

Visualising the foreign and the domestic in diaspora diplomacy: images and the online politics of recognition in #givingtoindia

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Introduction

As international political affairs evolve away from the formal realms of cooperation over trade and security matters towards building alliances with non-state actors, diasporas as communities positioned ‘betwixt and between the domestic and the foreign’ (Ho and McConnell 2019, 247) have become both a target of, and object for, relationship building in the diplomatic outreach work of Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs). Scholarship focuses on the legal and political reform through which MFAs mobilise diasporas, which in weakening the link between nation and bordered territory have secured deterritorialised global networks of political influence (Adamson and Demetriou 2007). However, the focus on these types of reforms leaves uninterrogated the ongoing relevance of diaspora groups’ geographically ‘layered identities’ (Brinkerhoff 2019, 61). These latter dimensions, including their emotional components, are significant because of the ways that diaspora diplomacy involves mobilising ideas of a homeland (Rana 2014). In its practice, diaspora diplomacy therefore blurs the traditional conceptual dichotomies that map domestic and foreign policymaking efforts onto, respectively, territorial and extra-territorial stakeholder communities. Addressing how foreign/domestic distinctions are varyingly produced and mobilised in building connections with diasporas thus requires greater engagement with the way that diplomatic practice modulates the associations between belonging, nation and territory. This paper suggests that in an era of the increased use of digital platforms in diplomatic work, answering these questions requires engagement with the visual richness of

online realities, using theories that explore the malleability of discourse, and specifically, the ambiguous qualities of images as a component of online discursive political representations.

Building on the work of Rana (2014) and Bernal (2014, 2018), this paper focuses on how the semiotic qualities of digital spaces contribute to the reconfiguration of foreign/domestic dichotomies of diasporic belonging, using a case-study of the social media diplomacy of the India Development Foundation of Overseas Indians (IDF-OI), a not-for-profit philanthropic organization that existed between 2008 and 2018¹. The IDF-OI formed one institutional element in an ongoing process of state transformation since 2001 aimed at building and mobilising domestic and foreign networks of state, private and community diaspora stakeholders. Chaired by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), the IDF-OI was established to channelize donations from individual diaspora philanthropists to community beneficiaries of national and state government development projects. As a diplomatic intermediary between the interests of Indian diaspora on one hand and the interests of the Indian state in meeting its targets for social development on the other, its role was to establish interest in philanthropy amongst diaspora stakeholders and persuade them to donate to state development projects through the IDF-OI's platforms. Alongside the development of a financial infrastructure for mobilising donations, the Facebook and Twitter accounts of the IDF-OI supported this work.

The social media activities of the IDF-OI formed part of an ongoing wider strategic coordination of varied social media platforms across the diplomatic networks of India's Public Diplomacy Division (Ittefaq 2019; Murti and Zaharna 2014; Natarajan 2014). These activities are reflective of the wider trend of online networked diplomacy, include a performative dimension of communicating 'rising India' as a trajectory of cultural and developmental modernization (Natarajan 2014). Indian diasporas are represented in virtual diplomatic spaces as ciphers of India's globally extensive cultural reach, civilizational past, and modern future, providing a discursive foundation for India's relations with audiences and policymakers in key countries (Gulati 2017). These perspectives illuminate crucial aspects of

¹ To avoid administrative duplication of fundraising efforts, the Union Cabinet approved closure of the IDF-OI in March 2018

(<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=177813>)

the way that online spaces further instrumentalize diaspora, but leaves questions concerning the multiple connotative potential of online diplomatic communicative practices, and therefore the significance of these spaces for serving different policy objectives.

Substantively, the paper uses a semiotic approach to analyse the visual narratives used in the IDF-OI's social media campaigns. I show that as a means of persuading diaspora actors to channel diaspora philanthropy through national and state government networks, the connotative systems embedded in the images circulated by the IDF-OI projected multiple different associations about philanthropists' relationships to nation and territory. First, images were designed to generate emotional and spiritual investments in domestic policy agendas, positioning IDF-OI philanthropic channels as an appropriate means of realising these aspects of diasporic belonging. Second, online spaces established philanthropists as wealthy global elites, with images designed to show that the operation of the IDF-OI meets their expectations of transparency and accountability. Third, images depicted philanthropists as key influencers within the domestic and international networks of the IDF-OI, and implied that participation in those networks through acts of philanthropy can enhance prestige and social standing both domestically and internationally. In doing so, I show, the use of the connotative potential of images simultaneously positioned Indian diasporas as territorial stakeholders within these domestic agendas, whilst also generating performative representations of the diaspora as an extra-territorial global public.

This examination of the visual nature of the Indian government's online messaging extends understanding of diaspora diplomacy in three ways. First, it shows that semiotics of images play a role in the construction of diasporas as diplomatic actors by giving depth of social, emotional and cultural meaning to the economic and political stakes they hold in relation to the nation-state. Second, the connotative qualities of social media offer potential for forms of narrativity and storytelling that can strategically advance multiple concepts of diasporas in relation to nation and territory, and therefore to their positionings as territorial and/or extra-territorial stakeholders depending on the context in which those ideas are deployed. Third, in using visually rich online mediums, this form of diaspora diplomacy risks reproducing existing structures and networks of diplomatic power, whilst excluding others from expressing their concerns and needs through these channels. This paper calls for further analysis about how digital platforms are shaping the norms and expectations of diasporic

participation in international relations. It joins Manor's (2019) call for further research about how digital mediums are empowering specific kinds of non-state actors to exert influence over the conduct of diplomacy, as online spaces increasingly blur the boundaries between foreign and domestic forms of statecraft.

Diaspora diplomacy for a digital age

As a now-regular feature of twenty-first century international statecraft, mechanisms of diaspora engagement are now well documented in the academic literature (Gamlen, Cummings, and Vaaler 2019). The view of diasporas as political assets is evident in the ways that governments increasingly deploy diaspora diplomacy, which Rana (2014, 70) defines as "engaging a country's overseas community to contribute to building relationships with foreign countries". In scholarship, this definition has been most often utilised to conceptualise the processes by which the presence of diaspora communities residing in one country are leveraged instrumentally by their 'home' country governments to achieve foreign policy goals such as economic and political cooperation with other governments (Gonzalez 2012), promoting the national image to foreign publics (Goirizelaia and Iturregui 2019) and building partnerships between state and non-state actors and agencies in multiple countries (Stone and Douglas, 2018). Yet forming direct connections with diaspora communities by utilising specific policy instruments and public diplomacy practices, is also an integral part of these processes, which for Rana (2014, 70) "has multiple consequences that go beyond the immediate objective". As she emphasises, the practice of diaspora diplomacy involves a wide range of consular and public activity that strengthens the emotional bonds that diaspora communities retain with their home countries. Since the outcome of building these transnational connections might be new flows of global capital resources that assist with domestic social, human and economic development goals (Mangala 2016), building emotive sentiment amongst diaspora audiences can become a diplomatic objective in its own right.

Whereas traditional diplomacy is regarded as government designed and directed, diaspora diplomacy forms a part of public diplomacy, with its role for relationship-building amongst non-state actors. Public diplomacy is built on persuasion, which is essential for facilitating networking-influencing the way stakeholders think about issues and boosting the credibility of ideas or goals (van Ham 2014). For Singh (2015) an essential aspect of persuasion

is the operation of 'meta power', that is, the social contexts and processes that influences what is considered to be of importance amongst the non-state actors with whom state actors aim to build productive diplomatic relationships. Of central importance are the social identities, positionings and experiences that give shape to the stakes that different non-state actors hold in their relationships with state actors. Digital spaces are profoundly changing the operation of metapower since the very nature of these specific kinds of 'interactional contexts' are forcing these social positionings and experiences into prominence in states' diplomatic negotiation with non-state actors. The specific qualities, structure and form of digital spaces – such as the role of images, language, hyperlinks, gifs, bubbles, hashtags, and character limits – provide an 'information rich' representational environment that allows diplomats to specifically engage with these social and cultural dimensions of persuasion as part of their craft (Manor 2019).

The visual qualities of digital spaces are only just beginning to be analysed as the basis of social negotiation between states and/or other actors in diplomacy (e.g. Crilley and Manor 2018). A relatively recent visual turn elsewhere in international relations has so far yielded a wide scope of empirical enquiry concerned with the emotional and affective aspects of images (Bleiker 2001), deploying interdisciplinary theoretical interventions more traditionally associated with the humanities such as a creativity, display, staging, narrative, storytelling, framing and plotting (Hansen 2011). As a specific medium of display, images are produced or selected for the aesthetic qualities that intersect with the cultural repertoires and identities of intended audiences (Hariman and Lucaites 2018). Visual framing thus forms an aspect of the art of constructing strategic narratives (Manor and Crilley 2018) and entails making deliberate aesthetic choices in order to make specific representations, induce particular actions, spin narratives and shape common purpose between states and foreign publics (Constantinou 2018).

An examination of how images and their visual qualities, aesthetic choices and the cultural codes (or themes) contained within them are relevant to the craft of diaspora diplomacy because of the ways that building relationships between diasporas and their homelands is in the main is practiced at a distance. Most work in diaspora diplomacy continues to focus on the use of legal and institutional reform to manage the process of coalition building between states, diasporas and foreign audiences. Diaspora identities are

geographically multi-sited and contain dimensions such as, inter alia, race, ethnicity, class, caste, nationality, locality and gender that intersect to variously constitute (extra)territoriality in overlapping territorially defined nations. They also have emotional components, that are associated with navigating these sometimes competing forms of belonging (Dickinson 2014). There are increasing calls for literature on diaspora diplomacy to be cognizant of how this complexity factors into the ways that state and diaspora interests form the basis of negotiations around mutual agendas (Brinkerhoff 2019; Ho and McConnell 2019; Spry 2019; Zaharna 2019).

Digital technology is an increasingly important medium for the virtual constitution of diasporic groups' relationships to their homelands by broadening the concept of citizenship through the production and circulation of a mobilizing 'infopolitics' (Bernal 2014). Providing a means for diasporas to more easily shape the conduct of domestic politics (Brinkerhoff 2009) digital technology can generate forms of dialogue that might offer counter-narratives or political dissent (e.g. Chonka 2019). However, Web 2.0 technologies are considered to be in the main beneficial to the conduct of diaspora diplomacy because they allow states to build and manipulate transnational networks of interpersonal ties between diasporas, officials, influencers and business figures (Kang 2017; Stone and Douglas 2018). As diaspora identity negotiation moves online, states must become more attuned to how to use these mediums to navigate these complexities (Manor 2017). This is particularly the case because online spaces enable diasporas to maintain multiple different geographical forms of identity that are both deterritorialized, transnational and localized in ways that confound traditional binaries of 'country of origin' and 'country of residence' (Kok and Rogers 2017; P. Kumar 2018).

The value of cyberspace for the conduct of diaspora politics for Bernal (2018) lies in not in its extraterritoriality, but in its elasticity, which creates multiple "new possibilities of connection and disjuncture.. [that are].. affective, social, and political" (p. 3), which allows for the endless reconfiguration of diaspora's insider/outsider relationship to territory. A close investigation of the semiotics dimensions of these spaces can yield important insights about how they are used to modulate the interplay between foreign and domestic objectives within the contexts of diaspora's complex geographical belongings and identities. Following Barthes (1977), one of the key focuses of semiotic approaches is to explore the patterns and structures of meaning embedded in signs, and the ways those structures can acquire meaning

through the shared social systems and conventions that surround their form (Hall, Evans, and Nixon 2013). When analysing the images chosen to engage diasporas in online diplomatic spaces, they can be conceptualised following Eco (1976) as being composed of both denotations, that is, their descriptive and 'literal' form; and connotations, which refers to their socio-historical and cultural and individual significances. It is these second order connotations, in which the form of the image can contain simultaneous interpretations, that are useful in diaspora diplomacy because overlapping intents, interests and concepts can be communicated through deliberate image choices and selection. This can prove useful for advancing multiple ideas in relation to the layered political and social identities of diaspora groups, and therefore be used to induce or incentivize different actions and behaviours in relation to those identities.

Methodology

This study focused on the social media accounts of the IDF-OI between 2016 and 2017, which was the duration of an online campaign specifically aimed at increasing philanthropic donations from the diaspora to the national development schemes supported through the IDF-OI. Manual screen-capturing recorded 1037 tweets or retweets (@GivingtoIndia) and 322 Facebook posts (@IDFOI) published by the organisation during the timeframe under consideration. Disregarding duplications, the study focused on those containing some form of visual material such as photographs, infographics, organisational logo branding or statement graphics. Infographics were the most common type of visual material posted, followed by posts incorporating photographs, which were the focus of the in-depth semiotic coding that forms the basis of the themes presented below. The coding process incorporated contextual analysis of text-only tweets and posts alongside other secondary data including IDF-OI brochures, promotional material and annual reports; and policy papers, consultation research, speeches and other recordings published by the Ministry of External Affairs between 2001 and 2017.

Following a semiotic analysis, the aim of the study was not to produce a correct truth, but following Rose (2016), to produce interpretations considerate of "the social circumstances in which they are embedded" (p. xxi) and the "cultural significance, social

practices, and power relations' that are embedded in each image" (p. xxii). Posts were initially coded to identify the denoted, or literal, components of the image such as the people depicted, activities being performed and objects in the image. Images were then coded for their connotations, drawing upon the secondary contextual information, and grouped into wider themes. This contextual information was also derived from the architecture of social media networks, since they act a "site of circulation" (Rose 2016) through which images are designed to move through the inclusion of searchable text, hashtags and clickable links, which are themselves shaped by socio-political considerations. In analysing IDF-OI images, the written components of social media posts, which in my study both formed part of some images and accompanied them as words, hashtags and links, provided critical information about the interpretative context for deriving the meanings of the images. Once the two-level analytical process was completed, themes were further amalgamated into the themes presented below.

As a method of interpreting political narratives, visual analysis can be productively used to draw attention to ways that systems of meaning are constructed and communicated through the specific qualities of those images. Nonetheless, there are limitations to this form of analysis of diplomacy, since this method fails to engage with the actual intentions involved in selecting particular images to display. Furthermore, it does not take account of the everyday practices and operation 'behind the scenes' of this form of diplomatic work. As Manor (2019, chapter 3) shows, a wide range of decisions go into creating and selecting visual content for social media, and turn on not only the motivations but also the varied skills, abilities, experiences and knowledge of those involved. My chosen analytical framework is also limited because it doesn't engage with audience interpretation, that is the real-world dilemmas and challenges that inform the reception of such images across multiple subject positions and at a range of sites. As such, my chosen methodological approach falls short of realizing a fuller interpretation of the contexts in which the selection of images for circulation takes place, and what such images actually do. I therefore recognize the limitations of this analytical approach, but nonetheless maintain that a semiotic analysis offers insights into the how the qualities of the images chosen for circulation project particular systems of meaning as a means of inducing particular actions or achieving specific diplomatic objectives.

National and local diaspora identities

Prior to 1991, people of Indian origin living outside of India were considered to be the concern of their own sovereign nation-states, and people leaving India were considered to have forfeited their rights as Indians and therefore not within the governing remit of the Indian state (Lall 2019). Through a series of economic, legal, diplomatic and political reforms that began after economic liberalisation in 1991 and intensified under successive governments since 2001, the Indian government now directs concerted efforts to leverage the economic and political potential of its large diaspora. With some 20 million people geographically dispersed by historical and contemporary forms of labour migration, newer diasporas in continental Europe, Australia, the United States, New Zealand have become the focus of sustained diplomatic engagements. Alongside the transformation of national-level institutional arrangements of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), its network of consulates and embassies deploy localised outreach efforts. These efforts are pursued through forming strategic alignments with Indian-origin religious, cultural and business groups and strategic individuals recognised as key 'connection formers' able to mobilise inward remittances, investment and venture capital for varied type of national and development projects (Rana 2014). Because of this networked structure, such strategic alignments with diaspora groups and actors are instrumental in further shaping diaspora policies and initiatives (Naujoks 2013) often in ways that are tailored to the local context. Government efforts to cultivate Indian identity through cultural circulation across what is essentially a 'network of networks', have accompanied the transformation of these economic and political structures, in the pursuit of making convergences around areas of mutual interest (Dickinson 2014).

The IDF-OI was established primarily to mobilise this networked structure to direct philanthropy from the wealth affluent diaspora towards State Governments' specified social and development projects and the Government of India's (GoI) two flagship development projects: *Swachh Bharat* (Clean India Mission) and *Namami Ganga* (National Mission for Clean Ganga). As an intermediary quasi-governmental organisation positioned between the diaspora on the one hand, and the MEA on the other, its task was to connect individual philanthropists' desire to 'give back' to the country of origin and the specific needs at state and national level. In practice, this involved soliciting and approving state projects that needed funding, such as toilet block or school construction; promoting and advertising its

sanctioned donation opportunities across the social media accounts of the Public Diplomacy Division; engaging with individual philanthropists through virtual communication such as Google Hangouts and WhatsApp groups, both to advertise and help develop its activities; and holding face-to-face meetings with local diaspora groups in countries of residence through its network of embassies. Donors wishing to fund sanctioned projects were directed towards the IDF-OI online portal to donate directly to fund a specific project in whole, or to a pool fund with other donors, who could be from anywhere across the diaspora. Diaspora groups in different countries or cities of residence were encouraged to hold local fundraising events to raise money, and were often organised around a mutual interest such as a state or village of origin.

Much of the work of the IDF-OI was informed by currents of Hindu nationalism, even shaping the composition of the managing committee of the IDF-OI, which included religious leaders such as Sri Sri Ravi Shankar². Hindu nationalist discourses have long been a part of diaspora engagement efforts since 2001 (Jaffrelot and Therwath 2007), but have recently intensified under the Modi government and has shaped the sorts of projects that diaspora philanthropists were directed to fund through the IDF-OI. For instance, *Namami Ganga*, is one of the flagship programmes of the right-wing nationalist government and draws explicitly on narratives of the purification of the sacred waters of the Ganges in domestic attempts to mainstream Hindutva nationalism (Alley 2019). Similarly *Swachh Bharat*, launched by Modi in 2014 in a speech linking the presence of public filth to the question of India's 'national character', has historical origins in Mahatma Gandhi's nationalist movements for sanitation in the 1950s (Luthra 2018). Also rooted in Hindu tenets of purification, *Swacchh Bharat* has seen the multiplication of sanitation projects initiated at state level, such as building community toilets in rural districts.

[Figure 1]

Social media images used by the IDF-OI reflected currents of Hindu nationalist sentiments as a means of drumming up support for these specific projects. For example, the tweet in Figure 1 exhorts contributors to use their donations to "This Diwali, spread laughter and joy with IDF-OI". The accompanying image at the denoted level, is a child crouched on

² I am grateful to the manuscript reviewers for raising this point

the floor lighting one of the many candles surrounding them on the floor, against the backdrop of a wall of lights. The image suggests they are one of many people to have lit candles at the time this photograph was taken, suggesting that they are taking part in one of the many public lighting rituals associated with the Diwali festival - one of the most widely practised festivals celebrated by the majority Hindu population in India and in the diaspora.

The figure of the child is a common theme of charity advertising campaigns worldwide, since on a connoted level children are associated with practices of care and compassion (Zarzycka and Kleppe 2013). In the Indian context, the image contains several additional cultural significances that would be apparent to Indian diaspora social media users. Diwali ('string or row of lamps') is celebrated, or attended, both in India and in the diaspora by many non-South Asians and non-Hindus, but has deep spiritual and ritualistic significance in Hinduism as a festival connecting the divine and earthly realms. During the five days that comprise Diwali, as many lights as possible are lit in domestic spaces and in larger-scale public displays to invite the material incarnation of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, into the home whilst rejecting goddess Alakshmi, a harbinger of poverty. The public lighting ceremonies take various forms across India and in the diaspora depending on contextual locations and geographic differences (Johnson 2007). In its material practice, Diwali is both "a demonstration of material wealth and to the divine an invitation for creation of material wealth" (Kumar, 2008, 67) that in India and in the diaspora has become a festival that is "simultaneously a religious festival and an event that espouses secular consumption" (Johnson 2007, 76). The image combined with the text connotes these contradictions: whilst invoking religious sentiment, it also invites the diaspora to participate in their own display and creation of material wealth through their earthly philanthropic practice. Further, although Figure 1 denotes a public ceremony, the choice of framing the child alone decontextualizes the exact nature, form or shape of that ceremony, allowing its religious and cultural connotations to be claimed by multiple diaspora publics.

Further examples demonstrate the ways that the connotations associated with images can be used to generate emotive sentiments that direct diasporic giving towards matters of domestic political importance. For example, Tweets and Facebook posts related to soliciting contributions to the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) contained quotes from contributors explaining their motivations to support NCMG, such as the one posted on 8

December 2016 which read “I am spiritually connected with Gangaji.. I feel proud to contribute for Mother Ganga”. Similarly, a tweet sent on 20 June 2017 (Figure 2) depicts a photograph of the Ganges, alongside text that reads “River ganga has been the source of physical and spiritual sustenance of the Indian civilization for millennia. To the Indian mind, the Ganga is a living goddess”.

The photograph in Figure 2, which in its denoted form is of people in a boat on a river at sunset and largely detached from any specific geographical context, but has significance in Hindu mythology where all rivers are revered as healing and purifying entities, and are important sites for multiple ritual and consecrative worship (R. P. B. Singh 1994). The sunset has additional connotation as a key time of day for making religious offerings at such sacred sites, and therefore is a particularly auspicious symbol. Additional second order connotations are added to the image through the accompanying text, which identifies it as the river Ganges, which for people of Indian origin forms part of “an assemblage of ... ideologically laden signs and images” (Sharma 2009, 38) and is central in the sacred geographies of a Hindu communal identity. Amongst its many significances in the major Hindu texts, rituals and scriptures, its most divine power is as the personification of the goddess Gaṅgā, whose waters offer purification and liberation from saṃsāra, or the cycle of death and rebirth.

Under the proliferation of Hindutva ideology, the ecological plight of the Ganges has become a metonym for the vulnerability of the India nation itself, via the reappropriation of the multiple sacred meanings of the Ganges as a maternal deity for the Indian people (Luthy 2019). For Luthy, articulations of Hindu civic duty have come to frame discourses of river protection both for domestic and international audiences, including non-resident Indians, and turn on connecting its physical-ecological and sacred properties. The image combining text and photograph in Figure 2 places the diaspora in a temporal trajectory connected to the Indian nation through both the material and spiritual connotations of the Ganges. Buttressed by an infrastructure of related links, hashtags, organisational logos, tweets and retweets encouraging donation to the NMCG, the image advances an understanding that philanthropy is a suitable avenue for diasporic Indians to contribute towards the maintenance of its spiritual qualities.

Although the communication of nationalist sentiments are common to the work of Indian diaspora diplomats (Jaffrelot and Therwath 2007), philanthropists are also motivated

by complex geographies of identification (Hay and Muller 2014) that in the Indian context include forms of kinship and relatedness embedded in place and locality (Gardner 2018). Enabling more localised forms of giving was a deliberate strategy of the IDF-OI persuasive visual practices, an initiative which itself emerged directly from dialogue with potential contributors across its diplomatic networks. Social media channels were used to advertise local projects, with prominence given to locational information and photographs of people, which are a particularly powerful tool in soliciting charity since they perform contradictory roles that can fulfil multiple needs (Zarzycka 2016). They carry a range of emotional messages that can be interpreted in multiple ways and therefore claimed by actors with diverse motivations.

The IDF-OI used images of people to establish an emotional stake in their philanthropy by visually connecting donors in countries of residence with local beneficiaries. Photographs of smiling contributors, crowds gathered at project foundation and unveiling ceremonies, pictures of project end-users and those involved in construction invites potential philanthropists to feel that even though they are part of a complex transnational network, they can – if they direct their donation through the IDF-OI- retain these more localised connections. For instance, a tweet posted on 6th September 2017 shows a composite of photographs of local people stood in front of various community sanitary facilities funded by overseas Indians holding signs reading “thank-you”, accompanied by the tweet “you can give more locals access to clean sanitation facilities” (IDF-OI 2017a). The details of the location remain anonymous and prominence is instead given to the recipients, suggesting a gratitude directed at future potential contributors.

Transparency and accountability of networked diplomacy

The rapid growth of Indian diasporic philanthropy in recent decades is attributed primarily to the size and wealth characteristics of its diaspora (Kassam, Handy, and Jansons 2016). Policy reports identify several structural challenges facing the full realization of its wealth potential in service of development projects including the fragmentation of diaspora mobilization structures and lack of transparency and trust in government channels, giving rise to a perception of an overly-bureaucratic, onerous and potentially corrupt system (A. D. Singh 2012). Kassam et al (2016) observe that these factors are in part behind the rise of internet-

based philanthropic platforms such as GuidestarIndia, Give2Asia and Giveindia, which in their pursuit of a corporate philanthropy based on transparency, legitimacy, credibility and accountability, are increasingly the gifting medium of choice for wealthy diaspora Indians. These trends reflect a wider 'philanthrocapitalism', that is, the market orientation of wealthy philanthropists and the mechanisms they deploy, such as financing tools, performance measurement, legitimacy and accountability requirements.

At its inception, the IDF-OI foregrounded credibility and transparency in its persuasive efforts to mobilise the complex 'network of networks' that exist between wealthy individual donors and state-selected projects in need (India Development Foundation of Overseas Indians 2016). These developments are reflective of the broader 'digital India' programme pursued since 2015, which Gurusurthy et al (2016) argue is a technocratic style of development aimed at digitizing the transactions between the state and citizens, eliminating bureaucracy, and making governance more transparent and accountable. This digitization of the relationship between Indian citizens and the state was designed to enable *Surajya*, a supposed democratization of governance through citizen-engagement - a further element of Modi's vision for India's neoliberal modernization. In a speech to the Indian diaspora in the USA in 2017, Modi identified these ongoing digital transformations as key to transparent governance and ending corruption, an element he identified as being central to fulfilling the Indian diasporas' 'dreams' of a developed India of which they were a part (Gulf News India, 2017). As such, these proclamations about what digital India was meant to achieve spoke directly to wealthy diaspora philanthropists who may have previously been reluctant to use government channels to direct their support.

Reflecting this agenda, IDF-OI images were used to promote itself as an appropriate intermediary organisation by showing that the operation of the IDF-OI met diaspora philanthropists' expectations of transparency and accountability. Images became an important means of projecting institutional openness and trustworthiness. Alongside quarterly reports on project progress and expenditures, photographs were identified as an aspect of the IDF-OI's monitoring mechanisms (2016). The deployment of visual imagery is meant to allow the Indian diaspora to visually 'see' the workings of the IDF-OI. This can be seen in three common themes circulated by the IDF-OI in tweets, retweets and Facebook shares between 2016 and 2018. One is the use of infographics to visualise the mechanisms,

pathways and decision-making processes that occurs in channelling donations. A common feature of political infographics is the unified display of text, image and graphics on a single surface (Jones 2015) and are particularly suited to the medium of social media because they are designed to distil information for speed (Cmeciu, Manolache, and Bardan 2016). One such infographic was retweeted by @GivingtoIndia on 9th July 2017, accompanied by a tweet that read “#DidYouKnow: How IDF-OI Works? #TransformingIndia” (Figure 3). Starting from a salient visual point (in this case, the main question – How does IDF-OI work?), the infographic shows seven numbered circles outlining the stages connecting philanthropists to projects, from the first stage (submission of projects by state) to the fourth (selection of Projects by overseas Indians), fifth (payment by OI) and finally seventh stage (project completion and utilization report). This is a method of translating complex behind-the-scenes processes, as a means of not only calling viewers to action, but seemingly presenting a sense of connection to beneficiaries, contributor agency in the selection of projects and a reciprocal accountability once the project is complete. The use of Prime Minister Modi in this infographic, whom Pal et al (2016) argue, uses social media to build a powerful brand as a “techno-savvy” accessible global leader outside of his traditional base, particularly amongst diaspora Indians, underscores this image’s messaging of an open digital India accustomed to technology .

[Figure 3]

Whilst infographics may be regarded as a form of informational transmission, which de Oliveira (2016) notes is the main purpose of India’s online diaspora engagement platforms, the embedded links and hashtags in the tweets and infographics also technologically integrates the IDF-OI into the wider networks of the Indian state. For instance, both the logo, embedded weblink and hashtag for #TransformingIndia connects audiences to MyGov.in, the citizen engagement platform of the Gol. For the interested and informed reader, this contextual information makes apparent the wider digital ecology of the Indian state, connoting the embeddedness of the IDF-OI’s informational transparency within these wider governance structures of Digital India.

A second related theme further unveiling the operation of the IDF-OI and connecting givers and recipients are visualisations of donations being actively being used. Figure 4 for

example, taken from the Facebook page of the IDF-OI, shows various phases in the construction of community toilets in Bikaner, Rajasthan. Accompanying the text are words such as ‘in full swing’ and ‘taking forward’, both of which connote these sites as a hive of activity. This sense is further emphasised in other photos that represent the speed of project completion, which is particularly effective when text, graphics and images are combined, which can be seen in Figures 5. This image shows the timeline of a donation that went to fund a healthcare centre in Suryapet, Telangana, from the contribution being received and a project for the contribution identified in January 2017, to the foundations being laid in March 2017, and the start of the construction a month later. The combination of charts, dates and pictures as a way of depicting the transparency of funding arrangements and flows of money, connotes a sense of efficiency in the delivery of projects.

[Figure 4] [Figure 5]

The third theme central to projections of transparency are those that show IDF-OI bureaucrats, ministers, representatives and partners at work behind-the-scenes, a practice now routine in contemporary digital diplomacy in general (Manor 2019). The selection of images taken from Facebook and Twitter accounts of the IDF-OI in Figure 6 shows activities such as meetings of IDF-OI Board of Trustees chaired by named ministers and officials, and officials interacting with the diaspora online and offline, signing Memorandum of Understandings and visiting projects to check on the “upkeep of assets”. This latter choice of descriptive text, framed in the language of accountability, reinforces the sense of transparency. By using images of bureaucrats in this manner, along with descriptions of what they are doing, the diaspora are allowed to ‘see the state’ (Corbridge et al. 2005), configuring the IDF-OI less as a faceless, nameless bureaucratic projection, and more as a set of people in their physical, material and embodied manifestations performing the everyday sorts of actions required by their duties. Making visible the online and offline networks in which the IDF-OI operates is intended to generate in the (wealth affluent) target audience a sense that their gifts are being used fully and appropriately, and thereby as representative of their interests.

[Figure 6]

The social prestige of networked gifting

As wider scholarship on philanthropy shows, philanthropists are not only motivated to give for simple altruistic reasons, but seek to use contributions to develop their social exchange relations, through which they are able to expand the scope of their international business interests, influence governments and gain international recognition and prestige (Schmid and Nissim 2016). In the Indian context, although philanthropic efforts at community development has been characterised as locally embedded forms of charity (Gardner 2018) a wide range of private business interests have historically shaped patterns of giving (A. Kumar 2018). In a recent case study of diaspora philanthropy in Dakshina Kannada in Karnataka State, Mustafi and Koskimaki (2018) show that philanthropists' desires to exert influence over socio-political networks of class and patronage embedded in specific geographical locations are behind specific types of giving.

Images are used for making apparent that philanthropy as channelled through the IDF-OI can be used as a means of making strategic alignments with different actors in the Indian state. Having the means to donate is represented as the means of access can be gained to this global network of diasporic global elite, both through online and offline channels. The idea that philanthropist are able to use gifting to access this globally connected transnational network is reinforced across the visual strategies of the IDF-OI. For instance, Figure 7 depicts a composite image of faces of contributors accompanied by text detailing their locations in different countries of North America, Europe, the Middle East and East Asia, encouraging further potential contributions by promising that "You too can join the network!". Several other visual strategies employ this framing in Tweets and Facebook posts, such as the posting of regular images of contributors handing over cheques at different governmental offices in India and at high commissions and consulates around the world, or meeting diplomats face to face. Images position IDF-OI as a coalition builders across these networks.

[Figure 7] [Figure 8]

The desire of diaspora philanthropists to use giving to enhance social prestige is built into the operational model of the IDF-OI, which promises that in return for donations, a

plaque will be placed at the site to acknowledge givers' contributions (MEA 2016). For example, on 21 June 2017 IDF-OI shared a Facebook photo album of the inauguration of a Community Sanitary Complex. One of the shared photos (Figure 8) depicts the wall plaque on the side of the building recognising the funding to the project given by Shri Yusuff Ali, CMD of the Dubai-based Lulu Group International. Together with the naming of the IDF-OI, MEA and Sikkim state government and the call-back to the *Swachh Bharat*, the donor is depicted as a member of a wide network of connected state and non-state actors. The visual materials in the IDF-OI's social media campaigns seem designed to appeal to the donor's needs for public gratitude and recognition, and to an illusion of interpersonal connection to the Indian state, which, through the supply of funding for key social and development projects, are the payoff for undertaking material improvements.

IDF-OI's social media strategies in general gave an illusion that anyone can use philanthropy to join in these interconnected territorial and extra-territorial networks. For example, the IDF-OI held four Google Hangouts in 2017, and advertisements about the events circulated on social media accounts issued open invitations. These hangouts functioned as a Q&A, in which a minister described the operation of the IDF-OI, circulated pictures, answered questions from the diaspora and received suggestions with a promise to take forward for discussion at the Trustee and managements boards (e.g. IDF-OI 2017d). Video recordings of the hangouts were circulated on social media, along with advertisements about subsequent events. These strategies created an impression that the IDF-OI was an intermediary organisation open to dialogue with members of the diaspora, who are able to shape its operation. With this emphasis on the interactive relationships between state and non-state actors, images position global philanthropists as influencers in the domestic arena.

[Figure 9] [Figure 10]

Nonetheless, whilst these visual strategies give an impression that the IDF-OI was open for anyone to potentially join the network –either through donation or through channels of dialogue- many of the images also reinforce idea that participation in networked diplomacy can only be accessed by those already embedded in global networks of power and influence. As Roohi (2018) argues, the diaspora-state partnership model of philanthropy is

built on pre-existing private and state networks, in which diaspora actors already hold positions of power and seek to utilise philanthropy to consolidate that power. Indeed, many of the images circulated by the IDF-OI show philanthropy as taking place within already-existing global political networks. For instance, Figure 9 is an image of members of the diaspora handing cheques over to the IDF-OI 'on the spot' at Pravasi Bharatiya Day, an annual gathering of the Indian diaspora in India where they are able to meet representatives of private and state actors and make strategic alignments for diaspora investment. The impression given is that these philanthropists have enough income at their disposal to make spontaneous donations. Similarly, Figure 10 shows a photo and description posted on Facebook on December 2nd 2016 showing the joint Secretary of the IDF-OI meeting and interacting with a group of business people in Thailand at a joint event organised with the Indian Social Club of Thailand and the Embassy of India in Bangkok. Both images imply that networks are already in existence, and that the IDF-OI's role is to mobilise, rather than create them. Therefore the visual strategies although designed to present an image of philanthropy as a means of gaining access to Indian state, at the same time they also subvert the idea that anyone can participate in diplomacy because of the ways they underscore the classed social identities of those who are already participating. By imparting to potential donors giving as a behaviour of enterprising, already globally politically networked subjects, the deployment of images of philanthropy invokes, and makes use of, existing structures whilst providing a medium for their perpetuation.

Taken together, the above visualisations of the mediating role of the IDF-OI offers a deceptive set of representations of networked forms of diplomacy. On the one hand, the images circulated appears to support an ideology of open participation in engagements with the state, and an implicit guarantee that acts of philanthropy can provide access to dialogue with state decision-making processes. Philanthropists and potential contributors are led to think they are only a few mouse-clicks away from transforming lives, and becoming part of this global networks of reciprocity between state and non-state actors. Yet this appearance of transparent information accessibility and connectivity obscures the unevenness of access that is rooted within the social and economic power differentials that are perpetuated and reinforced through images. Whilst visualisations of donor's social capital, prestige and access to power is a tactical strategy for increasing donations, the broader implications of these

images are that only those with pre-existing power and money and influence can access these forms of prestige, since they give an impression that networks are already in place.

Conclusion

This article explored the IDF-OI's 2016 and 2017 social media campaign to persuade the diaspora to channel philanthropy to national and state government social development projects. I argued that images were used to envision diaspora as part of a 'network of networks' that connected them to recipients via domestic and foreign policy interests within the Indian state. These visualisations were designed to show that the specific way of channelling philanthropy through the IDF-OI could be used to articulate the multiple emotional, social, economic dimensions of what it means to belong and identify as part of a networked diaspora who are connected to one another globally and through their engagements with domestic projects in India. Through the case study presented above, I showed that the semiotic qualities of images mediate the associations between belonging, territory and nation in three ways. First, analysed images show a set of affective possibilities built on and through the emotional connections rooted in place, nation and locality. Second, images reflect the characteristics of philanthropists as a wealthy elite who require their channels of philanthropy to be credible, accountable and transparent. Finally, engaging with the Indian state through philanthropy is shown in images as permitting entry into globally extensive networks of relationships with other diaspora elites, and with local and national state actors. The value of this semiotic reading of social media images has been to identify how online platforms can provide space for differentiated representations of diasporas as both territorial and extra-territorial, and thus as actors that can be mobilised to meet both foreign and domestic agendas.

In examining the semiotics of social media images, this study has shown the ways that digital mediums have the potential to empower those with existing structural advantage. States increasingly use digital spaces not just as a tool of communication with diasporas, but as a means of selectively extending and retracting their borders to those living abroad (Bernal 2018). The case of the IDF-OI similarly shows that the virtual encompassment of diaspora groups are not undifferentiated; rather a space is constituted for the minority whom the state considered to be affluent. In this case, the IDF-OI social media channels is a diplomatic space

constructed to achieve very specific domestic objectives. Although there exist other examples in the Indian context where social media has been used to draw attention to different areas of diplomatic concern (Bute 2018), the IDF-OI social media platforms set apart the wealthy elite from other members of the diaspora, establishing affective and social connections binding them into a web of political relations connecting state and non-state stakeholders that may have multiple other pay-offs.

The semiotic approach advanced here has wider implications about the role and value of diasporas in diplomacy, particularly in relationship to how online spaces can be used to engage different types of domestic and foreign audiences. As a form, 'diaspora' is now widely understood by MFAs as describing communities of expatriate nationals and their descendants. But as a sign, it conveys very different political meanings depending on the historical and geographical context of diaspora's evolving relationship to the nation and territory both of where they reside and where they identify as their origin. These differential meanings of the term diaspora have implications for different kinds of foreign policies and practices, requiring further research into which meanings take on significance, in what type of context and for whom. For the IDF-OI with a specific remit to mobilise the diaspora to meet domestic agendas, the connotations generated in its social media architecture served to incentivise philanthropy amongst very specific elite diaspora audiences by advancing an idea of themselves as both emotionally rooted inside its territorial borders, but economically deterritorialised outside of the nation-state. Other concepts or connotations associated with the visualisations of Indian diasporas in social media spaces could contribute to different expectations of what diasporas can or should do. If we are to more fully account for such differentiated use of diasporas in meeting foreign and domestic agendas, it is therefore important to seek an understanding of the role of the visual as a specific organizing technology of interaction and relate it to the question of how diplomatic relationships between state and non-state actors are constructed, (re)presented and transformed in social media settings.

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Figure Captions

- Figure 1: The joy of giving (source: IDF-OI)
- Figure 2: National Mission for Clean Ganga campaign. Source @GivingtoIndia
- Figure 3: Flow-chart of donations. (Source: IDF-OI)
- Figure 4: Stages in the construction of community toilets in Bikaner, Rajasthan (Source: IDF-OI)
- Figure 5: Flow-chart of Health Centre construction in Suryapet, Telangana. (Source: IDF-OI)
- Figure 6: The IDF-OI at work. (Source: IDF-OI)
- Figure 7: Global network of contributors (Source IDF-OI)
- Figure 8: Signage on community sanitary complex, East Sikkim (Source: IDF-OI)
- Figure 9: Interacting with the diaspora, Sukhumvit, Bangkok, Thailand (Source: IDF-OI)
- Figure 10: On the spot donations at Pravasi Bharatiya Divas 2017 (Source: IDF-OI)