as a nation brand during its eight years of existence. This nation brand was built on Sweden's longstanding state feminist tradition, at home and abroad, as well as its gradual move to a more sophisticated form of digital diplomacy. Hence, Sweden's feminist foreign policy was to a great extent an exercise in feminist-informed branding, paired with a strong awareness that the digital communication of feminist values required both pragmatism and policy adaptation. The chapter analyses how strategies of hashtag feminism resonated among global audiences not least within digital advocacy networks to draw attention to and mobilise support for the distinct feminist values that informed Sweden's feminist foreign policy. Finally, the chapter discusses how feminist foreign policy was contested by a range of actors globally, focusing on an official state visit by Sweden to Iran in 2017.

Chapter 5 explores how new opportunities to employ visual language, symbolic representation and global visibilities contributed to the construction, diffusion and communication of Sweden's feminist foreign policy to multiple global audiences. The launch and trajectory of Sweden's feminist foreign policy entailed managing its visual representation. The reach and resonance of Sweden's feminist foreign policy relied on usages of visual representations and visibility structures that were politically mobilised by the former Social Democratic government and the MFA. In the chapter, we examine the employment of such visual language in articulating feminist foreign policy, centring the analysis on a travelling photo exhibition titled 'Swedish Dads'. The exhibition quickly became associated with Sweden's feminist foreign policy, triggering debates and discussions in a range of national contexts. Finally, we analyse Sweden's WikiGap initiative, which aimed to increase the number of Wikipedia entries specifically referring to women and their stories throughout history. The initiative is an important illustration of how feminist foreign policy managed to contest embedded practices in the gendered politics of online visibility.

The final chapter concludes by summarising the main findings of the book and by reflecting on new avenues for the study of the politics of feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy.

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The Politics of Feminist Foreign Policy and Digital Diplomacy: Leadership, Branding and Visuality

Abstract This chapter examines the interplay between digital diplomacy and feminist foreign policy by advancing a theoretical framework based on three key processes of politicisation: (a) articulation, (b) resonance and (c) contestation. This framework captures the fluctuation between antagonistic and agonistic political dynamics and the interplay between digital diplomacy and foreign policy. It highlights how these dynamics shape how states navigate, influence and respond to global developments. More specifically, the framework analyses these political dynamics and processes within three core foreign policy and diplomacy domains: (a) leadership, (b) branding and (c) visuality. As such, it seeks to explain why, how and in what ways the politics of digital diplomacy and feminist foreign policy are pursued, practised and perceived in contemporary global politics.

Keywords Politics of digital diplomacy • Leadership • Resonance • Contestation • Feminist foreign policy

2.1 Introduction

A defining feature of contemporary global politics is the digitalisation of foreign policy and diplomacy as international organisations, governments and Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) continuously search for new ways of managing and communicating their diplomatic practices

worldwide. Foreign policy and diplomacy embody a duality of stability and change, furthering longstanding national interests while continuously seeking new and innovative policy orientations. In this book, we show that digital communication offers ample opportunities to communicate such change and innovation, given its ability to reach multiple audiences swiftly across the global community. While these digital communication channels are effective in raising awareness and ensuring resonance and support for normative shifts in foreign policy practice amongst global actors, they also have the potential to fuel contestation and antagonism, particularly in an era marked by increasing political polarisation and populist sentiments worldwide.

This chapter analyses the politics of feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy. We advance a theoretical framework by highlighting some central processes of politicisation in feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy. These processes enable states to construct, elevate and assert their prioritised foreign policy objectives across various political arenas. In doing so, they find receptive audiences, which may facilitate prevailing positions, narratives and power structures in the formal and informal dynamics of diplomatic and foreign policy practices. Digital diplomacy not only gives rise to different policy positionings in global politics but also triggers clashes between and within states. In this book, we seek to fill a gap in existing scholarship on digital diplomacy, which primarily considers digital forms of communication to be the core of digital diplomacy, rather than probing questions about the politics behind it. In contrast, we locate and problematise digital diplomacy within a profoundly political realm in which digital forms of communication are shaped, circulated, received and contested. This is examined across three domains of activities central to the digital communication of Sweden's feminist foreign policy: (a) leadership, (b) branding and (c) visuality. Across these domains, we examine how the digital diplomatic communication of Sweden's feminist foreign policy was articulated, not only in regards to the resonance it gave rise to amongst other states and audiences, but also in what ways digital communication was employed to contest gendered power structures and injustices in global politics.

The theoretical framework integrates various strands of research within the broader fields of digital diplomacy (Bjola, 2016; Cornut & Dale, 2019; Duncombe, 2019) and feminist-informed foreign policy analysis (Smith, 2020). This integration represents a novel endeavour, combining insights from these two bodies of scholarships. Specifically, our research

focuses on elucidating the political dynamics inherent in feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy. We present a theoretical framework, which captures these dynamics and manifestations through leadership, branding and visuality.

2.2   THE POLITICS OF FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY AND DIGITAL DIPLOMACY

The transformation of societies through digitalisation and the growing importance of ICT have profoundly reshaped global relations and foreign policy communication and practice. This poses challenges to the traditional political authority of states and their leaders. State actors no longer hold a monopoly on global communication, with political discourses becoming increasingly difficult to control and navigate (Jackson, 2019). To project a distinct voice in an increasingly crowded and competitive information environment, states must carefully curate their strategic narratives (Miskimmon et al., 2018). These changes in power diffusion have provided new opportunities to seek, gain and maintain political influence on a global scale through digital platforms (Manor, 2019). The ability to harness social and political influence and global attention has become crucial to successfully managing foreign policy agendas (Cornut & Dale, 2019; Jackson, 2019; Miskimmon et al., 2018). However digital platforms are not neutral channels for political communication – their formatting logic and algorithmic governance, condition and shape the patterns and effects of digital communication (Cornut, 2022; Dijck & Poell, 2013). Moreover, the digitalisation of foreign relations intersects with diplomacy as the management of change in international relations.

As developed in the introductory chapter, a central premise of this book is that digital diplomacy is inherently political rather than a mere communicative practice of diplomatic communication. The digital environment, in particular social media platforms, offers critical opportunities to increase the reach of and response to foreign policy strategies, and connect those to normative ideas, social movements, states, organisations, etc. This emerging pattern of multidirectional foreign policy identification reflects the dynamics of a networked world in which ideas and strategies travel faster than ever before, frequently, resonating with global audiences, and significantly increasing the opportunities for both political visibility, engagement and contestation (Hall, 2019). Governments often harness

this opportunity to engage in state advocacy and branding, gaining global resonance online.

Therefore, by employing digital diplomacy toolsets, governments, political leaders and other foreign policy actors can signal their normative and interest-based commitments across multiple contexts, creating both policy resonance, but also dissonance amongst other states and audiences. As shown in the ensuing empirical analyses in Chaps. 3, 4, and 5, this was evident in the digital communication of Swedish feminist foreign policy. In what follows, we address the dissonance and antagonistic responses often produced amongst online audiences by digital diplomacy, pointing to their role in the digital communication of foreign policy change.

Chantal Mouffe's (2013) concept of 'the political' is central here. It refers to the persistent prevalence of antagonism in political communities and human social relations. More specifically, it captures the fluctuation between antagonistic and agonistic political dynamics in all political spheres. Antagonism refers to severe conflictual relations between enemies whereas agonism refers to an acceptance of the other as a legitimate adversary and opponent in politics. Notably, the political should not be equated with politics itself. According to Mouffe (2000, 2005), politics pertains to the practices, discourses and institutions that help to create order in inherently conflictual human relations. Hence, the goal of a more constructive and democratic form of politics is to transform antagonistic political dynamics into agonistic ones, that is, to perceive political actors not as enemies but rather as adversaries. Such a process enables political actors to move away from conflictual to transformative politics. At the same time, Mouffe (2013) tells us that the very essence of a vibrant democracy is the inherently conflictual tensions and agonistic political struggles that exist between adversaries. Hence, the political, as a relational practice, does not necessarily oppose agonistic practices and confrontational dialogues; rather they are central to democratic politics. In short, the politics of feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy highlight how states' specific foreign policy orientation and practices generate policy resonance and agonistic contestation amongst global audiences.

Feminist politics, as a transformative platform for change, is inherently agonistic and frequently feminist policy initiatives generate discomfort amongst world leaders who remain unconvinced of their potential to profoundly transform global politics for the better (Aggestam et al., 2023). Since feminist foreign policy is a highly politicised and contested area of

global politics, it gives rise to contestation, and, at times, antagonism and agonism (Aggestam & Bergman Rosamond, 2018). Politicisation refers to moving a particular issue or development from a non-political or apolitical arena to a heightened political space (Hay, 2007, 2013). As Colin Hay (Hay, 2007, p. 81) notes, a particular set of issues may "become the subject of deliberation, decision making and human agency where previously they were not". Such politicisation mobilises various political actors and arenas, leading to policy articulation, resonance and contestation of diverse political ideas and positions. Hence, politicisation enables the expression of distinct and polarised ideological positions, triggering public discussions of conflicting policy alternatives (Hagmann et al., 2018; Zürn, 2014, p. 50). Politicisation then is characterised by antagonism and agonism, producing competing power dynamics, all of which are key components of the political across different political domains and between societies (Mouffe, 2005).

By emphasising the processes of politicisation and exploring the fluctuation between antagonism and agonism in global politics, this book moves beyond the technical and de-politicised practices of digital diplomacy. This distinct approach enables us to critically examine the agonistic reactions provoked by state-led and sanctioned advocacy and branding, as exemplified by Sweden's use of digital diplomacy to contest global threats to women's reproductive rights. As noted by Aggestam and True (2020, p. 145) "[w]hile progress has been made in advancing pro-gender norms in various international fora, individual state foreign policies and their international relations, we can at the same time observe an opposite trend of increasingly antagonistic global politics, which vociferously contests and resists the diffusion of pro-gender norms." Digital diplomacy is particularly suited to nation branding and the communication of foreign policy objectives to diverse audiences as discussed in Chap. 4, notably through visual storytelling. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, digital diplomacy also offers significant opportunities to contest the political agendas of other actors. Increasingly, digital diplomacy is employed by states to scrutinise other states' foreign policies and responses to global developments. Thus, social media and digital platforms have emerged as key arenas for resistance, contestation and as a way of projecting state identities.

Central to our analysis is the convergence of digital diplomacy and the emergence of new political agendas (e.g. the rise of right-wing populism) foreign policy change (e.g. the launch of feminist foreign policy) and major power shifts (geopolitics) in global politics. These dynamics have

generated new patterns of interactions among state actors, including antagonistic and confrontational ones (see, e.g., Crilley & Chatterje-Doody, 2021; Marlin-Bennett & Jackson, 2022). The ways diverse political positions are articulated, contested and 'travel' across digital platforms to mobilise various political actors reflect competing power relations and hierarchies. As noted above, our analysis rests on the premise that gender constitutes a major fault line in a world, increasingly characterised by global turbulence and polarisation. Thus, the promotion of pro-gender norms by some states has encountered vigorous digital resistance and contestation, targeting gender equality and women's rights (Aggestam & True, 2021). These antagonistic political and gendered dynamics are central to our analysis of the political intersections between digital diplomacy and feminist foreign policy.

Feminist foreign policy, as an idea, method and practice, has been emulated by a range of states and institutions, contributing to placing gender justice and equality at the centre of global politics. A the same time, the adoption of Sweden's feminist foreign policy coincided with the rise of right-wing populism worldwide, resulting in far-right parties forming governments in several countries. Far-right parties rest their political arguments and rhetoric on the "rights of the family as a basic societal unit and depict religious conservatives as an embattled minority" (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018, p. 708). Their narration is rooted in fear of the other, welfare chauvinism and mistrust in so called 'gender ideology' (Graff, 2014), which they pair with anti-globalism and a pronounced defence of traditional gender roles (De Sá Guimarães & De Oliveira E Silva, 2021). The mobilisation of conservative values on social media also reflects debates frequently imbued by a backlash against feminist values in global politics (Agius et al., 2020). Right-wing extremists, radical Islam and Christian anti-abortionists often rely on strategies of digital advocacy in opposing women's rights. For instance, political hashtags, such as #prolife and #righttolife, are systematically used by self-defined conservative actors based in Europe and the US to actively oppose reproductive health policies. Thus, the successful launch and implementation of new foreign policy initiatives, not least feminist foreign policies, require a capacity to take issue with sentiments of anti-genderism, and to navigate the increasingly competitive and shifting digital landscape of global politics (Jackson, 2019; Postema & Melissen, 2021).

Assertive foreign policy agendas by some states are maintained by using distinct forms of digital diplomacy (Zeitzoff, 2017). To study the

intersection of feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy, we advance a theoretical framework that rests on articulation, resonance and contestation. This framework allows us to investigate the political dynamics of digital diplomacy, not least its ability to effectively articulate foreign policy goals through social media platforms (Hermann & Hagan, 1998). Here articulation refers to the construction and presentation of political messages by states, with the ambition of those messages resonating with targeted audiences. In short, articulation is not an apolitical form of strategic communication or simply an effort to disseminate information but a political practice enabling states to convincingly communicate their foreign policy objectives to intended audiences. Through digital diplomacy, states strategically and politically employ various communication tools to convey their foreign policy stances, values and objectives, and in that process they construct political narratives that connect with world leaders and multiple audiences.

Moreover, the political can be seen as a site for constructing collective identities and alliances (Mouffe, 2005, p. 70) and our framework enables us to analyse how the politics of digital diplomacy generates resonance among other states and their political leaders. Resonance occurs when the articulated political messages and narratives of a state's digital diplomatic efforts align with other states and global actors' interests, values and goals. This resonance can lead to the forming of alliances, new forms of cooperation and mutual recognition and support for distinct foreign policy objectives across states. Thus, digital platforms provide ample opportunities for states to connect with like-minded actors, create networks and amplify their messages which generates resonance and builds transnational coalitions, with feminist transformative projects at times emerging from such cooperation.

Our framework also uses the concept of contestation, which recognises that the political, whether expressed in domestic or global policy commitments, is inherently conflictual, contested and marked by competitive power struggles and hierarchies. In the context of digital diplomacy, not least feminist foreign policy, contestation refers explicitly to how states challenge the articulated messages and narratives of other states. Digital platforms facilitate rapid dissemination of information and allow diverse voices to participate in shaping global discourses. Therefore, foreign policy articulated via digital diplomacy frequently faces contestation, with such disagreements arising from both domestic and international actors who offer alternative views on contemporary political developments. As

the ensuing empirical chapters will show, Sweden's feminist foreign policy was regularly subjected to such contestation if not antagonism. To examine these fluctuating processes of politicisation we specifically focus our analysis on three facets of foreign policy and diplomacy: (1) leadership, (2) branding and (3) visuality.

2.3   Foreign Policy Leadership and Agency

Political leaders, notably ministers and diplomats, are key to navigating and shaping foreign policy change and continuity. They are significant political drivers in articulating their preferences while silencing political alternatives. They also contribute to some issues being moved into the political realm while downplaying the significance of others. For example, the current Swedish right-of-centre coalition government contested the significance of feminism as a platform for foreign policy when it took power in October 2022, leading it to abandon feminist foreign policy and, as such, moving it out of the political realm.

Political leaders can leverage their resources, including their experiences, to instil policy change, with digital communication amplifying their outreach. Moreover, they are increasingly well equipped to capitalise on their ability to communicate and create rapport with followers on and offline, drawing attention to their ideological preferences and transformative desires. Political leaders employ distinct ideological and normative ideas to build coalitions and networks to promote policy change, manoeuvring within and across existing domestic and international structures. For example, through her diplomatic efforts, on and offline, former Swedish foreign minister Margot Wallström actively sought to disrupt the gendered global order by advancing the principles of feminist foreign policy in international affairs. Indeed, gender, understood as both a social construction of identities and a system of power, impacts on how leadership is pursued and what policy changes are achieved. Yet, to date, the study of foreign policy leadership has been for the most part gender-blind (Bashevkin, 2018) with some exceptions (Hudson & Leidl, 2015; Smith, 2020). In this book, we acknowledge the historical entrenchment of structural patriarchal principles within the realms of leadership, diplomacy, state identities, institutions and the broader global order. As situated actors, political leaders have to navigate pro- and anti-gender norms in global politics to enhance their influence and authority in foreign policy endeavours. Therefore, foreign policy

leadership embodies a relational and contextual practice wherein individual characteristics and gender schemas act as powerful lenses shaping public perceptions and interpretations of leadership (Aggestam & True, 2021). While leaders for long had to rely on orthodox forms of diplomatic signalling, communication and representation to put their ideological messages across, their ability to do so has been greatly facilitated by the digitalisation of diplomacy (Duncombe, 2017).

Indeed, in the past fifteen years, we have witnessed a sharp rise in political leaders' use of strategic communication. They use social media as a political platform to communicate their messages to both domestic and foreign publics and as a way of projecting their distinct self identities onto those audiences (Duncombe, 2019). The politics of leadership in digital diplomacy then refers to the ways in which social media have become platforms for politicians and diplomats to publicly enact agency and perform identity (Freistein & Gadinger, 2022; Svendsen, 2022). Social media platforms, like Twitter and Facebook, alongside traditional communication channels, offer leaders innovative ways to project their self-images and novel opportunities to transform political communication that facilitate interaction with new domestic and global audiences. These enactments of agency and performances of leadership are shaped by distinct political contexts. Social media platforms are profoundly political and social spaces that reproduce embedded struggles over hierarchical positions and over meaning in foreign policy narratives (Miskimmon & O'Loughlin, 2021). In Chap. 3, we specifically examine how feminist leadership and narratives shape new foreign policy agendas and how social media platforms are used for this purpose. We argue that the enactment of political leadership on social media is indicative of the political nature of digital diplomacy—very notably, it offers ample opportunities to heighten the significance of gender justice in global politics.

2.4   Nation Branding and Positionality

The politics of digital diplomacy requires both recognition and contestation of states' nation brands (Browning, 2015; Browning & Ferraz de Oliveira, 2017). Nation branding rests on states' ability to resonate with global audiences, whether other nations, foreign leaders or publics. Thus, rather than treating branding as a one-way line of communication, we conceptualise it in relational and political terms. Hence, the actor in question, through its political acts and discursive interventions, seeks

acceptance through recognition, which may lead to policy resonance, and, at times dissonance, if not agonistic responses. Consequently, nation branding has inherent political properties, enabling states to ideologically position themselves in global politics by drawing attention to their foreign policy priorities. However, that positioning requires acceptance, which is often acquired through discursive interventions and heightened forms of visibility, as will be discussed in Chap. 5.

The management of state images online also reflects a market logic, allowing strategy and competition to shape representations of state identities which benefit commercial and political elites (Kaneva, 2011). Critical approaches to nation branding therefore assume that international demands determine the management of state images and therefore result in 'competitive identity practices' (Browning & Ferraz de Oliveira, 2017). Interrogating the process of nation branding is key to critical investigations of digital diplomacy because digital strategies and practices have amplified the role and reach of branded state identities. Moreover, social media have profoundly changed how we consume information and what information we pay attention to (Dijck & Poell, 2013). In the realm of digital diplomacy, what is deemed appealing is determined by the demands of the online audiences who 'consume' the state image.

As laid out above, there are inherent forms of antagonism in every political community and within all social and political relations, offline and online, which condition states' competition for acceptance, attention and recognition in the global sphere. While orthodox forms of diplomacy are reserved to a select few and often take place behind locked doors, digital lines of communication are highly visible and accessible to broad audiences, opening antagonistic responses to states' expressions of their political identities (Barberá & Zeitzoff, 2018; Zeitzoff, 2017), not least in the context of foreign policy change. Because branding is a relational practice, building on reception and acceptance as well as dialogue between like-minded partners and adversaries, it lends itself to political contestation. Contestation occurs when the projected brand does not resonate with online audiences, whether states or other audiences. We therefore critically engage with the dynamics of digital diplomacy, here defined as a politics of branding, and, in so doing, explore the relational underpinnings of those political dynamics. This enables us to explain how and why digital arenas are more than innovative channels for political communication. Instead, they are inherently relational political spaces

that enable multiple forms of dialogue, some producing resonance and others dissonance. In the case of Sweden's feminist foreign policy, the global resonance of pro-gender norms provided a space for digital communication, contestation and antagonistic dialogues, as will be analysed in Chaps. 3, 4, and 5. Moreover, by staying attentive to nation branding and political positionality, we are able to explain both the rise and fall of Sweden's feminist foreign policy.

2.5   The Political Power of Visuality

Using images and visual communication helps to politicise and legitimise world politics and to package and represent it to domestic and international publics. Analytically, visual diplomatic practice refers to the production of a set of symbols and visual language that become representative and intuitively associated with the policy communicated to domestic and/or global audiences. While visual projections and diplomatic signalling are far from new phenomena, digital media have produced unprecedented opportunities for visual communication (Bleiker, 2018; Freistein & Gadinger, 2022). Traditionally, political communication has used visual representation, such as political posters, cartoons and infographics to convey political messages and persuade individuals to support particular ideologies and causes (Nagel et al., 2012). Social media platforms favour visual content, with the latter gaining prominence as a distinct area of political communication, leading to the adoption of more sophisticated communicative strategies (Veneti et al., 2019), particularly in foreign policy. The competitive and political nature of the digital medium makes visual communication an effective way to generate online attention, which is an insight informing contemporary practices of digital diplomacy (Wright & Rosamond, 2021).

The power of visuality in digital diplomacy specifically refers to the ability to both (re-)produce and (re-)stabilise the political authority and legitimacy of states as well as their political leaders, in particular, by resonating with global norms that are recognised by transnational online audiences. Visuals can evoke sensual and relational experiences (Adler-Nissen et al., 2019) and therefore touch audiences in more profound ways than simple textual messages (Bleiker, 2018). Thus, visuals are relational, emotional and deeply political in their dynamics, with audiences tending to respond to visual symbols and images in more engaged ways. This in turn enables both the naturalisation of political ideas and the contestation of political

ideological positions. Thus, visuals have agonistic qualities that can inspire political action and relational dialogical engagement, lending themselves nicely to feminist communication.

Moreover, social media platforms are inherently visual because they favour visual images and artefacts over speech and text (Crilley et al., 2020). For instance, Twitter builds on text-based information sharing through brief updates of Tweets where the prevalence of embedded images has increased. In contrast, Facebook has always encouraged visual communication, providing many functions including text-based posts, photo sharing and sophisticated privacy settings. Their differences aside, social media's increased emphasis on visual data reflects both technological advancements (the ease with which images can now be shared) and competition in the 'attention economy' whereby a picture is worth more than words (Rose, 2016). As a result of a more visually saturated information environment, accelerated by social media, images are recognised as key sites of political contestation, if not antagonism, and are increasingly central to politics. In digital diplomacy, visual imagery is assumed to "maximize the reach and engagement of online messages, increase the visibility of certain topics while downplaying or discrediting others, and recasting the production, dissemination and consumption of political meaning" (Crilley et al., 2020, p. 630). As we have alluded to above, the profound influence of visual digital images stems from their ability to connect with the online public through cognitive shortcuts like symbols and stories to personal and emotional lives (Adler-Nissen et al., 2019; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Duncombe, 2019).

Our position here is that the meaning of images is performed through discourse (Adler-Nissen et al., 2019). While social media afford their users instantaneous forms of advocacy by inviting low-cost and low-effort spontaneous reactions (Hall, 2019), such reactions also become productive in discourse that political actors can leverage. To clarify, visuals contribute to political discourse both as representations of politics and through the reactions they may evoke, fostering a sense of relationality across spaces. As indicated above, visual communication is considered to be more powerful and political than verbal communication in its ability to invoke emotions and convey 'truths' (Dan et al., 2021). We, therefore, engage with visuality as a form of representation and visibility as a structure, both of which are central aspects of what we define as the political.

2.6   Conclusion

The politics of digital diplomacy and foreign policy affirm the central role of digital platforms in shaping political narratives, creating alliances and providing opportunities for dissent and alternative voices within global politics. By recognising the dynamic interplay between processes of politicisation, such as articulation, resonance and contestation, in the context of digital diplomacy and foreign policy, we can gain a deeper understanding of how states navigate and shape global political ideas and narratives. Our framework provides a novel approach which provides ample opportunities to analyse and advance knowledge of the complexities and implications of digital diplomacy; how it interacts with foreign policy and how it shapes the broader landscape of global politics in the digital age. In particular, it is applicable to scholarship that centres on foreign policy change, with Sweden's feminist foreign policy being a critical case here.

In Chaps. 3, 4, and 5, Sweden's feminist foreign policy serves as a prime example of the constitutive relationship between foreign policy and digital diplomacy. Political leadership, nation branding and visuality not only contributed to the articulation of Sweden's feminist foreign policy objectives but generated resonance among other states and their political leaders, leading them to adhere to similar pro-gender and feminist values and goals. At the same time, the digital diplomatic communication of Sweden's feminist foreign policy encountered contestation, with a wide range of actors criticising its policy goals, ambitions, authenticity and ability to challenge prevailing gendered power structures and hierarchies within the global order. Thus, by studying Sweden's previous feminist foreign policy we gain insight into its location within a deeply politicised world order, with digital platforms providing spaces for the articulation of diverse perspectives and voices.

As the global landscape undergoes transformations and power shifts, the norms and principles that have long governed global affairs are being reconfigured in a vacuum, leaving room for alternative perspectives and ideologies to gain traction on the international stage. In this context, foreign policy and digital diplomacy become crucial tools for states to assert their influence and promote their interests as well as their ideological convictions and ethical visions. With its vast array of social media platforms, online networks and digital communication channels, the digital realm offers states unprecedented opportunities to articulate their viewpoints, engage with global audiences, and forge alliances based on shared values

and objectives. Indeed, one of the key successes of Sweden's feminist foreign policy was its emulation by other states and international organisations. Undoubtedly, this development was amplified by the country's prolific and skilled use of digital diplomacy.

Moreover, as the global order becomes more fragmented and diverse, the politics of digital diplomacy and foreign policy enable states to contest and challenge prevalent and emerging narratives and power structures. Thus, the digital sphere allows alternative voices, dissenting opinions and marginalised perspectives to be articulated and heard. Non-state actors, civil society organisations and individual leaders can utilise digital platforms to advocate for gender justice, human rights and democratic values, amplifying their impact and influencing global discourses. In sum, the politics of digital diplomacy and feminist foreign policy involves navigating the digital landscape while maintaining a commitment to policy transparency, credibility and ethical conduct.

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Political Leadership and the Digital Diffusion of Feminist Foreign Policy

Abstract This chapter examines the role of political leadership and the utilisation of digital diplomacy in advancing the norms and objectives of feminist foreign policy. It explores the various roles that leaders play in the political articulation, resonance and contestation of feminist foreign policy in the digital realm. It specifically analyses how and in what ways former Swedish foreign minister Margot Wallström actively engaged, as a norm entrepreneur, in efforts to garner political support for Sweden's feminist foreign policy, while disseminating a feminist vision of a more gender-just world order to global online audiences. Moreover, the chapter examines how Wallström strategically articulated Sweden's feminist foreign policy as a prioritised agenda and the international resonance it elicited, particularly evidenced by the positive responses of states such as Canada and Germany. Finally, the chapter elucidates the ramifications of political leadership and gendered contestation on social media by analysing Sweden's role in the #shedecides digital campaign. This campaign was triggered in response to the reinstatement of the US global gag rule by the Trump Administration, which sought to restrict the sexual and reproductive rights of girls and women worldwide.

Keywords Political leadership • Digital diplomacy • SRHR • Margot Wallström • Feminist foreign policy

3.1   Introduction

The launch of Sweden's feminist foreign policy gained considerable impetus from the political leadership of former foreign minister Margot Wallström, a prominent figure within the Social Democratic party and an esteemed top diplomat with notable positions both within the European Union and the UN. Wallström played a crucial role in shaping the trajectory of Sweden's feminist foreign policy, both ethically and politically, particularly during its formative years. Political leaders can normatively influence their states' foreign policies by shaping their external agendas, for instance by integrating pro-gender norms into foreign policy practices (Aggestam & True, 2020, 2021; Bashevkin, 2018; Davies & True, 2017; Jalalzai & Krook, 2010; Kaarbo, 2015). Social media have provided new and innovative avenues for leaders to convey such foreign policy visions to global audiences, in ways distinct from traditional media (Freistein & Gadinger, 2022). Most notably, social media provide large audiences within and beyond borders, with traditional media being less accessible to global publics. Hence, digital diplomacy, leveraging the unique communicative attributes of digital platforms, has become an essential tool for many political leaders (Bracciale, 2022).

Specifically, Margot Wallström's leadership was instrumental in the articulation, resonance and contestation of Sweden's feminist foreign policy and gained worldwide attention. She navigated and sought to harness the gender dynamics of global affairs to achieve distinct foreign policy change, often by using social media. In this chapter, we first examine the role that Wallström played in the articulation of feminist foreign policy and the ways it was projected on social media. Second, we discuss how the launch of a feminist foreign policy generated resonance among like-minded states. Third, we assess how Sweden's leadership role in feminist foreign policy practice, embodied by Margot Wallström, sparked contestation and debates online in the light of the US reinstatement of the global gag rule during the Trump administration.

3.2   Political Leadership and the Articulation of Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy

In this chapter, we define Margot Wallström's role in initiating Sweden's feminist foreign policy as that of a 'norm entrepreneur' (Davies & True, 2017). Her leadership was central to the political articulation and

diffusion of Sweden's feminist foreign policy, inspiring other states to adopt a feminist framing of their foreign policies. Thus, Wallström was acting as an international agenda-setter providing a strong voice in the formulation, framing and digital diffusion of Sweden's feminist foreign policy (Aggestam et al., 2021; Breuning, 2013; Nordberg, 2015). Specifically, she leveraged her international presence and political position to advance the recognition and diffusion of Sweden's feminist foreign policy agenda. This was a highly deliberate strategy, with Wallström herself noting that successful political leadership entails good timing and not being afraid of taking firm stances on issues, even if they are contentious and disputed (Wallström, 2019a; Wallström, 2019b). Hence, Wallström's leadership revolved around formulating ambitious goals, agendas and to send clear feminist signals to allies and adversaries in global politics (Wallström, 2018, 2019b). This transformative style of foreign policy leadership was evident throughout her tenure as foreign minister. It was also used by the Ministry for Affairs (MFA) as a profile-raising tactic well-suited for digital diplomacy (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019a, p. 31).

In various media interviews, Wallström stressed her intention to use a feminist frame to articulate and raise awareness of global gender inequalities and forms of discrimination to challenge traditional foreign policy ideas and practices. As she stated, "it's time to become a little braver in foreign policy. I think feminism is a good term. It is about standing against the systematic and global subordination of women" (Wallström cited in Nordberg, 2015). For Wallström (2019b), 'bravery' involved politicising Swedish foreign policy and diplomacy by adopting a firm feminist position on global injustices, while at the same time recognise that those goals were in line with Sweden's longstanding commitment to peace, freedom, and the UN (in Swedish, the terms refer to *fred*, *frihet*, '**F**N'). This strategic articulation reflected affirmative rhetorics and careful balancing of Sweden's international role as a 'moral superpower' (Bjereld & Möller, 2015). Wallström continuously referred to "the four Fs" (as seen above in bold) as a communicative strategy, adding '**f**eminism' to the original three Fs, with the fourth one being effectively incorporated into Sweden's foreign policy (Wallström, 2019b). Wallström often highlighted the contents and pillars of Sweden's feminist foreign policy with the use of acronyms, making it more accessible, catchy and suitable for communication, in particular in the digital realm (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019a, 2019b). While the articulation of feminist foreign policy was deeply rooted in Wallström's political and strategic visons, her ability to diplomatically

communicate its essence, produced widespread resonance among global publics.

Wallström's persona, as the face of feminist foreign policy and leading advocate of its goals, was actively promoted by the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) through the utilisation of digital diplomacy. This was evident in the frequent use of photographs of Wallström performing her duties in formal settings, and, through the reproduction of her vision of Sweden's feminist foreign policy across a range of contexts and discursive settings (see Fig. 3.1 for an illustrative example). Moreover, this communication productively used visuals to add appeal and reach to Sweden's feminist foreign policy. The yellow backdrop and the blue letters in the

Fig. 3.1   Digital communication from the Swedish MFA (Color figure online)

image signal Sweden's national identity (the colours of its flag), using the caption "this government is pursuing a feminist foreign policy that aims to strengthen women's rights, representation and resources" as a key message and the hashtag #FemForeignPolicy as an invitation to social media engagement.

Furthermore, the messaging consistently emphasised the three pillars of Sweden's feminist foreign policy: rights, representation and resources, later supplemented by a fourth pillar, reality. The fourth R reinforced Sweden's commitment to the conduct of evidence-based foreign policy, ensuring that Sweden's feminist foreign policy would be grounded in the 'real' world, and, as such, not lose track of the individuals at the receiving end of the country's justice-driven global efforts. Other states also came to use the four Rs as a rhetorical device not least Germany. The principles served as a guide for formulating and fine-tuning foreign policy initiatives, helping Sweden to fulfil its prioritised objectives, as outlined in Sweden's feminist foreign policy action plans (Government Offices of Sweden, 2015c).[1]

Between 2014 and 2019, Wallström considerably shaped the projection of Sweden's feminist foreign policy on social media platforms, particularly Twitter and Facebook. However, gradually Sweden's feminist foreign policy became politically and visually associated with a range of ministers, most notably Deputy Prime Minister Isabella Lövin and former trade and foreign minister Ann Linde (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019a). The initial emphasis on political leadership served as a tactic to launch Sweden's novel feminist foreign policy agenda and gain global traction and attention in that process. Later on it highlighted the actual policy impact of Sweden's feminist foreign policy. Two intertwined factors explain this trajectory. First, Wallström's political platform and long-standing commitment to pro-gender norms made the projected leadership narrative possible and contributed to the successful launch of Sweden's feminist foreign policy. Initially, this digital representation focused on her persona and leveraged her existing global outreach and networks. Second, the personalisation and use of 'selfie' representations gained traction on social media as an effective communication strategy for digital diplomacy,

[1] The six prioritized objectives were (1) full enjoyment of human rights; (2) freedom from physical, psychological and sexual violence (3) participation in preventing and resolving conflicts, and post-conflict peacebuilding; (4) political participation and influence in all areas of society; (5) economic rights and empowerment; (6) sexual reproductive health and rights.

aligning with the broader trend of showcasing political leaders in a time of heightened public interest in global politics (Cornut et al., 2022; Manor, 2019). The emphasis on Wallström's leadership was a reflection of the information environment at the time and the increased focus of news media on political leaders when reporting on political contentions and antagonism in world politics (Day & Wedderburn, 2022; Freistein & Gadinger, 2022). The focus on feminist foreign policy leadership, first embodied by Wallström and then emulated by other global leaders such as Justin Trudeau, was contrasted to the hypermasculine leadership styles of an increasing number of populist political leaders, such as Russian President Vladimir Putin, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, US President Donald Trump and the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (Aggestam & True, 2021; Agius et al., 2020; Ashwin & Utrata, 2020; Johnson, 2020).

3.3   The Global Resonance of Feminist Foreign Policy Leadership: Canada and Germany

Margot Wallström's political leadership and feminist advocacy have come to normatively inspire a range of political leaders and, an increasing number of states having adopted feminist-informed foreign policy platforms, including Canada, Columbia, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Mexico, Germany and Spain amongst others. By framing its foreign policy feminist, Sweden was able to exercise diplomatic leadership, with a rapidly growing number of states also seeking to promote gender equality in global politics. Nonetheless, Wallström and other Swedish ministers never specified more exactly what kind of feminist ideas they adhered to, often conflating gender with women. Their vision of feminist foreign policy was based on broad liberal ideas about gender mainstreaming and representation. As such, the approach was less transformational and did not directly challenge the multiple intersecting power relations, structures and gendered harms that have detrimental effects on the lives, freedoms and rights of not only women but other vulnerable individuals. Still, Sweden's feminist foreign policy was well received amongst like-minded allies, not least Canada and Germany.

To highlight the global resonance of Sweden's feminist foreign policy, we focus on Canada and Germany, two states that have adopted feminist foreign policies. While Germany has acknowledged the pioneering role of Sweden's feminist foreign policy, Canada tried to project a more

independent feminist narrative, although still very much resonating with Wallström's vision of feminist foreign policy as a state practice (Achilleos-Sarll et al., 2023; Zhukova, 2023).

Sweden's broad feminist foreign policy agenda aligned with the ideological underpinnings of the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government that took office in 2015 as well as its vision of gender equality (Chapnick, 2019). In the 1980s, the Canadian International Development Agency actively promoted gender equality, which was identified as "a leading edge of international practice" (Tiessen & Carrier, 2015, p. 96). Canada was also involved in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 (Riddell-Dixon, 2001; Tiessen & Carrier, 2015). In the early 2000s, Canada chaired the Working Group of the United Nations (UN) Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations and the 'Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security' (Tiessen & Carrier, 2015). This was consistent with Canada's self-narrative as a 'good', peaceful, tolerant and 'orderly' state (Howell, 2005; Richey, 2001; Tiessen & Carrier, 2015). However, in 2009 the Canadian Conservative government led by Stephen Harper (2006–2015) decided to drop gender equality from the country's official domestic foreign policy repertoire, settling for 'equality between women and men' (Tiessen & Carrier, 2015). Hence, it became important for the newly elected leader Justin Trudeau to recommit to pro-gender norms in global politics. On 21 September 2015, Trudeau tweeted in French, "*Je suis feministe et j'en suis fier #placeaudebat*",[2] indicating a clear shift in Canada's projection under his leadership (Justin Trudeau, n.d.). For example, Trudeau declared in 2015 his intention to promote gender-inclusive governance, expressed in the appointment of an equal number of men and women to cabinet positions. Moreover, Trudeau and his government renamed the Canadian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development 'Global Affairs Canada', signalling his intention to engage with non-state actors and a commitment to multilateralism. The relabelling of the ministry provided a normative framework for Trudeau's rebranding of Canada as one of the world's leading champions of gender equality (Maloney, 2016). Most notably, and, as part of the rebranding of Canada, the Trudeau government announced in 2017 that it would adopt a feminist international assistance policy, using that platform to provide aid globally to women's rights organisations (Fillion, 2018). The aim was to pursue a "human rights

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[2] I am a feminist and I am proud of it #placeinthedebate (authors' translation).

approach in six target areas: gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, human dignity, growth that works for everyone, environment and climate action, inclusive governance, and peace and security" (Parisi, 2020, p. 169). Trudeau's leadership in feminist foreign policy was also expressed by his decision to make gender equality a signature theme of Canada's presidency of the G7 in 2018. This initiative drew on the image of Trudeau as a feminist leader on social media and on Canada's policy-making institutions and reputation as a gender-equal state as seen in Fig. 3.2. The catch phrase: "We shouldn't be afraid of the word feminist" was reproduced from Trudeau's speech at the G7 summit in Davos, Switzerland, in 2017 (Wang, 2016). Hence, Justin Trudeau seemingly framed Canada's feminist foreign policy as an independent leadership initiative in line with its 'good state' trajectory (Lawler, 2005).

Germany, on the other hand, was more explicitly inspired by Sweden. Germany adopted a feminist foreign policy in 2021 and renewed that commitment in 2023. As discussed in Chap. 4, Sweden has a longstanding tradition of state feminism in stark contrast to Germany that notably lacks such a historical tradition. This might explain why German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock has openly recognised Sweden as a source of feminist inspiration, not least by adopting the significance of the 'three Rs':

Fig. 3.2 @SweMFA (Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2017)

Representation, Rights, Resources. However, Germany chose to add a fourth key concept: 'Diversity'. In 2022, Baerbock stated that "just like you, Ann Linde, the pioneers in Sweden, we are also looking first and foremost at the three Rs you came up with: rights, resources and representation. We want to mainstream Feminist Foreign Policy by focusing on these three Rs" (Baerbock, 2022b). In contrast with Sweden, Germany's feminist foreign policy places more focus on human security and intersectionality, which the following extract indicates "the spotlight on people, regardless of their background, gender, belief or who they love. If we focus particularly on women and marginalised groups, it makes our security policy more comprehensive. It makes it and us stronger" (Baerbock, 2022b). Germany has also introduced an ambassador for feminist foreign policy and has made women's representation a priority in its global affairs, to give the "foreign service a more female face and to raise the proportion of women in senior roles" (Annalena Baerbock, 2022b). In a similar way to Margot Wallström, who became the face of Sweden's digital projection of feminist foreign policy, Baerbock has become a symbol of Germany's strong commitment to showcasing women within its foreign service.

Germany, like Canada, has pared its commitment to feminist foreign policy with an active approach to digital diplomacy. In a speech to Germany's ambassadors, Foreign Minister Baerbock noted in September 2022 that "communication lies at the heart of our diplomacy". However, she also stressed the significance of the country's foreign representatives considering the conditions of the "host countries." Her view is that "local platforms and forums" are the most effective strategies for delivering diplomatic messages, with Baerbock emphasising the importance of social media in this context (Baerbock, 2022a). Germany's digital diplomacy aligns with its focus on human security and a gender-sensitive approach to digital technologies, expressed in an active attempt to eradicate online violence and ensure that women have equal access to digital toolsets (Federal Foreign Office, Germany, 2023). To sum up, Sweden's feminist foreign policy, we argue, provided normative inspiration and generated broad policy resonance amongst like-minded states. Canada and Germany, though in different ways, have emulated the former Swedish government's quest for feminist foreign policy leadership, having adopted digital practices to convey their aspirations for feminist leadership globally.

3.4   Contesting the US Global Gag Rule

While Sweden's activist approach to feminist foreign policy received praise, it also triggered criticism and contestation (Nordberg, 2015). At the core of Sweden's feminist foreign policy was its readiness to engage in a range of politically contested foreign policy domains (Aggestam & Rosamond, 2018). As such, Sweden parted from other states whose main objective was to further the less politically charged UN Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. In contrast to a more technocratic and depoliticised approach observed in countries like Australia and Norway (Lee-Koo, 2020; Skjelsbæk & Tryggestad, 2020), Sweden's engagement spanned a broader spectrum of issues. As we have indicated above, Foreign Minister Wallström showed awareness from the start that Sweden's feminist foreign policy would render gendered conflicts of global interest visible (Wallström, 2014). This, we argue, was a deliberate political move of contestation, clearly indicating awareness of the challenges facing political leaders who engage in antagonistic gendered games in global politics (Aggestam and True, 2021). With the rise of extreme right-wing populism, heightened polarisation and misogyny in global politics, Sweden's feminist foreign policy evoked increasingly hostile debates on pro-gender norms, not least on social media. For instance, feminist foreign policy became a key target in Russia's disinformation campaign, effectively disseminated on social media through a "troll army" aimed at the European Union and Sweden itself (Hedling, 2021). These Russian narratives portrayed Sweden as an example of multiculturalism and feminism gone "too far" which resonated with many social media debates, shaped by prevailing patterns of identity constructions along geopolitical and gendered lines (Edenborg, 2022, p. 499). Thus, the articulation of Sweden's feminist foreign policy could be seen as a direct provocation of the axis of states committed to 'traditional values' (Agius & Edenborg, 2019; Norocel & Paternotte, 2023). These dynamics of gendered geopolitics, disinformation and rising levels of contention on social media coincided with the launch of Sweden's feminist foreign policy and Margot Wallström's first annual foreign policy declaration, which warned against "digital propaganda wars" as "new security threats" that "must be fought" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2015b). Thus, Sweden's feminist foreign policy rapidly became associated with its government's efforts to contest attacks on gender equality, justice and women's rights globally.

Such contestation was particularly prevalent in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), which was one of the prioritised domains of Sweden's global feminist endeavours. The Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs demonstrated early preparedness to address this 'headwind agenda', and in so doing, sought to challenge several states' pronounced resistance to SRHR (Government Offices of Sweden, 2015a). As highlighted in the Swedish "Handbook on feminist foreign policy," initiatives about SRHR policies often encounter resistance through suppression techniques, such as ridicule, and the deliberate marginalisation of policy advocates (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019a, p. 101). Consequently, the Swedish government anticipated opposition from the Global South but also from member states within the European Union, such as Hungary and Poland (Rosén Sundström & Elgström, 2020). The European Union has not yet reached a consensus on a robust common policy stance concerning SRHR, prompting Swedish deputy prime minister Isabella Lövin to observe:

> Many people I speak with are noticing a growing resistance against the rights of women and LGBT individuals in the world—not just in the form of ISIL and other violent extremist groups, for whom the control of women's sexuality is at the very heart of their existence and rhetoric—but also in negotiation rooms and within nationalistic and populist parties in Europe. We need to join forces: governments, parliamentarians, CSOs and other relevant actors. This is another reason why SRHR is a central part of a feminist government's work. (Government Offices of Sweden, 2015d)

The election of far-right populist governments in a range of like-minded states including the US (under Trump), Russia, Bahrain, Guatemala, Hungary, Philippines, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and Nigeria has led to the mobilisation of global anti-gender campaigns. This development has created new alliances giving rise to the roll back on gender equality and SRHR as well as the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals, all of which are issues closely associated with anti-family and pro-abortion values (Aggestam & True, 2021, p. 386). The reintroduction of the global gag rule by the Trump administration in 2016 showcases how major backlashes emerged on digital platforms against gender equality particularly in the area of SRHR. The repercussions associated with the reinstatement of the global gag rule were met with both support and critique among states and global audiences. It sparked heated debates and new waves of SRHR

contestations. Several governments issued statements criticising the decision, noting that the policy could put the lives of women and girls at risk, often leading to unsafe abortions (McGovern et al., 2020). Likewise, right-wing extremists, radical Islamists and Christian anti-abortionists who oppose women's human rights, particularly sexual and reproductive health rights, often have expressed their resistance to reproductive health policies, for example, by using political hashtags such as #prolife and #righttollife. Such hashtags demonstrate how reinterpretation and hijacking can be used as tools of norm contestation online. Thus, social media platforms are increasingly recognised as the main arenas for political contestation and agonism (Zeitzoff, 2017). The reinstatement of the global gag rule triggered several digital campaigns worldwide. Below, we zoom in on the digital advocacy campaign "#SheDecides," organised by Sweden, Denmark, Belgium and the Netherlands. In this campaign, former foreign minister Wallström together with former deputy prime minister Isabella Lövin exercised political leadership, and, we argue, were key central drivers in mobilising resistance against the global gag rule.

3.4.1   *#shedecides*

In 2017, a notable protest movement emerged on various social media platforms around the hashtag #shedecides as a 'digital punchline' to challenge the global gag rule. The hashtag had previously been employed by activists advocating for women's rights, specifically targeting limitations imposed on women's sexual and reproductive rights. Consequently, #shedecides had already gained recognition as an established feminist hashtag on Twitter, symbolising opposition to the US-led backlash against reproductive health for women in the Global South (Khoja-Moolji, 2015). However, at the beginning of 2017, the use of the hashtag experienced a significant surge online, with numerous tweets shedding light on the detrimental consequences of the global gag rule on the status of women's human rights within the area of SRHR. This time state actors were actively joining forces with women's rights organisations in opposition to the global gag rule. The Netherlands took the lead by introducing a novel crowdsourcing initiative under the hashtag #shedecides, establishing a global fund aimed at facilitating women's access to safe abortion services. Shortly thereafter, Sweden joined the Netherlands, followed by Belgium, Denmark and Finland, in supporting the organisation of a conference held

in Brussels. The primary objectives of the conference were to launch the funding initiative and extend assistance to non-governmental organisations impacted by the global gag rule (Government Offices of Sweden, 2017). For Sweden, this initiative aligned well with its prioritised commitment to SRHR, a central component of its feminist foreign policy agenda (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019a).

At the #shedecides fundraising and advocacy conference in Brussels on 2 March 2017, Sweden pledged SEK 200 million in support to SRHR to reduce the impact of the regressive policies of the US (Government Offices of Sweden, 2017). The Swedish MFA also orchestrated the mobilisation of government officials and diplomats with the explicit aim of advancing global advocacy through online platforms, including social media channels and the official Twitter and Facebook accounts of the government. Consequently, the hashtag #shedecides emerged as the most widely utilised hashtag by the Swedish MFA during the specific week of the conference and ranked as the third most frequently employed hashtag throughout the spring of 2017 (@SweMFA). This strategic endeavour resulted in significant global outreach and garnered substantial attention.

The conference achieved notable success in several ways, particularly its capacity to bring together 50 governments, international organisations, and leaders from civil society. Collectively, these entities made substantial commitments, amounting to 181 million euros towards measures pertaining to SRHR, thereby ensuring the continuity of family planning initiatives in several developing countries. A joint conference statement was collaboratively made by Isabella Lövin, together with ministerial colleagues from Belgium, Estonia, Finland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Luxembourg and Denmark. This statement symbolically was released on International Women's Day on 8 March 2017 and received widespread coverage in various European news outlets. Its contents expressed unwavering support for SRHR and vehemently opposed the implementation of the US global gag rule:

> Unfortunately, the fight for women's and girls' rights suffered a setback on 23 January with the reintroduction of the Mexico City Policy, also known as the Global Gag Rule…The broad international support for women's rights is crucial for the lives of millions of women and for the development of their countries. And it shows that when other countries turn down their engagement in the fight for women's and girls' rights, we are ready to turn up our engagement. (Lövin et al., 2017)

The #shedecides campaign successfully gathered widespread international political and economic support for SRHR. The Swedish government used it to demonstrate its ability to make its feminist foreign policy operative, and result-driven, which added credibility to its quest for feminist leadership on and offline. In addition, the campaign enabled the Swedish government to project the relevance of feminist foreign policy to domestic audiences. It showed Sweden's capacity to lead a countermovement by employing digital contestation to protest against the growing global backlash against gender equality and the rights of women and girls. While Sweden was one of the central drivers in the European opposition movement against the global gag rule, the actual use of feminist terminology was limited in the framing and contestation of the backlash against sexual and reproductive rights. It is likely that a more explicit use of feminist terminology, as a platform for norm contestation, may have been seen as a barrier to rallying broader global and domestic consensus on SRHR. This assumption is sustained by the fact that Sweden's feminist foreign policy rested on both an ethical commitment to global gender justice as well as policy pragmatism, which was seen as the best way of achieving concrete and measurable results (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016).

The extensive digital advocacy efforts undertaken by Wallström and Lövin in support of SRHR attracted significant contestation and resistance on social media platforms. Various international critics, interest groups and pro-life activists framed the #shedecides digital campaign as an endeavour aimed at mobilising 'female dictators' and 'feminazis.' These critics expressed their disapproval through hashtags such as #antifeminism, which gained traction on Twitter after March 2017.

Despite the revival of domestic debates concerning Sweden's involvement in state- and government-oriented participation in global activism and advocacy for SRHR through the #shedecides campaign, support for SRHR remained steadfast within Sweden. On the Swedish government's Twitter updates, however, one could note that some argued that feminist advocacy was better suited for civil society actors, and, as such, questioning the appropriateness of state-led advocacy initiatives. Nevertheless, the Swedish government was standing firm in its commitment to SRHR, in terms of policy and digital practice.

In the summer of 2017, the government reaffirmed its commitment to pursue norm contestation in the area of SRHR by pledging additional funding to support organisations adversely affected by the expanded

global gag rule (Government Offices of Sweden, 2017). This commitment aimed to ensure the resilience of Sweden's SRHR initiatives. Furthermore, to reinforce the strength of its policy and extend its reach to global audiences, a Facebook post featuring an image of Foreign Minister Margot Wallström and Deputy Prime Minister Isabella Lövin was shared. The accompanying text emphasised the detrimental consequences of the new policy iteration, asserting that it would not truly "protect life" but instead increase the likelihood of harm to women. The image prominently featured the #shedecides banner, alongside hashtags such as #Shedecides, #SRHR, and #MexicoCityPolicy, all of which served as indications of deliberate acts of contestation intended to amplify Sweden's feminist foreign policy message to online audiences.

3.5   Conclusion

This chapter has examined the pivotal role of political leadership in initiating, shaping and executing Sweden's feminist foreign policy, with a particular emphasis on utilising digital tools and practices to facilitate these processes. By analysing the interplay between Sweden's feminist foreign policy and the political platform of Foreign Minister Margot Wallström, we have highlighted her adeptness in articulating feminist foreign policy as a strategic vision with clearly defined pathways for implementation, thereby solidifying its integration within the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). Moreover, Sweden's feminist foreign policy has resonated with like-minded states having adopted their iterations of feminist foreign policies. While Germany has openly acknowledged Sweden's normative influence on its feminist foreign policy, Canada has not. Nonetheless, Sweden's normative entrepreneurship, closely tied to Margot Wallström's political leadership, has been evident in the communication strategies of various political figures. Furthermore, Sweden's feminist foreign policy stood in stark contrast to the antagonistic stance of governments seeking to restrict Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, thereby elevating the symbolic significance of Margot Wallström and Isabella Lövin, as advocates of gender justice, on global digital platforms.

Sweden's feminist foreign policy provides three important insights into the constitutive relationship between political leadership and digital diplomacy. First, the political process of norm entrepreneurship is central to foreign policy alterations, with the latter being bolstered by skilful and

strategic usages of digital diplomacy. Digital diplomacy is a dynamic mechanism for projecting, sustaining and legitimising foreign policy leadership within global politics by combining effective diplomatic articulation with practical implementation strategies. These articulations and strategies enhance the coherence and resonance of transformative foreign policy agendas. Secondly, the digital dissemination of foreign policy agendas facilitates their dissemination beyond national boundaries, potentially fostering mobilisation and emulation among like-minded states, as demonstrated in this chapter. Third, digital platforms add strength to foreign policy leadership, engendering a spectrum of global reactions ranging from admiration to animosity. As we have shown in the analysis above, the symbolic significance of political leaders such as Margot Wallström, not least in the context of gendered and polarised geopolitical dynamics, elicits a rangeof responses within global politics. The inherently political nature of online leadership communication gives rise to emotional reactions while giving states a range of opportunities to firmly position themselves as advocates of pro-gender norms in the global order.

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CHAPTER 4

Nation Branding, Digital Advocacy and Feminist Foreign Policy

Abstract This chapter examines how Sweden's feminist foreign policy was constructed and managed as a nation brand during its eight years of existence. This particular nation brand built on and was informed by Sweden's longstanding state feminist tradition as well as its more recent digital sophistication. As the chapter shows, Sweden's feminist foreign policy was an exercise in feminist branding, paired with a strong awareness that digital communication of feminist values required both pragmatism and policy adaptation. We analyse how strategies of hashtag feminism triggered resonance among global audiences not least in digital advocacy networks, drawing attention to and mobilising support for the distinct values and ambitions of Sweden's feminist foreign policy. Finally, we examine how Sweden's feminist foreign policy was contested by actors globally. To illustrate this process of contestation, we pay particular attention to a Swedish state visit to Iran in 2017, which triggered a range of strong online reactions.

Keywords Feminist foreign policy • Nation branding • State feminism • Iran • State feminism

4.1   Introduction

Sweden's feminist foreign policy rapidly gained prominence as a nation brand on the global stage. Nation branding shares many characteristics with the marketing techniques employed by commercial actors, enabling states to enhance their reputation and self-images beyond borders (Anholt, 2007; Kaneva, 2011). In this context, digital diplomacy is an effective tool for advancing, monitoring and managing states' global images and reputations (Bjola & Jiang, 2015). Communicating values and norms beyond borders enables states to highlight their foreign policy preferences and gain worldwide visibility and recognition among like-minded partners (Melissen, 2005; Rankin, 2012). However, nation branding may also involve competitive identity dynamics through agonistic and antagonist positionings (Browning & Ferraz de Oliveira, 2017; Mouffe, 2000). Sweden's adoption of a distinct feminist foreign policy in 2014 was an opportunity to re-politicise its global reputation as a state committed to gender equality worldwide, doing so by adopting the political label of feminism.

This chapter examines how Sweden's feminist foreign policy was articulated as a nation brand, during its eight years of existence. Sweden has a long tradition of capitalising on its comparably progressive values, actively incorporating them into its nation brand (Larsen et al., 2021). In this chapter, we propose that Sweden's foreign policy was an exercise in feminist-informed branding, though, paired with a strong awareness that the communication of feminist values required pragmatism and policy adaptation to produce global resonance. It was the comprehensive and pragmatic definition of feminism that enabled the brand to be re-packaged and communicated to a broad range of audiences (Bergman Rosamond & Hedling, 2022). Below, we analyse Sweden's digital articulation of its state feminist tradition globally. Second, we examine how hashtag feminism resonated among global audiences. Third, we illustrate how feminist foreign policy was contested by focusing on the reactions that Sweden's well-documented state visit to Iran triggered in 2017.

4.2   The Digital Articulation of Sweden's Feminist Nation Brand in Foreign Policy

By adopting strategies of digital diplomacy, states gain new opportunities to construct and manage their nation brands (Manor, 2019). To communicate foreign policy change, states use diplomatic articulation, grounding that communication in clear and consistent messages of the nation's distinct values, identity and image, and, in so doing, targeting intended

audiences (Anholt, 2007). In this context, the role of digital communication is to ensure that the brand's message is effectively projected on digital platforms and is understood by audiences. Central here is the brand's alignment with the nation's overall cultural, historical and political strategy, vision and self identity (Pamment, 2014). Sweden's articulation of its feminist foreign policy involved crafting a clear and compelling narrative of foreign policy change while ensuring that articulation reflected Sweden's longstanding identity, culture and aspiration. Similarly, the country's digital articulation of its new feminist foreign policy trajectory built on the legacy of its already established nation brand as a progressive state, committed to gender equality at home and abroad. Thus, it was essential for Sweden to adjust its nation brand to ensure that its feminist foreign policy would be perceived as an extension of its state feminism, an international image that had served Sweden well since the 1960s (Bergman Rosamond, 2020: Bergman Rosamond & Hedling, 2022). State feminism refers to both women's participation in public life as well as "the activities of feminists or femocrats in governance and administration, institutionalised feminism in public agencies…, and the capacity of the state to contribute to the fulfilment of a feminist agenda" (Lovenduski, 2005, p. 4). State feminism, therefore, combines "feminism from above" expressing support for gender equality, social policy and women's presence and representation in political parties and institutions, with civil-society-driven "feminism from below" (Hernes, 1987, p. 153; Lovenduski, 2005). Anchored within this intersection, feminist foreign policy was articulated as an externalisation of an already recognised identity, narrative and ambition.

The externalisation of Sweden's self-identification is in part mythical (Ryner, 2002) since it disregards gendered injustices that remain within Swedish society, including the lack of equal pay and women's overrepresentation in the care sector (Bergman Rosamond, 2020; Towns, 2002). Featured as a dominant discursive trope in articulating Swedish political imaginary is a notion of state exceptionalism, grounded in a social 'myth' (Ryner, 2002) and/or an idealisation of the state. This idealisation of the self has been transformed into a widely recognisable discursive 'truth' informing the narration of Sweden's self-identity. Such exceptional reshaping persists despite the existence of nativist sentiments, the conduct of militarism at home and abroad, and the damaging effects of neoliberal marketisation (Ryner, 2002). However, in the context of nation branding, inconsistencies are generally silenced with coherent 'success' narratives being privileged. Such narratives centre on common visions and values, fostering a sense of national pride and unity (Kaneva, 2011; Shepherd,

2021), that benefits the nation's unique brand. The role of success in crafting a nation brand has largely been enhanced by the embrace of social media (Bjola & Pamment, 2019).

In an increasingly competitive attention economy, digital diplomacy provides key opportunities to communicate the notion of a successful self to global audiences and to do so in highly visible ways (Hedling, 2019). Thus, the successful construction of a nation brand requires the creation of a sense of the self as different from others, implying that the self is more advanced than its counterparts in the global arena (Browning & Ferraz de Oliveira, 2017). This tactic was visible in Sweden's tendency to present itself as a feminist pioneer, being the first nation ever to adopt a feminist foreign policy. Part of this strategy was to uphold the self as a leader, as discussed in Chap. 3, and to ensure that other states would also adopt feminist foreign policies (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019b; Wallström, 2014). Being the first country to repackage its foreign policy based on feminist principles and values put Sweden in a strong position to engage in feminist-informed nation branding, adding force to its self-narrative as and ambitious and independent international actor. While framed as a 'brave move' (Nordberg, 2015) this branding strategy was, if anything, a 'safe move' since it positioned feminist foreign policy within Sweden's firmly established state feminist tradition (Jezierska & Towns, 2018).

To ensure a global audience for its feminist foreign policy, the Swedish government increased its political control over Sweden's nation branding efforts (Karlsson, 2021). Skilful communication and ensuring wide visibility were cornerstones in Sweden's feminist foreign policy (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019b). At least in part, the overall strategy was defined by the government's active attempt to fully integrate feminist foreign policy into Sweden's long-established nation brand as a committed gender actor. This was particularly important since Sweden sought to become the "strongest voice for gender equality and full employment of human rights for all women and girls" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2015). In trailblazing a foreign policy approach, based on the advancement of global gender justice, Sweden was aware of the advantages associated with conducting a normative foreign policy that would come across as more advanced and developed than other states (Thomson, 2022). To bring attention to gender equality and justice as key aspects of Sweden's nation brand, the Swedish MFA published texts on Sweden's wide array of 'successful' gender-equality-focused initiatives in the Global South (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019a).

However, as noted previously in this book, the Swedish MFA never spelt out what kind of feminism it adhered to and how it informed its conception of feminist foreign policy (Thomson, 2020). Nonetheless, Sweden's self-assigned 'do good' feminist brand, strengthened its strategic self-image (Zhukova, 2023; Zhukova et al., 2022) and provided opportunities to project itself as a highly advanced feminist state.

4.3   Digital Resonance through Hashtag Feminism

Sweden's feminist foreign policy brand resonated well with the fourth wave feminism, which has evolved since 2012 and is characterised by activism on digital platforms (Jain, 2020; Nacher, 2021). The Swedish government and its MFA strategically mimicked hashtag activism as a key component of its feminist digital media repertoire, and, as a way to mobilise online visibility (Aggestam et al., 2021). Hence, using well-recognised hashtags that had previously been employed within feminist digital activism was a way to both perform and showcase the resonance of feminist foreign policy within a broader (and non-state) feminist social movement. Hashtag activism entails using hashtags known as organising nodes, with the latter referring to how something becomes searchable and connected on social media. The explosion of social media posts in the aftermath of the kidnapping of schoolgirls in Nigeria, in April 2014, under the hashtag #BringBackOurGirls, is an example of a feminist campaign that relied on mobilising visibility on social media to pressure the United States and Nigerian governments to take action (Ofori-Parku & Moscato, 2018). In 2017, the #MeToo hashtag went viral – it was used 12 million times in the first 24 hours alone after actress Alyssa Milano encouraged global publics to mobilise and enhance the visibility of gender based and sexual violence worldwide (Clark-Parsons, 2021).

In the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs' handbook for Sweden's feminist foreign policy, hashtag feminism was described as a key method for norm change and mobilisation (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019b, p. 52). The #MeToo movement often figured in the government's official documents, as an inspiration for online mobilisation and a call for the necessity to digitally communicate and diffuse the country's feminist foreign policy (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019a). In this way, the government ensured that the Swedish feminist brand would resonate with 'like-minded alliances' globally (Government Offices of Sweden,

2019a). As alluded to above, the government and the MFA sought to launch Sweden's feminist foreign policy brand by mimicking recognised feminist hashtags used spontaneously or over time by advocacy coalitions, such as the #MeToo movement. These hashtags did not signal participation in the actual social movements; rather they were used to enhance the visibility of Sweden's feminist foreign policy brand. This was done by generating a digital vocabulary that would symbolically reiterate the key values of Sweden's global feminism across online settings. As noted earlier, Sweden's outward projection of its feminist foreign policy brand was often adapted to appeal to global audiences that were sceptical of the virtues of feminism, but, yet supportive of gender equality (Jezierska, 2022; Jezierska & Towns, 2018; Zhukova et al., 2022). The appropriation of a digital vocabulary therefore reflects the careful balancing between idealism and pragmatism that also characterised Margot Wallström's vision of feminist foreign policy, as discussed in Chap. 3. To mimic feminist hashtags was a way of supporting transformative mobilisations while at the same time avoiding the language associated with the more assertive claims employed by feminist activists. Hence, the digital vocabulary used by the MFA enabled a 'flexible translation' of typically Swedish notions of exceptionalism and state feminism into the online realm (Bergman Rosamond & Hedling, 2022).

As table 4.1 shows below 62% of the 5083 posts posted on the Swedish MFA's institutional account (@SweMFA) on Twitter between 1 January 2017 and 17 October 2022, used hashtags. Out of these posts (3156), 15% (478) of the hashtags clearly alluded to feminist foreign policy through distinct language or known terms associated with Sweden's feminist agenda. It is important to note here that government accounts do not frequently use hashtags, rather, these are more associated with the digital expressions of social movements and advocacy groups (Stache, 2015). Thus, by using hashtags, Sweden connected its state feminist tradition and support for global gender equality to a recognised digital discourse that would more likely resonate with global audiences, as Table 4.1 shows.

#FeministForeignPolicy (or the short forms #FemForeignPolicy or #FFP) remained consistently in the top 10 of hashtags. In addition, the MFA used #GenderEquality, #MoreWomenMorePeace, #Wikigap and #EqualityMakesSense hashtags. These hashtags aligned with the government's and, most vocally Margot Wallström's, strategy of framing feminist foreign policy as a pro-gender mainstreaming and "smart" policy (Wallström, 2019). In a report from 2019 (Government Offices of

Table 4.1 Hashtag feminism

Top 5 hashtags generated by @SweMFA	*Top 5 established feminist hashtags used by @SweMFA*
#FeministForeignPolicy; #FemForeignPolicy; #FFP	#OrangeTheWorld
#GenderEquality	#FeministFriday
#MoreWomenMorePeace	#WPS
#WikiGap	#SheDecides
#EqualityMakesSense	#SRHR

Sweden, 2019a), the reasoning behind the hashtag #EqualityMakeSense was further clarified as seen in the quotes below.

#EqualityMakesSense Under the hashtag #EqualityMakesSense the Swedish Foreign Service published examples of how it sought to further gender equality worldwide, disseminating the principles of feminist foreign policy and sharing information about its work and events. Examples of such communication include:

"Women are an essential ingredient in the recipe for lasting peace."
"When women carry out professional work, economies grow. It's that simple. It's important to include the under-used workforce resource."
"Counteracting the systematic and global subordination of women is a good thing in itself. However, it's also a smart practical policy."
"Investing in women's development reduces poverty. It builds societies, democracies and economies."

The hashtag #EqualityMakesSense was effectively used to communicate Sweden's feminist foreign policy as a smart policy. The selection of hashtags that emphasised gender equality rather than feminism also signalled a reluctance to fully embrace a more radical feminist transformation of the global patriarchal order as noted earlier in Chap. 3. Hence, feminist foreign policy was instrumentally framed as something that 'makes sense' from a pragmatic and rational point of view rather than being driven by strong ethical concerns. Moreover, the use of established feminist hashtags (see the right column of Table 4.1) was more explicitly linked to initiatives aimed at transformative change. Still, it situated Sweden's commitment to the feminist foreign policy within a broad coalition of state actors. For

instance, #OrangetheWorld and #WPS (Women, Peace, Security) are originally UN hashtags. #SheDecides and #SRHR (Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights) were used by a coalition of states opposing the US global gag rule in 2017 and #FeministFriday is a prevalent social media trend. Therefore, the embrace of hashtag feminism, as a strategy for projecting feminist foreign policy globally, reflects a diffusion strategy that was aimed at reaching broad audiences, with hashtags contributing to signaling and 'selling' Sweden's strong commitment to gender equality broadly.

4.4   Contesting Sweden's State Visit to Iran

Sweden's endeavour to reshape the gendered dynamics of the global order was a profoundly political undertaking. It entailed not only seeking support for the feminist nation brand among like-minded partners, but also a willingness to navigate criticisms and contestations emerging from a wide array of actors engaged in gender activism or, indeed, contesting the latter. The digital representation of Sweden's feminist foreign policy often attracted such contestation (Nordberg, 2015), with its digital communication reinforcing this tendency. For example, contestation emerged during a historical period characterised by populist campaigns and a growing commitment to alternative ideologies rooted in "traditional values" and "pro-family norms," whereby Sweden's foreign policy reorientation was positioned as a confrontation (Aggestam & True, 2021; Agius & Edenborg, 2019). Sweden's commitment to a progressive feminist brand was, in part at least, an effort to contest the non-feminist foreign policies of other states, particularly in the context of international aid and SRHR, as we discussed in Chap. 3. Hence, this positioning rendered the Swedish government vulnerable to antagonism, with many global actors taking issue with the core values of Sweden's FFP.

However, the political contestation associated with nation branding is a complex and multidirectional process, involving the difficult management of various inconsistencies arising from the articulation of the nation's distinct brand (Christensen, 2013; Dolea, 2015). In a digital era defined by multiple crises, conflict and anti-genderism, states must navigate such contestations, whether they arise among internal audiences (the domestic public) or external audiences (the targeted global public). Platforms like Twitter have given rise to dynamic phenomena such as 'Twitter storms' and meme cultures, capable of swiftly politicising content and generating

significant shifts in public opinion and discourse (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich & Bou-Franch, 2019; Ofori-Parku & Moscato, 2018). In such a fast-paced digital environment, a nation brand must possess the stability and resilience to resist vocal opposition from adversaries and withstand moments of contestation. As noted in Chap. 2, feminist politics is inherently political and prone to trigger conflict and emotional responses. Hence, actors engaging in global feminist politics must be sufficiently strong to withstand moments of contestation, not least in times of global crises.

Indeed, digital platforms have enabled rapid information dissemination and amplified diverse voices and perspectives. Twitter storms, such as the widespread circulation of hashtags and collective mobilisation of users around a particular issue or cause, can swiftly reshape public narratives and challenge established norms and beliefs (Vasterman, 2018). Furthermore, the increasingly important meme culture, with its ability to encapsulate complex ideas or critique through humorous or satirical images and captions, can quickly reshape public perceptions and generate alternative discourses (Hakoköngäs et al., 2020).

Given the fluid nature of digital spaces, where information flows rapidly and opinions can be swayed by viral content, it is imperative for a nation brand to be firmly rooted in distinct national values and principles, with feminism being one of the key values of the former Social Democratic government. By maintaining consistency and coherence in its normative messaging and actions, a nation brand can navigate the treacherous waters of the digital age and effectively engage with its audience while withstanding potential challenges and inconsistencies that may arise in that process.

Sweden's state visit to Iran in February 2017 gave rise to heated sentiments and contestation. The visit was undertaken despite Iran's abuse and oppression of women's rights, and poor track record on gender equality. Hence, the state visit to Iran by a feminist government was questioned from the outset (Taylor, 2017). Yet, this did not lead Sweden to cancel the visit, rather a large delegation composed of then Prime Minister Stefan Löfven and Trade Minister Ann Linde as well as other ministers went ahead with the visit. The aim was to discuss Swedish national, commercial and security interests with the Iranian regime. The optic inconsistency between the principles of feminist foreign policy and the projection of Sweden's feminist nation brand was not left unnoticed—it was met with massive protests on social media. Photographs depicting Swedish female diplomats and politicians wearing hijabs, chadors and long coats during their visit to Iran were widely disseminated on digital platforms, including

Twitter and Facebook. These images captured the moment when Iranian President Hassan Rouhani greeted the Swedish delegation. While it is not uncommon for Western female state officials and diplomats to adhere to local customs and veil themselves during state visits to Arab states, this particular image sparked controversy. It was perceived by many as incongruous with Sweden's ongoing digital campaigns advocating for women's rights and empowerment—two fundamental pillars of Sweden's feminist foreign policy (Aggestam et al., 2023).

The online projections of the Swedish government's visit to Iran triggered swift reactions, particularly from opposition leaders. They argued that the female delegates' adoption of modest attire reflected what they saw as the 'known hypocrisy' of Sweden's feminist foreign policy, as well as its purported submission to the masculinist Iranian leadership (Nordström & Svensson, 2017). The judgment of the Swedish government came under scrutiny, with opposition leaders and women's rights activists expressing strong objections through various channels, including news media, social media platforms and parliamentary hearings (Fråga 2016/17:893 Jämställdhetsintegrering i handelspolitiken, 2017; Karlsson, 2017; Nordström & Svensson, 2017; Svensson, 2017). Consequently, the viral images of Sweden's state visit to Iran were interpreted as evidence of the perceived hollowness and lack of substance in Sweden's feminist foreign policy.

The public discourse surrounding this issue highlighted the tension between the government's commitment to feminist principles and its concrete foreign policy actions and diplomatic practices. The conflicting interpretations of the visit underscored the challenges faced by Sweden in navigating cultural and political sensitivities while promoting its feminist foreign policy agenda. The controversy surrounding the attire of the Swedish delegates also serves as a reminder of the complex interplay between cultural norms, diplomatic protocol and the ideals espoused by Sweden's feminist foreign policy. It also exemplifies the potential for digital images to shape public perceptions and ignite debates over the consistency and authenticity of a state's policy commitments.

The state visit to Iran evoked widespread adverse reactions across various digital platforms, amplifying the voices of dissent. Within Iran, women's rights activists voiced strong criticism against the Swedish government, casting doubt on the ethical foundations of Sweden's feminist brand. Notably, an Iranian journalist and political activist known for opposing the mandatory hijab law in Iran played a prominent role in these online

interventions (Stewart & Schultze, 2019). With a thought-provoking collage of photos posted on Facebook, she questioned the genuineness and credibility of Sweden's feminist foreign policy (Aggestam et al., 2023, p. 14). Moreover, it exacerbated the discrepancy between Sweden's feminist rhetoric and its foreign policy actions (Nordström & Svensson, 2017). In one instance, the activist shared a photo initially posted on Facebook, featuring five Swedish female government officials, including former trade minister and later foreign minister Ann Linde, wearing hijabs during their introduction to Iranian President Rouhani. Notably, former male Swedish prime minister Stefan Löfven, stood beside President Rouhani, thereby accentuating the gendered dynamics of the state visit. Accompanying the images, the activist's caption urged the Swedish female government officials present during the visit to strongly condemn the gender injustices highlighting the "unfair situation in Iran." She noted that Iranian women did not expect the Swedish delegates to "come and save Iranian women," but rather to stand up against the "discriminatory laws in Iran"(Aggestam et al., 2023, p. 15).

By highlighting the disparity between the government's professed commitment to gender equality and the decision to conform to a compulsory dress code that restricts women's agency, such critiques challenged the authenticity and effectiveness of Sweden's feminist foreign policy brand. The viral circulation of the images and the ensuing discussions demonstrated the power of digital platforms in shaping public discourse and holding governments accountable for their actions.

The protest post by the Iranian activist garnered significant support across social media platforms and became a focal point for Swedish opposition parties to voice their strong objections to the government's clothing practices during the state visit. Notably, the photographic imagery used by the Iranian activist achieved inter-visual status (Hansen, 2011) as it was salvaged and circulated internationally by media outlets such as BBC News and the Washington Post. Furthermore, the Facebook post served to contest and critique Sweden's feminist foreign policy, with the hashtag #feministforeignpolicy employed for this purpose (Sweden defends officials wearing headscarves in Iran, 2019; Taylor, 2017).

The critique of Sweden's feminist foreign policy extended to Twitter, where several high-profile statements were shared, again casting doubt on the credibility and legitimacy of Sweden's approach. One such statement captured the tone of the voiced criticism by pointing out that "Sweden's self-declared first feminist government in the world sacrificed its principles

and betrayed the rights of Iranian women" (Anonymous, 2017). This statement, accompanied by the headline "Walk of shame", gained traction on Twitter and Facebook, capturing global attention and prompting many commentators to question the authenticity of Sweden's feminist foreign policy. The persistence of this moment of contestation created a fracture in the nation's brand. Whenever criticism of Sweden's feminist foreign policy arose, the image of the feminist government wearing veils would resurface on social media, serving as a powerful symbol of the perceived incongruity between Sweden's professed values and its foreign policy practices.

In response to the mounting criticism on social media, and in seeking to clarify its stance on the veiling practices employed during the state visit, the Swedish government posited that the women delegates' dress code abided by Iranian law (Taylor, 2017). The government claimed that it was legally obliged to respect the Iranian judicial system during the high-profile state visit. The Swedish foreign minister Margot Wallström noted that:

> If you go there [Iran] as a visitor, and especially if it's an official visit, you observe the law. You do it out of respect for their legislation. You also follow diplomatic protocol….The important thing is what you bring up [during meetings] and what this visit is really supposed to be about. It was important to go there and have the important conversations that were held. You can then in other ways support what civil society and women's organizations are fighting for. But it's not the right opportunity, so you have to make a choice. (Interview cited in Karlsson, 2017)

In line with Wallström's view of feminism as a pragmatic and 'smart' method, she navigated the storm by claiming that by communicating with Iran and encouraging the country to 'open up', Sweden's feminist foreign policy could still lead to positive change for the women and girls of Iran. However, criticism emerging from several directions was seen as a wake-up call for some ministers. Trade Minister Ann Linde announced shortly after the visit that she would refrain from wearing a veil on an upcoming visit to Saudi Arabia, a country where wearing a hijab is not required by law.

This episode in Sweden's digital diplomacy and nation branding demonstrates the significance of striking the right tone when attempting to disseminate norms and values on a global scale. This task has become increasingly challenging in a world characterised by turbulence and a

backlash against what is often perceived as gender ideology (Agius et al., 2020). The photographic images and accompanying captions used by the Iranian activist, highlight the perceived shallowness of Sweden's feminist foreign policy and activism, a position that was reverberated by a range of political groups, parties and feminist activists.

However, it remains uncertain whether the digital contestation of Sweden's feminist foreign policy had a tangible impact on the government's commitment to advance gender justice on a global scale. Despite facing criticism, Sweden's feminist foreign policy, both as a brand and a practice, experienced some degree of success until its abrupt discontinuation in 2022 following the Swedish elections, with a new Conservative-led government taking office.

4.5 Conclusion

State feminism emerged as a resilient and influential platform for the former Swedish government's efforts enabling it to rebrand its foreign policy on the global stage. The emphasis on social media platforms and the strategic use of feminist hashtags by the Swedish MFA exemplify the power of resonance in digital diplomacy. These digital tools allowed the government to strategically engage with global online audiences in multiple ways. By seeking resonance with multiple, often diverse societal audiences, Sweden by and large succeeded in disseminating its key normative messages across the world, and in so doing managing to amplify the impact of its feminist foreign policy agenda. The resonance between Sweden's state objectives and the aspirations and concerns expressed by global civil society strengthened the country's position and credibility as a leading global gender actor.

However, Sweden's feminist foreign policy also encountered contestation and agonistic responses. The Swedish state visit to Iran in 2017 is a significant example of the potential challenges and pitfalls of online communication in the context of digital diplomacy. This episode shows how important it is for states and political leaders to exercise caution and sensitivity in their digital diplomacy efforts and the need for skilful management and navigation of controversies emerging along the way. Thus, the ability to anticipate and respond to online contestation is central to ensuring the credibility and legitimacy of a nation's foreign policy initiatives in the digital age.

Swedish feminist foreign policy provides valuable insights into the politics of digital diplomacy and the profoundly political properties of nation branding. It also highlights the efficacy of utilising a nation brand as a platform for the reorientation and politicisation of foreign policy— Sweden's feminist foreign policy, for all intents and purposes is a deeply political project that give rise to both contestation and resonance. Both forms of politicisation were achieved through strategic communication and dialogue, not least with, feminist global civil society. For Sweden, this involved managing and mitigating the contestations concerning its feminist foreign policy, while maintaining the credibility of its digital diplomatic efforts and distinct feminist visions.

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CHAPTER 5

Visuality, Digital Visibility and Feminist Foreign Policy

Abstract In this chapter, we explore how online opportunities, emerging from visual language, symbolic representation and global visibilities productively diffused the communication of Sweden's feminist foreign policy to global audiences. The launch and trajectory of Sweden's feminist foreign policy involved the management of visual representations and close navigation of the visual saturation of the contemporary political information environment. The reach and resonance of Sweden's feminist foreign policy were strengthened by the political mobilisation and employment of a range of visual representations and visibility structures. This chapter analyses the use of visual language in the political articulation of Sweden's feminist foreign policy. To this effect, we provide a visual analysis of a photo exhibition that became a successful conversation, enabling the connection between the global goals of feminist foreign policy with wider gender debates that resonated with a range of national settings. Finally, we analyse the WikiGap initiative, which aimed to enhance the visibility of women's stories and experiences online. The initiative illustrates how Sweden's contestation of gendered politics was made visible online.

Keywords Visual IR • Feminist foreign policy • Visual diplomacy • Feminist visibility

5.1   Introduction

Visual communication is often considered more powerful than verbal communication because it invokes emotions and productively conveys perceived 'truths' about a range of pressing issues (Dan et al., 2021). Digitalisation processes and the rise of social media platforms have amplified the productive power inherent in visual communication. The timing of the launch of Sweden's feminist foreign policy in 2014 and its trajectory through the 'golden age' of social media generated new and innovative strategies for visualising feminist foreign policy (Crilley et al., 2020).

In this chapter, we examine the visuality and visibility of Sweden's feminist foreign policy and how the policy was curated by the Swedish Government and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) within the realm of digital diplomacy. We demonstrate how Sweden's digital diplomacy gradually became more niched in its feminist outlook and image, sustained by visual narration and photographic storytelling (Aggestam et al., 2021; Bergman Rosamond & Hedling, 2022). The visual language gained specific performative effects in the context of feminist foreign policy, which emerged from its ability to connect to grassroots advocacy, family life and global feminist solidarity. The chapter analyses how and to what extent digital diplomacy was used to increase feminist visibility to produce visions of feminist foreign policy conducive to Sweden's ambitions of creating a more gender-just global order. While visuality and visibility refer to different aspects of visual power in the contemporary information environment (Bleiker, 2018; Brighenti, 2010), Sweden's feminist foreign policy was sensitive to both processes. First, we examine the role of visual language in articulating feminist foreign policy and how it evolved. Second, we analyse the success of the photographic exhibition "Swedish Dads", emphasising the resonance it produced amongst various audiences in local settings around the world. Third, we assess how the WikiGap campaign became a lighthouse initiative for the transformative potential of feminist foreign policy by contesting gendered silences within dominant sites of knowledge production online.

5.2   Articulation: Feminist Foreign Policy as a Visual Practice

Digital diplomacy served the articulation of Sweden's feminist foreign policy well by making it a partial visual practice. Here, a visual practice refers to the production of a set of symbols and visual language that

gradually become representative and intuitively associated with the policy in question (cf. Boscarino, 2022). Adopting a carefully curated visual language and a selection of specific symbolic representations it became central to the distinct articulation of Sweden's feminist foreign policy. An essential part of this process was to create continuity and coherence in the visual language employed in Sweden's feminist foreign policy, with the former Swedish government and the MFA actively seeking to integrate and streamline the feminist agenda into their overall activities. The visual language that was employed to communicate the ambitions of Sweden's feminist foreign policy can broadly be categorised into three strands: (1) a visual focus on leadership, in particular on Foreign Minister Margot Wallström (as discussed in Chap. 3); (2) a communicative strategy broadly aligned with feminist aesthetics; and (3) a set of distinct visual symbols in the digital communication of feminist foreign policy. These strands were somewhat overlapping while following distinct timelines. In the initial stage, there was an emphasis on visual leadership (2014–2017), followed by a period defined by the employment of feminist aesthetics (2017–2020). The last period was defined by far-reaching efforts to craft a visual identity by employing a range of political symbols and images (2019–2022).

While Sweden's feminist foreign policy received praise suggesting that the digital communication of its core principles and ambitions worked, it was also critiqued by a range of domestic and global actors (Rosén Sundström & Elgström, 2020). For example, Sweden's feminist foreign policy has been criticised for being an exercise in liberal interventionism (Achilleos-Sarll, 2018), which is rooted in neoliberal market logics (Robinson, 2021). Others have argued that Sweden's feminist foreign policy was morally inconsistent with its longstanding internationalist traditions pertaining to international disarmament and peace. In contrast, others have pointed to its disconnection from grassroot feminist movements (CONCORD, Swedish and European CSOs for global development, 2017). The gradually more pronounced employment of visual language resting on feminist aesthetic methods (Korsmeyer & Weiser, 2004) could be seen as a way of addressing parts of this criticism.

Moreover, the adoption of visual imagery, which broadly rests on feminist aesthetics, can be seen as a way of broadening the scope of the feminist foreign policy agenda. For example, gradually there was more use of advocacy imagery and symbols as well as visual storytelling, (Bergman Rosamond & Hedling, 2022). The visual communication of feminist foreign policy could also be viewed as a response to and support for global

feminist movements, such as the MeToo movement. Moreover, contents related to Sweden's support for LGBTQ+ rights and advocacy for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), which were prioritised areas of the feminist foreign policy (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019b), often emulated the aesthetic online expression employed by global civil society. For instance, the Swedish government's articulated support for the Stockholm Pride festival, with the advocacy banner and hashtag #loveislove. The background depicts many individuals holding up signs with messages of love, which is a popular form of activism in social media campaigns (Lee & Chau, 2018).

In addition to adopting the visual language of civil society advocacy groups, the MFA sought to connect the articulation of feminist foreign policy with Sweden's policy impact. The digital communication of feminist foreign policy moved away from the use of photographic imagery of politicians in action, giving speeches or going about their business, to visual representations of the women who stood to benefit from Sweden's reinforced commitment to feminist-informed international aid in the Global South (Bergman Rosamond & Hedling, 2022). However, portraying recipients of international aid is an ethically sensitive endeavour signalling 'white saviourism' (Lynch, 2019) and western superiority. While recognising the danger of such racialised and gendered representations we would argue here that Sweden's adoption of aesthetics, though often used as a strategic tactic, enabled visual communication that highlighted the agency of women worldwide. For instance, one of the images posted on social media to advance feminist foreign policy pictured participants during the Somali Women's Convention held in Mogadishu in March 2019. In the images, Somali women were constituted as agents of their own destinies through vibrant coloured veils, with men being in the (visual) minority. The use of feminist aesthetics then contributes to a more balanced depiction of women 'over there', with the former Swedish government seemingly wanting to avoid only assigning victimhood to women in the Global South.

Between 2019 and 2022, the MFA again sought to reinvent its visual identity by advancing its own symbolic language. As discussed in Chap. 4, the branding of feminist foreign policy was in part an exercise in visuality, connecting the past to the present to project Sweden's longstanding commitment to gender equality at home and abroad. Thus, the constitution of feminist foreign policy as a visual practice relied on appropriating long-established symbols of state feminism, portraying them as icons of

foreign policy visions and central to Sweden's feminist awakening. The image pictured in Fig. 5.1 of Agda Rössel (9010–2001) was circulated by the Swedish MFA on social media (Instagram) multiple times.

Rössel was the first women ambassador to the UN between 1958 and 1965 and a fitting symbol of Sweden's feminist foreign policy, a social democrat from a humble background and one of the first senior woman diplomats in the world. At the time of her appointment as UN ambassador, she was a controversial choice. When her biography was published in 2019, Wallström wrote the foreword and hosted a memorial seminar at the MFA in her honour (Jäderström, 2019). Moreover, in 2019 the Swedish representation to the UN in New York redesigned one of the conference rooms, naming it the "Agda Rössel room" (Radio Sweden, 2019). Rössel was described as an "unknown pioneer" suitable for the MFA's strategic ambition to reconstitute firmly rooted gender roles and notions of leadership in diplomacy within feminist discourse and practice (Bergman Rosamond & Hedling, 2022, p. 312). Thus, the articulation of Sweden's feminist foreign policy within visual language was a concerted effort to broaden the appeal of the country's gender equality agenda by employing feminist aesthetics, while aligning with the country's formally articulated foreign policy goals.
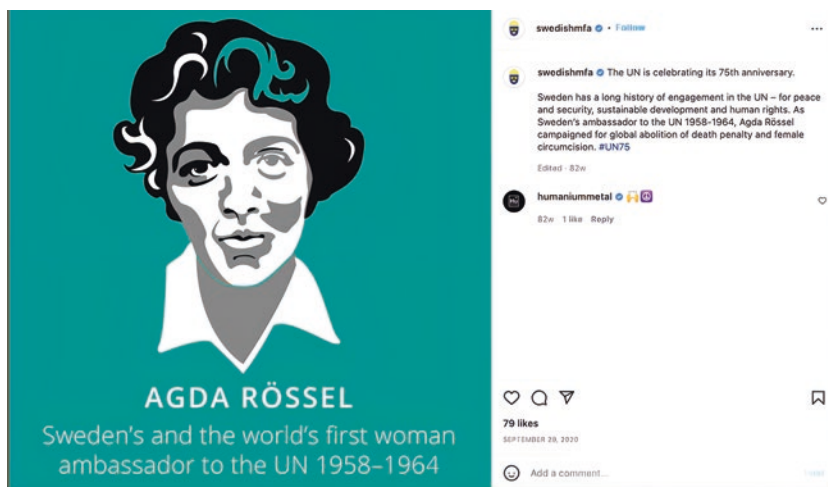

Fig. 5.1 Instagram post @SwedishMFA, 29 September 2020

5.3   RESONANCE: VISUAL EXPERIENCES
OF GENDER EQUALITY

Sweden's feminist foreign policy was diffused through several visual campaigns to ensure that it would reach global audiences. One of those campaigns was the Swedish Dads photo exhibition, a successful feminist foreign policy campaign that yielded a somewhat unanticipated reach and response by global audiences. The reason for this success was the way the exhibition resonated with experiences of fatherhood and gender equality amongst local audiences in a broad range of countries. The campaign featured portraits of 25 Swedish fathers on parental leave and documented their views on being a modern man and father. Swedish photographer Johan Bävman took the photographs with the specific purpose of being used in the campaign. The fathers depicted had all taken at least six months of parental leave, a choice made possible by the gender-equal distribution of parental leave in Sweden since 1974 (Sundström & Duvander, 2002). The exhibition, produced by the Swedish Institute, Sweden's leading public diplomacy agency, aimed to show the effects of more gender-equal parenting at the individual and societal levels and toured Swedish embassies from 2015 onwards. The exhibition took different forms and was sometimes shown beyond the confines of Swedish embassy buildings, including in the Shanghai Metro and at the OECD in Paris. The Swedish government saw the exhibition as an important tool in visualising the country's feminist foreign policy with the extract below capturing this position:

> The exhibition is provided through SI and has evolved into an important tool in the work of feminist foreign policy to bring about new attitudes and values. The photographs have been shown at Swedish embassies in around 70 countries, and more exhibitions are planned. The *Swedish Dads* exhibition has generated discussion in many countries, and has acted as a useful springboard for further dialogue and events relating to gender roles and gender equality. Swedish embassies have arranged local photo competitions in which fathers can participate in several countries, including China, Uganda, Thailand, Tunisia and Switzerland. In other cases, the exhibition has been augmented with discussions of parental insurance, socially engaged photography, the role of fathers and norms of masculinity. The exhibition has taken different forms and has been shown in different places within society, including in the Shanghai Metro and at the OECD in Paris. Employees at some embassies have also further developed aspects of the campaign by adopting the term 'Embassy Dads' and using social media to

talk about their own experiences as dads and equal partners. A collection of photographs from the local exhibitions all over the world has also been created under the title *Global Dads*. (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019a, p. 41)

The success of the campaign can be explained by Sweden's ability to package the campaign in a fashion that would not seem contentious in some settings but rather resonate with local audiences. For example, in Japan the campaign was reported to have inspired Japan's Minister of the Environment Shinjirō Koizumi to take two weeks of parental leave (Hong, 2023; Motoko, 2020), a decision that shocked many Japanese people. where new fathers are entitled to parental leave, but where very few exercise that right (less than 6% in 2019) (Berger, 2020; McCurry, 2020).

In other contexts, the exhibition became a way to showcase that Swedish embassies embody typical Swedish ideals of gender equality and justice. For instance, the Swedish embassy in Berlin (@SchwedischeBotschaft) identified a connection between #EmbassyDads and feminist foreign policy on *International Women's Day* in 2017. The embassy posted a photograph depicting the Swedish Ambassador to Germany together with what we assume to be his daughters[1] next to a statement on the need to involve men in gender equality (to break the glass ceiling), indicating the Ambassador's personal commitment to feminist foreign policy. Thus, the ambassador appropriated the feminist message of the exhibition to illustrate his firm commitment to gender equality by being an "Embassy dad", demonstrating how Sweden's feminist foreign policy transpired in the country's diplomatic representation in ways thought to resonate with German audiences.

In addition to the #EmbassyDads campaign, Swedish embassies arranged local photo competitions inviting fathers from various countries including China, Uganda, Thailand, Tunisia and Switzerland to participate, using the hashtag #GlobalDads (Admin, 2016). The success of the campaign can in part be explained by Sweden's ability to visually communicate the principles of its feminist foreign policy through the medium of an aesthetically pleasing and highly contemporary exhibition. By using photographs depicting the lived experience of Swedish dads and pointing

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[1] The other photographs in the #EmbassyDads all feature male diplomats with their children.

to the significance of gender-equal parental rights, the campaign strengthened Sweden's self-narration as an exceptionally gender-equal state.

The timing of the campaign also mirrors the global coverage of the UN campaign #HeforShe, which highlighted the role and responsibility of men in contributing to global gender equality (Harvey, 2020). The campaign was launched in 2014 by former Harry Potter actor Emma Watson, with the latter giving a speech to the UN that rapidly went viral on social media (Stache, 2015). The success of the #SwedishDads campaign can be explained by its ability to appropriate the #HeforShe script (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019c, p. 2), with the former Swedish prime minister Stefan Löven actively supporting the #HeforShe campaign in the UN context (Government Offices of Sweden, 2015). Thus, the MFA was able to capitalise on global discourses on men's roles in the promotion of global gender equality, creating shared visual experiences across a range of contexts, with the Swedish Dads campaign having the potential also to inspire interest in feminist foreign policy (Karlsson, 2021).

While the photographer initially intended for the campaign to inspire more men to go on parental leave in Sweden (Hong, 2023), the global projection of the campaign conveniently left out the fact that more women than men make use of parental leave provisions in Sweden. Nor did it problematise the representation of white, heterosexual middle-class men in the campaign, thus, disregarding feminist and queer calls for intersectional sensitivity in global relations (Weber, 2013). Later on, the Swedish Institute added a photo of an African-Swedish man to improve the optic representation of the exhibition, after having procured the rights to the photo exhibition (Mitchell, 2021).

In sum, the Swedish dad campaign was successfully packaged within the wider narration of feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy, emphasising liberal norms of gender equality and justice as smart choices—these are less contentious choices than a more transformative feminist agenda that may not have found resonance with local contexts.

5.4   Contestation: Challenging the Invisibility and Silencing of Women's Stories and Experiences

As a foreign policy agenda, Sweden's feminist foreign policy was a highly visible political endeavour. Visibility is inherently political and provides channels through which gendered inequalities and injustices can be made

visible to global online and offline audiences, enabling them to contest the patriarchal gender order and the gendered harms within it. A solid commitment to visibility then enables the uncovering of previously silenced voices and stories, with stories of women and girls being historically silenced in global politics (Hansen, 2000).

Under the foreign policy leadership of Margot Wallström and later Ann Linde, the Swedish government and MFA sought to raise awareness of the highly political feminist question "where are the women?" that was first posed by feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe (1996). One way to ensure women's visibility was to increase their representation in foreign policy, diplomacy and peacebuilding processes to make gendered harms, discrimination and conflicts of interests more visible to larger audiences (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019a).

The visualisation of feminist foreign policy was also translated into digital diplomacy, with the specific aim of contesting and challenging online patriarchal structures and inequalities. One of the flagship initiatives in this vein was the #WikiGap initiative. It was launched by the Swedish MFA in partnership with Wikipedia on International Women's Day on 8 March 2018. Wikipedia, created in 2001, is the world's most extensive online and user-generated encyclopedia.

Wikipedia is a key site for the global and multilingual production of knowledge being the fifth most visited website in the world (Beytía & Wagner, 2022). Wikipedia's rapid rise and reach have led to concerns about systematic asymmetries (Gustafsson, 2020), not least gendered ones. Online knowledge production is a profoundly political and gendered activity, giving rise to epistemic exclusions of marginalised groups. Wikipedia entries can be edited by multiple users and have therefore been critiqued for producing selective stories that highlight certain collective memories, historical events and geographical locations while silencing others (Kumar, 2017). For example, women's experiences are notoriously absent from stories about war and peace (Enloe, 1996; Weber, 2013). Studies have shown a significant bias against women's representation and experiences in Wikipedia biographies (Bear & Collier, 2016; Gauthier & Sawchuk, 2017; Reagle & Rhue, 2011). Rather, Wikipedia tends to disproportionately collect information about specific social groups, most notably men, from the Global North, particularly from the US and Western Europe (Beytía & Wagner, 2022). Women's experiences of opposition and harassment in peer-produced open-source communities can

also help to explain their absence from Wikipedia (Langrock & González-Bailón, 2022, p. 301).

The problem is not only that women's interests are not sufficiently covered, and that women are less likely to edit Wikipedia articles, but also that women's biographies often are deleted because they are being perceived as non-notable subjects (Lemieux et al., 2023; Tripodi, 2021).[2] When the WikiGap initiative was created, men produced 90% of the contents, and there were four times more articles that focused on men rather than women (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019b, p. 55). Given the gendered and discriminatory nature of Wikipedia, it is not surprising that the former Swedish government viewed it as a significant cause, worthy of being incorporated into Sweden's feminist foreign policy.

Thus, WikiGap was a significant initiative within the broader feminist foreign policy framework introduced in 2018. The first WikiGap event was hosted by the Swedish embassy in New Delhi, which held an edit-a-thon after discovering that only 3 % of Indian editors on Wikipedia were women (Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2018b). Edit-a-thons are public events, associated with Wikipedia, where participants collaborate to learn how to edit Wikipedia together and write new entries. The MFA saw this event as a good example of how Sweden's feminist foreign policy could travel across contexts and be translated into practice by increasing "women's visibility and participation in the public sphere" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019c, p. 11). However, the organisation of edit-a-thons to contest gender imbalances on Wikipedia and by extension in global knowledge repositories was not an idea that Sweden alone could claim. Several feminist-focused initiatives had already demonstrated the impact of collective efforts to increase the representation of women on Wikipedia (Tripodi, 2021). Since 2015, advocacy initiatives (e.g. 500 Women Scientists, Women in Red and Art + Feminism) regularly organised groups of new and existing editors to write and improve articles about women on Wikipedia.

WikiGap edit-a-thons specifically sought to reduce the gender gap on Wikipedia, and to make more women interested in editing articles. During such an edit-a-thon, participants would write or translate biographies

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[2] A frequently used example of this practice is that of physics Nobel laureate Donna Strickland who did not have a Wikipedia entry at the time of being awarded her Nobel prize in 2018. Her biography had been rejected and deleted because her research was not significant enough (Langrock & González-Bailón, 2022).

about women to uncover their stories and contributions to society. Thus, the WikiGap initiative was consistent with the broader Swedish feminist foreign policy objective of enhancing women's representation, while empowering future generations by contesting and correcting the privileging of men's experiences and life histories. The first event, organised by Sweden, took place across multiple settings and more than 1600 people took part, writing articles in over thirty languages. During the first three months of the campaign alone, participants wrote approximately 4000 new articles that were read over five million times (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019b, p. 55).

Foreign Minister Margot Wallström hosted the official launch event in Stockholm (#WikiGapSthlm, which took place at the Royal Technical Institute). She envisaged WikiGap as a contestation of gendered social structures arguing that its: "impact will immediately become a reality for everyone who uses the Internet" (Wallström cited in Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2018c). To support this initiative, a toolbox was developed, containing a step-by-step guide to organise #WikiGap events, including logos, communication materials and suggestions for those wishing to develop the project further (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019a; Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2018a, 2018b).

The WikiGap initiative was more than a stunt in public diplomacy or a superficial engagement with popular cultural knowledge constructions. It was a targeted effort by the Swedish government to tackle what was perceived as a pervasive issue of underrepresentation of women in global politics and storytelling, a concern that Foreign Minister Margot Wallström frequently raised. Including women's stories and experiences and promoting female editors on Wikipedia could therefore be seen as a conscious strategy to challenge both the systemic gendered structures and the tactics employed by conservative and anti-gender elites worldwide to undermine gender equality (Tripodi, 2022).

By actively engaging in the WikiGap initiative, the Swedish government aimed to confront the systemic barriers that perpetuate gender disparities and counter the tactics employed by conservative elites to marginalise efforts to achieve gender equality. The significance of the initiative is recognised in Sweden's *Handbook on Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy* as an example of how to empower women in the realm of knowledge production (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019b, p. 55). Similarly, Margot Wallström noted in 2019 that:

making eminent women and their achievements more visible on the world's largest digital encyclopedia is a concrete result … of our feminist foreign policy. More than 100 million page views of 32,000 new or updated articles is a clear sign of the impact of WikiGap. I hope that they can inspire many people around the world and give people more women role models. (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019c)

Thus, the WikiGap initiative can be viewed as a multifaceted approach that sought to address the broader societal challenge of women's under-representation. It also embodies a tangible effort to promote inclusivity in digital spaces. WikiGap also represents a noteworthy example of digital diplomatic communication, where the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the government joined forces with Wikipedia to address the issue of the invisibility of women's stories and knowledge on a global scale. Including the WikiGap initiative within the broader framework of Sweden's feminist foreign policy was a strategic move, adding visibility and credibility to Sweden's feminist outlook. By leveraging the power of digital platforms, WikiGap sought to transcend traditional gendered boundaries and engage in a transformative feminist endeavour to reshape global knowledge production.

WikiGap encountered minimal opposition from Sweden's international partners and adversaries, despite its inherent potential for controversy. However, its significance lies in its political implication, since it effectively politicised women's narratives and their roles within the realm of global knowledge production. By actively engaging with Wikipedia, the initiative transformed the platform into a site of gender politics, disrupting the status quo and challenging the predominance of male-centric accounts of historical events and factual information. Hence, WikiGap prompted critical reflections on the structural biases embedded within knowledge systems and production.

Furthermore, the collaboration between the Swedish government and Wikipedia through the WikiGap initiative illustrates the power of digital diplomacy in reshaping public discourse and challenging long-standing gender inequalities. The initiative propelled the issue of gender representation to the forefront of public consciousness, mobilising collective action and fostering an understanding of the structural barriers that have perpetuated the marginalisation of women's voices historically.

To conclude, the WikiGap initiative is an instructive example of the evolving landscape of digital diplomatic communication where

governments harness the power of online platforms to challenge prevalent power structures, amplify marginalised voices and redefine the parameters of global knowledge production. By harnessing the capabilities of digital platforms, such initiatives have the potential to create meaningful shifts in public discourse, foster inclusivity and gender equality and pave the way for more equitable representation in the digital age.

5.5   Conclusion

In this chapter, we have demonstrated that visual communication and a strong awareness of the significance of digital visibility were key to the articulation, resonance and contestation of Sweden's feminist foreign policy. By visualising Swedish feminist foreign policy, the MFA sought to engage multiple audiences, with visual representations and symbols facilitating global feminist conversations and collective activities. Though in part an exercise in nation branding, this strategy was inherently political, aiming to achieve social and political transformative and progressive change in line with Sweden's global feminist agenda. Thus, the deployment of visuality and visibility through digital platforms activated the politics of visuality, projecting and diffusing Sweden's feminist identity beyond borders to transform and challenge the structural inequalities of global and domestic politics.

The analysis of the visual projection of Sweden's feminist foreign policy provided in this chapter can contribute to new understandings of the role of visuality and visibility within the politics of digital diplomacy in three distinct ways. First, visual communication enhances the articulation and resonance of diplomatic policies. Using visual language and representations in digital diplomacy makes it possible for policymakers to communicate their normative goals and messages to diverse audiences effectively. Second, visual communication in digital diplomacy enables the projection and diffusion of political identities, facilitating the alignment of diplomatic agendas with broader global causes. Finally, attention to both visuality and visibility can lead to a better understanding of the balancing act in diplomatic messaging of foreign policy. In the feminist quest for transformative global politics, using visual language and initiatives to address invisibilities requires managing the potential risks of communicating progressive agendas in political contexts less dedicated to feminist-informed change.

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Conclusion: Feminist Foreign Policy and Digital Diplomacy in a Turbulent World

Abstract This concluding chapter highlights the key findings of the book and explores the trajectory of the politics of feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy amidst evolving and changing geopolitical dynamics. With the abandonment of feminist foreign policy by the new Swedish Conservative-led government in 2022, we unpack the ramifications and opportunities for pursuing a feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy in a turbulent world. Highlighting the geopolitical significance of gender as a divisive force within the digital sphere, we advance new theoretical knowledge garnered from the case studies examined in this book. By way of conclusion, we showcase prospective avenues for the potential transformative forces of feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy.

Keywords Feminist foreign policy • Nation branding • Digital diplomacy • Sweden • Leadership

6.1 Introduction

The pivot towards feminism within Sweden's foreign policy marked a profoundly political move, sparking resonance, contestation, resistance and antagonism. This book has examined the interplay between digital

diplomacy and feminist foreign policy, with a focus on Sweden as a case. The former Swedish government's bold embrace of an overtly feminist foreign policy can be interpreted as a deliberate attempt to firmly position itself in global politics, aspiring to "become the strongest global voice for gender equality" (Government Offices of Sweden, 2018). This deliberate positioning not only offered unparalleled avenues for asserting leadership in global gender politics but also signified a transformative and globally influential diplomatic approach, originally pioneered by Sweden and subsequently echoed by other states as well (Achilleos-Sarll, 2018; Robinson, 2021; Thomson, 2020; Zhukova et al., 2022).

Furthermore, digital technologies have had a transformative effect on diplomacy, triggering significant changes in the ways states engage with foreign policy, thereby reshaping conventional diplomatic practices. This book has demonstrated how the launch and adoption of feminist foreign policy required the usage of digital platforms and social media channels to amplify visibility and facilitate political outreach and engagement. Thus, the nexus of feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy has elicited widespread support while concurrently provoking resistance from states and other global actors.

While our focus has been on Sweden, our distinct approach to the analysis of the political dynamics of foreign policy and digital diplomacy is applicable to other states that have sought to achieve normative foreign policy shifts through the use of digital platforms. This emerging trend reflects the political dynamics of a gradually more networked world where ideas and norms travel faster than ever before (Jackson, 2019; Zaharna et al., 2014). Thus, it is increasingly important to understand the intersections between states' foreign policies and their use of digital diplomacy. However, knowledge of the intersection between normative foreign policy and digital diplomacy remains scarce. In this book, we have offered ample opportunities to fill this gap. Below, we synthesise the key theoretical and empirical findings of the book. Subsequently, we engage in a forward-looking discussion, exploring the potential for transformative feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy amidst a turbulent world marked by gendered dynamics, geopolitical changes, growing polarisation, autocracy, militarism, etc. We argue that gender equality and justice are now central in global politics, requiring advocates of feminist foreign policy to adopt strategies that can effectively address such challenges, not least on digital platforms.

6.2   Key Findings and Contributions

This book rests on a novel analytical framework that enables a close examination of the intersections between the politics of feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy. We have argued that digital diplomacy is a highly political form of communication rather than a neutral and apolitical practice. Similarly, feminist foreign policy is inherently political, resting on states and other actors' politicisation of gender justice and equality globally. In the book, we have analysed the politicisation of feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy, focusing on resonance, contestation, resistance and antagonism. While Sweden's feminist foreign policy found resonance with various global actors, it also led to contestation and resistance. Such dissonance often emerges from states' different ideological positions on women's sexual and reproductive rights, as well as their entitlement to bodily integrity. As shown in this book, there is a fluctuation between antagonism and agonism at the intersection of feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy. The Swedish case demonstrates how such fluctuating political dynamics profoundly shape the ways states navigate, influence and respond to global developments and how political dynamics are produced, maintained and altered in digital diplomacy and feminist foreign policy. To substantiate these claims, we have examined distinct forms of politicisation in the digital diplomatic communication of Sweden's feminist foreign policy by focusing on foreign policy leadership (Chap. 3), nation branding (Chap. 4), and its use of visuality (Chap. 5) in digital diplomacy. Guiding the analysis of these categories are three key concepts that we systematically applied in all three chapters: (1) articulation, (2) resonance and (3) contestation. This distinct approach enabled us to empirically unpack the questions of why, how and in what ways the politics of digital diplomacy and feminist foreign policy are viewed as catalysing factors for conflict and cooperation in contemporary global politics.

6.2.1   *The Politicised Nexus Between Foreign Policy Leadership and Digital Communication*

The results emerging from our empirical analysis demonstrate the seminal role of Sweden's diplomatic leadership in the initiation and advancement of feminist foreign policy, with particular emphasis on the use of digital diplomacy to bolster the objectives and norms associated with the country's feminist aspirations. A key facet of this analysis involved the interrogation

of political leaders' involvement in articulating, resonating and contesting feminist foreign policy within the digital realm. Central to our findings is the recognition of foreign minister Margot Wallström as a principal agent propelling the articulation, adoption and implementation of Sweden's feminist foreign policy agenda. Wallström's normative entrepreneurship and leadership were identified as pivotal factors in the mobilisation of the political backing for Sweden's feminist foreign policy endeavours, both domestically and internationally. The absence of such entrepreneurial vigour and assertiveness would likely have curtailed the resonance of Sweden's feminist foreign policy with other states, civil society organisations and transnational actors. Notably, Wallström consistently disseminated her vision of a more gender-just global order to diverse online audiences, viewing Sweden's feminist foreign policy as an ethical as well as a strategic agenda. Moreover, the analysis further revealed instances wherein countries such as Canada and Germany, both of which sought to replicate the expansive ambitions and articulations of Swedish feminist foreign policy. Indeed, Germany's foreign minister Annalena Baerbock has on several occasions praised the Swedish government's pioneering feminist efforts.

The book also addressed the impact of political leadership and gendered contestation on social media platforms, with particular emphasis on Sweden's involvement in the #shedecides digital campaign. This campaign, precipitated by the reinstatement of the US global gag rule by the Trump administration, posed substantial threats to women's sexual and reproductive rights on a global scale. In short, the results stress the centrality of digital platforms in shaping the political landscape of foreign policy leadership, engendering a diverse spectrum of global reactions, some of which are overtly antagonistic. As such, it elucidates the multifaceted role of political leadership in evoking various emotive responses in global politics, with digital communications of foreign policy leadership constituting an inherently politicised practice.

6.2.2   Digital Nation Branding: Reorienting and Politicising Foreign Policy

Sweden's feminist foreign policy brand, we have argued, rested on its longstanding state feminist tradition, commitment to global gender justice, and self-identity as a technologically advanced nation, dedicated to digital communication, transformation and diplomacy. To attract attention, and rally support for its feminist ambitions, Sweden actively engaged

in diplomatic communication, employing innovative methods, including digital campaigns and visual techniques. Thus, in part at least, Sweden's feminist foreign policy was an exercise in feminist branding sustained by the active use of digital diplomacy. Central to this strategic approach was the utilisation of pragmatism and policy adaptability, incorporating the integration of digital advocacy into the articulation of feminist foreign policy. In substantiating this argument, we examined the case of Sweden's adoption of hashtag feminism, specifically analysing its effectiveness in eliciting resonance among global audiences, particularly within digital advocacy networks. We also thoroughly examined the challenges and contestation triggered by Sweden's projection of a feminist image, notably highlighted by the controversies stemming from its state visit to Iran in 2017. The analysis elucidates the inherently politicised nature of digital diplomacy and nation branding. Indeed, nation brands serve as fertile ground for the reorientation and politicisation of foreign policy objectives, giving rise to both contestation and policy resonance.

6.2.3   Practicing Feminist Foreign Policy: Global Visibility and Digital Strategies

The diffusion of Sweden's feminist foreign policy in global politics was made possible by the efficient utilisation of online platforms, leveraging visual language, symbolic representation and heightened global visibility. The launch and trajectory of Sweden's feminist foreign policy involved the management of visual representations.

The amplification and resonance of Sweden's feminist foreign policy were bolstered by the strategic political mobilisation of visual representations and digital visibility frameworks. To examine the role of visual language in the political articulation of Sweden's feminist foreign policy, we conducted an analysis of the renowned photo exhibition "Swedish Dads", which served as an effective catalyst for discussions aligning Sweden's global feminist foreign policy with pertinent gender discourses at local levels. Moreover, the WikiGap initiative designed to enhance the online visibility of women's stories and experiences illustrates how Sweden's feminist foreign policy enabled the country to contest the online silencing of women's experiences and pointing to their central role in producing knowledge, thus foregrounding their pivotal contributions to history and knowledge dissemination.

The results in this book demonstrate the interconnectedness between feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy. Without digital diplomacy, Sweden's feminist foreign policy would have faced challenges in inspiring other states to embrace feminist platforms in their external conduct. Transnational feminism increasingly relies on digital communication and technologies (Vachhani, 2023; Youngs, 2015), whereby feminist and intersectional ideas about gender-just peace, reproductive rights, women's human rights, and development are dispersed online worldwide. While civil society organisations traditionally spearhead such advocacy, an increasing number of states engage in online feminism, often under the framing of feminist foreign policy, employing a range of politicised digital strategies to reach target audiences. Sweden's WikiGap and Swedish Dad campaigns are instructive examples here, eliciting resonance and antagonist reactions amongst global actors and states.

6.3   Reorientation and Cessation of Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy

[G]ender equality is a core value for Sweden and this government, but we will not conduct a feminist foreign policy"… Because labels on things have a tendency to cover up the content. (Tobias Billström, Sweden's foreign minister, quoted in Thomas, 2022)

After the Swedish elections in the autumn of 2022, a new conservative government was formed with the support of the populist radical right party, the Sweden Democrats, that openly dismisses feminism. Within a few days, the new foreign minister, Tobias Billström, declared an end to the country's feminist foreign policy. The reasons for this drastic foreign policy move can be explained by both domestic and international factors. In the domestic context, feminist foreign policy had become intimately linked to the Social Democratic party and former foreign minister Margot Wallström. Scrapping Sweden's feminist foreign policy was, therefore, a strong signal of governmental politics (Hermann, 1990) and a move to break with the legacy of the Social Democratic reign between 2014 and 2022. Seen in this light, Sweden's feminist foreign policy doctrine could be viewed as a Social Democratic label, rather than a bipartisan political venture, enjoying broad political consensus.

This development attests both to the weaknesses and strengths of digital diplomacy. Sweden's feminist foreign policy lasted eight years. We

propose here that feminist foreign policy, no matter how effectively communicated across social media, cannot be confined to digital nation branding alone, but ultimately needs to be rooted in society and combined with the structural transformation of the intersecting power relations that undergird global gender politics. It is about transformative change and the creation of a more inclusive, equitable and gender-responsive world order. In this regard, the swift discontinuation of Sweden's feminist foreign policy and the subsequent absence of a more robust public debate shows that the feminist foreign policy was not as firmly ingrained in Swedish foreign policy orientation as presumed. This might be explained by the fact that Sweden's feminist foreign policy was not as radically disposed as one might have expected it to be, with many diplomatic practices being quite similar to those used in previous periods, and, as such, it relied on already existing international and transnational mechanisms, practices and frameworks.

This can be contrasted with another significant foreign policy initiative taken by the Social Democratic government in 2014, namely, the diplomatic recognition of the state of Palestine. Initiated almost concurrently with the launch of the feminist foreign policy, this move aimed in a similar way to signify a transition towards a more independent Swedish foreign policy and to assert ambition in assuming foreign policy leadership in global affairs. Despite considerable controversy surrounding the diplomatic recognition of Palestine at the time, the new Swedish government in 2022 still opted to uphold this policy despite opposition from its minor coalition partners—the Christian Democrats and the Liberal Party—both advocating for its repeal.

Despite the termination of Sweden's feminist foreign policy, we can establish that feminist foreign policy is now a global phenomenon spearheaded and emulated by several other governments. The diffusion and adoption of feminist foreign policy by other states could be seen as a success story, enabled by Sweden's novel digital advocacy, a key feature of its feminist foreign policy. Moreover, the institutionalisation of Sweden's feminist foreign policy, in terms of gender equality training and gender-informed working routines and practices of diplomacy in the broad context of Swedish external relations, has produced a lasting legacy (Towns et al., 2023). Hence, the label, although an essential part of the discursive projection of feminist foreign policy, was at least in part accompanied by authentic and tangible foreign policy change and practice. As the Swedish case suggests, states committed to feminist foreign policy need to ensure

their feminist advocacy is paired with active engagement with civil society and other actors, domestically and globally, as well as open public dialogue.

But the discontinuation of feminist foreign policy also signals the initiation of a major reorientation of Sweden's contemporary foreign and security policy due to the dramatically changing geopolitical situation in Europe and beyond. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and Sweden's subsequent application for NATO membership enforced a new preference for a foreign policy largely informed by national security interests in its adjacent neighbourhood. This context of a deteriorating security environment moved Sweden away from its normative commitments and values, a process that commenced before the elections in 2022. During its last year in office, the Social Democratic government focused on upgrading the Swedish defence force as well as preparing the country's NATO application (Wright & Rosamond, 2023).

This book has on several occasions underlined the noticeable growing trends of antagonistic anti-gender politics and 'alpha male foreign policy' in a world defined by securitisation, militarism, populism and gender backlash (Susan, 2017). The discontent with the liberal world order has engendered support from both far-right and Islamic extremist fractions. These movements recruit adherents by advocating practices detrimental to women's rights and wellbeing. Indeed, anti-feminist far-right parties are in power in a range of countries, including India, Hungary and Turkey, to name a few. Typically, such parties share an aversion to globalisation, multiculturalism, immigration and gender equality, often outright dismissing feminism and feminist activism. Their policies are defined by heteronormative values and definitions of gender, biological sex and the nation, often using toxic masculinist narratives to dismiss feminist ideas, notions of gender equality, and, as such, promoting traditional family values and gender roles (Norocel & Pettersson, 2022). Hence, the changing geopolitical context does not imply that security concerns replace the need for normative values; these elements are highly interlinked. Full-scale wars and conflicts also tend to produce gendered harms such as displacement and sexual and gender-based violence (Kronsell & Svedberg, 2011; Wilcox, 2015).

6.4   New Frontiers of Research

Research on the relationship between foreign policy and digital diplomacy is gradually expanding. However, there is less research focusing on the interplay between normative questions of feminism, gender and

foreign policy. As demonstrated in this book, feminist foreign policy stands out as an example of how digital platforms are productive in articulating foreign policy reorientation, political narratives and forging alliances, and how social media spaces are essential in producing resonance and contestation of feminist foreign policy in global politics. By way of conclusion, we propose three avenues for researching the intersection between feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy, delineating their potential both as state practice in global politics and as a burgeoning field of scholarship.

First, this book has stressed the need to better understand how foreign policy reorientation happens in a primarily digital global information environment and how activist foreign policies are furthered or challenged by the reach and influence of social media platforms. As we have argued, it is crucial to approach digital diplomacy as a profoundly political practice anchored in the politics of foreign policy and the digital information environment. The findings of this book suggest that the convergence of these power-political dynamics is more frequent than studies of digital diplomacy, usually show. Neglecting the digital component in the analysis of Sweden's feminist foreign policy would entail overlooking numerous factors contributing to its effective (re)positioning of Sweden as a global advocate for gender equality. To further our knowledge, we need comprehensive studies across a range of domestic and international political contexts that analyse the efficiency of state advocacy in foreign policy, and how it mobilises online publics. This involves conducting comparative analyses of the translation of feminist-informed foreign policies into states' digital diplomacy strategies. It also engages in ethical considerations in regards to the employment of digital methods in seeking political influence and maintaining a clear separation between digital advocacy and malicious forms of digital disinformation. Understanding these nuances of how states engage in normative advocacy in the digital landscape is crucial for grasping the evolving gendered lines of geopolitical conflicts.

Second, the politics of feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy bring other forms of international cooperation, actors and material factors to the analysis of global politics. As demonstrated in this book, Sweden's digital diplomacy mimicked other actors' use of digital advocacy strategies (Hall, 2019). The Swedish Social Democratic party's tradition of activist foreign policy and close alignment with social movements partly explain the successful translation of feminist foreign policy into digital

diplomacy. Acknowledging the interplay between politicising processes of articulation, resonance and contestation within digital diplomacy and foreign policy, we can attain a more profound understanding of how states navigate and mould global political narratives and alliances. To be effective, digital diplomacy must be credible. Our empirical analyses show how and when digital diplomacy stirred contestation of the feminist foreign policy when credibility was questioned, for instance, in the case of the state visit to Iran in 2017 as discussed in Chap. 3. To further our understanding of the role of credible signals in diplomacy (Cohen, 1987) in the digital age (Duncombe, 2017), we need more research on how digital diplomacy may contribute to or jeopardise such processes. We also established that cooperation with new and at times unorthodox actors, such as the open-sourced Internet-based encyclopedia Wikipedia, was one of the most tangible ways whereby Sweden's feminist foreign policy could contribute to addressing global gender imbalances as shown in Chap. 5. Therefore, digital platforms, tools and services are not only mechanisms for extending reach and exerting influence but are also shaped by patriarchal structures, capable of generating change. In future explorations of the intersection of feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy, we suggest that more attention is placed on the influential role of non-state actors in the digital economy.

Third, as we have emphasised throughout this book, the quest for gender equality in foreign policy cannot be separated from patriarchal and adversarial gendered power dynamics that are becoming increasingly prevalent in global politics. Moreover, we recognise that even within feminist foreign policy frameworks, the potential exists for perpetuating power imbalances. Hence, future research should closely study the tendency amongst some states to privilege hegemonic masculinist understandings of gender in their articulation and conduct of foreign policy, and thereby reduce the significance of feminist ideals, norms and practices that actively seek to transform the gendered world order. Expanding on this research could involve exploring case studies of specific countries or regions to examine how gender policies are formulated and implemented, and how they impact wider societal structures. Additionally, investigating the role of international organisations and alliances in shaping gender narratives within foreign policy practice provides further insights into the broader dynamics at play in such policy-making. Examining the intersections between gender and other social identities, such as race, class and sexuality would also contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the

wider power relations that impact feminist foreign policy and practice. Lastly, exploring the potential role of grassroots movements and civil society in challenging and reshaping gender norms within foreign policy frameworks offer practical insights into fostering change that transcends traditional gender norms and biases.

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Methods Appendix

Abstract This chapter is the methods appendix of the book *The Politics of Feminist Foreign Policy and Digital Diplomacy*. It contains three sections. The first section focuses on methodological choices and data collection, including documents, social media data, campaigns, online observations, and interviews. The second and third parts discuss the practical implications and ethical dimensions of the research.

Keywords methods • observations • data • ethics • social media

7.1 The Politics of Feminist Foreign Policy and Digital Diplomacy

This methods appendix of the book *The Politics of Feminist Foreign Policy and Digital Diplomacy* contains three sections that outline the data, method, ethics and implications of the research presented in the book.

7.1.1 *Methodological Choices*

The book investigates the intersection of feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy in Sweden's global positionings 2014–2022. It examines the development and trajectory of Sweden's feminist foreign policy, asking a set

of questions in regards to its relationship with digital diplomacy, not least the extent to which the latter has amplified or constrained Sweden's feminist ambitions in global politics. The study is based on a mixed-methods design whereby a range of methods and analytical strategies were used. In the eight years that Sweden projected itself as a feminist government with an explicitly feminist foreign policy, the role and nature of its digital diplomacy changed. This is explained by the political change in Swedish domestic debate, in the international arena and by technological change that influenced the norms and practices of digital diplomacy (Aggestam et al., 2021; Bjola, 2016; Bjola & Pamment, 2019). These multiple processes of change are examined and analysed in the book. The aforementioned processes also had implications for our methodological choices and the varying character of the material and methods employed across the chapters.

In this book, we treated social media in digital diplomacy as a channel of digital public diplomacy during the 2014–2016 period (Manor, 2019). Since 2017 social media outlets became more contentious political spaces, in which gender norms were advanced through the global mobilisation of the #MeToo campaign, a campaign that also was resisted through backlash in the form of right-wing populism and disinformation (Bjola & Pamment, 2019; Clark-Parsons, 2021; Dan et al., 2021). This produced a new relationship between feminist foreign policy and digital diplomacy, which focused on social media as a space and tool for norm change and mobilisation against gender backlash, often with a focus on women's sexual and reproductive health and rights (Aggestam et al., 2023). The final phase of our study took place during the the Covid-19 pandemic 2020–2022 which in turn lead to new ways of using social media as well as other virtual spaces, with both of them becoming replacement for political interactions. The methodological implication of this development is that the social media data served different purposes and we employed other empirical sources to provide rigour and nuance to our study. Our choices here were informed by the context in which a range of digital diplomacy practices were analysed.

Although there is variation in the empirical materials and methods used throughout the book, there is also some substantial overlap, as documents, semi-structured interviews, social media accounts and web pages are the primary sources that we draw on as a research corpus in the empirical chapters.

Documents

The empirical chapters use data arising from key documents, such as annual statements on foreign policy, reports, handbooks, speeches and press releases that forged the official narrative surrounding Sweden's

Table 7.1   Documents

Type of document	Brief description
Annual statement on foreign policy	*The annual statement presented by the foreign minister in the Riksdag*
Strategies, action plans and handbooks	*Strategic and instructional documents pertaining to FFP and/or digital diplomacy*
Reports	*Summaries of the implementation results of FFP*
Government communication	*Press releases and open eds by members of the government*
Speeches	*Speeches given by members of the government*
Interviews in news media	*Interviews given by members of the government and quoted in news media*

feminist foreign policy 2014–2022. This official narrative was also advanced through a series of high-profile interviews with representatives of the Swedish governments, most notably foreign minister Margot Wallström (2014–2019) and her predecessor Ann Linde (2019–2022) in international media outlets. In addition to documents produced by the government, the MFA and the Swedish embassies, we studied debates on the Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy in the Swedish Parliament (Sveriges Riksdag) and material produced by the Swedish Institute, the leading public diplomacy agency in Sweden. The genres of documents that we draw on are summarised in Table 7.1 above. All documents are cited in the reference lists provided in the book.

Social Media Data, Campaigns and Online Observations

Digital diplomacy was, during most of the time period (2014–2022), foremost equated with active use of social media channels in the communication of foreign policy. As argued in the book, we approach social media as vital discursive sites for constituting and negotiating meaning for Swedish feminist foreign policy amongst an international audience. We have, therefore, monitored the Swedish MFA's use of social media during this time. While the favoured channels have differed slightly over time Twitter (later renamed X), Facebook and later Instagram (since November 2017) have remained the most prioritised platforms over time (e.g. the MFA has during different periods also used YouTube, Periscope, etc.). Our data collection has focused on these three platforms (and indirectly YouTube since videos are often cross-posted). Moreover, we have made a purposeful decision to only focus on English language accounts since digital diplomacy is an outward-facing activity aimed at international

audiences. The Swedish MFA has multiple English-speaking social media handles aimed at different audiences (e.g. the Africa department uses the handle @AfricaSweMFATwitter to communicate with African audiences). We have focused our analyses on the accounts aimed at a general audience across all three platforms (SweMFA on Twitter and Facebook and swedishmfa on Instagram). We also monitored the Twitter and Facebook accounts of the acting minister for foreign affairs (Margot Wallström 2014–2019 and Ann Linde 2019–2022). In addition, we monitored the dedicated UN accounts during the time Sweden was a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council 2017–2018 and the OSCE accounts during its chairpersonship of the OSCE in 2021.

Our collection of social media data has followed two separate rationales of monitoring and extraction. We began monitoring the three social media handles in August 2019 and conducted bi-weekly observations until November 2022, when Sweden abandoned its feminist foreign policy. The bi-weekly observations served to grasp the continuity of the digital diplomacy narrative and to identify any disruptions to that storytelling. We also backtracked the feeds of the social media accounts (to the extent that they could be backtracked) to the launch of the feminist foreign policy in 2014 using Twitter Advanced Search and Facebook's user interface. We studied the feed based on the thematic categories in our framework and analysed the role of digital diplomacy in shaping the leadership, branding and visual representation of feminist foreign policy. This material is presented and cited in the empirical chapters. All data collection was concluded before Twitter changed ownership in 2022 and was renamed X in 2023.

We also conducted analyses of the themes, topics, hashtags and timing covered in the social media handle on Twitter in three datasets. We used Twitter's API. 20 Academic Access on three separate occasions to extract data on all tweets posted by the MFA (on the general English-speaking account), between September 2017 and November 2022, by the delegation to the UN between 2017 and 2018 and the delegation to OSCE during 2021. The total amount, including retweets, is presented in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2   Twitter data

Twitter handle	Start date	End date	Total amount (n)
@SweMFA	01-09-2017	16-11-2022	5083
@SwedenUN	01-01-2017	21-12-01-2018	2463
@SwedeninATOSCE	01-01-2021	31-12-2021	718

In addition, we attended several virtual live-streamed events organised by the MFA or the Swedish embassies during 2019–2022. These events panel talks, Q & A sessions on the topic of feminist foreign policy and several Wikipedia edit-a-thons analysed in Chapter 5.

Interviews

The book also draws on a few elite and expert interviews conducted between 2015 and 2021. We interviewed representatives of the Swedish government and the MFA. We conducted additional interviews because we believe they reveal how practitioners themselves perceive and understand feminist foreign policy and the role of digital diplomacy therein. We included this perspective to triangulate how and with what implications feminist foreign policy brought change to the implementation of Swedish foreign policy in general and in digital diplomacy in particular. Table 7.3 provides an (anonymised) overview of the interviews cited in the book. Table 7.4 provides an indicative overview of our interview guide. All interviews were conducted in Swedish; we offered the interviews the option of not recording the interviews in exchange for more frankness. When they opted for this, we engaged in extensive note-taking and transcribed the notes after the interview.

Practical Implications

The Covid-19 pandemic both altered and complicated the focus of our research. There were both practical and epistemological implications of the pandemic for a research project seeking to understand digitalisation within the realism of foreign policy and diplomacy. In practical terms, we became reliant on virtual tools to conduct interviews during 2020–2021

Table 7.3 Interviewees

Role	Date	Mode	Record
Government representative	26-11-2018	Face-to-Face	Transcribed
Government representative	28-01-2019	Face-to-Face	Transcribed
Diplomat	11-11-2019	Face-to-Face	Transcribed
Diplomat	11-11-2019	Face-to-Face	Transcribed
Communicator	12-11-2019	Face-to-Face	Transcribed
Communicator	12-11-2019	Face-to-Face	Transcribed
Diplomat	11-05-2021	Virtual	Recorded
Diplomat	16-05-2021	Virtual	Transcribed
Diplomat	26-05-2021	Virtual	Transcribed
Diplomat	26-05-2021	Virtual	Transcribed

Table 7.4   Interview guide for semi-structured interviews with diplomats

Interview parts	Example questions
Part 1 background questions	• In which capacity do you come into contact with feminist foreign policy in your work? • In what capacity do you come into contact with 'digital diplomacy' in your work? • What is your perception of how digital diplomacy has emerged as a way of working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs? (e.g. when did it first become important and why?)
Part 2 Digital diplomacy	• How does digital diplomacy conducted through the institutional accounts of the MFA differ from that conducted through the accounts of individual diplomats or foreign policy leaders? How do they interact? • What are the priority audiences for your digital diplomacy work? • What do you perceive as the most important measure of good content when embassies and diplomats use social media in the service? If encouragement from the MFA or the digital network is perceived as important, can you give an example of content that meets such a criterion? • World leaders and diplomats who get a lot of attention on social media often take risks (they are outspoken, 'release' news and entertain followers in surprising ways). Sometimes this has positive consequences and sometimes negative ones. What is your experience of how this behaviour is rewarded or 'punished' within the MFA? • The MFA's guidance on social media in the foreign service advocates personal approach and informal tone. This implies a greater individual responsibility to communicate, which may present difficulties in practice. The balance between the personal and official role on social media becomes 'a matter of judgement', how do you work with this kind of judgement? (e.g. to what extent do you have training sessions when this type of issue is discussed)
Part 3 Feminist foreign policy	• What is the role of digital diplomacy in Sweden's feminist foreign policy? • In what ways is feminist foreign policy integrated into the MFA's digital communication strategies? • What do you think are the particular challenges in communicating Sweden's feminist foreign policy on social media? How are these challenges being addressed? • Some elements of feminist foreign policy may be perceived as provocative by some international audiences; is this something you notice, if so how and how do you deal with it?

and were affected by the difficulty of limited access and transparency during the crisis situation (e.g. Maurer & Wright, 2020). These constraints could be overcome through previous experiences and connections in the field. However, digital adaptations forced by travel restrictions and social distancing measures changed the meaning and the nature of 'digital diplomacy' (Bjola & Manor, 2022). Digital diplomacy and digital tools quickly developed into primary sites of foreign policy and diplomatic exchange (Eggeling & Adler-Nissen, 2021; Danielson & Hedling, 2022). The epistemological implications were, therefore, more influential than the practical, forcing us to consider changes that could not have been foreseen.

Ethical Dimensions
The conduct of interviews and the collection of social media data raise ethical concerns, given that it can entail handling personal information (Townsend & Wallace, 2017). The interviews we conducted for this study did not concern sensitive information about the informants' personal lives or private views. As the interview guide demonstrates, we only asked questions about the individuals' professional activities in relation to other MFA's and public audiences. In this sense, our informants represented political positions at the state level, government officials and public civil servants that are not members of political parties. Furthermore, all interviewees were given the option of not being recorded and when this was requested, we engaged in extensive note-taking during and after the interview. In these cases, approval of the exact quotes used in the analysis was obtained via e-mail after the interview.

   The social media material collected for this book only concerns the official activities of state actors and to some extent their public representatives in a professional capacity. The social media users were hence not vulnerable by any definition. With digital diplomacy being an articulated strategy, this was an online context of actively seeking visibility and attention by outside parties (Williams et al., 2017). While we did include retweets (recirculated posts) in our data, the nature of the accounts entailed that they were almost entirely consistent with government representatives in Sweden or elsewhere and hence could be treated as symbolic representations of state discourse (Williams et al., 2017). We did not include interventions in comment fields generated by the accounts we monitored. This entails that we have not collected any personal information or views expressed by private individuals.

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