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Vol. 24, issue 1 (2020)

**Re-defining Gender, Sexuality, and Discourse in the Global Rise of Right-wing
Extremism**

Edited by Giuseppe Balirano and Rodrigo Borba



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The (Anti)gender Discourse of the Global Far-right. A Way of Introducing

Patriarchal masculinity cripples men. Manhood as we know it in our society requires such a self-destructive identity, a deeply masochistic self-denial, a shrinkage of the self, a turning away from whole areas of life, the man who obeys the demands of masculinity has become only half-human [...]. To become the man I was supposed to be, I had to destroy my most vulnerable side, my sensitivity, my femininity, my creativity, and I had to pretend to be both more powerful and less powerful than I feel.

Roger Horrocks, *Masculinity in Crisis: Myths, Fantasies, and Realities*

On the 22nd of January 2021, a young man was arrested in the small seaport of Savona located on the coast of the northern Italian region of Liguria. The incident caused a relatively small ripple across national media and received very little international coverage. The young man in question, Andrea Cavalleri, had founded a successful extreme-right wing organization called ‘New Social Order’ (Nuovo Ordine Sociale) and used the Telegram messaging service to spread propaganda and recruit followers. Besides publishing numerous damning posts against Jews and left-wing politicians, Cavalleri’s objective was to increase the notoriety of the Incel movement, to which he claimed to belong, by slaughtering women during a pro-feminist rally since, as he declared, “Modern women are devoid of sentiment, just dolls made of flesh to be exterminated”. (https://genova.repubblica.it/cronaca/2021/01/22/news/terrorismo_indagine_sull_estrema_destra_suprematista_a_savona_arrestato_22enne-283714514/). The sleepy town of Savona is not New York, London, or Paris, and yet Cavallari, thanks to the inexorable spread of social media, was on the verge of embarking on a killing spree worthy of Utøya or Christchurch. The names of those guilty of planning or carrying out bloodbaths inspired by extreme right-wing supremacist sentiment rarely stick in our minds, and the fleeting glory of their tweeted slogans soon fades. What remains is the growing unease caused by the sheer volume of unadulterated hatred seeping into our lives from the press, the media, and the internet.

Fuelled by dissatisfaction towards the relative empowerment of women and LGBTIQ constituencies in the West, this kind of reaction to changes in gender and sexual orders, albeit not new, has been bolstered by (and in itself, boosts) the recent global rise of far-right extremism. Cases such as that of Savona balloon across the globe and, although they cater to local specificities, much of their content and form circulate transnationally with little to no variation. Taking issue with the view of gender as socially constructed (which Lage and Márquez identify as the bedrock of what they call “the New Left”¹), detractors attempt to enforce a transcendent view of gender, one that is immutable, biology-driven, based on sexual dimorphism and well-established hierarchical roles for men and women – one in which there is not place for gay, lesbian, queer and trans folks.

¹ Agustín Lage and Nicolás Márquez, *El Libro Negro de la Nueva Izquierda: Ideología de género o subversión cultural* (Madrid: Grupo Unión, 2016).

The widespread hold of far-right extremism across the globe jeopardises the work of human rights and social justice and poses an encroaching threat to democratic societies by mainstreaming reactionary, racist, Islamophobic, xenophobic, and antigender political agendas and discourses.² In broad terms, in the current age of the Internet and Social Media, the far-right scenario appears to be undergoing a bi-directional shift towards the emergence of a mixture of transnational formalised political parties, such as the Sweden Democrats, Vox in Spain, Lega in Italy and the AfD in Germany, and a series of other far-right movements which have arisen in various settings, sometimes within parliaments and often as unrecognised groups in numerous countries.³ In much the same way as the previously mentioned lone wolf supremacists, by exploiting the online environment, these political entities can directly address their sympathisers and position themselves as the voice of their people.⁴ It is in these virtual environments that the discussion about and around gender politics is characterized by an opposition of emancipative contents, actions and institutions. More specifically, as Graff *et al.* highlight,⁵ when it comes to far-right movements “calls for national revival and unity invariably include appeals to [...] a sturdy masculinity, [...] heterosexuality as the only acceptable norm [...] and discipline”.⁶ Indeed, as Cynthia Enloe maintains when delineating the intricate link between nationalism and masculinity “nationalism has typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope”.⁷

A direct and inevitable consequence of such discourses has been the unwavering hostility of far-right groups towards gender equality and sexual liberation. By coalescing disparate political actors, civil society groups and institutions around the globe, these multifarious bodies united by core aspirations have set out on a moral crusade whose aim is to strengthen modern (and seemingly outdated) ideals, such as that of the nuclear ‘traditional’ family and the nation.⁸ ‘Agenda Europe’, a pan-European, Christian-extremist network is a fine example of this kind of congregational strategy and has, over the years, become a go-to point for traditionalist perspectives on sexual and reproductive rights. In their manifesto entitled ‘Restoring the Natural Order’, (<https://agendaeuropa.files.wordpress.com/2019/05/rtno-2014.pdf>) the unnamed authors progressively dismantle the political ideologies that undermine ‘Natural Law’. Thus, Marxism, Feminism, Homosexuality, Gender Theory, Relativism and Anti-Discrimination are seen as “dangerous and destructive ideologies” (19). The manifesto goes so far as to put forward a glossary which claims to differentiate between ‘how *they* call it’ and ‘what it is’ (126) where, amongst others, the phrase ‘homosexual love’ is graphically redefined as ‘sodomy’ (129).

² According to Nairn, this opposition between political achievements in human rights and equality vs. the fight against such accomplishments characterises the idea of a nation itself. He views the nation as a ‘modern Janus’ with two highly contrasting ‘faces’: a conservative, jingoistic, ‘warfare’ visage vs. a more progressive, community-enhancing ‘welfare’ side. Along these lines, far-right movements would appear to be a feature of the more regressive half of Janus. See Tom Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain. Crisis and Neo-Nationalism* (London: New Left Books, 1977). See also: Joane Nagel, “Masculinity and Nationalism: Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 21.2 (1998), 242-269.

³ Michaela Köttig *et al.*, eds., *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-43533-6.

⁴ Lynn Berg, “Between Anti-Feminism and Ethnicized Sexism. Far-Right Gender Politics in Germany”, in Maik Fielitz and Nick Thurston, eds., *Post-Digital Cultures of the Far Right: Online Actions and Offline Consequences in Europe and the US* (Bielefeld: transcript-Verlag, 2019), 79–91. Richard Miskolci, *Batalhas morais: Política identitária na esfera pública técnico-midiática* (Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2021)

⁵ Agnieszka Graff *et al.*, “Introduction: Gender and the Rise of the Global Right”, *Signs*, 44.3 (2019), 541-560.

⁶ Graff *et al.*, “Introduction”, 551.

⁷ Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 45.

⁸ Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: The Shameless Normalization of Far-Right Discourse* (London: SAGE Publications, 2020, 2nd edition).

Interestingly, these discourses repeat and foment contents, slogans, discursive formulae, tropes and topoi that travel transnationally but are, nonetheless, locally adapted within national borders. Instances of these boundless but still identifiable discursive products belonging to far-right parties can be found across the globe. For instance, the 2016 Colombian referendum whose aim was to ratify the peace agreement between the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) and the government was rejected by the population on the grounds that it would lead to a “flexibilization” of gender norms. Accounting for the fact that the armed conflict victimizes LGBTIQ people forty times more frequently than the heterosexual population⁹, the agreement aimed to further equality to all citizens, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity. Demanding the term “gender” to be dropped from the text, Colombian Catholic authorities vociferously mobilized their forces to repel it while also requiring changes in the agreement to include religious institutions as vulnerable groups. These demands were not granted, and, by a small majority, the population voted against the peace agreement because that would supposedly lead to unrestrained sexual perversion. Examples such as this mushroom across the globe. The Brazilian ultraconservative politician Jair Bolsonaro became president due to his vitriolic speeches against women and LGBTIQ+ individuals to such an extent that he singled out the fight against ‘gender ideology’ as a political platform in his inauguration speech.¹⁰ In Hungary, gender studies programmes have been progressively dismantled in recent years. In France, Spain, Slovenia and Italy, self-identified guardians of good morals (i.e., *Strazarji*, *Sentinelle in Piedi*, *les Sentinelles*) have publicly demonstrated against progressive laws on same-sex marriage and abortion. Just a few days before the writing up of this introductory note, at a meeting in Ankara organised by the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan hosting the European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen and the European Council President Charles Michel, Ms von der Leyen was left standing as no chair had been provided for her. She was visibly taken aback when the two men sat on the only two available armchairs, relegating her to an adjacent sofa and hence preventing her from taking an active part in the talks. Video footage of the incident has elicited thousands of anti-Erdogan comments on social media platforms giving rise to the so-called ‘Sofa Gate’. No woman, let alone the European Commission’s first female President, should be on the receiving end of such thoughtless and shameful behaviour. Sadly, the incident is merely symptomatic of a deeply rooted disrespect for women not only within the Turkish establishment but wherever far-right parties rule the nation. In Peru and Panama, the Covid-19 pandemic was also used to further binary understandings of gender via restrictive measures limiting the circulation of women and men, who could access essential services on different days of the week. Such a policy led to the strengthening of transphobic violence.¹¹ According to Brazilian feminist anthropologist Sonia Corrêa¹², such sex segregation measures “reiterate the biological determinism of sexual dimorphism”, which undergird the antigender agendas of the far-right whose aim is to bring us “back to where we always have been.”¹³

The democratic expansion and emancipation yielded by recent changes in the patriarchal system of values have been increasingly met with suspicion, mistrust, and open and patent contempt by the far-right fringes of society that “see their own sexual anxieties reflected in the figure of the angry white

⁹ See Camila Muelle, “Como hacer necropolítica en casa: ideología de género y acuerdos de paz en Colombia”, *Sexualidad, Salud y Sociedad*, 27 (2017), 172-198.

¹⁰ See Rodrigo Borba and Danillo da Conceição Pereira Silva, “Swings and Scales of Democracy. The ‘Transgender Epidemic’ and Resistance to Antigenderism”, *Trabalhos em Linguística Aplicada*, 59.3 (2020), 1916-1945.

¹¹ Amaya Perez-Brumer and Alfonso Silva-Santisteban, “COVID-19 policies can perpetuate violence against transgender communities: Insights from Peru”, *AIDS and Behavior*, 24 (2020), 2477-2479.

¹² Sonia Corrêa, “Back to Where We Always Have Been: Sex/Gender Segregation to Contain COVID-19”, *Engenderings*, The London School of Economics and Political Science, 9 Abril 2020. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2020/04/09/back-to-where-we-always-have-been-sex-gender-segregation-to-contain-covid-19/>

¹³ See Corrêa, 2020.

straight cis man” typically embodied by the leaders political extremist movements.¹⁴ As César and Duarte argue,¹⁵ when the war is both political and moral, gender, sexuality, and sexual diversity soon become weapons. As a consequence, such groups discursively enact de-democratising dynamics that counter global political achievements in the fields of gender equality and freedom. However, as Borba and Silva underline,¹⁶ following Butler,¹⁷ such democratic achievements in the human rights cannot easily be destroyed. Therefore, polarized and dichotomous discourses shape and reshape the public sphere and its participation structures: far-right conservative ideologies are met by resistance as well as forms of counter-discourses that (re)negotiate specific meanings and values. Such processes are of course magnified by the recent affordances provided by social media which allow for the amplification of these discursive phenomena.¹⁸

By foregrounding gender (or, rather, the various facets of antigenderism) in the linguistic and semiotic practices of right-wing extremists in places as diverse as Latin and North America, Europe, and East Asia, this issue of *Anglistica AION* investigates discourses and practices that are integral to far-right masculinist ideology. The moral crusade enacted by far-right groups and movements against gender equality aims to preserve heteronormative family ethics, gender values, and the naturalised hierarchies of the traditional roles of men and women. These lynchpins represent the essence of far-right resistance, as reported in the differing national and cultural settings of the contributions that make up this volume. Clear-cut definitions of what constitutes far-right activism and ideology are difficult to establish, mainly due to the far-right’s ability to permeate all social strata and numerous civil society organisations, but with a specific preference for political settings. In these contexts, the far-right earns accolades from significant chunks of a nation’s electorate largely affected by deep-rooted dissatisfaction, cynicism, and outright rejection of political, business and banking elites.¹⁹ Perhaps, a distinction can be drawn between the radical right, which is opposed to liberal aspects of democracy (such as minority rights), but does not usually promote the use of violence, and the far-right, which is inherently anti-democratic and, in many cases, legitimises the use of violence to pursue its political aims.²⁰ However, moving beyond minimal definitions, there is no doubt that the prevalence of far-right extremism in a country’s institutions and organisations produces a set of adverse factors, which include antifeminist misogyny, toxic masculinity, and the centrality of anti-gender equality.²¹

Within these far-right scenarios, while narratives of femininity evoke and replicate associations with emotional vulnerability, personal and professional incompetence, and the need to protect white

¹⁴ Borba and Silva, “Swings and Scales of Democracy”, 1919.

¹⁵ César and Duarte, “Governo e Pânico Moral”, 144. As cited by Fernando Altair Pocahy and Thalles do Amaral de Souza Cruz, “Gender and Sexuality in the Brazilian Educational Rhizome. A Cartogenealogy of Production, Marking and Governance of Difference”, in Moira Pérez and Gracia Trujillo-Barbadillo, eds., *Queer Epistemologies in Education. Luso-Hispanic Dialogues and Shared Horizons* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 110.

¹⁶ Borba and Silva, “Swings and Scales of Democracy”, 1919.

¹⁷ Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard U.P., 2015). DOI: 10.4159/9780674495548.

¹⁸ Giuseppe Balirano and Bronwen Hughes, eds., *Homing in on Hate. Critical Discourse Studies of Hate Speech, Discrimination and Inequality in the Digital Age* (Naples: Paolo Loffredo Editore, 2020). Luiz Paulo Moita-Lopes and Joana Plaza Pinto, “Colocando em perspectiva as práticas discursivas de resistência em nossas democracias contemporâneas”, *Trabalhos em Linguística Aplicada*, 59 (2020), 1590-1612.

¹⁹ Akkerman Agnes et al., “How Populist Are the People? Measuring Populist Attitudes in Voters”, *Comparative Political Studies*, 47.9 (2014), 1324-1353.

²⁰ See: Sikata Banerjee, *Make Me a Man! Masculinity, Hinduism, and Nationalism in India* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005); Martin Durham, *White Rage. The Extreme Right and American Politics* (London: Routledge, 2007); and Duncan McDonnell and Annika Werner, *International Populism. The Radical Right in the European Parliament* (London: Hurst, 2019).

²¹ Graff et al., “Introduction”, 551.

womanhood, narratives of masculinity are associated with the hegemonic struggle to preserve patriarchal rights, triggered by the fear of emasculation, loss of manhood, and declining (white) male privilege. This volume therefore explores how notions of ‘masculinity’ or ‘femininity’ are exploited as symbolic capital, ideological resource, and/or as a rhetorical device not only to problematise and marginalise the antagonistic ‘Others’, identified as ethnic, political, religious, or gendered threats to a desired uniformity, but also to legitimise and validate prejudices as well as particular forms of gendered violence.

This gendered aspect of the far-right appears to remain largely unquestioned as antifeminist and antigender-equality sentiment continue to mark nationalist policies and rhetoric.²² Such opposing attitudes not only underpin the populist and extremist mobilisation that unceasingly wages a ‘culture war’ against the ‘Other’, but also shape public opinion and policy debate on a range of issues, from immigration and reproductive rights to social protection and constitutional reform. In recent years, a number of internationally recognised studies have provided well-documented accounts of how these issues are perceived and exploited by the far-right in different countries, most often to generate fear, and spread misinformation and conspiracy theories.²³ In other accounts, the construction of far-right antigender representation filtered through extremist intolerance, has been given a distinct focus.²⁴

It is within this wider debate that conflates gender with far-right resentment that this issue of *Anglistica AION* pursues its aims. The contributions all contend a common denominator: the need to remain vigilant and steadfast when dealing with the far-right crusade against gender equality. In all the case studies in this issue, the essence of far-right resistance is embodied by a political agenda that aims to preserve heterocisnormative family ethics, traditional gender values, and the naturalised hierarchies of the conventional roles of men and women. It is against this background that the scholars whose work makes up this edited publication have approached the far-right centrality of gendered arguments and gendered policies. Through various well-established approaches in sociolinguistics (such as Corpus Linguistics, Critical Discourse Analysis, Linguistic Anthropology to name but a few), each contribution analyses the importance of gender within far-right rhetoric, yielding subject matter that is both insightful and original.

This issue of *Anglistica AION* opens with the paper “Discursive Constructions of the Enemy through Metonymy. The Case of *CitizenGo*’s Anti-genderist E-petitions” by Stamatina Katsiveli (Queen Mary University of London, UK) and Elvis Coimbra-Gomes (Queen Mary University of London, UK). The authors investigate the transnational online petition platform *CitizenGo.org* by combining corpus linguistics methodologies and critical discourse analysis in the examination of metonymic variants related to gender identity and sexuality. Katsiveli and Coimbra-Gomes cogently show how these far-right E-petitions repurpose progressive vocabulary for regressive ends. Metonymy

²² See, however, Eric Russel, *The Discursive Ecology of Homophobia: Unravelling Anti-LGBT speech on the European Far Right* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2019).

²³ See: Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2007); Paul Hainsworth, *The Extreme Right in Europe* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2008); Bob Clifford, *The Global Right Wing and the Clash of World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2012); Mammone *et al.*, eds., *Varieties of Right-Wing Extremism in Europe* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2013); Sabine von Mering and Timothy Wyman McCarty, eds., *Right-Wing Radicalism Today: Perspectives from Europe and the US* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2013); Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear*.

²⁴ See: Sara R. Farris, *In the Name of Women’s Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke U.P., 2017); Neil Datta, *Restoring the Natural Order: The Religious Extremists’ Vision to Mobilize European Societies against Human Rights on Sexuality and Reproduction* (Brussels: European Parliamentary Forum, 2018). Retrieved online from www.epfweb.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/rtno__EN_epf_online_2021.pdf (last accessed December 15, 2020); Graff *et al.*, “Introduction”.

offers the discursive grounds for this kind of semiotic work by providing semantic flexibility to antigender propaganda.

“Back to the Future? The Tradwives Movement and the New Forms of Conservative Consensus Building” by Bruna Di Sabato (University of Naples Suor Orsola Benincasa, Italy) and Bronwen Hughes (University of Naples “Parthenope”, Italy) zoom in on the role of conservative women in countering feminist views of gender. The authors integrate methodologies and approaches drawn from Corpus-Based Discourse Analysis and Systemic Functional Linguistics to investigate the online ‘Tradwives’ movement. By exploring different discourses and ideologies, they progressively reveal forms of kid-gloved nationalism and gender discrimination.

The paper “‘Beautiful, Maidenlike and a Housewife’: Gender in the Rise of the Far Right in Brazil” by Douglas R. Knupp Sanque (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) focuses on how the friction between different forms of femininity in Brazilian politics opened the discursive avenue for the rise of Jair Bolsonaro and his misogynistic rhetoric. In particular, the author investigates the textual trajectories of a magazine article about the trophy wife of former president Michel Temer and how it pitched a traditional form of femininity against the unconventional gender performances of Dilma Rousseff during her impeachment trial. The author thus demonstrates how the conservative performance of gender helped discursively construct Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment and was later implemented into the complex neofascist discursive rhetoric that led to the election of Jair Bolsonaro.

In her paper “The Vilification of the ‘Squad’: The Discursive (De)Construction of Women in U.S. Far-Right Media”, Margaret Rasulo (University of Campania Luigi Vanvitelli, Italy) investigates which discursive strategies are deployed in the headlines, images, and reader comments of the popular far-right *Breitbart News Network* website in the representation of the four first-term Democratic women of colour (i.e., Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, Rashida Tlaib of Michigan and Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts), referred to as the ‘Squad’. In her contribution Rasulo illustrates that the ensuing representation intentionally provoked a vitriolic response from *Breitbart’s* readership.

In “‘Unicorns’, ‘Narcissistic Snowflakes’ and ‘Undifferentiated’ Citizens. Gender in YouTube-Populism. The Case of *Lega Nord* and UKIP” by Serena Santonocito (University of Naples Parthenope, Italy) investigates the transnational discursive representation of gender in the context of social networking sites. Using quantitative and qualitative approaches, the author zeroes in on the official YouTube channels of UKIP (UK) and *Lega Nord* (Italy) to scrutinize how these parties use antigender rhetoric to discursively mobilize discriminatory views and uncivil behaviours from their supporters.

Last but far from least, Ping-Hsuan Wang (Language Training & Testing Center, Taipei, Taiwan), in the contribution titled “Populism against Same-Sex Marriage in Taiwan. Integrating Stance-taking and Framing in Facebook Posts and Comments”, articulates the ‘stance triangle’ (evaluation-positioning-alignment) and frame theory with a view to analysing the way in which populist discourses linguistically construct a singular ‘people’ against ‘the elites’. Pitting the authentic (i.e. heterosexual) ‘people’ against ‘elites’ that supposedly aim to destroy the status quo, as Wang illustrates, is strategically achieved by the Coalition of Happiness for Our Next Generation’s (CHONG, 下一代幸福聯盟) stance against same-sex marriage (SSM) in Taiwan, who uses social media to amplify the reach of its bigotry.

Together, the papers in this special issue of *Anglistica AION* paint a vivid (albeit terrifying) portrait of our contemporary times. Importantly, they illustrate that attending to the intricacies of discourse, rather than being an epiphenomenon of the recent global rise of far-right extremism, is one of its central dimensions. It is through the rather convoluted ways far-right actors discuss gender that they manage to forge thwarted images of human rights demands, mobilising ever bigger factions of the

population against gender equality and sexual diversity. The complexity of the contexts investigated here attest to the sophisticated ways through which far-right extremists develop transnational modes of action, tropes, figures, rhetorical forms, and concepts that are yielded in attempts to halt the empowerment of minoritized groups worldwide. Investigating the (anti)gender discourse of the global far-right may be painful but is a necessary step to garner the impetus to counter-act. We hope this special issue contributes to this end.



Des hommes during La Manif pour Tous on February 2, 2014 in Lyon
From https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hommes_d%C3%A9fend_la_famille.JPG
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Discursive Constructions of the Enemy through Metonymy. The Case of CitizenGo's Anti-Genderist E-Petitions

Abstract: Many studies have mentioned the significance of the online petition platform *CitizenGo.org* in mobilizing a transnational network of right-wing extremist groups and disseminating their 'anti-genderist' agenda. However, the specific discursive practices employed in the online petitions remain underexamined. In the current study, we bridge this gap by combining corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis. Following a corpus-driven approach through Sketch Engine, key-multiwords related to gender/sexuality were analyzed in terms of metonymy. The analysis revealed three different metonymic variants (i.e., PART FOR WHOLE, WHOLE FOR PART, and PART FOR PART), which are strategically employed in the construction of a depersonalized gendered/sexual Other, and the repurposing of progressive vocabulary for regressive ends. We argue that metonymy provides a semantic flexibility to the anti-genderist propaganda, and as such, it merits serious scholarly attention.

Keywords: *anti-genderism, CitizenGo, metonymy, corpus linguistics, critical discourse analysis, global right*

1. Introduction¹

In the last decades, conservative anti-feminist movements have significantly grown around a coherent agenda, which selectively borrows from liberal-left, feminist, and anti-colonial discourses, replaces individual rights with rights of the family, and positions religious conservatives as an oppressed minority.² Such anti-gender campaigns and mobilizations around the globe began in the mid-2000s, and have manifested ever since in a variety of diverse national contexts such as Spain, Slovenia, France, Poland, Brazil, India and the United States.³ Despite its local contextualization across different countries, gender conservatism is not “just one of many aspects of right-wing value systems”, but rather “a sentiment at the heart of the Right’s value system and political strategy, a platform for organizing and for recruiting massive support”.⁴ From this perspective, anti-genderism has been described as a transnational phenomenon, “a coherent ideological construction consciously and effectively used by right-wing and religious fundamentalists worldwide”.⁵ Even though the global Right is not a unified political movement, anti-genderism builds a coherent cross-national resistance to the gains achieved by feminist and LGBTQ+ movements over the years. Although not all members of

¹ We would like to thank the following people for their insights, which enhanced the quality of this paper: the two anonymous reviewers, the editors Rodrigo Borba and Giuseppe Balirano, our supervisor Erez Levon, and our PhD peers at Queen Mary University of London Chiara Ardoino, Matthew Hunt, Liam O’Hare, Rosie Oxbury, Louis Strange, and Chloé Vincent. All remaining mistakes are, of course, our own.

² Elżbieta Korolczuk and Agnieszka Graff, “Gender as ‘Ebola from Brussels’: The Anticolonial Frame and the Rise of Illiberal Populism”, *Signs*, 43.4 (2018), 797-821.

³ For an overview see Agnieszka Graff et al., “Introduction: Gender and the Rise of the Global Right”, *Signs*, 44.3 (2019), 541-560; Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, eds., *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017); Sonia Corrêa, ed., *Políticas Antigênero en América Latina: Estudos de Caso* (Rio de Janeiro: Associação Brasileira Interdisciplinas de Aids - ABIA, 2021), <https://sxpolitics.org/GPAL/>.

⁴ Graff et al., “Introduction”, 541.

⁵ Korolczuk and Graff, “Gender as ‘Ebola from Brussels’: The Anticolonial Frame and the Rise of Illiberal Populism”, 798.

the Right are religious, it is noteworthy that the religious Right has risen fast worldwide⁶. It adopts a rhetoric that foregrounds anti-genderism as a scientific and “alternative field of knowledge production” based on a Christian humanism.⁷ Ultimately, by exploiting divergences within feminist thought about sexual differences, colonialism and classism, the (religious) Right appropriates progressive discourses for regressive ends when opposing gender, sexual and reproductive rights.⁸

Despite their heterogeneity, anti-genderist discourses systematically involve the semantic reconfiguration of progressive vocabulary. An indicative example is the coalition between the Holy See, Muslim leaders, and right-wing US fundamentalist Protestants who contested the meaning of certain terms included in the “Declaration and Platform for Action” discussed at the 1995 conference in Beijing. They successfully discarded the mention of “sexual orientation” as a category of protection against discrimination, on the basis that it contradicts religious and cultural values of certain states.⁹ In particular, they argued that human rights are being semantically elasticized and degraded, because “sexual orientation” normalizes pedophilia, bestiality, incest, and adultery.¹⁰ Similar reservations were also expressed against “gender”, which was framed by the Vatican as a Western imperialist attempt to colonialize international human rights.¹¹ In particular, the Vatican proclaimed a “nightmarish vision” of “gender” as concealing a secret (pro-LGBTQ+) agenda that threatens the nucleus of a stable society – i.e., the “natural” sexual order and heterosexual family – by urging people to choose their gender/sexuality regardless of biological differences.¹² Interestingly, while articulating an explicitly anti-feminist discourse under the label “new feminism”, the Vatican distanced itself from sexism by replacing discussions of “natural subordination of women” with discussions of the “complementary differences of the sexes”, thus leaving gender hierarchies intact.¹³ This discourse was crystalized in a lexicon¹⁴ written by the Vatican as a referential clarification of “ambiguous and debatable terms” promulgating a “culture of death”. By conflating heterogeneous (mostly radical) feminist groups that draw on critical, feminist, and queer scholarship, this lexicon accused “gender feminists” of secretly spreading an unscientific, Neo-Marxist “gender ideology” through the creation of a totalitarian “Orwellian language”.¹⁵

Of course, the semantic demonization of the terms “gender” and “sexual orientation” alongside the very use of the term “gender ideology” is far from being a naïve misunderstanding of gender studies.¹⁶

⁶ Graff et al., “Introduction”, 543.

⁷ Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk, “‘Worse than Communism and Nazism Put Together’: War on Gender in Poland”, in Roman Kuhar and David Patternote, eds., *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 183.

⁸ For an example of how anti-genderist movements use discourses of their opponents for their own goals, see the discussion about “grafting” in Gal, Susan, “Making registers in politics: Circulation and ideologies of linguistic authority”, *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 23.5 (2019), 450-466.

⁹ Dianne Otto, “Lesbians? Not in My Country”, *Alternative Law Journal*, 20.6 (1995), 288-290.

¹⁰ Cynthia Rotschild, “We Would Have a Hard Time Going Home: Fear of Sexuality in the International Sphere”, in Scott Lang and Susana T. Fried, eds., *Written Out: How Sexuality is Used to Attack Women's Organizing* (New York: International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission), 83-120.

¹¹ Doris E. Buss, “Robes, Relics, and Rights: The Vatican and the Beijing Conference on Women”, *Social and Legal Studies*, 7.3 (1998), 339-363.

¹² Mary Anne Case, “After Gender the Destruction of Man: The Vatican's Nightmare Vision of the Gender Agenda for Law”, *Pace Law Review*, 31.3 (2011), 802-817.

¹³ Sara Garbagnoli, “Le Vatican Contre la Dénaturalisation de l'Ordre Sexuel: Structure et Enjeux d'un Discours Institutionnel Réactionnaire”, *Synergies Italie*, 10 (2014), 145-167; Sara Garbagnoli, “Against the Heresy of Immanence: Vatican's ‘Gender’ as a New Rhetorical Device against the Denaturalization of the Sexual Order”, *Religion and Gender*, 6.2 (2016), 187-204.

¹⁴ Pontifical Council for the Family, *Lexicon: Ambiguous and Debatable Terms regarding Family Life and Ethical Questions* (Front Royal, VA: Human Life International, 2006).

¹⁵ For an example of how the use of a gender-neutral morpheme in a Brazilian educational context stirred debate, see Rodrigo Borba, “Gendered Politics of Enmity: Language Ideologies and Social Polarisation in Brazil”, *Gender and Language*, 13.4 (2019), 423-448.

¹⁶ Agnieszka Graff, “‘Gender Ideology’: Weak Concepts, Powerful Politics”, *Religion & Gender*, 6.2 (2016), 268-272.

Rather, similar semantic contestations emerge as strategic political tools to mobilize a transnational network of conservative actors consisting of religious leaders, right-wing political parties, international anti-choice organizations (e.g., World Congress of Families) and online petition platforms (e.g., CitizenGo.org).¹⁷ Although these assembled groups often have conflicting interests, they draw on each other's agendas to contest austerity measures, precarity, and allegedly corrupt elites (UN, EU, WHO) who are thought to colonize the world with "gender ideology". Through petitions, demonstrations, publications, workshops, conferences and political initiatives, anti-genderists employ right-wing populist, fear-mongering discursive constructions – e.g., victim-perpetrator reversal, scapegoating, and the construction of conspiracy theories –¹⁸ to frame themselves as the true minority that needs to be saved from a neoliberal ideology of gender.¹⁹ As such, "gender ideology" becomes a "performative utterance that transforms the social reality it supposedly describes".²⁰ It constitutes a "symbolic glue"²¹ or an "empty signifier"²² that conflates highly heterogeneous groups into a contestable, common (queer/neoliberal) enemy.

Although scholarly work on anti-genderism as a transnational phenomenon is growing,²³ studies that specifically focus on the linguistic construction of anti-genderist discourse are relatively lacking (though notable exceptions are: Barát on the populist anti-gender discourses in Hungary;²⁴ Borba on language ideology and gendered politics in Brasil,²⁵ and on the functions of anti-genderism as a register;²⁶ Mad'arová on anti-genderists' argumentative strategies in Slovakia;²⁷ and Russell on homophobic language in European far-right groups).²⁸ Taking into consideration the aforementioned theoretical contributions to anti-genderism, the present article delves deeper into the ways in which the semantic appropriation and reconfiguration of progressive vocabulary is involved in anti-genderist discourses from a linguistic perspective. In particular, we argue that the manipulation of the meaning associated with terms like "gender" and "sexual orientation" is systematically involved in the strategic creation of a tangible gendered/sexual enemy, against whom people must take action. This is accomplished through the metonymization of progressive vocabulary to refer to a dangerous gendered/sexual Other. As Mbembe puts it, in the contemporary era, where separation, hate movements and hostility prevail, "the enemy is [...] more dangerous by being everywhere: without a face, name, or place".²⁹ In what follows, we show that metonymy is involved in a "game of representations" with the ultimate goal to turn feminist and other progressive groups into a "type-image" (47), in which the dangerous enemy finds a face and a name. We specifically focus on the

¹⁷ Kuhar and Paternotte, *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe*; Korolczuk and Graff, "Gender as 'Ebola from Brussels'".

¹⁸ Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (London: Sage, 2015).

¹⁹ Graff and Korolczuk, "'Worse than Communism and Nazism Put Together'".

²⁰ Garbagnoli, "Against the Heresy", 198.

²¹ Eszter Kováts and Maari Põim, eds., *Gender as Symbolic Glue: The Position and Role of Conservative and Far Right Parties in the Anti-Gender Mobilization in Europe* (Brussels: FEPS and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Budapest, 2015).

²² Stefanie Mayer and Birgit Sauer, "'Gender Ideology' in Austria: Coalitions around an Empty Signifier", in Roman Kuhar and David Patternote, eds., *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 23-40.

²³ Elizabeth Corredor, "Unpacking 'Gender Ideology' and the Global Right's Antigender Countermovement", *Signs*, 44.3 (2019), 613-638; Graff et al., "Introduction"; Korolczuk and Graff, "Gender as 'Ebola from Brussels'".

²⁴ Erzsébet Barát, "Populist Discourse and Desire for Social Justice", in Kira Hall and Rusty Barrett, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Sexuality* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., forthcoming).

²⁵ Borba, "Gendered Politics of Enmity".

²⁶ Borba, "Enregistering 'Gender Ideology'", *Journal of Language and Sexuality* (forthcoming).

²⁷ Zuzana Mad'arová, "Love and Fear: Argumentative Strategies against Gender Equality in Slovakia", in Heinrich Boll Foundation, *Anti-gender Movements on the Rise? Strategising for Gender Equality in Central and Eastern Europe* (Berlin: Heinrich Boll Foundation, 2015).

²⁸ Eric Russel, "Les Hommen: The Language of Reactionary Masculinity", *Gender and Language*, 13.1 (2019), 94-121.

²⁹ Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Durham: Duke U.P., 2019), 49.

online petition platform *CitizenGo.org*, since it provides access to written discourses that get disseminated around the globe. As such, they play a significant role in orchestrating the transnational anti-genderist movement, and it becomes imperative to understand their discursive strategies in calling for political action.

2. CitizenGo: The Expansion of an International Network

The genesis of CitizenGo dates back to the late 1990s, when its founder Ignacio Arsuaga discovered American grassroots movements and their lobbying tools.³⁰ Arsuaga was especially drawn to the rising popularity of new digital technologies for political action (e.g., *MoveOn.org*), which he employed in 2001 when founding *HazteOir.org* (“make yourself heard”). This Spanish website presented itself as a populist online platform that offered a forum, e-petitions and different sources of political information to Spanish people who felt abandoned by their government and want to take political action. Although the website claimed to not “promote any ideology”,³¹ its initiatives were undertaken in the name of a “Christian humanism”.³²

After spending more than a decade adapting online advocacy techniques from American to Spanish politics, *HazteOir.org* launched its expansion platform *CitizenGo.org* in October 2013. Among its board of trustees are personalities who have connections to influential international anti-LGBTQ+, pro-life, and ultraconservative groups.³³ Although its headquarters are located in Madrid, its team members – who are proclaimed “social leaders” in issues relating to “family, life, and liberty” – cooperate in a “virtual (international) office”, where they offer campaigns in twelve languages influencing institutions, governments and organizations in fifty different countries.³⁴ Since its development into a transnational platform, CitizenGo has gained important impact, reflected in the exponentially increasing self-reported numbers of *HazteOir* and CitizenGo’s members.³⁵ As illustrated in Figure 1, starting from 380,000 in 2013, CitizenGo has more than 14 million members to date. Compared to the relatively small numbers of *HazteOir*’s members, these increasing numbers are indicative of CitizenGo’s success and transnational influence.

As a platform that enables the solidification of a wide-spanning network, CitizenGo has the potential to spread ultraconservative propaganda internationally. For instance, it supported France’s *Manif Pour Tous*,³⁶ Ireland’s anti-abortion rallies³⁷ and co-organized workshops with the World Congress of Families in Italy.³⁸ A recent campaign that caught the media’s attention was a bus with transphobic slogans that circulated through Spain, France,³⁹ Germany,⁴⁰ Kenya,⁴¹ Chile,⁴² and the

³⁰ J. Lester Feder, “The Rise of Europe’s Religious Right”, *BuzzFeedNews* (2014), <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/lesterfeder/the-rise-of-europes-religious-right>.

³¹ “Sobre Hazteoir”, *HazteOir.org*, (n.d.), <http://www.hazteoir.org/p/todo-hazteoir-org>.

³² For a review of *HazteOir*’s political engagement: Monica Corneja and José Ignacio Pichardo-Galán, “From the Pulpit to the Streets: Ultra-Conservative Religious Positions against Gender in Spain”, in Roman Kuhar and David Patternote, eds., *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe. Mobilizing against Equality* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 233-252.

³³ For a review: Ellen Rivera, “Unraveling the Anti-Choice Supergroup Agenda Europe in Spain. A Case Study of CitizenGo and HazteOir”, *CovertAction Magazine* (2020), <https://covertactionmagazine.com/index.php/2020/01/03/unraveling-the-anti-choice-supergroup-agenda-europe-in-spain-a-case-study-of-citizen-go-and-hazteoir>.

³⁴ “About us”, *CitizenGo.org*, (n.d.), <https://www.citizen-go.org/en/about-us>.

³⁵ Adapted from “Memorias HO”, *HazteOir.org*.

³⁶ Catherine Mallaval and Virginie Ballet, “CitizenGo, Chambre d’Écho des Bigots”, *Libération* (2016), https://www.liberation.fr/france/2016/11/23/citizen-go-chambre-d-echo-des-bigots_1530482_

³⁷ Andrea Peña, “CitizenGo Reúne más de 50.000 Firmas para Apoyar el ‘NO al Aborto’ en Irlanda”, *Actual* (2018), <https://www.actual.com/vida/citizen-go-reune-mas-de-50-000-mensajes-de-apoyo-al-no-al-aborto-en-irlanda/>.

³⁸ Hélène Barthélemy, “The American Anti-LGBT Movement Goes to Italy”, *SPLCenter.org* (2018), <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/12/19/american-anti-lgbt-movement-goes-italy>

³⁹ Nigari, “Le Bus CitizenGO contre la théorie du genre face au lobby LGBT”, *AgoraVox.tv* (2017), https://www.agoravox.tv/tribune-libre/article/le-bus-citizen-go-contre-la-theorie-74722_

US.⁴³ Probably its most well-known success was in 2013 when the EU parliament discussed the “Estrela Report” about women’s health and reproductive rights. CitizenGo collected signatures and orchestrated the sending of 200,000 threatening e-mails to politicians who supported the non-binding resolution⁴⁴, which led to the unexpected rejection of the report.

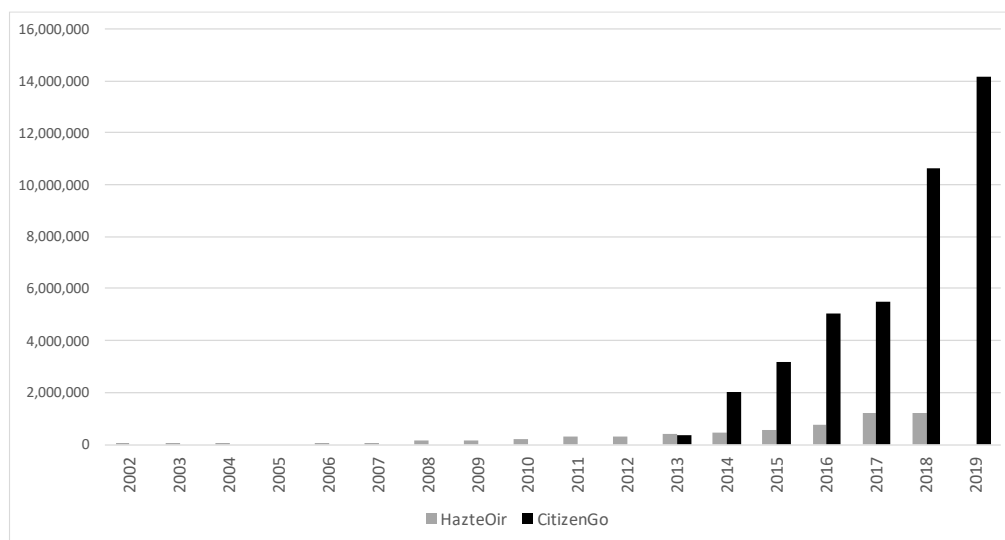


Figure 1. Numbers of HazteOír and CitizenGo’s members

Given its growing socio-political impact, many studies mention the central role of CitizenGo in the global anti-genderist movement,⁴⁵ or highlight its local adaptation across national contexts such as across Latin America.⁴⁶ However, none has actually analyzed the use of language in CitizenGo electronic petitions (e-petitions). In the current study, we make use of the data-driven synergy of corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis to explore the discursive and argumentative tools employed in CitizenGo’s e-petitions. As explained in the following section, we particularly focus on the systematic use of metonymy, which we argue is a mechanism involved in the multivalent semantic plasticity of “gender ideology” rhetoric.

⁴⁰ Katja Thorwarth, “Der Bus des Grauens”, *Fr.de* (2017), <https://www.fr.de/meinung/grauens-11025288.html>.

⁴¹ Cole Parke, “The Right’s ‘Gender Ideology’ Menace Rolls to Africa”, *OpenDemocracy.net* (2018), <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/gender-ideology-menace-rolls-to-africa>.

⁴² Efe Noticias, “Polémico Bus CitizenGO Llega a Chile y Organizaciones LGBTI se Movilizan en su Contra”, *DiarioElDia.cl* (2017), <http://www.diarioeldia.cl/pais/polemico-bus-citizen-go-llega-chile-organizaciones-lgbti-se-movilizan-en-su-contra>.

⁴³ “Support Biological Reality! Support the #FreeSpeechBus!”, *CitizenGo.org*, (n.d.), <http://citizen-go.org/en/ed/42723-freespeechbus>.

⁴⁴ Nikolaj Nielsen, “MEP Receives 41,000 Emails against Gay Rights”, *EUObserver.com* (2014), <https://euobserver.com/justice/123001>.

⁴⁵ E.g., Corredor, “Unpacking ‘gender ideology’”; Graff et al., “Introduction”; Korolczuk and Graff, “Gender as ‘Ebola from Brussels’”.

⁴⁶ Corrêa, *Políticas Antigénero en América Latina*.

3. Data & Method

We scraped 687 e-petitions (351,020 words) that were available in CitizenGo from 18 September 2013 (first petition) to 24 June 2019. For ease of analysis, we restricted our corpus to those petitions published under the language tab “English”. To contextually ground the analysis, we also kept the following meta-data: the petition’s URL, addressee, date, and author. Images and a few passages written in non-Anglophone languages were replaced with a tag. The corpus was then uploaded into the online software Sketch Engine⁴⁷ which automatically annotated the data for part-of-speech.

We chose to approach the data in an exploratory, bottom-up manner, by triangulating critical discourse analysis with computerized corpus linguistics tools. That is, instead of starting the analysis with preconceived hypotheses, we let the quantitative and qualitative results guide us through “a corpus-driven approach” to analyze discourse.⁴⁸ The mixing of these methods has been shown to reduce researchers’ bias when conducting discourse analysis.⁴⁹ We thus started with a quantitative keyword analysis.⁵⁰ This reveals which linguistic items occur more often in our corpus than expected when compared to the whole “English Web 2013”⁵¹ reference corpus containing online language (ca. 19.6 billions words). The effect-size metric “simple math” was used to calculate keywords. This metric is a simple ratio of relative frequencies of words plus a variable N that controls for low- and high-frequency keywords. Keeping N=0 generated a list where the top keywords represented exclusive words in our corpus that referred to hashtags, political personalities, documents, and organizations (e.g., #freespeechbus, Petr Jašek, Katarzyna Jachimowicz, GIRFY, etc.). These keywords did not reveal any shared, transnational concerns that were representative of our CitizenGo corpus, as they only appeared in single petitions. Therefore, through trial and error, we settled upon N=10 to generate higher frequency (case insensitive) keywords that revealed transnational political discourses shared in multiple e-petitions. Keywords’ statistical significance was also tracked, by examining corresponding log-likelihood scores with a threshold of $p < 0.0001$.⁵²

We then manually grouped the top 100 keywords with the largest effect sizes (ranging from 8.5 to 125.7) that were significant at $p < 0.0001$ into the following 14 semantic categories: bodily integrity, CitizenGo, crime, family, gender and sexuality, humanity, language, law and rights, nation-state, places, religion, reproduction, values, and miscellaneous. Although those categories hint at expected concerns present in e-petitions, we chose to focus on the most relevant category for the current study, namely “gender and sexuality”. We read through its 1757 instances of the keywords *LGBT*, *(trans)gender*, *homosexual(ity)*, *sex[ual]ity*, *pornography*, *prostitution*, and *gay*, and noticed that some keywords were often used metonymically.

Metonymy is a figure of language and thought in which one entity (a source) is used as a vehicle to refer to another entity (a target), within the same frame, domain or idealized cognitive model (ICM).⁵³ For instance, in the sentence “He was shocked by Vietnam”, “Vietnam” (source) is used as a metonymic vehicle referring to the war that happened in the 1960-70s (target) and not to its literal meaning (i.e., the location). Despite the close relationship between metaphor and metonymy, there is

⁴⁷ Sketch Engine, “What is Sketch Engine?” (2020), <https://www.sketchengine.eu/#blue>.

⁴⁸ Elena Tognini-Bonelli, *Corpus Linguistics at Work* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001).

⁴⁹ Paul Baker et al., “A Useful Methodological Synergy? Combining Critical Discourse Analysis and Corpus Linguistics to Examine Discourses of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the UK Press”, *Discourse and Society*, 19.3 (2008), 273-306.

⁵⁰ Costas Gabrielatos, “Keyness Analysis: Nature, Metrics and Techniques”, in Charlotte Taylor and Anna Marchi, eds., *Corpus Approaches to Discourse: A Critical Review* (London: Routledge, 2018), 225-258.

⁵¹ Sketch Engine, “enTenTen: Corpus of the English Web” (2020), <https://www.sketchengine.eu/ententen-english-corpus/#toggle-id-3-closed>.

⁵² Gabrielatos, “Keyness Analysis”, 254n8.

⁵³ Günter Radden and Zoltán Kövecses, “Towards a Theory of Metonymy”, in Klaus-Uwe Panther and Günter Radden, eds., *Metonymy in Language and Thought* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999), 17-59.

one important distinction made with respect to the notion of “contiguity”: in metonymy, the source and the target are semantically related, as they belong to the same ICM. Based on this, a corpus-driven approach to metonymy can reveal how a specific concept is systematically assigned to different related meanings through figurative speech and, thus, how it is semantically manipulated.

Given that metonymy often operates above the word-level,⁵⁴ the previous keyword procedure was applied to Sketch Engine to calculate and identify “gender and sexuality” key-multiwords (i.e., unusually frequent two-word phrases with a noun headword). Since Sketch Engine is liable to annotate some multiwords inaccurately (e.g., in *gender ideology* the software annotated some instances of *gender* as a verb), all instances of the generated key-multiwords were considered regardless of their part-of-speech annotation and number. As shown in Table 1, our analysis considered 705 instances of key-multiwords originating from 27.8% (n=191) e-petitions.

As Dirven argues, metonymy is situated on a continuum between literal language and metaphor, which often makes its occurrence hard to spot.⁵⁵ While early research on metonymy relied on intuition-based judgments for its identification,⁵⁶ we drew on Markert and Nissim’s corpus-based annotation scheme to systematically spot metonymies.⁵⁷ Their scheme, which particularly focuses on metonymic uses of locations and organization names, involves the annotation of their data (e.g., locations) using three categories (i.e., metonymic, literal, and mixed reading). However, their approach is a top-down analysis which builds on previous literature on the relevant metonymic mappings (e.g., place-for-event). Since we were dealing with understudied and not clear-cut metonymic patterns which are not immediately recognizable, we decided not to directly code for metonymies. Rather, next to the literal and ambiguous categories, we used a broader category of “figurative readings” that also included metaphors. After comparing our coding and resolving our disagreements one by one, we excluded from qualitative analysis key-multiwords that were used literally more than 90% of the time: *same-sex*, *opposite-sex*, *biological sex(es)*, *sexual exploitation*, *human sexuality*, *sexual violence*, *gay pride*, *gender dysphoria* (see Table 1).

In order to specifically identify metonymies without any presuppositions of their conceptual mappings, we followed Biernacka’s bottom-up approach.⁵⁸ This consists in 1) identifying lexical units, 2) establishing their contextual meaning, 3) determining if they have a more basic contemporary meaning in other contexts than the meaning in the given context, and 4) determining whether the two meanings are connected by contiguity (i.e., semantic closeness), in which case the identified lexical unit is used metonymically. Therefore, we coded the figurative and ambiguous cases by determining their contextual meaning through a reading of their concordance lines (i.e., their occurrence with neighboring co-text), and comparing it to their contemporary reading.⁵⁹ The *Cambridge Dictionary of English* (CDE) was deemed to be an appropriate reference due to its data-informed entries. If contextual and contemporary meanings were different and their connection was one of semantic closeness and adjacency, then the key-multiword was classed as a metonymy vehicle that designates a semantically-related referent. Overall, we identified 130 metonymies. Ambiguous (whereby the contextual meaning could be both literal and metonymic) and exclusively metaphorical cases were excluded from analysis (e.g., *sexual revolution* and *sex(ual[ity]) education*). Although 67.9% of the

⁵⁴ Jeannette Littlemore, *Metonymy: Hidden Shortcuts in Language, Thought and Communication* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2015), chapter 6.

⁵⁵ René Dirven, “Metonymy and Metaphor: Different Mental Strategies of Conceptualisation”, in René Dirven and Ralf Pörings, eds., *Metaphor and Metonymy in Comparison and Contrast* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2003), 75-112.

⁵⁶ Littlemore, *Metonymy*, 19-20.

⁵⁷ Katja Markert and Malvina Nissim, “Corpus-Based Metonymy Analysis”, *Metaphor and Symbol*, 18.3 (2003), 175-188.

⁵⁸ Ewa Biernacka, *A Discourse Dynamics Investigation of Metonymy in Talk* (PhD Thesis, The Open University, 2013), 115-127.

⁵⁹ See Biernacka, *A Discourse Dynamics Investigation of Metonymy in Talk*.

705 key-multiwords were most often used literally, the 130 identified metonymies revealed a systematic pattern in their conceptual mapping, indicating an incremental discursive effect with socio-political consequences.

KEY-MULTIWORDS	Freq.	%Texts (N)	Literal	Metonymy	Ambiguous
			% (N)	% (N)	% (N)
<i>same-sex</i>	249	13.10 (90)	99.6 (248)	0.4 (1)	- -
<i>gender identit(y/ies)</i>	61	5.39 (37)	57.4 (35)	21.3 (13)	21.3 (13)
<i>sexual orientation(s)</i>	53	5.24 (36)	41.5 (22)	17.0 (9)	41.5 (22)
<i>sex([ual]ity) education</i>	84	3.93 (27)	54.8 (46)	2.4 (2)	42.9 (36)
<i>gender ideology</i>	36	3.06 (21)	- -	100 (36)	- -
<i>opposite-sex</i>	28	2.91 (20)	100 (28)	- -	- -
<i>gay marriage(s)</i>	26	2.47 (17)	- -	100 (26)	- -
<i>biological sex(es)</i>	17	2.33 (16)	100 (17)	- -	- -
<i>sexual exploitation</i>	29	1.46 (10)	89.7 (26)	6.9 (2)	3.4 (1)
<i>sexual revolution</i>	13	1.46 (10)	- -	- -	- -
<i>gay lobby</i>	15	1.31 (9)	- -	100 (15)	- -
<i>gender expression(s)</i>	11	1.31 (9)	- -	- -	100 (11)
<i>human sexuality</i>	12	1.16 (8)	100 (12)	- -	- -
<i>sexual violence</i>	23	1.02 (7)	100 (23)	- -	- -
<i>transgender ideology</i>	15	1.02 (7)	- -	100 (15)	- -
<i>gay pride</i>	12	1.02 (7)	91.7 (11)	8.3 (1)	- -
<i>gender dysphoria</i>	11	1.02 (7)	100 (11)	- -	- -
<i>sexual agenda</i>	10	1.02 (7)	- -	100 (10)	- -
TOTAL	705	27.80 (191)	67.9 (479)	18.4 (130)	11.8 (83)

Table 1. Analyzed key-multiwords

4. Analysis

The fact that metonymy is situated between literal language and metaphor is related to some of its “edgier” communicative functions: namely vague language, evaluation and positioning.⁶⁰ That is, the intended meaning (target) often remains unspecified. It constructs a vagueness that can be strategically manipulated for communicative and evaluative purposes. Alongside strategic vagueness, metonymies have been reported to have a strong depersonalizing effect⁶¹ in contexts where speakers/authors want to create distance from a particular group of people, while reducing it to its most relevant attributes. From this perspective, uses of metonymy are practices of *othering* whereby a given Other is strategically framed as an out-group with specific, conveniently condensed defining properties. This function of metonymy alongside its socio-political implications has been investigated across various contexts. A large body of work has looked at the role of metonymy in the development of in-/out-

⁶⁰ Littlemore, *Metonymy*, 96-97.

⁶¹ Littlemore, *Metonymy*; Ruth Wodak et al., *The Discursive Construction of National Identity* (Edinburg: Edinburg U.P., 2009).

group relationships in political discourse,⁶² journalistic media,⁶³ as well as in the construction of national identity⁶⁴ or faith communities.⁶⁵ In the present section, we explore how systematic metonymic uses of the identified key-multiwords are involved in the construction of a gendered/sexual Other targeted by anti-genderist e-petitions.

Although there are a number of different typologies of metonymy suggested in the relevant literature,⁶⁶ the majority of them involve a PART-WHOLE relationship.⁶⁷ According to this relationship, the metonymic reading of a lexical item mobilizes either a whole conceptual entity or a part of it (source), in order to invoke the intended referent (target) within the same ICM. Overall, the metonymized key-multiwords found in our data fall into three broader categories, according to the type of metonymic mapping they instantiate: i.e., PART FOR WHOLE, WHOLE FOR PART and PART FOR PART. In the remainder of this section, we explore each of these types, which systematically appear as MEMBER OF CATEGORY FOR CATEGORY, CATEGORY FOR MEMBER OF CATEGORY⁶⁸ and DEFINING PROPERTY FOR STANCE respectively. Taking into consideration the contextually emergent metonymic meaning of the key-multiwords, as well as the nuances of each metonymization process, we will argue for the central role of these metonymies in the construction of the gendered/sexual enemy.

4.1 Member of category for category

The first type of metonymy found in the figurative use of gender/sexuality-related key-multiwords involves a PART FOR WHOLE mapping, where a subgroup of an entity (source) is used to refer to the entity as a whole (target), e.g., “England” for “Great Britain”. This pattern is systematically found in all the instances of the key-multiword *gay lobby*:

- (1) *These leaders need your encouragement to withstand the pressure of the **gay lobby**, the mainstream media, and the apparatus of the Western European powers which seem to have turned their face against the natural family.*

Author: CitizenGo
Addressee: 24 European Prime Ministers/Presidents

Extract (1) appears in a petition opposing the decision of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) to rule against Italy on the basis that it does not legally recognize same-sex marriage. The petition is addressed to “the leaders of 24 European countries (most of them, in Eastern Europe) which still recognize marriage between a man and a woman and which are party to the ECHR”. Its intention is to encourage those leaders to refuse to modify their country’s legal framework in case the “gay lobby, the mainstream media and the apparatus of the Western European powers” puts pressure on

⁶² Teun A. van Dijk, *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (London: SAGE Publications, 1998); Wodak, *The Politics of Fear*.

⁶³ Weiwei Zhang et al., “Variation in the Non Metonymic Capital Names in Mainland Chinese and Taiwan Chinese”, *Metaphor and the Social World*, 1.1 (2011), 90-112.

⁶⁴ Wodak et al., *Discursive Construction of National Identity*.

⁶⁵ Peter Richardson, *A Closer Walk: A Cognitive Linguistic Study of Movement and Proximity Metaphors and their Impact on Certainty in Muslim and Christian Language* (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2013).

⁶⁶ For an overview: Weiwei Zhang, *Variation in Metonymy: Cross-Linguistic, Historical and Lectal Perspectives* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2016), 20-23.

⁶⁷ This relationship is commonly found in the literature as “PART-WHOLE synecdoche”. Although synecdoche is often considered distinct from metonymy in traditional rhetoric, many scholars have argued that it is a subtype of metonymy. For an overview see: Zhang, *Variation in Metonymy*, 18-20.

⁶⁸ Radden and Kövecses, “Toward a Theory of Metonymy”, 34-35.

them. This formulation leads to an interesting question as to what *gay lobby* is actually referring to. According to CDE, *lobby* is defined as “a group of people who try to persuade the government or an official group to do something”. From this perspective, the literal meaning of the compound *gay lobby* would refer to LGBTQ+ groups whose political activity pressures policy makers to grant them rights. However, in the majority of the remaining petitions in which *gay lobby* occurs, nowhere do the petitioners refer to specific LGBTQ+ organizations and associations with socio-political activity. Rather, in extract (1) *gay lobby* refers to a wide range of unmentioned agents, groups and individuals who support same-sex marriage, and threaten to interfere with the pro-family legislation that the aforementioned 24 countries maintain. This is similar to what previous research found when analysing mentions of *gay lobby* in the Irish⁶⁹ and British⁷⁰ press. For instance, Baker argues that it is constructed as a homogenous group of people composed of unspecified “activists, campaigners, pressure groups, protesters, and demonstrators [... as well as] radicals and militants” who were described as “strident and vociferous” in their demands for gay rights.⁷¹

We argue that this use of the key-multiword *gay lobby* instantiates a PART FOR WHOLE metonymy and, more specifically a MEMBER OF CATEGORY FOR CATEGORY (i.e., LGBTQ+ associations for LGBTQ+ individuals and supporters of LGBTQ+ rights).⁷² Through this metonymic mapping, the petitioners condense referential information under a single descriptive term (i.e., *gay lobby*) which can be more easily instrumentalized in the service of political purposes. In particular, a whole range of positionalities is conflated under an abstract Other, and framed as a political opponent against whom the petition calls for action. In this way, any LGBTQ+ individual – but also any supporter of LGBTQ+ rights – is conveniently framed as part of a threatening lobby and, by implication, as the political enemy. This practice becomes even clearer in the PART FOR PART metonymy discussed in section 4.3.

4.2 Category for member of category

Another important type of metonymic mapping between source and target involves a WHOLE FOR PART relationship. That is, a whole entity (source) is used to refer to a part of it (target), e.g., “America” for “United States”. The key-multiwords *gender identity* and *sexual orientation* are commonly used in this way. As shown in Table 1 above, contrary to the other metonymic key-multiwords analyzed in the present study, these terms are also commonly used in literal speech (57,4% and 41,5%, respectively). According to CDE, “gender identity” is defined as “a person’s feeling of having a particular gender”, while “sexual orientation” is “the fact of someone preferring to have sexual relationships either with men, or with women, or both”. Both definitions refer to gender identity and sexual orientation as properties that include the whole range of gender/sexual identifications. A typical literal use of both multiwords – which mostly co-occur with each other – is given below:

- (2) *The Kentucky regulation states that "DJJ staff, volunteers, interns and contractors shall not imply or tell LGBTQI juveniles that they are abnormal, deviant, sinful or that they can or should change their **sexual orientation or gender identity**".*

Author: CitizenGo USA
 Addressee: Commissioner of the Kentucky Department of Juvenile Justice

⁶⁹ Leanne Barlety and Encarnación Hidalgo-Tenorio, “‘To Be Irish, Gay, and on the Outside’: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Other after the Celtic Tiger Period”, *Journal of Language and Sexuality*, 5.1 (2016), 1-36.

⁷⁰ Paul Baker, *Public Discourses of Gay Men* (London: Routledge, 2005).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁷² This is also the case in similar uses of the term *lobby* in other discourses, see *Green lobby*, *Black lobby*, *Catholic lobby* etc.

This e-petition argues against the policy of the Kentucky Department of Juvenile Justice described in the extract. *Sexual orientation* and *gender identity* are referring to a gender/sexuality-specific property that can or should be “changed”. That is, regardless of the argument in which they are involved, these key-multiwords are used in their literal “contemporary meaning”. Interestingly, a close look at the totality of similar literal uses reveals that all of them are included in reported speech; that is, they refer to documents or positions cited in the petitions, which are followed by negative evaluation or calls for action. In this sense, even when used literally as in (2), these terms are either mocked and framed as invented or attributed to other parties rather than the petitioners. In other words, the literal definition of these terms provided in the CDE already reflects an epistemological understanding of gender/sexual diversity which the petitioners reject; *gender identity* or *sexual orientation* are useless in a world-view that exclusively assumes the in-born and inherent existence of (heterosexual) man and woman. However, as we argue below, while some CitizenGo petitions report and reject the literal meaning of those terms, others even modify their contemporary referent through metonymy.

Excluding the ambiguous cases, in which the context is not sufficient to specify whether the intended meaning is literal or figurative (see Table 1), the following extracts focus on uses of *gender identity* and *sexual orientation* in which the referent clearly diverges from the literal, contemporary meaning of “property” (21,3% and 17% respectively):

- (3) *Support the pro-family movement in Trinidad and Tobago! Say NO to special rights for "sexual orientation". This petition is sponsored by the Trinidad and Tobago Council of Evangelical Churches*

Author: World Congress of Families (sponsored by the Trinidad and Tobago Council of Evangelical Churches, the International Organization for the Family)
Addressee: MP and Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago

- (4) *The city's first openly lesbian mayor, Annise Parker, has subpoenaed Houston pastors for all books, materials, speeches, and "all communications with members of your congregation" that mention homosexuality, and gender identity or Mayor Parker herself.*

Author: Alejandra Fabris (USA)
Addressee: Houston Mayor

Extract (3) appears in a petition calling for solidarity with the pro-family movement in Trinidad and Tobago, which is against the normalization of same-sex relations and anti-discrimination laws. Here, *sexual orientation* is framed as a claim uttered by certain groups which needs to be denied. The use of the preposition “for” in the phrase “sexual rights for” would usually call for an animate object (e.g., a group of people). However, the literal meaning of *sexual orientation* does not refer to a group of people, but to a property of a person. Given that an individual’s general characteristic (e.g., age) cannot be claimed or denied but simply exists, *sexual orientation* is used metonymically in this context to refer to non-heteronormative sexual identities, while implicitly excluding heterosexuals. Similarly, extract (4) is drawn from a petition which seeks to stop the Mayor of Houston, Annise Parker (who is a lesbian) from taking legal action against pastors who promote anti-LGBT ideas. *Gender identity* co-occurs with *homosexuality* and invokes the same discourse of non-normativity. That is, the pastors’ mentions of *gender identity* do not refer to “a person’s feeling of having a particular gender” as defined in CDE, but rather to non-heteronormative ideas around gender identity.

In these metonymic uses of *sexual orientation* and *gender identity*, the intended referent (or metonymic target) invokes non-heteronormative positionalities within the gendered and/or sexual spectrum. As a WHOLE FOR PART metonymy, an entity-source (i.e., gender and sexuality as a property which involves the whole range of identities) is used to invoke a non-normative subgroup as

its target. In this sense, the metonymic mapping invokes a CATEGORY FOR MEMBER OF CATEGORY relationship: i.e., the generic and inclusive “gender/sexuality” for “non-normative gender/sexuality”. Crucially, the contextual meaning of all these instances can potentially conflate various referents under these lexical units (e.g., LGBTQ+ individuals, supporters of LGBTQ+ rights, feminists). More accurately, the targeted referent here involves all those agents who understand, and literally use, the terms *gender identity* and *sexual orientation* to refer to gender/sexual diversity. They thus adopt the epistemological understanding that the very use of these terms entails. Simply put, in this WHOLE FOR PART metonymy the literal referent of these key-multiwords – i.e., a property that everyone (including normative identities) has – is narrowed down to target those people who use the terms literally (i.e., the non-normative subgroup). Importantly, nowhere in the 130 analyzed metonymies does the same type occur to refer to normative gender/sexual identities.

4.3 Defining property for stance

The third important metonymic configuration we find in our data involves a PART FOR PART metonymic mapping. In this case, a subgroup of a whole entity (source) is used to refer to another subgroup of the same entity (target). For instance, *the pen* (i.e., instrument) can be used to refer to *the writer* (i.e., agent) in the *action* ICM of *writing*.⁷³ Even though this example is fairly straightforward, PART FOR PART metonymy can be more complicated when dealing with more abstract notions, as illustrated in the following extracts:

- (5) *Transgender ideology is apparently doing nothing short of attempting to redefine what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman. It is not remotely concerned with reality or our understanding of the nature of men and women as essentially tied to their role in reproduction.*

Author: CitizenGo
Addressee: BBC

- (6) *In this new proposal, the FEMM ... continues to promote: early childhood indoctrination in **gender ideology** at public schools (without the prior consent of parents,) abortion, LGBT "marriage", and gender quotas in public life.*

Author: CitizenGo Europe (Spain)
Addressee: European Parliament

Extract (5) is involved in an e-petition which calls for action against a BBC program on transgender issues addressed to children. Similarly, the petition in which extract (6) occurs argues against a proposal introduced in 2014 by the *Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM)* of the European Parliament regarding gender discrimination in the workplace. As illustrated in both extracts, the e-petitions argue for the dangers of a certain *ideology*, described as *transgender* and *gender* respectively. In other words, the two key-multiwords refer to an ideology of a sort – i.e., “a set of beliefs or principles” (CDE) – further defining it through the adjectival use of (*trans*)*gender*. From this perspective, both individual compounds are used literally; the intended reading is not distant from the contemporary meaning of *ideology*. However, the metonymy is located precisely in the modifiers of *ideology*.

Firstly, the literal meaning of “transgender” is someone “who feels that they are not the same gender they were said to have when they were born” (CDE). Although this already entails epistemological and ontological assumptions regarding the existence of transgender people, the use of

⁷³ Radden and Kövecses, “Toward a Theory of Metonymy”, 37.

“transgender” as a modifier of *ideology* foregrounds a slightly different meaning. What is being discussed in the petition is not only the ideology that transgender people adopt (which would maintain the contemporary meaning of the term), but also the ideology of support and, more importantly, the acknowledgement of transgender identity/issues/rights. The key-multiword is hence used metonymically as a PART FOR PART relationship which we describe as DEFINING PROPERTY FOR STANCE. In other words, a personal trait of a category (i.e., being transgender) is used to denote a specific ideological position with respect to this category (i.e., acknowledgement and support of transgender people).

This is specifically evidenced in the use of *gender ideology*. According to the petition cited in extract (6), students of public schools are threatened with the possibility of getting indoctrinated in *gender ideology*, alongside issues of *abortion* and *LGBT marriage*. The contemporary meaning of “gender” is defined as “the physical and/or social condition of being male or female” (CDE). Similar to *gender identity* and *sexual orientation* (see section 4.2), the term already reflects an epistemological assumption that there exists a non-inherent relationship between biology and behavior. It is precisely this assumption that is attacked by the petitioners through this metonymic use. Employed as a modifier of *ideology*, *gender* is not literally referring to a general “property” anymore, but rather targets a series of unnamed agents who are grouped together around the same ideological position. Through a PART FOR PART mapping, a descriptive property (i.e., having a gender) is used as a vehicle to refer to a particular related stance (i.e., acknowledging and supporting gender diversity).

Both key-multiwords (i.e., *transgender/gender ideology*) are the outcome of a metonymic configuration which uses a defining property to refer to a particular ideological stance. In this way, the petitioners turn any mention of (trans)gender rights/issues/(people) into an ideological concept, and exclude any possibility that gender diversity exists. Ultimately, they construct a vague Other; an enemy who is defined only by their own ideological stance. This is also the case in the metonymic use of *sexual agenda*:

- (7) *The petition will be delivered to your UN delegation; it will ask that they work to delete any and all references to the harmful **sexual agenda** that supports abortion, free access to birth control, sexual orientation and gender identity, and comprehensive sexuality education.*

Author: CitizenGo
Addressee: United Nations

Similarly to the aforementioned cases, the compound *sexual agenda* is here referring to an ideological agenda of a sort; hence it is being used literally. The metonymicity of the term is again located in the modifier (i.e., *sexual*). According to CDE, the term “sexual” describes someone or something “relating to the activity of sex”. From this perspective, the literal meaning of the key-multiword would be a list of aims or possible future achievements (see CDE’s definition of “agenda”) relating to sexual activity. However, as illustrated in extract (4) and present in all occurrences of the key-multiword, the *agenda* under discussion involves issues that are not exclusively related to sex acts. As described in the petition, the sexual agenda accused of being harmful is concerned with abortion, birth control, sexuality education, as well as sexual orientation and gender identity (see section 4.2). Therefore, in this context, *sexual* refers to a variety of epistemological and ontological assumptions adopted by a targeted enemy; assumptions that are understood to be dangerous and unethical, and thus criticized by the petition. In other words, a descriptive characteristic is foregrounded as the modifier of the agenda that is assigned to an *ideological* gendered/sexual Other through a DEFINING PROPERTY FOR STANCE metonymy.

More interestingly, as evidenced in other occurrences of the key-multiword, *sexual agenda* seems to be understood as a cluster of “stigmatized” views that do not exclusively revolve around sexual

activity. This is the case in extract (8). This petition argues against two bills which were to be discussed in the Parliament of Malta, namely “Equality Act, 2015” and “The Human Rights Equality Commission Act”. The extract cites a series of issues introduced in the bills, which are subsequently described as a *sexual agenda*:

- (8) “protected characteristics” shall be age; belief, creed or religion; disability; family responsibilities; family or marital status; gender expression or gender identity; HIV status; maternity; pregnancy; race, colour or ethnic origin; sex or sex characteristics; and, sexual orientation;” Unfortunately, this **sexual agenda** is being promoted all around the world.

Author: CitizenGo
 Addressee: Parent/Teacher Associations in Malta and Gozo, the Catholic Hierarchy and the Maltese Parliament

As illustrated in the issues listed in the extract, *sexual agenda* conflates a variety of criticized positions that extend beyond gender/sexuality-related issues, also including race and ethnicity. Thus, not only does this DEFINING PROPERTY FOR STANCE mapping target an ideological Other who is defined by a liberal stance with respect to gender/sexual rights, but it also condenses other social issues under this unified “dangerous” political agenda.

5. Final Remarks

Taking into consideration the central role of CitizenGo in the dissemination of anti-genderist discourse often mentioned in previous literature, the above discussion highlights the systematic involvement of metonymy in the discursive construction of the gendered/sexual enemy. Specifically, it foregrounds three different metonymic uses in which gender/sexuality-related key-multiwords are involved. In the MEMBER OF CATEGORY FOR CATEGORY metonymy (section 4.1), where a subgroup of an entity refers to the whole entity, *gay lobby* targets LGBTQ+ individuals and supporters of LGBTQ+ rights rather than exclusively referring to specific activists and associations. Conversely, in the CATEGORY FOR MEMBER OF CATEGORY metonymy (section 4.2), where a whole entity refers to part of it, a general property (*gender identity*, *sexual orientation*) is narrowed down to non-normative gendered/sexual identities and supporters of gender/sexual diversity. The final metonymic mapping we discuss concerns the DEFINING PROPERTY FOR STANCE relationship, where a subgroup of an entity refers to another subgroup of the same entity. In the case of *transgender/gender ideology*, a defining property (i.e., being transgender or having a gender, respectively) is used to refer to an ideological stance (i.e., acknowledgment of transgender people or a social-constructionist understanding of gender). Similarly, *sexual agenda* foregrounds a property (i.e., relating to sex acts) to target a particular ideological stance that conflates liberal positions with respect to gender, sexuality and other social issues. Together, these metonymies highlight aspects of reality while downplaying others, conveniently broadening or narrowing the worldview according to the petitioner’s argumentative needs.⁷⁴

Two significant socio-political consequences arise from these three metonymic configurations. On the one hand, as part of the referential/nomination strategies employed by right-wing populists,⁷⁵ the semantic elasticity of metonymy strategically shapes public opinion about progressive sexual and reproductive rights by advancing an affective “us vs. them” dichotomy. As we have shown, it effectively condenses LGBTQ+ people, feminists, and supporters of women’s and LGBTQ+ rights

⁷⁴ Littlemore, *Metonymy*, 99.

⁷⁵ Wodak, *Politics of Fear*; Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism* (London: Routledge, 2001).

into a homogeneous Other. This Other is framed as a political enemy (*gay lobby*) or as an ideological movement, which adopts an epistemological understanding of gender/sexual diversity, uses concepts such as *gender identity* and *sexual orientation*, promotes a (*trans*)*gender ideology* and follows a particular *sexual agenda*. Such metonymic configurations help construct a vague – yet tangible – enemy, a “terrifying object”⁷⁶ that facilitates the mobilization of conservative groups to take action by creating, signing and sharing CitizenGo e-petitions.

On the other hand, metonymy is involved in the repurposing of the concepts of gender and sexuality. As various linguists stress, metonymization – i.e., “using words for the near neighbors of the things you mean” –⁷⁷ is one of the most effective operators of semantic change.⁷⁸ The aforementioned metonymies contribute to a similar semantic change of (*trans*)*gender (identity)* and *sexual orientation*, by narrowing down their contemporary meaning to refer to agents who understand and adopt these terms alongside the assumptions these entail. By framing them as invented, unscientific and meaningless ideological concepts, the petitioners reject the possibility of gender/sexual diversity and ultimately deny the very existence of those who acknowledge it or use it for self-identification. It is this metonymy-based semantic reconfiguration of *gender* and *sexuality* that contributes to the emergence of a new “ominous and alien”⁷⁹ vocabulary, elsewhere described as an “empty signifier”⁸⁰ or a “symbolic glue”⁸¹ that secures ideological coherence across divergent actors.

Given CitizenGo's transnational network, we argue that the metonymic uses explored in the present study provide new vocabulary which helps to solidify the establishment of a borderless, ultra-conservative discourse community⁸² constituting an “alternative field of knowledge”.⁸³ As such, metonymy is involved into a conventionalized aggregate of signs that constitute anti-genderism as a register bringing anti-genderists into a cohesive – although heterogeneous – whole.⁸⁴ A cross-national investigation of other metonymic/figurative configurations involved in anti-genderist rhetoric could give a better insight into how the anti-gender register is nationally contextualized and adapted to empower conservative coalitions.

⁷⁶ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 42.

⁷⁷ Brigitte Nerlich and David D. Clarke, “Outline of a Model for Semantic Change”, in Günter Kellermann and Michael D. Morrissey, eds., *Diachrony within Synchrony: Language History and Cognition* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1992), 137.

⁷⁸ Jan Ifversen, “Conceptual History: The History of Basic Concepts”, in Ruth Wodak and Bernhard Forchtner, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2018), 125.

⁷⁹ Korolczuk and Graff, “Gender as ‘Ebola from Brussels’”, 799.

⁸⁰ Mayer and Sauer, “‘Gender Ideology’ in Austria”.

⁸¹ Kováts and Pöim, *Gender as Symbolic Glue*.

⁸² Littlemore, *Metonymy*, 65.

⁸³ Graff and Korolczuk, “Worse than Communism and Nazism Put Together”.

⁸⁴ Borba, “Enregistering ‘Gender Ideology’”.

Back to the Future?

The Tradwives Movement and the New Forms of Conservative Consensus Building¹

This paper aims to explore the ‘Tradwives’ movement, a small but growing community led by a number of online mentors whose motivational support is both eloquent and prolific. As the name suggests, Traditional wives believe that a woman’s place is in the home and that men and women should embody the distinct yet complementary roles of breadwinner/homemaker.

By investigating a Corpus made up of approximately 3,500 tweets and drawing upon a hybrid methodology integrating tools from Corpus-based Discourse Analysis and SFL applied to the communicative language adopted across the Twitter platform, we will explore the array of different discourses, opinions, values, and ideologies which surround and characterize the modern day ‘Tradwife’. The wider scope of our research is also to identify, within the dynamics enacted in the context under examination, an upsurge of traditionalist if not reactionary values. We argue that the Tradwives’ social media discourses are representative of a system of values which is insidiously finding ways to spread and circulate through alternative channels therefore fuelling and propagating the alt-right ideology.

Keywords: *Tradwives, feminism, right wing nationalism, social media, microblogging, SFL*

1. Introduction

Much as we are loath to admit it, the authors’ interest in the topic of Traditional wives (henceforth Tradwives) did not stem from in-depth scholarly research, but rather from idle curiosity concerning a recent TikTok video in which an American mother, only known as ‘Michelle from North Carolina’, now residing in the UK, took it upon herself to demonstrate how to make a ‘true British cup of tea’. As the resulting beverage had little to do with what is commonly known as tea, be it British or otherwise, the recording received a good deal of attention from the press and from social media. One person in particular, Alena Kate Pettitt, was exceptionally piqued by the presumption that British tea could in any way be associated with the micro-waved potion produced by Michelle, and promptly proceeded to make a YouTube video entitled “How to make a proper British cup of tea, and tea etiquette” in which she clarifies that “making a proper cup of tea is an important element of our lifestyle in England”.² This was our first encounter with the main British exponent of the Tradwives movement. Pettitt is the embodiment of all things British: she lives in a character cottage in the Cotswolds, has written two books promoting British etiquette and ladylike manners, runs a series of YouTube videos known as ‘The Darling Academy’ (a sort of finishing school for would-be British homemakers), and incessantly repeats that she wishes to return to a 1950s lifestyle in order to “harness the best of what made Britain great”.

Besides the constant reiteration of traditional British values throughout her writings and videos, with the Union Jack, Cornishware Pottery, and royal memorabilia as recurrent themes in the visual

¹ Although the authors conceived and worked on this paper collaboratively, Bruna Di Sabato is responsible for the ‘Introduction’ and ‘Discussion and Conclusive Remarks’ sections; Bronwen Hughes is responsible for the two sections entitled: ‘Methodology and Corpus’ and ‘A Critical Analysis of the Tradwives Corpus’.

² See “How to make a proper British cup of tea + tea etiquette”, *YouTube* (2020), www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kTyQh2PKUQ&ab_channel=TheDarlingAcademywithAlenaKatePettitt

imagery, Pettitt is also renowned across social media for her desire to “submit to her husband” and to “honour the natural order of gender roles”.³

The trivial manner by which we were drawn towards a social phenomenon so far removed from the mores of the country in which we reside (although echoes are to be found in the Italian Catholic world), turned into genuine curiosity when we discovered the extensive popularity of the Tradwife movement in the Anglo-Saxon world. We were therefore led to investigate such discourses; and, being more interested in observing the widespread resonance of the phenomenon rather than analysing a single public persona, we opted to turn to social media, specifically Twitter, to verify whether the Tradwife/Tradwives hashtags and streams only attracted aficionados of good housekeeping, or whether nationalism and gender submission were effectively significantly recurring themes.

As will be illustrated in the section devoted to analysis, our findings did stretch much further afield than we expected, touching upon white supremacy, virulent anti/pro-feminism, Brexit, and even male dominated activist movements present in the ‘Manosphere’⁴ such as ‘Men Go Their Own Way’ and ‘Incels’.

The global anti-gender right currently stands as a challenge to progressive forces. Indeed, it is often by cashing in on the fears of Christian fundamentalists and right-wing populists and by promoting conservative agendas in which the notion of domestic love and harmony rests upon gender essentialism, that they succeed in curtailing women’s autonomy. Such behaviour is masqueraded as a need to protect ‘the weaker sex’ from the risk of gender violence. As Graff, Kapur, and Danuta Walters state “Gender conservatism has in recent years become the lingua franca of an otherwise diverse global trend. It is what brings together right-wing activists from otherwise distant walks of life: believers and nonbelievers, nationalists and universalists, populists who demonize global capital and traditional Reagan/Thatcher-style conservatives with a neocon love for the market”.⁵ Besides illustrating the manner in which gender and sexuality stand at the heart of the global right, the three scholars also comment upon the channels employed

by right wing groups to guarantee the viral spread of their gender essentialist messages: “Global right-wing agendas also rely on a labyrinth of networks, including social media and more militant, aggressive, and misogynistic populist movements, to develop and pursue their brand of gender politics. They intervene and work with dominant gender, sexual, and cultural norms to produce a nationalist, antifeminist, gender/heteronormative, xenophobic, and antiminority majoritarianism”.⁶

Indeed, ‘our wives’ encourage considerations related to gender, sex, sexuality, race, nationality, religion, physical appearance, etc. As intersectional studies show, the ‘intersection’ among such systems of values may easily generate (or be generated by?) forms of discrimination. The media are keeping tabs on the tradwife phenomenon arguing that what “could be mistaken for a peculiar style of mommy-vlogging is a virulent strain of white nationalism”.⁷ Annie Kelly, author of a much-cited article published in the 1st June 2018 edition of *The New York Times* further states: “tradwives remain worth contemplating because they help illuminate some of the forces that drive the alt-right and where the movement might be going”.⁸ Scholars worldwide are also paying attention to the role women play in supremacist movements especially as regards the digital far right. Tradwives are in fact mentioned

³ See “Submitting to my husband like it’s 1959: Why I became a Tradwife – BBC stories”, YouTube (2020), www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZwT-zYo4-OM&ab_channel=BBCStories.

⁴ The term “manosphere” is of uncertain origin though it is thought to have first appeared in a blog in 2009. It is used to identify forums and online communities dedicated to men’s interests, and gained popularity when Ian Ironwood published *The Manosphere: A New Hope for Masculinity* in 2013 (Red Pill Press).

⁵ Agnieszka Graff et al., “Introduction: Gender and the Rise of the Global Right”, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 44.3 (Spring 2019), 541-560.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 547.

⁷ Annie Kelly, “The Housewives of White Supremacy”, *The New York Times* (2018), www.nytimes.com/2018/06/01/opinion/sunday/tradwives-women-alt-right.html

⁸ *Ibid.*

by Nancy Love in a recent study published in *Frontiers in Sociology* as “the best example of alt right views on traditional sex/gender roles”.⁹

The gender-separatist and misogynist stance recurrently found in the manosphere, is not only the preserve of men, as will be illustrated: indeed, many women tweeting under the Tradwives hashtag defend men’s rights and share the desire to return to the dominance/subservience of traditional power roles and extreme notions of femininity and masculinity.¹⁰ As J. Ebner states, tradwives appear to perceive gender roles as the result of “sexual economics, a marketplace where men can gauge a woman’s sexual market value (SMV), where age, femininity, and health are the most sought-after qualities, whereas education or career prospects are of little interest”.¹¹

Investigation of the way in which ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ are discursively enacted in different manners and across different contexts and epochs is by no means novel.¹² The present study, focusing on an aspired return to traditional gender roles and the ensuing counter response, serves to underline that the battle for gender supremacy is still very much alive and scholarly research must continue to document its many evolutions. The wider scope of our research, however, is to identify, within the dynamics enacted in the context under examination, an upsurge of traditionalist if not reactionary values. We argue that the Tradwives’ social media discourses are representative of a system of values which is insidiously finding ways to spread and circulate through alternative channels. In the following pages we will illustrate the methodology employed to collect and critically analyse our corpus of Tradwives tweets in an attempt to answer the following research questions:

- How do users create and negotiate micro-blogging discourses around traditional gender roles and values? (RQ1)
- What role can hashtags play in propagating ideologies and broadening ambient affiliation? (RQ2)

2. Methodology and Corpus

In order to examine the hashtags pertaining to the Traditional Wife/Wives movement we felt the need to steer clear of excessively procrustean frameworks and opted to employ a hybrid methodology integrating tools belonging to Corpus-based Discourse Analysis with SFL applied to the investigation of the communicative language adopted across the Twitter platform.

We therefore employ a social semiotic approach which views microblogging as a social practice in which the combined metadata and metadiscursive roles of hashtags enable them to figure as meaning-making resources. The metafunctional diversification which characterizes SFL can be said to span across all linguistic strata from context – through discourse semantics and lexicogrammar – to

⁹ Nancy S. Love, “Shield Maidens, Fashy Femmes, and TradWives: Feminism, Patriarchy, and Right-Wing Populism”, *Frontiers in Sociology*, 23 (December 2020), www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fsoc.2020.619572/full.

¹⁰ Clearly due to the anonymity they grant, gender identity on Twitter, like on other Social Networking Sites (SNSs), can never be thoroughly verified. When we talk about ‘women’ or ‘men’ tweeters, it is merely because we take their pronoun use and gendered discourses at face value.

¹¹ Julia Ebner, “TradWives: Joining the Female Anti-Feminists”, in *Going Dark: The Secret Social Lives of Extremists* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 27.

¹² See for example: Deborah Cameron, “Performing Gender Identity: Young Men’s Talk and the Construction of Heterosexual Masculinity”, in Sally Johnson and Ulrike Hanna Meinhof, eds., *Language and Masculinity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 47-65; Jennifer Coates, “Competing Discourses of Femininity”, in Helga Kotthoff and Ruth Wodak, eds., *Communicating Gender in Context* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1997), 285-314; Anna Livia and Kira Hall, eds., *Queerly Phrased: Language, Gender, and Sexuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Janet Holmes and Stephanie Schnurr, “Politeness, Humour and Gender in the Workplace: Negotiating Norms and Identifying Contestation”, *Journal of Politeness Research: Language, Behaviour, Culture*, 1 (2005), 121-149; Janet Holmes, *Gendered Talk at Work: Constructing Gender Identity through Workplace Discourse* (New York, Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).

phonology and graphology.¹³ When focusing on tweets, the three dimensions of meaning tend to be realized via different kinds of patterning. Indeed, experiential meanings present a constituent structure, or topic, realized by a single hashtag such as #Feminism or #homemaker; textual meanings are concerned with the order in which the text within the tweet unfolds as a cohesive structure; and interpersonal meanings tend to be realized in a more prosodical manner, granting hues of evaluation to the meanings in the post or in the tag itself #Feminazi or #Iloveyman. As Kreis states, “Other than being topic-based, hashtags are now often also ‘evaluative’, thus used to ideologically express identity, beliefs and group membership”.¹⁴ In turn, these linguistic functions work together to realize the social function of enacting ambient affiliation in terms of public social relations rather than on the level of private dyadic dialogue. Indeed, Zappavigna asserts: “Microblogging as a practice creates alignments around shared quotidian experiences by conferring upon the private realm of daily experience a public audience”.¹⁵

Far from being mere discourse markers, hashtags also serve as ideological tools not only to facilitate group inclusion or exclusion, but also to emphasize a polarization of points of view, in an ongoing struggle for control in discourse. This is obviously particularly true in the field of hashtag activism where the same tags can be used by both sides of the polarized spectrum. In such cases, the two competing factions attempt to re-appropriate the other side’s slogans and hashtags in order to initially benefit from the influence they wield in their designated catchment area only to subsequently diminish it. It is in fact sometimes difficult to tell whether a pro- or an anti- orientation is being construed when the two sides exploit the same tag.

In terms of corpus-selection and corpus-building, we selected the tags connected to the seed terms ‘Traditional wife/wives’, and, at the time of writing #tradwife/#tradwives were trending. We also included the #thedarlingacademy and #aproncladhousewives as these two tags were launched by Alena Pettitt, the previously mentioned founder of the British tradwives movement. The numbers of tweets which included the latter two tags, however, turned out to be negligible.

To download the tweets an adapted version of a Python library called ‘Get Old Tweets’ was used (<https://github.com/Mottl/GetOldTweets3>) and after replacing line breaks and a number of typographical symbols in Unicode, the output was saved as an xml file.

When collecting the tweets we further inserted the following specifications: only tweets in English, gathered in a period stretching from the 15th of March 2018 until the 15th of March 2020. We established the starting date for our collection by keeping an eye on the spread of the movement. 2018 was a significant year for the tradwife wave and although interest shown by social media towards the movement had begun some years previously, it is in the last couple of years that signs of a possible exploitation of this phenomenon by right wing ideologists has become marked with an avowed nostalgia for a past in which gender norms were firmly dependent upon biological masculinity and femininity.

After removing the duplicates, 3,288 tweets were collected with the following breakdown:

- #aproncladarmy: 8
- #tradwife: 2826
- #tradwives: 452
- #thedarlingacademy: 2

¹³ Christian M.I.M. Matthiessen, *Lexicogrammatical Cartography: English Systems* (Tokyo: International Language Sciences Publishers, 1995).

¹⁴ Ramona Kreis “#refugeesnotwelcome: Anti-refugee discourse on Twitter”, *Discourse & Communication*, 11.5 (2017), 498-514.

¹⁵ Michele Zappavigna, “CoffeeTweets: bonding around the bean on Twitter”, in Philip Seargeant and Caroline Tagg, eds., *The Language of Social Media* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 140.

The corpus as a whole presents 94,005 tokens and 73,148 types, and when preparing it for investigation, the most time-consuming task pertained to the investigation of the aggregated hashtags that accompanied the tradwife/wives tags lending extra meaning and extra bonding power to each tweet by further expanding the circle of ambient affiliation. Indeed, it was often only by tabling these additional tags that we were able to observe the pernicious stepping-stone itinerary wending from innocuous traditional topics and values to ideological and gender-oriented discourses.

When investigating the posts belonging to the TRADWIVES corpora, we initially identified the two generic macro-categories ‘in favour of traditional values’/ ‘against traditional values’, and subsequently through close examination of all the tweets, we pinpointed 5 sub/micro-categories which bring the pro/anti positions to the fore around a number of aggregate topics.

For the sake of linear analysis, we chose to entitle the 5 categories as follows:

- Intersectional activism
- Gender: dominance vs oppression
- Feminism: Choice and Femininity vs Regression
- Toxic jezebels vs the younger cow
- Nationalist sentiment #MAGA, #Brexit, and the #Tradwife nightmare

In the section which follows, we will illustrate and comment upon our findings.

3. A Critical analysis of the TRADWIVES Corpus

Linguistics, like many other scholarly disciplines, now possesses well-honed tools to decipher the ideational metafunction of meaning-making. Conversely, the interpersonal dimension, which allows users to build and maintain power and solidarity through the adoption of stance and identity, often remains less well-understood.

In recent years SFL theory has focused on the ‘coupling’ of evaluation with other kinds of linguistic meanings as a way of bringing out the values construed in the process of affiliation.¹⁶ In our research, the term ‘coupling’ refers to the manner in which ideational meaning co-patterns with interpersonal meaning in the Twitter microposts to create an evaluative stance. The interesting aspect of the #tradwife/#tradwives tags is that, unlike ambifunctional tags such as #Trumpsucks or #Ilovecats, where the ideational/interpersonal co-patterning is evident, they do not in fact present any inscribed *a priori* interpersonal evaluation, as both the terms ‘traditional’ and ‘wife/wives’, and their combination within the hashtag, are devoid of objective evaluative colouring. It is only when they are adopted by either the pro- or anti- tradwife factions that they are intra-textually charged with inscribed or invoked attitudinal meaning ready to be conveyed to those already belonging to the affiliative community or to prospective members through “multiparty, temporarily fluid and highly intertextual conversations”.¹⁷

For the sake of clarity and ease of classification, when providing examples of the 5 categories that illustrate the positions taken up by the pro/anti tradwife activists, we will in each case begin by examining the ‘pro’ tradwife tweets, and then move on to the ‘anti’ ones.¹⁸

¹⁶ Zappavigna et al., “Syndromes of Meaning: Exploring Patterned Coupling in a NSW Youth Justice Conference”, in Ahmar Mahboob and Naomi K. Knight, eds., *Questioning Linguistics* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 103-117.

¹⁷ Zappavigna, “Ambient Affiliation: a linguistic perspective on Twitter”, *Journal of New Media and Society*, 13.5 (2011), 790.

¹⁸ Any inaccurate spelling/syntax/verb forms or generally unconventional language features contained in the reported tweets are all authentic. The authors have not modified the excerpts in any way.

3.1 *Intersectional activism*

3.1.1 *Pro-Tradwives*

[1] Look up #tradwife on twitter! You'll find a bunch of lonesome lefty childless feminist cat ladies losing there shit over it. Any woman that decide to become a housewife and feel extremely content about it should post pictures of there happy lives, just to rub it in there feminist faces. #nohardfeminism #mychoice #genderroles

[2] My goal is to make our country better for everyone by getting rid of #TheseGays, encouraging more women to follow the #TradWife model, working toward better pay for men (the true bread-winners), putting the immigrants in their place, and making life easier for Christians. #Tradwives #TradRevolution #MAGA

[3] Hey qanon, I made you some milk and cookies #Tradwife #traditionalgenderroles #ibelonginthekitchen #makeachoice

As can be seen in the excerpts above, hashtags are syntactically flexible and “in terms of the information flow of a text they can occupy an initial, integrated and culminative position”.¹⁹ As for the experiential meaning, hashtags can also take up the ‘participant’, ‘process’ or ‘circumstance’ role in a clause and, as is evident in the first 2 tweets listed above, #tradwife [1] and #TheseGays [2] both occupy participant positions. Furthermore, in terms of interpersonal functions, hashtags can realize all the speech functions: indeed, in the 3 tweets listed above we have a number of statements, for instance #nohardfeminism [1], #ibelonginthekitchen [3] and commands, such as #makeachoice [3]. In these cases, as Zappavigna states: “the function of these interpersonally orientated tags has little to do with aggregating posts into searchable sets, and much more to do with adopting particular attitudinal dispositions, involved in enacting different kinds of identities”.²⁰

It is evident that an analysis of every single discriminatory discourse interpellated by the pro- or anti- tradwife factions would take us well beyond the scope of this study. However, quoting Zappavigna once more, it is worth remembering that “any act of communing is also an act of construing the self (as a textual persona)”,²¹ and the aggregate tags that each tweeter attaches to their post not only expand its affiliative remit but also serve to build up increasingly stratified identities.

Tweet [1] in favour of the traditional wife role also intersectionally and critically calls into play feminists by listing all the stereotypical negative characteristics commonly attributed to them (they are unmarried, childless and consequently ‘lonesome’; they treat cats as substitutive objects of devotion ‘cat ladies’; they are hysterical and unable to control their anger ‘losing their shit’). The aggregated tags coherently contest feminism #nohardfeminism, praise gender differentiation #genderroles, and touch upon the issue of free choice, #mychoice, as a fundamental factor when selecting a given affiliation. The question of Choice or Fourth Wave feminism will be taken up when we analyse the third micro-category in our corpus.

The intersectional nature of excerpt [2] upholds the values of white, American right-wing, heterosexual, Christian men. From the point of view of the textual metafunction it is interesting to note the way in which #TheseGays and #TradWife are smoothly integrated into the cohesive structure of the post. The use of the deictic plural reference ‘these’ in the #TheseGays tweet, suggests a categorization mechanism through which the ‘gay category’ is anaphorically referred to through in-

¹⁹ Zappavigna, *Searchable Talk: Hashtags and Social Media Metadiscourse* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 31.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 125.

group underlying discourses where such individuals are already negatively connoted. In much the same way, the phrase ‘putting the immigrants in their place’ suggests that the prospective/existent affiliative audience is already well-aware of the ‘rightful place’ in question. These linguistic strategies are widely adopted to create polarized discourses whereby out-groups are rhetorically created in opposition to the speaker/writer’s in-group, and the affiliative bonds which result from communing around the ideational/attitudinal coupling of a given hashtag “make up the value sets of our communities and culture”.²²

The third ‘in favour’ tweet is once more intersectional in nature in that it humorously brings together the mysterious figure of ‘Q’, head of the anonymous fringe organization ‘Qanon’ which claims that a conspiracy of left-wing, Satan-worshipping child molesters is currently plotting to overturn President Trump, and the submissive Tradwives whose role is to nourish their men while submitting to them. Two aspects of this particular tweet are interesting: the first is the covert or ‘invoked’²³ nature of the afforded attitude which does not exhibit any indicators that evaluation is in fact taking place, and is difficult to spot for those who do not possess the ideological values of the tradwife/right-wing community. As Doran states: “By virtue of its implicitness, this evaluative language is often difficult to see if it has not already been learnt. But this also gives it much of its power, by being only accessible to particular communities, it often invokes large networks of values relatively efficiently”.²⁴ The second interesting aspect is intrinsically connected to the first: in terms of intra or co-textual relationships, the aggregate hashtags #traditionalgenderroles, #ibelonginthekitchen and #makeachoice supply the “evaluative metacommentary”²⁵ lacking in the post itself. Thus, those in favour of the tradwives ideology can capture the initial underlying appeal of the post, only to have their impressions confirmed by the hashtags which follow.

3.1.2 *Anti-Tradwives*

[4] #tradwives is a Stormfront push that they're trying to normalize. They envision a whites only, female submissive community where women give birth to as many babies of European heritage as poss to propagate their despicable supremacist beliefs. Shun them -They're epitome

[5] I see a lot of #tradwife stuff doing the rounds. Just a heads up: “Tradwife” as a term has a lot more baggage behind it than staying home to take care of the domestic sphere. It's a dangerous rebranding of Kinder, Küche, Kirche with strong anti-migrant and homophobic undertones.

[6] Beware, the traditional wife movement seems to loosely unite a diverse group of crazy #tradwife Russia bots Right wing Europeans Conservative Christians Incels Nazis Trump people Antivaxers Home schoolers Brexiters The racists old folk Ladies who bake cakes

The many tweets that condemn the Tradwives movement, of which the above are merely a small sample, are as intersectional as those in favour. However, whereas the ‘in favour’ posts integrate or aggregate a number of kindred hashtags to expand their affiliative network, either directly or via the recommendation algorithms, the ‘against’ grouping, in the main, simply lists the categories they

²² Naomi K. Knight, “Wrinkling Complexity: Concepts of Identity and Affiliation in Humor”, in Monika Bednarek and James R. Martin, eds., *New Discourse on Language: Functional Perspectives on Multimodality, Identity, and Affiliation* (London: Continuum, 2010), 43.

²³ James R. Martin and Peter R. R. White, *The Language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

²⁴ Yaegan J. Doran, “Seeing Values: Axiology and Affording Attitude in Australia’s ‘invasion’”, in James R. Martin et al., eds., *Accessing Academic Discourse: Systemic Functional Linguistics and Legitimation Code Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 162.

²⁵ Zappavigna, *Searchable Talk*, 66.

believe partake in a common right-wing ideology: from ‘Involuntary Celibates’ to ‘Ladies who bake cakes’ [6]. It is also worth noticing that the underlying braggadocio employed by the pro-‘Tradwifers’ is replaced by the cautious, almost fearful tone, employed in excerpts [4], [5] and [6] all three of which contain a warning: ‘Shun them’ [4], ‘heads up’ [5], ‘Beware’ [6].

3.2 Gender: dominance vs oppression

3.2.1 In favour of dominance

[7] Good morning! If youre reading this, youre ALIVE! Which means God has blessed you with another day, use it to the fullest by blessing others. Ladies, use it to bring beauty to your family, community and world. Smile, be kind, be submissive #tradwives Men, lead your families, forge ahead #genderroles #loveyourman

[8] I am a SAHM. People regularly think Im crazy for wanting to stay home and care for my family. It is the most important work, I need to be protected, I need an Alpha male. #SAHM #Tradwife #thisisthefuture

[9] Women, cultivate your mind so when your husband comes home from a long day you can talk to him about something other than the kids. Read news headlines, read a book on a topic that interests him. If needed, watch sports with him. You might like it too #tradwives #happymarriage

The three tweets in favour of gender dominance all trace a clear demarcation between dominant alpha males who protect their families and ‘forge ahead’ [7], and submissive wives happy to be stay-at-home-mothers (SAHM) and submit to their men [8]. The connection created in excerpt [7] between traditional Christian values and traditional gender roles is unsurprising and the post is strongly reminiscent of the 10th book of the New Testament where the Epistle to the Ephesians similarly states: “Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord ... as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything”.²⁶ Again in this case the aggregate hashtags #genderroles and #loveyourman serve as an intra-textual metacommentary to augment the attitude inscribed in the post.

In tweet [8] the stay-at-home-mother employs an interesting mechanism to evade accountability and raise support for her views: rather than specifically blaming the anti-tradwife or feminist communities for criticising her traditional values, she employs the generic ‘people’ and states “People regularly think Im crazy for wanting to stay home”. In a seminal article, Anita Pomerantz drew attention to the manner in which ‘extreme case formulations’ (ECFs) are commonly employed in discourse. ECFs are descriptions or assessments that deploy ‘extreme’ expressions such as: every, everyone, people, all, none, best, least, always, perfectly, brand new and absolutely, commonly used in contexts in which an individual feels a need to pre-empt or defend him/herself against possible accusations or criticisms. “Interactants use extreme-case formulations when they anticipate or expect their co-interactants to undermine their claims and when they are in adversarial situations”.²⁷

In turn, excerpt [9] is striking for the pedagogical tone it assumes, reminiscent of a 1950s ‘good wife’ guide. In this post the male/female roles and duties are seen as entirely natural, and the fact that a tradwife may also derive pleasure from indulging her husband’s interests ‘you might like it too’ is considered relatively inconsequential. The ideational/interpersonal coupling provided by the aggregate #happymarriage tag serves to supply the invoked attitude that is not inscribed in the body of the post.

²⁶ *The New International Version of the Holy Bible*, Ephesians 5 (Colorado Springs: International Bible Society, 1973), 22-33.

²⁷ Anita Pomerantz, “Extreme Case Formulations: A Way of Legitimizing Claims”, *Human Studies*, 9 (1986), 222.

3.2.2 Against gender oppression

[10] I read stuff about #tradwives and want to say Under His Eye

[11] Also doormat. Dont forget the being a doormat, talked down to as an inferior species, and never truly being respected part. #tradwife #tradLife

[12] But apparently the happy hubby makes an effort too “When I get up to answer the door to greet him he has flowers” Oh the excitement of a #Tradwife #tradwives #feminismisbliss #britanniadoesntrule

The writer of tweet number 10 relies on the ability of the ambient audience to capture both the intertextual and interdiscursive implications present in the post. From an intertextual point of view, the ‘Under his Eye’ phrase clearly refers to Margaret Atwood’s novel and ensuing televised series, *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Interdiscursively, however, the connection established between the Tradwife movement and the dystopian novel foregrounds all the shared negative discourses and values (male supremacy, enforced submissiveness, absence of free will) that the two have in common.

Social media texts are necessarily rooted in heteroglossic meaning and, due to the ambient environment, posts always enter into a relation with other posts in the same stream although without any need for direct dialogical interaction. Wesch employed the phrase ‘context collapse’²⁸ when referring to the impossibility for Social Networking Site users to attune to the parameters of a given context because the audience is largely unknown.

In excerpt [11], the tweeter appears to join an ongoing conversation in which there is clear topic continuity around the anti-tradwives subject-matter. The rhetorical effect created is twofold, on the one hand it points to the fact that the tradwife values are considered so negative as to warrant not just one isolated post, but a thriving, ongoing, conversational activity; on the other, the use of ‘also’, ‘don’t forget’ and ‘part’ all contribute to the idea that the negative aspects mentioned in this particular post are merely an addendum to far more detrimental features that have already been mentioned elsewhere. The #tradwife tag located in culminative position serves to supply cataphoric reference and focus to the attitude expressed in the post; whereas the #tradlife tag, in terms of co-textual relations, serves to augment said attitude by expanding it from the restricted context of the ‘wives’ to the more widespread ‘lives’.

Thanks to their function as metadata, hashtags also allow “the user to track in real-time unfolding discourse about a specific event or issue”.²⁹ Having read the many posts written by Alena Pettitt, the instigator of the British tradwives movement, it was relatively simple for the authors to identify the quote in tweet [12] as a phrase the Cotswolds’ housewife pronounced in early 2020. Based on Bakhtin’s theory of heteroglossia and dialogism, it may be useful here to briefly engage with the engagement resource located within the appraisal system network and which enables readers to evaluate how external voices are integrated into texts; in tweet [12], the author acknowledges the alternative voice and values introduced by the reported phrase through a process of “extra-vocalization” which incorporates external voices into a text through explicit or indirect quotation.³⁰ A closer look at the excerpt, however, reveals a number of discordant lexico-grammatical features which

²⁸ Michael Wesch, “YouTube and You: Experiences of Self-Awareness in the Context Collapse of the Recording Webcam”, *Explorations in Media Ecology*, 8.2 (2009), 23.

²⁹ Zappavigna, “Searchable talk: the linguistic functions of hashtags”, *Social Semiotics*, 25.3 (2015), 278.

³⁰ Peter R. R. White, “Extended Reality, Proto-Nouns and the Vernacular: Distinguishing the Technological from the Scientific”, in James R. Martin and Robert Veel, eds., *Reading Science: Critical and Functional Perspectives on Discourses of Science* (London: Routledge, 1998), 272.

contradict a bland integration of external viewpoints: the contrastive use of ‘but’ as a discourse opener, the use of ‘apparently’ to express doubt and scepticism, and the sarcasm inherent to the phrases ‘happy hubby’ and ‘oh the excitement’ clearly signal the value position with which the reader is being aligned. In Martin and White’s words: “In such cases the monoglossia of the attitudinal assessment over-rides the heteroglossia of the attribution to present the speaker/writer as categorically aligned with a given value position”.³¹ Again, as we have seen in previous cases, the two hashtags #Tradwife and #Tradwives serve to augment the negative attitude inscribed in the post by figuring as the participants against whom the sarcasm is directed. The last two tags in tweet [12], #feminismisbliss and #britanniadoesntrule, despite their culminative position, serve a fundamental role in the textual organization of the post: by heteroglossically positioning these ideational/interpersonal couplings in a contrastive relationship to the #Tradwife couplings, the author succeeds in evoking the putative values at the heart of the tradwife movement (anti-feminism, nationalism) and subsequently manipulating them by inscribing positive attitude. This complex mechanism is known as ‘finessing’ and is concerned with “meaning-making processes by which the speaker/writer negotiates relationships of alignment/disalignment with regard to the various value positions referenced by the text and hence vis-à-vis the socially-constituted communities of shared attitude and belief associated with those positions”.³²

3.3 (Anti)feminism

3.3.1 Upholding ‘choice’ and ‘femininity’

Some years ago, a number of scholars³³ began to claim that we had now entered a ‘postfeminist’ era due to the superannuated nature of the feminist issues still being championed, and the ongoing manipulation and commodification of feminist discourses exploited to promote women’s empowerment for commercial ends. Others, consider that the rise of antifeminism on SNSs and other participatory communities and the ensuing struggle to defend feminist values, point to the fact that the anti/pro-feminism debate is still very much alive today.³⁴

As Lawrence and Ringrose assert: “It is arguably the immediacy and connectivity of the Internet that have enabled this shift from “third-wave” to “fourth-wave” feminism. Social media sites allow users to interact and create spaces for discussion and what has led to a “call-out” culture, in which problematic behaviour such as misogyny can be identified, “called out”, and challenged”.³⁵ They further add: “Indeed, social media sites are so integral to the idea of a new era of feminism that research has positioned them as the birthplace of the fourth wave”.³⁶

³¹ Martin and White, *The Language of Evaluation*, 116.

³² *Ibid.*, 95.

³³ See for example: Ofra Koffman and Rosalind Gill, “‘I Matter and so Does She’: Girl Power, (Post)feminism and the Girl Effect”, in David Buckingham et al., eds., *Youth Cultures in the Age of Global Media. Studies in Childhood and Youth* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 242-257; Rosalind Gill and Ana Sofia Elias, “Awaken your incredible’: Love your Body Discourses and Postfeminist Contradictions”, *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics*, 10.2 (June 2014), 179-188.

³⁴ See for example: Ealasaid Munro, “Feminism: A Fourth Wave?”, *Political Insight*, 4.2 (2013), 22-25; Rosalind Gill, “Post-postfeminism?: New Feminist Visibilities in Postfeminist Times”, *Feminist Media Studies*, 16.4 (2016), 610-630; Debbie Ging, “Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere”, *Men and Masculinities*, 22.4 (2017), 638-657.

³⁵ Emilie Lawrence and Jessica Ringrose, “@notofeminism, #feministsareugly, and Misandry Memes: How Social Media Feminist Humor Is Calling out Antifeminism”, in Jessalynn Keller and Maureen E. Ryan, eds., *Emergent Feminisms: Complicating a Postfeminist Media Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 215.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 217.

Besides the ineradicable connection to social media, fourth wave feminism is also often referred to as ‘choice feminism’ due to the belief that today women’s authentic agency and empowerment necessarily stem from an ability to make their own choices, whether big or small.

In two of the excerpts which follow [13] [14], it is against what they perceive as the incoherence and hypocrisy of feminists that the Tradwives rebel, claiming that the scope of operable and acceptable ‘choices’ cannot exclude the desire to stay at home, thus by extension, tradwives qualify as feminists. Excerpt [13] once more calls out the inconsistency pertaining to the feminists’ selective choices and the ‘#IAmSoSickOf(Lies)’ tag serves as a popular, and often humorous, phrasal template meme on the Twitter platform customarily completed in many different ways: lies, drinking, commercials, men, taxes; its position as header of the post will doubtless serve to widen the Tradwife catchment area. Tweet [14], by anaphorically using the pronoun ‘she’ and the demonstrative adjective ‘this’ appears to call a specific interlocutor into play, although it does not draw upon the @ convention for broadcast messages. Although we are unable to provide any factual backing for this statement, the authors believe that the ‘she’ in question again refers to Alena Pettitt and to her much-criticised ‘submitting to my husband like it’s 1959’ tweet published at the beginning of 2020. Three aspects are of interest here: the previously mentioned anaphorical use of ‘she’ which points to the assumed widespread ambient participation in the ‘Tradwives’ discourse; the implicit nature of the provoked attitude expressed through the metaphor ‘froth at the mouth’ which denotes the mad/rabid traits often attributed to (hysterical) feminists; and lastly, the #makewomengreatagain, once again a phrasal template, which exploits the #MAGA (Make America Great Again) structure in order to reap the benefits of the association between the two affiliated ambient communities.

The second two tweets in the foursome that follows focus on the femininity versus feminism duality, the second main area of conflict dividing anti- from pro- feminists as the two terms embody the true essence of womanhood for the opposing factions. Tweets [15] and [16] both propagate the stereotypical image of feminists as sad, ugly (or at least unfeminine), and alone. The cliché is further enhanced by a number of well-selected lexical oppositions: in [15] ‘beautiful thing’ and ‘feast of femininity’ contrast with ‘sad existence’ and ‘threatened’; in [16] the #notofeminism in culminative position precludes feminists from being ‘true’ women, who are loved and protected by their men.

[13] #IAmSoSickOfLies First, #Feminist want self-empowered women, but then recoil in horror, if the choice is to stay at home #Tradwife

[14] Hasnt she got the right to choose this lifestyle if she wants? Why does it make you froth at the mouth? Interesting. I thought choice feminism was about women wanting to do whatever they want. She wants to be a #TradWife - shell have a long and successful marriage. #makewomengreatagain

[15] Yes. Yes. Being a #Tradwife is a beautiful thing a feast of femininity and it's only a reflection of their own sad existence that feminists could feel threatened by it #femininenotfeminist

[16] Just to confirm for the confused ones - a TRUE woman is one who embraces her femininity, nurtures & cares for her household, respects & allows her Man to lead #tradwife sums it up #notofeminism

3.3.2 Regression

[17] Ive no idea where the hashtag #tradwife comes from but it is so backward its North Korean #feminism #empoweringwomen

[18] the #tradwife movement is an insult to the advancement of women and is NOT something we should be promoting as a society. Theres a reason 1959 is in the past #genderequality #feminism

[19] This reinforcement of #tradwives ideology is based on specifying what kinds of choices and roles women are restricted to. And by almost every margin seen, it's used to reinforce White Supremacy. #getoutofthehouse #strongwomen #feminism

In their many posts, the anti-tradwife feminist tweeters underline the anachronistic, regressive nature of the Tradwife movement: in tweet [17] it is compared to the totalitarian state of North Korea where women's (and not only) freedom, rights and overall development are severely curtailed; in [18] the intertextual reference is once again to Alena Pettitt's post 'submit like it's 1959' which we have previously had occasion to mention. Post [19] is particularly interesting as, in critiquing the notion of restricted choice, the pro-feminism tweeter is in fact employing a reverse image structure of the tradwife argumentation: whereas, according to the tradwives, the feminists exclude the stay-at-home option from the array of possible choices a woman can make, the tradwives, from the feminist point of view, restrict a woman's choice exclusively to that very same option.

3.4 Toxic jezebels versus the younger cow

3.4.1 Toxic Jezebels

A further category which opposes the pro- and anti-tradwives centres on the relationship between tradwives and men. Whereas previously we investigated dominance versus submission, this micro-category focuses on the benefits that men acquire from entering into a relationship with a tradwife and, conversely, on the lack of benefits that the tradwives reap from such relationships. In the pro-tradwife tweets which follow it is the domestic, submissive, housebound qualities of stay-at-home-wives that are praised, and the excerpts all appear to be expressed with a man's point of view in mind although, as we have already had occasion to mention, it is impossible to ascertain the gender identity of Twitter users with any degree of conviction.

In excerpt [20] the support expressed for 'the boys' is supplemented by the aggregated tags: '#antifeminism', which merely serves to oppositionally highlight the values shunned by tradwife enthusiasts, and #MGTOW (Men Going Their Own Way), an online community of gender separatists located within the manosphere of anti-feminist websites, who advocate total dissociation from women. Their manifesto proclaims: "Men Going Their Own Way is a statement of self-ownership, where the modern man preserves and protects his own sovereignty above all else. It is the manifestation of one word: "No", thus ejecting silly preconceptions and cultural definitions of what a "man" is. Looking to no one else for social cues. Refusing to bow, serve and kneel for the opportunity to be treated like a disposable utility".³⁷ The submissive nature of the tradwives stands as a perfect corollary for men who do not wish to kowtow to dominant women.

Tweet [21] introduces an interesting structure in terms of textual organisation with the initial statement presenting the general prescriptive anti-feminist theme, reinforced by the deontic 'must', followed by a rhematic structure in which the inclusive 'we' / 'our', directly address the ambient male

³⁷ Men Going Their Own Way, www.mgtow.com/.

community; and the aggregate tags once more serve to reinforce the anti-feminist message. Excerpt [22] again adopts a prescriptive tone, though this time the imperatives are addressed to the mothers of the tradwife seekers. Here, the intertextual reference in the aggregate tags is to Megan Markle regularly accused by online trolls of being a narcissistic gold digger (#megain/#narcissisticabuse) and the reason for which Prince Harry decided to exit the Royal Family (#Megxit). From an interdiscursive point of view, Markle's detractors accuse her of being both a strong-willed feminist and a rather loose woman out to lure wealthy men (toxic jezebel) and thus the antithesis of the submissive, morally-upstanding tradwives they wish to find.

[20] #Tradwife a lady after my own heart. Let's hear it for the boys! #antifeminism
#MGTOW

[21] men must refrain from marrying a feminist or an employee woman. We have to look for a #Tradwife that we can trust in to keep the house and devote herself to raising our children = guarantee success in family relations for centuries, as well as creating job opportunities for men #nofeminism #traditionalgenderroles

[22] For mothers, raise your sons to have standards and boundaries, so they are not snared by feminists and toxic jezebels #Tradwife #narcissisticabuse #megain #Megxit

3.4.2 *The younger cow*

The anti-tradwife posts to be found in this micro-category, all focus on the expendable position that women occupy after having devoted their lives to men. The interesting aspect of the three tweets that follow is the switch of the chosen addressee and the accompanying change of tenor and mode. In tweet [23] while intertextually referring back to the statement 'your husband should always come first' (again, most probably with reference to one of Alena Pettitt's numerous externalizations), the author directly bombards the tradwives with a series of questions that recall spontaneous dialogue. In this manner an equal-footing relationship is established in which, although the language is crude ('dumps', 'younger cow'), the underlying sentiment appears to be one of sympathy and solidarity. The 'younger cow' expression stands as a form of invoked attitude provoked through metaphor, where the term 'cow', although not flattering, evokes a 'giving' animal with sacrificial virtues. Excerpt [24] appears to counter an underlying defensive statement uttered by the man who will 'trade in' his tradwife at a later point. This is an interesting mechanism since through pre-emptive denial of the right to speak, by 'silencing' the accused party's initial (understated) self-justificatory statement, the tweeter is able to minimize the strength of said statement and reinforce the strength and validity of his/her own accusatory arguments. Whereas tweet [23] expresses amazed sympathy for the tradwives' naivety and [24] blames men for the dire consequences that the tradwife will have to suffer, excerpt [25] returns once more to the concept of 'choice' and responsibility for the consequences of one's actions. By listing a series of positive adjectives and noun phrases – 'sharp-suited', 'intellectually stimulating' and 'female executive' – the author of the tweet implies that as the tradwife has chosen to be a sloppy, boring, housewife, she has also chosen to be betrayed. The #getoutofthehouse tag in culminative position is therefore a strongly-expressed order rather than an encouraging exhortation.

[23] OMG OMG! Cant believe this #tradwives your husband should always come first? And what will you do when he dumps you for a younger cow? Have you got a plan B?

[24] Until you trade her with a younger woman in later life and your #tradwife's pension will be fucked up and she will have to start working at Tesco by the age of 50.

[25] Its her choice after all if he runs away with some sharp-suited, intellectually stimulating female executive, nobodyll be a bit surprised. #tradwife #tradwives #getoutofthehouse

3.5 Nationalist sentiment #MAGA, #Brexit and the #Tradwife nightmare

As can be seen in the four tweets that follow, the connection between the tradwife movement and national unity is recognized by both those in favour and those against. The causal link, however, differs in the two categories. In the ‘pro’ excerpts [26] and [27] it is by upholding the movement that Britain [26] and America [27] will thrive. In [26] the repeated use of the inclusive adjective ‘our’ serves to reinforce the nationalistic in-group sentiment and to charge the ideational hashtag #TrueBrit, open to contextual modification, with positive interpersonal sentiment. In [27], the link between tradwives and right-wing traditional values is brought to the fore by the aggregated tags in culminative position: the homeschool moms defend their childrens’education against the invasive power of the state, and the #ServeYourFamilyServeYourCountry and #Make America Great Again tags are good examples of the right-wing rhetoric that fuels the passions of activists bent on restoring ‘traditional family values’ to the centre of American life.

In the ‘anti’ tweets [28] and [29], tradwives are no longer seen as the driving force behind positive national expansion, but rather as a further negative consequence of the isolationist policies implemented by Brexit and Trumpism.

[26] #TradWives are good for our people and our country #TrueBrit

[27] If you want to see a better, thriving America, promote #tradwives #homeschool moms #ServeYourFamilyServeYourCountry. #MAGA

[28] Ok so #MAGA and #Brexit most definitely led to the #TradWife nightmare

[29] #tradwife life is definitely not for me IT has scary undertones of “Make Britain Great Again”. Luckily MBGA doesn't have the same ring as #MAGA

4. Discussion and Conclusive Remarks

According to J. Daniels: “Ever since its mainstream adoption in the 1990s, the Internet has been exploited, amongst other things, by white supremacist groups as a tool to recruit and radicalize unwary individuals”.³⁸ Twenty years down the line, social media platforms, such as Reddit, YouTube, and Twitter, continue to further this practice. Although to date attention has often focused on posts, streams, or single tweets posted by men as the principal agents of online diffusion and subsequent radicalization, we feel that disregarding the role of women as active promulgators of white, supremacist and nationalistic values would in fact skew our understanding of the phenomenon as a whole.

While investigating the Twitter streams upon which this study focuses, with a view to understanding how users create and negotiate micro-blogging discourses around traditional gender roles and values (RQ 1), it soon became evident that women³⁹ were actively supporting ambient

³⁸ Jessie Daniels, *Cyber Racism: White Supremacy Online and the New Attack on Civil Rights* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), 3.

³⁹ As previously mentioned, although it may appear somewhat naive to take declared gender at face value, a number of recent studies from which we have quoted (amongst others: Julia Ebner’s *Going Dark*, Kathleen Blee’s *Racism: Women in the Hate Movement*) have amply demonstrated, interviews at hand, that woman play an active role in propagating right wing values.

communications whose main focus was to re-establish traditional heterosexual/monogamist values, criticize feminism, and forward right-wing propaganda. Our analysis illustrates how, when promoting traditional gender roles in their online posts, the tradwife women assume the role of submissive wives, doting mothers or brides-to-be, striving to emulate widely promoted prelapsarian values of domesticity and compliance. In their tweets men on the other hand deploy their virility and masculinity, vow to support and safeguard their house-bound spouses and regularly uphold the value of whiteness. Such findings are in line with other investigations of women related to far right/extremist movements: in her study of interviews with women belonging to the Ku Klux Klan and Neo-Nazi groups, Kathleen Blee documents how they mould their understandings of community goals to fit their own beliefs and life experiences, and subsequently strive to “perform the wifely supportive roles that enable white Aryan men to maintain their racial vigilance”.⁴⁰

The opportunity to spread propaganda to a vast audience at practically no cost or exertion is one of the most appealing reasons for employing SNSs for indoctrination and group recruitment; and, as Koehler states: “These structural amenities ... effectiveness, cheap communication, anonymity, economical gain etc. allow for a better integration of each member into the movement arguably leading to the stabilization of the ideological commitment and the consolidation of the worldview”.⁴¹

It seems to us that the intersectional nature of the microblogging discourses under observation in this study, effectively serves to extend the Tradwives catchment area to ensnare affiliate communities. The analysis has in fact often revealed a theme/rheme pattern, with tradwife standing as theme and affiliated tags standing as rheme and charging the ideational tag with positive or negative interpersonal value depending on the interests being upheld.

Our investigation on the role hashtags play in propagating ideologies and broadening ambient affiliation (RQ 2), confirms they have the power to operate an “audience-selecting role”,⁴² indeed, as previously mentioned, posts containing a hashtag can reach audiences well beyond the catchment area of existing followers.

It must also be remembered that besides devoted hashtags and trending content, Twitter users can also be introduced to topics related to their generic sphere of interest through the recommendation algorithms which display content on the basis of users’ previous online behaviour. The recommendations present analogous accounts for the users to follow, creating networks of like-minded prosumers and content. Returning to this specific study, it is indeed by following this stepping-stone itinerary that a person interested in innocuous tips concerning, for example, British floral designs could progressively find themselves “sliding down the rabbit hole”⁴³ of traditional nationalistic values, as the term ‘British’ is granted salience by the algorithm.

As has become evident through our current research, it is often by adding ever more virulent hashtags to the initially harmless ones used as a lure, that radicalized users and activist groups can ensnare new affiliates.

To conclude, the online complex of interpersonal bonds which traverse multiple discursive regions creating communities and sub-communities and often invoking large networks of values is now very much part of our world. And those engaged in investigating discursive features have a crucial role in tracing such new forms of consensus building. We as researchers must (at least try) to survey linguistic phenomena while steering clear of any ideological influence. This is where corpus collection and

⁴⁰ Kathleen Blee, “Becoming a Racist: Women in Contemporary Ku Klux Klan and Neo-Nazi Groups”, *Gender & Society*, 10.6 (December 1996), 691.

⁴¹ Daniel Koehler, “The Radical Online: Individual Radicalization Processes and the Role of the Internet”, *Journal for Deradicalization*, 1 (December 2014), 119.

⁴² Umashanthi Pavalanathan and Jacob Eisenstein, “Audience-modulated Variation in Online Social Media”, *American Speech*, 90 (2015), 205.

⁴³ Sarah Florini, “Tweets, Tweeps, and Signifyin’: Communication and Cultural Performance on ‘Black Twitter’”, *Television & New Media*, 15.3 (March 2014), 228.

quantitative analysis play a significant role: while an objective stance is doubtless difficult to apply to such ideologically marked themes, data-driven research contributes to keeping scholars on the right track enabling them to produce objective and informative results.

To counter and challenge online extremist movements and the damage they cause, anti-discriminatory speech guidelines should be enforced on websites. Such measures will, however, only be effective if enacted in combination with educational initiatives. While we, as academics, may detect and trace social phenomena by identifying recurring linguistic traits, as educationalists we must encourage young people to hone their critical thinking skills. Against the current backdrop of dangerously shifting political dynamics, research and education may promote adequate measures to prevent the attractiveness and inclusiveness of extremist online and offline movements.

We hope the reader will now excuse us while we celebrate the end of our research by having a genuinely British cup of tea.

“Beautiful, maidenlike and a housewife”.
Gender in the Rise of the Far Right in Brazil

Abstract: The last six years in Brazilian politics have been defined by tense polarization. Such polarization reached its peak during the impeachment process that removed former President Dilma Rousseff from office, often characterized by commentators as social, political and even affective turn in the country. Ample media discussions were held regarding corruption, nationalism, unemployment, inflation and even communism. Another important issue, however, related to the impeachment process is that of gender, which has not deserved the same attention, especially in mainstream media. During the course of the impeachment, a magazine article received wide public attention: “Marcela Temer: bela, recatada e do lar” [“Marcela Temer: beautiful, maidenlike and ‘a housewife’”] was published by *Veja* magazine on April 18, 2016, featuring Brazil’s then-future first lady, and circulated intensively on the Web. Against this backdrop, this paper analyzes the aforementioned article by tracking its trajectory online and by investigating how femininity is (re)performed at each entextualization until the campaign period in 2018. Partial results show that the figure of personhood projected for women by *Veja* is sharply contrasted with the one projected onto Ms Rousseff. Such figure of personhood was later picked up by right-wing extremists, who blatantly reject gender equality and emphasize the role of women in the private sphere. I argue that such conservative view of gender helped discursively construct Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment in 2016 and was later integrated into the complex neofascist politics which elected Jair Bolsonaro President of Brazil.

Keywords: *gender, impeachment, chronotope, identities, far-right, fascism*

1. Introduction

In 2018, Brazil elected far-right politician Jair Bolsonaro to be its President for the forthcoming four years. Brazil was certainly not the first country to swerve to the right, as the world has been witnessing the rise of far-right politicians and parties. In the Brazilian case, the 2018 elections seem to have been a finish-line for a process which started in 2014, after the re-election of left-wing President Dilma Rousseff (*Partido dos Trabalhadores-PT*, Workers’ Party). Displeased with that result, two months after the election, millions of people throughout the country held public demonstrations to protest against the PT government, many of which demanded Ms. Rousseff’s impeachment.

After tumultuous internal processing (with special commissions installed, reports, votings, appeals to the Supreme Court etc.), congress impeached president Dilma Rousseff on August 31, 2016, and vice-president Michel Temer took office until January 01, 2019, when Bolsonaro’s incumbency started. Former president Rousseff, members of the PT and the left-wing in general have declared that Ms. Rousseff’s removal from office was a coup d’état, arguing that there was no legal basis to justify an impeachment. Many commentators, including Ms. Rousseff,¹ have stated that this process was underpinned by misogynistic and sexist motives, not least because it was driven by an alliance formed mostly by (white) men. This means that gender is a key element in this intricate process.

¹ For Dilma Rousseff’s speech immediately after her impeachment see “Dilma Rousseff faz pronunciamento após votação final do impeachment”, *YouTube* (2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKkpe53jaPk&t=3s>.

In this paper I analyse how discourses about gender have aided the rise of conservatism and right-wing extremism in Brazilian institutional politics. To do so, I centre my analysis on an article published by *Veja* magazine on April 18, 2016 titled “*Marcela Temer: bela, recatada e ‘do lar’*” [“Marcela Temer: Beautiful, maidenlike and ‘a housewife’”], featuring Brazil’s then-future first lady. Published one day after the Lower House of congress had approved the impeachment request, the article circulated intensively in the media and on the internet, reaching the country’s Trending Topics. More specifically, the analysis does not only concentrate on the *Veja* article vis-à-vis Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment, but also seeks to examine its intertextual connections with other media outputs: a previous text about Dilma Rousseff’s presidency, published by *Isto É* magazine, and successive instances of recontextualization: first, when Ms. Marcela Temer (as first lady) launched a new government initiative in October 2016; second, during a campaign act in 2018 defending candidate Jair Bolsonaro (the current president).

The next section is aimed at providing some background information about the recent political scenario in Brazil, focusing specifically on Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment process. I argue, following several commentators, that the proceedings intensified political polarisation in Brazil, not least because the PT administrations had an impact on the enfranchisement of poor and black people, women and the LGBTIQ community. Specifically, gender was a key element in the communication of the impeachment.

In section 3, I discuss the methodological strategy of tracking textual trajectories, as I argue that the figure of personhood constructed for Marcela Temer in the *Veja* article moved across different contexts, undergoing necessary adjustments and modifications at each phase of entextualisation, from *Veja* (during the impeachment proceedings) until a campaign act of far-right politicians. The data are presented in subsections 4.1 through 4.4.

The analysis of articles published in *Veja* (subsection 4.1) and *Isto É* (subsection 4.2) shows how gender was linked to Brazilian institutional politics while the impeachment was being processed. The different kinds of femininity performed by Dilma Rousseff and Marcela Temer are explored in order to construct different realities for the country, vis-à-vis the presence (or absence) of women in positions of power. In subsection 4.3, we observe how the identity constructed for Ms. Temer was recontextualised in the launching of government programme *Criança Feliz*, i.e., during Temer’s administration. Subsection 4.4 shows an example of how the femininity previously embodied by Ms. Temer is used strategically in more radical terms under the ideology of bolsonarismo. I then provide my concluding remarks on section 5, warning against the fascist threat in Brazil, whose recent political scenario I discuss in the next section.

2. The Impeachment Process and the Macropolitical Landscape of Brazil

Dilma Rousseff’s second term in the presidency started with a sharp economic recession, as GDP shrank by 3.5%, with rising unemployment and inflation.² Moreover, the PT was facing massive corruption accusations as a result of the investigations carried out by Car Wash Operation (*Operação Lava-Jato*). Consequently Ms. Rousseff was dealing with a crisis both political and economic, as her approval rates to drop to 9% in July, 2015.³

In this scenario, as mentioned in the introduction, the impeachment process started on December 2, 2015, when the impeachment request filed by the opposition was accepted by former President of the Lower House, Eduardo Cunha (*Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro-PMDB*, Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement). The request argued that fiscal manoeuvres, undertaken to comply

² Laura Carvalho, *Valsa Brasileira: do Boom ao Caos Econômico* (São Paulo: Todavia, 2018), 98.

³ See Leandro Prazeres, “Aprovação ao governo Dilma é de 9%, diz Ibope”, *UOL* (2015), <https://noticias.uol.com.br/politica/ultimas-noticias/2015/07/01/dilma-pesquisa-ibope.htm>.

with the surplus target, should be considered crimes committed by the president, which is the legal requirement for an impeachment. After the appropriate steps to process the request were taken, the Lower House approved the impeachment on April 17, 2016. The Senate, then, impeached Ms. Rousseff on August 31, 2016.⁴

Based on the above timeline, three important points can be raised. Firstly, several intellectuals,⁵ denounced the impeachment as a coup d'état, arguing that the budget manoeuvres mentioned above were not illegal, which meant there was no legal basis for the impeachment. This issue is controversial, but many intellectuals in the field of Law, with whom I align, agree that the reasons for the impeachment were not actually crimes.⁶ The government also defended the idea that the coup was orchestrated by the elites and carried out by congress with the goal of stopping the inclusion of social minorities seen during the PT administrations. Indeed, malnutrition dropped by 80% and Brazil left the UN Hunger Map in 2014.⁷ Efforts to enfranchise black and indigenous people, women and the LGBTQ community were also undertaken, amongst other policies. So, replacing Ms. Rousseff with her VP Michel Temer would allow for the implementation of neoliberal reforms to reduce the size of the State, thereby interrupting the expansion of social rights to groups historically marginalised. Unsurprisingly, the Temer administration did introduce neoliberal reforms while it also produced massive corruption scandals.

Secondly, Dilma Rousseff's impeachment was not a consensus within Brazilian society. The 9-month long impeachment process was accompanied by street demonstrations both pro and against the removal of president Rousseff. These two opposing political groups disputed the narrative constructing the process as either a legitimate impeachment or a coup d'état in an environment of great uncertainty and tension. This means that institutional politics⁸ has become a popular subject in Brazil, as people have been actively participating in discussions and public demonstrations, even if in offensive terms. As Borba⁹ argues, this process threw the country into an affective polarization, in which hateful and outrageous comments and speeches became more frequent and accepted in political debates, both inside and outside parliament. A famous indication of the growing hostility between such groups was a bumper sticker many attached to their car gas tank, which depicted president Rousseff with her legs spread as the gas pump metaphorically violated her. Indeed, Borba¹⁰ also argues that such radicalisation provided the “niche within which Bolsonaro was able to thrive”, reaching the presidency of Brazil with nearly 58 million votes. Once in office, this discursive dynamic has become a pattern of

⁴ The Brazilian constitution establishes that both Houses of congress must approve the impeachment of a president, by a majority of 60% each.

⁵ Jessé Souza, *A Radiografia do Golpe: Entenda como e por que Você Foi Enganado* (Rio de Janeiro: Leya, 2016); Marilena Chauí, “A Nova Classe Trabalhadora Brasileira e a Ascensão do Conservadorismo”, in Ivana Jinkings et al., eds., *Por que Gritamos Golpe? Para Entender o Impeachment e a Crise Política no Brasil* (São Paulo: Boitempo Editorial, 2016), 15-22; André Singer, *O Lulismo em Crise: um Quebra-cabeça do Período Dilma (2011-2016)* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2018).

⁶ Marcelo Semer, “Ruptura Institucional e Desconstrução do Modelo Democrático: o Papel do Judiciário”, in Ivana Jinkings et al., eds., *Por que Gritamos Golpe? Para Entender o Impeachment e a Crise Política no Brasil* (São Paulo: Boitempo Editorial, 2016) 107-114; Lenio Streck, “Lawfare”, in Giovanni Alves et al., eds., *Enciclopédia do Golpe. Vol. 1* (Bauru: Canal 6, 2017), 119-126.

⁷ See FAO, IFAD and WFP, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World: Strengthening the Enabling Environment for Food Security and Nutrition* (Rome: FAO, 2014), <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4030e.pdf>.

⁸ The reason why I choose “institutional politics” (as opposed to simply “politics”) is due to the fact that there is a political dimension to all aspects of life, from waking up under a roof to being stopped by the police. I use “institutional politics” to emphasize the role of so-called democratic institutions. So, this refers to talk about political parties, politicians, bills, laws etc. The growth of this kind of talk is observable in the last few years in Brazil.

⁹ Rodrigo Borba, “Disgusting Politics: Circuits of Affects and the Making of Bolsonaro”, *Social Semiotics*, 31.5 (2020), 677-694.

¹⁰ Borba, “Disgusting Politics”.

communication, something Silva (2020)¹¹ calls incendiary framing, i.e. consistently “being outrageous, responding to critique with slurs, and inciting the communicability ... of hate and fear”.

The third important point is the relevance of gender in the communication of the impeachment. Even though the impeachment request legally accused Ms. Rousseff of fiscal crimes, many debates in traditional and social media centred around other topics, such as corruption, economic policy and gender. Sosa argues that issues of gender and sexuality played a key role in Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment and in the consolidation of the right-wing.¹² He argues¹³ that, as president, Ms. Rousseff challenged gender norms both in her gender performance and in her policies. Of course, this is not restricted to Brazil. Even though so-called Global Right is not a unified movement, “antagonism towards feminism is both a sentiment at the heart of the right’s value system and a political strategy, a platform for organizing and for recruiting massive support” all over the globe.¹⁴

Against this backdrop, the *Veja* article on Marcela Temer, praising her as a beautiful woman who enjoys staying home and taking care of her children and husband, called attention especially because it was published only one day after the Lower House of congress had approved Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment. What this paper shows is that that specific model of femininity also played a role during Temer’s incumbency and in Bolsonaro’s election. This means that such model was recontextualised in different texts, following a text trajectory. In the next section, I lay out why and how I am tracking this text trajectory as a methodological tool of analysis.

3. Text Trajectories: The Performative Circulation of Discourse

As Blommaert argues, texts shift from one context to the other.¹⁵ The impeachment request, for example, was ‘originally’ filed on October 21, 2015 and made its way into commission discussions, reports, appeals, Supreme Court decisions and voting sessions, among others. Hence, “texts are [...] transportable ‘projectiles’ that travel across contexts”¹⁶ which means that any text is an entextualisation, i.e., a selection of forms, structures and meanings intended to circulate further. So, for example, an article about the first-lady’s beauty published on a weekly magazine will likely be received in a middle-class family living room, where it can be discussed amongst family members.¹⁷ This is possible because discourse can “be viewed not as restricted to a single, bounded context but as continually decontextualized and recontextualized—extracted from certain texts, genres, contexts, and social worlds and inserted in others”.¹⁸

In this paper, after comparing the models of femininity constructed by *Veja* for Marcela Temer and by *Isto É* for Dilma Rousseff, I show how Ms. Temer’s emphasised femininity travels into two other contexts: the launching of a government programme in 2017 and a campaign act in 2018.¹⁹ For this

¹¹ Daniel Silva, “The Pragmatics of Chaos: Parsing Bolsonaro’s Undemocratic Language”, *Trabalhos em Linguística Aplicada*, 59.1 (January-April 2020), 524.

¹² Jay Sosa. “Subversive, Mother, Killjoy: Sexism against Dilma Rousseff and the Social Imaginary of Brazil’s Rightward Turn”, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 44.3 (July-September 2019), 738.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 719.

¹⁴ Agnieszka Graff, et al., “Introduction: Gender and the Rise of the Global Right”, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 44.3 (July-September 2019), 541.

¹⁵ Jan Blommaert, *Discourse: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 62.

¹⁶ Johanna Woydack and Ben Rampton, “Text Trajectories in a Multilingual Call Centre: The Linguistic Ethnography of a Calling Script”, *Working Papers on Urban Languages and Literacies*, 147 (London: King’s College, 2015), 4.

¹⁷ Any linguistic production may well involve expectations of circulation, but these expectations may not be met. For example, a phone conversation is generally expected to circulate no further than the duration of the call. However, if it leaks to the media, that conversation may be listened to in the news, corporate media websites, YouTube, vlogs etc.

¹⁸ Charles Briggs, “Anthropology, Interviewing, and Communicability in Contemporary Social Life”, *Current Anthropology*, 48 (2007), 562.

¹⁹ I provide further details on choice of data as I analyse each text.

reason, I have chosen to track textual trajectories as a methodological strategy,²⁰ as it allows for an examination of how discourse circulated creating meanings about gender, from the impeachment in 2016 to the election of far-right president Jair Bolsonaro in 2018. Examining discourse circulation provides a privileged position for an analysis of how the social reality of the impeachment (and its aftermaths) was constructed, and how discourses about gender were modified and adapted in different recontextualisations.

This selection of data shows how discourses about gender travelled through contexts being consistently entextualised in more conservative and reactionary terms. This process seems to be imbricated with the replacing of left-winger Dilma Rousseff with conservative Michel Temer, and then with the election of far-right extremist Jair Bolsonaro. To undertake this analysis, I now turn to data analysis, beginning with the *Veja* article about Marcela Temer.

4. Gender in Brazil's Rightward Turn

As mentioned in the introduction, I start my data analysis by examining the *Veja* article “*Marcela Temer: Bela, recatada e ‘do lar’*” [beautiful, maidenlike and ‘a housewife’].²¹ Then I analyse how it relates to an article about Dilma Rousseff (published in *Isto É* - see subsection 4.2); and how it was recontextualised during the Temer administration (subsection 4.3) and in the Bolsonaro campaign (subsection 4.4).

4.1 Beautiful, maidenlike and “a housewife” - the next first-family

On April 18, 2016, one day after the voting session in the Lower House, *Veja* magazine published article titled *Marcela Temer: Bela, recatada e ‘do lar’* [beautiful, maidenlike and ‘a housewife’],²² which was the second Trending Topic on Twitter in Brazil on April 19, 2016²³ and generated a series of parodies on the internet. *Veja* is a nation-wide publication and the most sold magazine in the country.²⁴ It has a right-wing audience of conservative middle-class individuals.

²⁰ Blommaert, *Discourse*; Branca Fabricio, “Trajectories of Socialization in School Transcontexts: Discourse Journeys on Gender and Sexuality”, *Working Papers on Urban Languages and Literacies*, 94 (London; King’s College, 2012).

²¹ Title translation was taken from an article on *Forbes*, which covered the circulation of the *Veja* piece. See <https://www.forbes.com/sites/shannonsims/2016/04/20/the-hilarious-feminist-backlash-to-brazils-impeachment-fallout/#28a254f76573>.

²² See Juliana Linhares, “Marcela Temer: bela, recatada e ‘do lar’: A quase primeira-dama, 43 anos mais jovem que o marido, aparece pouco, gosta de vestidos na altura dos joelhos e sonha em ter mais um filho com o vice”, *Veja* (2016), <https://veja.abril.com.br/brasil/marcela-temer-bela-recatada-e-do-lar/>.

²³ The most commented hashtag was #emmemoriadelas (in memory of them [feminine]), which shared information about women tortured and killed during the Brazilian military dictatorship. This is related to the homage by Jair Bolsonaro (a congressman back in 2016) to Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra (a well-known torturer). Ms. Rousseff was tortured during the dictatorship. See <https://trendogate.com/placebydate/23424768/2016-04-19>.

²⁴ Pedro Sobreiro, “Qual a revista de maior circulação no Brasil? E no mundo? Poderia ser a ME...”, *Super Interessante* (2020), <https://super.abril.com.br/mundo-estranho/qual-a-revista-de-maior-circulacao-no-brasil-e-no-mundo/>.

Marcela Temer: bela, recatada e “do lar”

A quase primeira-dama, 43 anos mais jovem que o marido, aparece pouco, gosta de vestidos na altura dos joelhos e sonha em ter mais um filho com o vice

Por Juliana Linhares
19 de abril de 2016, 19h04



Marcela, mulher do vice, Michel Temer, jantares românticos e apertados carinhosos (Bruno Poletti/Folhapress)

Marcela Temer é uma mulher de sorte. Michel Temer, seu marido há treze anos, continua a lhe dar provas de que a paixão não arrefeceu com o tempo nem com a convulsão política que vive o país – e em cujo epicentro ele mesmo se encontra. Há cerca de oito meses, por exemplo, o vice-presidente, de 75 anos, levou Marcela, de 32, para jantar na sala especial do sofisticado, caro e badalado restaurante Antiquarius, em São Paulo. Blindada nas paredes, no teto e no chão para ser à prova de som e garantir os segredos dos muitos políticos que costumam reunir-se no local, a sala tem capacidade para acomodar trinta pessoas, mas foi esvaziada para receber apenas “Mar” e “Mi”, como são chamados em família. Lá, protegido por quatro seguranças (um na cozinha, um no toalete, um na entrada da sala e outro no salão principal do restaurante), o casal desfrutou algumas horas de jantar romântico sob um céu estrelado, graças

Image 1: Title, lead and main picture in the *Veja* article

The article in question presents characteristics of both VP Michel Temer and his wife, Marcela. The *lead* in the article refers to Marcela Temer as the “almost first lady”, which implies that her becoming first lady is a matter of time, as there is no precondition required, such as “if the impeachment is indeed approved”. Hence, it was also a matter of time for Ms. Rousseff to be replaced with Mr. Temer in the presidency of Brazil. This reference together with the date when this text was published produce an intertextual link between the article and the session in the Lower House, and the former ought to be seen as a recontextualisation of the latter, even if the article does not state that explicitly.

The article mentions that the Temers go to fancy restaurants where important people are regulars (lines 5 and 6) and plan holidays at the beach (lines 23 and 24). Marcela goes to beauty parlours (line 35) and has personal stylists (lines 43 and 44). Together, these signs index a routine of a high-class family that Michel and Marcela Temer live. The whole narrative takes place in high-class environments, where everything develops in an ordered and balanced manner, with no mentions to situations of stress or fights, for example, between the Temer couple.

Bakhtin proposes the notion of chronotope, that is, time and space as one inseparable dimension (Timespace), constructing a social world that organises the narrative and selects elements and characters that fit into the timespace characteristics it builds.²⁵ Blommaert exemplifies this process with the indexical “once upon a time” in a narrative, which “prompts a timeless and geographically unidentifiable place in which princes, giants, witches, wizards, and dwarfs can be expected alongside imaginary animals (dragons, unicorns) and animated objects (talking trees or moving rocks)”.²⁶

At first, the narrative takes place in an expensive restaurant, which the article qualifies as “sophisticated, expensive and cool” (line 4). Other locations they inhabit are the north coast of São

²⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981).

²⁶ Jan Blommaert, “Chronotopes, Scales, and Complexity in the Study of Language in Society”, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 44 (2015), 111.

Paulo (lines 23 and 24), beauty parlours with a fancy clientele (line 40) and the Palace of Jaburu (line 53) – which is the VP’s official residence in Brasília – accompanied by habits such as smoking cigars and drinking wine. These places and habits index a chronotope of urban high-class society, since most people cannot afford to share these places and habits.

According to Blommaert and De Fina,²⁷ chronotopes work as identity frames, because “[they are] a constraint on what is possible in the way of identity work”. Agha states that certain textual forms, and I would add chronotopes, are indexically associated with figures of personhood.²⁸ So, the timespace configuration summons these figures to inhabit it and perform roles, which may or may not be in accordance with the chronotope of the narrative.

In the case under analysis here, it is necessary that characters are constructed as figures of personhood adequate to the urban high-class chronotope, of order and balance. In this sense, Marcela Temer is constructed as sophisticated (line 5), nurturing, calling her husband by his nickname “Mi” (line 9), romantic (line 12), as well as extremely polite (line 33). Such characteristics index an identity of a high-class woman, who knows how to inhabit the chronotope created for the narrative.

Under the title, the lead describes Marcela: “The almost first-lady, 43 years younger than her husband, appears little [in public], likes knee-long dresses and dreams of having another child with the vice [president]”. The parallelism is evident between title and lead: “Marcela Temer” becomes “the almost first lady”; “beautiful” becomes “43 years younger than her husband”; “maidenlike” becomes “appears little in public, likes knee-long dresses”; and “a housewife” becomes “dreams of having another child with the vice-president”. Hence, her youth indexes beauty (Marcela was 32 years-old then); staying in the private sphere and not wearing revealing clothes index good behaviour for a woman (a maiden); and being a housewife involves motherhood (having and taking care of children and therefore being a good mother). Marcela is constructed as a good woman, on the basis of her appearance, as well as her social and professional behaviour. By the same token, she is also presented as a woman loyal to her husband (line 14), a good mother (line 28), a good housewife (line 29).

It is noticeable that Marcela’s femininity is constructed in strict dialogue with the model of womanhood produced within the heterosexual matrix. According to Butler, “gender ... is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality”.²⁹ The complementarity between male and female passes as a natural fact, when it is actually achieved through constant performative work. Discourse on gender does not simply inform us about men and women; it creates these very objects. So, the urban high-class chronotope, in which the actions develop in an ordered and balanced fashion, is also constructed on the basis of the performance of gender which does not disturb the heterosexual matrix, thereby not causing confusion or problems.

Unsurprisingly, VP Michel Temer’s identity is constructed in such a way that complements Marcela’s and works adequately in the constructed chronotope. According to *Veja*, Michel constantly proves that his passion has not “gone cold” (line 2), smokes cigars and drinks wine (line 51) and has published a poetry book (lines 53 to 58). Such qualities index a romantic and sophisticated man. He is also constructed as a hardworking man, who works to “exhaustion” (lines 50 and 51). In this chronotope, Michel Temer inhabits the desired position of man – because he has the necessary qualities – in this high-class, sophisticated and heterocisnormative world.

The construction of Michel as a hardworking man and of Marcela as a housewife reproduces the gendered division of tasks within the family. In such a division, the woman is responsible for the private sphere, and therefore has a secondary role, reinforced in line 44, when Marcela Temer is constructed as Michel’s “digital hand [arm]”, constantly checking social networks to keep her husband informed. Not only is she constructed as a helper, but the metaphoric reference to her as a part of the

²⁷ Jan Blommaert and Anna De Fina, “Chronotopic Identities: On the Timespace Organization of Who We Are”, *Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies*, Paper 153 (2015), 6-7.

²⁸ Asif Agha, *Language and Social Relations* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 2006), 138-139.

²⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 194.

man's body intertextually invokes the biblical story of Adam and Eve, which cooperates in the naturalisation of gender division and hierarchization, by attributing a secondary role to women.

The aforementioned naturalisation of gender roles receives explicit evaluation in the article, as can be observed in the first and last sentences, which present parallel structures. The first sentence, under the lead, is "Marcela Temer is a lucky woman" and the last sentence in the article is "Michel Temer is a lucky man". This positive evaluation of the Temers leaves readers to imagine who the unlucky people are, those who don't inhabit this chronotope. In other words, since not everyone can inhabit the heterocisnormative high-class chronotope or performs gender in the same manner, readers ought to fill in the blanks: those excluded from the chronotope are unlucky men and women.

Readers are presented with the image of success: the clear division and hierarchy that constructs good masculinity (performed by Michel Temer) and good femininity (performed by Marcela), especially vis-à-vis the public sphere, in impressive conformity with the heterosexual matrix. So, we are left with the thought of: how was Dilma Rousseff constructed in the media when she was president? The next section tries to answer that.

4.2 *A president out of her mind*

The article "A president out of her mind [*Uma presidente fora de si*]"³⁰ was published in the weekly magazine *Isto É* on April 06, 2016, that is, 12 days prior to the *Veja* article on Marcela Temer. This piece was published in the same week when congressman Jovair Arantes would present his report on the impeachment (which would later be the basis for the voting). The article motivated the hashtag #IstoÉMachismo (literally, this is sexism, which is a pun on the magazine name), which entered the Brazilian Trending Topics.

The article begins with the sentence: "The last few days in the *Planalto* have been marked by moments of extreme tension and absolute disorder with a president dominated by constant nervous explosions, when, in addition to irritability, she exhibits total disconnection with the reality of the country"³¹ (lines 1 to 3). Other predications attributed to Ms. Rousseff include "out of her mind" (lines 6 and 27-28), out of sync with reality (lines 3 and 39), "emotionally dismantled" (lines 65 and 66), "out of whack" (line 75). She is also said to be taking prescription drugs, including one to treat schizophrenia (lines 18 and 19).³² All these predications index a diagnosis of psychological disease, which means that *Isto É* constructs Ms. Rousseff as a clinically insane woman.

The publication also states that the president was "irascible" (line 6), "aggressive" (line 7), "vindictive" (line 57), "desperate" (line 58), "irresponsible" (line 58), impatient (line 31), which are feelings evaluated negatively that index lack of capacity to govern a country. These feelings may be understood as symptoms of the state of madness Ms. Rousseff was supposedly in. The symptoms also include actions negatively evaluated, such as yelling curse-words at random (line 9), as well as directed at drivers (line 83), pilots (line 23 and 28-29), members of her staff and political allies (lines 87, 91, 93 and 94); destroying the furniture when reacting to bad news (line 16). In a similar vein, the magazine cover shows the president with her mouth open, seemingly screaming (image 2 below), suggesting that that image is an example of Ms. Rousseff's screams and curse-words. The photograph, however, was taken when president Dilma Rousseff was celebrating a goal scored by the Brazilian national team (image 3 below) during the 2014 World Cup, hosted by Brazil.

³⁰ See Sérgio Pardellas and Débora Bergamasco, "Uma presidente fora de si", *Istoé* (2016), https://istoe.com.br/450027_UMA+PRESIDENTE+FORA+DE+SI/.

³¹ The Palácio do Planalto (Highland Palace) is the official federal government headquarters.

³² Line 20 in the text actually says the medicine is not effective, as is easily noticeable, indicating the level of sarcasm with which Ms. Rousseff was being treated.



Image 2: Ms. Rousseff screaming in *Isto É* cover



Image 3: Ms. Rousseff screams in celebration of a goal scored by the Brazilian team

As a result, this construction of Ms. Rousseff is built around a chronotope of disorder, mainly due to the president's reactions, which cause a state of permanent stress. In other words, her figure of personhood is the cause of this permanent stress and chaos. Moreover, the situations narrated are all problematic, such as delays, airplane turbulences, corruption accusations, not to mention the impeachment request being processed in congress. In this timespace configuration, and considering her supposed reactions, Dilma Rousseff is constructed as the reason for the economic and political crisis, invoking the Freudian concept of hysteric woman. It should be noted that Ms. Rousseff does not fit the female model advocated by the *Veja* article on Marcela Temer. Rather, Ms. Rousseff was involved in the armed movement against the dictatorship and has a reputation of never crying (not even when she underwent torture). So, Ms. Rousseff performs a kind of femininity which is very different from Marcela Temer.

Consequently, in a state of absolute chaos, the political crisis will be resolved by restoring order. The construction by *Isto É* of a woman in a position of power, together with the construction by *Veja* of an ordered and balanced world with a woman in a secondary position, allows for the interpretation

that the order to be restored to the country begins by restoring the patriarchal order of gender hierarchy. The bourgeois family ideal offers a synecdoche of a broader social order discursively embodied by the Temers. They inhabit a chronotope of order and equilibrium, as Michel and Marcela perform the activities in accordance with the patriarchal gender division and hierarchy. Replacing Dilma Rousseff with Michel Temer is the alternative to resolve the crisis, whose bigger cause, according to *Isto É*, is the fact that a woman is in charge. Indeed, when Michel Temer took over as president, all his 24 ministers were (white rich) men.³³ Shortly afterwards, the figure of personhood embodied by Marcela Temer would become the basis of an official government programme.

4.3 Marcela Temer launches “*Criança Feliz*”

The role of femininity, specifically in relation to Marcela Temer, was once again entextualised on October 05, 2016, when the Temer administration launched the program *Criança Feliz* [Happy Child]. Its goal is to provide medical, pedagogical and psychological assistance to children from poor families. Marcela is attributed the role of program ambassador, and she delivered its launching speech.³⁴ The ceremony was closed with a speech delivered by president Michel Temer.³⁵



Image 4: Marcela Temer speaks during the launching of *Criança Feliz*

Marcela states in her speech that she considers the care of children during early childhood one of the most relevant social causes. According to her, “Each time we kiss our small children, we talk to them. Each time we carry them in our arms, we read them a story or sing them a lullaby, we are helping their development. What we, mothers, notice instinctively has been proven by science”. Among other things, the program aims at having government officials visit poor people’s homes and

³³ Filipe Matoso, Fernanda Calgaro and Alexandro Martello, “Michel Temer dá posse a 24 novos ministros do governo”, *GI* (2016), <http://g1.globo.com/politica/processo-de-impeachment-de-dilma/noticia/2016/05/michel-temer-da-posse-aos-novos-ministros-do-governo.html>.

³⁴ See “Marcela Temer faz seu primeiro discurso como primeira-dama”, *YouTube* (2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPi1j3mOmAc> and “Marcela Temer lança ‘Criança Feliz’ e faz discurso sobre amor”, *YouTube* (2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSRFgycn9T4>.

³⁵ See “Governo Federal lança Programa Criança Feliz”, *YouTube* (2016), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lchgrNYHno8&ab_channel=TVBrasilGov.

talk to them about the need of emotional involvement with their infants. Marcela's speech works, therefore, as a lesson: a mother should kiss, talk, carry, read stories and sing lullabies to her children.

Paradoxically, she constructs the knowledge of the importance of such actions as instinct and yet the program aims at teaching it to poor mothers. The idea is to inform poor mothers about the importance of being emotionally involved with their children. If poor mothers need to be taught about that, then the assumption is that poor families don't know how to take care of their children. Hence, it is possible to argue that *Criança Feliz* operates in a classist, even racist, manner, given that the majority of poor people in Brazil is black.

The profile outlined for Marcela Temer in the *Veja* article is recontextualised in this political event very successfully. Having constructed Marcela as a good woman, who takes good care of her husband, home and children, the figure of personhood projected for the first lady is a perfect fit for an ambassador of a program directed at assisting poor children. So, the chronotope is an unequal world, with good and bad, poor and rich mothers. Poor bad mothers must be taught to be good through a program whose symbol is a nationwide recognised symbol of motherhood: Marcela Temer. Moreover, Ms. Temer will be a volunteer, which means she would not receive any wages. She constructs herself as a mother concerned, not just with her kids, but with poor kids as well, and that concern, not money, is the reason why she will put her efforts into the program. In his speech, president Michel Temer stated that "Marcela's presence [as an ambassador in the program] aims exactly at encouraging the ladies, women of the country". He urges the women of the country to take care of the country's children.

Marcela Temer's profile by *Veja* magazine managed to travel from the media field to the political field. Marcela's volunteer work with underprivileged children buys her, and by extension her husband, political capital as concerned solidary people in a position of power. Moreover, this organisation of genders in the political field helps consolidate the restoring of order mentioned earlier. The gender divide and hierarchy are reiterated and even amplified: the president requests that the women of the country be concerned with the welfare of all Brazilian children, thereby emphasising the role of women as mothers, within the private sphere. So, emphasized femininity - the construction of women within the heterosexual matrix - becomes the basis of an official government programme, aimed at buying political capital with the Brazilian population.

This construction of Marcela Temer was also perceived as an intertextual response to the *Veja* article in the comments section of the video on YouTube. In other words, the figure of personhood constructed for Marcela seems to have circulated effectively, buying her and her family political capital. In the comments section of the video, a user qualifies Ms. Temer as "beautiful, maidenlike, a housewife and... TERROR OF THE FEMINAZI".³⁶ In other words, Marcela Temer embodies the antifeminist ideal, reifying the rigid norms of femininity, and this ideal was recontextualised in this comment as a positive attribute, while at the same time suggesting a very negative evaluation of feminists (implied by the comparison with the Nazis).

In a nutshell, gender hierarchy became the basis of a government programme after Ms. Rousseff's impeachment, especially on the basis of Marcela Temer's figure of personhood. Moreover, as is known, Jair Bolsonaro won the election in 2018, so I now turn to examine how his campaign used discourses about gender.

4.4 *Femininity and anti-feminism in the 2018 election*

During the presidential campaign, on September 29, 2018, public demonstrations occurred in several cities in Brazil with the *#EleNã*o (Not Him) motto. These demonstrations were led by women and were very critical of Jair Bolsonaro and his reportedly sexist remarks. On the following day, Jair's

³⁶ "Feminazi" is a contraction of feminist and Nazi. This neologism seems to imply that feminism is an authoritarian movement.

son,³⁷ Eduardo Bolsonaro, stated during a public counter-demonstration: “Right-wing women are prettier than left-wing women. They don’t show their breasts in the streets nor do they defecate in the streets. Right-wing women are more hygienic”.³⁸

It is remarkable that Eduardo chooses beauty as the fundamental criterion to separate women into two groups: the beautiful right-wing women and the ugly left-wing women. This division indexes the female figure of personhood whose main positive characteristic is beauty (as opposed to intelligence or sense of humour, for example). Furthermore, he reinforces this separation on the basis of behaviour, because “right-wing women do not defecate in the street or show their breasts”, which implies that left-wing women do.

Uttered in a public demonstration, this text is directed at potential voters (whose slight majority, in Brazil, is female). According to the article on the website, other people present in the event praised the female participation in it. They emphasised women’s importance as mothers, friends, who take care of the house, of men and their families. Eduardo’s statement was made before the election that made him the most voted deputy in Brazilian history. So, this construction of good women as beautiful and maidenlike is a successful electoral strategy, thereby making the relation between gender and institutional politics a key issue in the growth of the far-right across the globe.

In other words, the compliment to women in the role of mothers, wives and housewives completes the transposition of the figure of personhood constructed by *Veja* for Marcela Temer. Right-wing women are beautiful (at least more than left-wing women), maidenlike (they behave accordingly in public) and housewives (mothers, wives, housewives). The model of good woman, previously embodied by Marcela Temer, now performatively creates a political group supposedly coherent, that is right-wing women. Moreover, deviations from this model, implicit in *Veja*, are now explicit and form the opposed group, that is left-wing women. Eduardo also makes explicit the relation between gender roles and political division and identification (specifically left and right).

5. Final Considerations

The *Veja* article about former first lady Marcela Temer is an intertextual response to Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment process. Considering how popular institutional politics has become in Brazil, gender appears as a key element in people’s perception of the political scenario in the country. Seen together, the articles by *Veja* and *Isto É* project complementary realities. The chronotope in *Isto É* is one of total disorder due to Ms. Rousseff’s actions as president. The chronotope in *Veja* presents order and peacefulness, due to Marcela Temer’s actions as a beautiful and maidenlike housewife. A woman in power, acting in the public sphere as the country’s commander, generated crises; a woman at home, taking care of a powerful man and his family, generates peace and tranquillity. No country wants to be in a crisis, and resolutions are obviously necessary. Replacing Ms. Rousseff with Michel Temer provided such resolution: the public sphere is now inhabited by a man, who has a wife at home.

This is not saying Ms. Rousseff was impeached simply due to the fact that she is a woman, as indeed the process is more complex than that. However, her femininity, especially because it does not conform to gender norms, was used politically, to help communicate the idea of the impeachment. Her femininity, alongside her insistence in following the rule of law, allows us to read her as a feminist killjoy, as mentioned by Sosa.³⁹ The killjoy impedes the others’ happiness by pointing out problems only she can see, thereby going against overall consensus. Sosa states that “[w]hen the killjoy points

³⁷ On September 06, 2018, then candidate Jair Bolsonaro was stabbed during a campaign act and did not participate in any further ones.

³⁸ See Gilberto Amendola, “Eduardo Bolsonaro: Mulheres de direita são mais bonitas”, *Terra* (2018), <https://www.terra.com.br/noticias/eleicoes/eduardo-bolsonaro-as-mulheres-de-direita-sao-mais-bonita-que-as-da-esquerda,59522ad8735ac9edb07fb3c5e6b26e9ejucf0k1i.html>.

³⁹ Sosa, *Subversive, mother, killjoy*, 736.

out a problem to others, people begin to treat her as the problem”,⁴⁰ which explains the need for Ms. Rousseff to be removed from office. I should also point out that, although there was general consensus that the Senate would impeach her, Dilma Rousseff refused to resign.

As discourse moves from one context to the next, we see that the division of gender roles becomes the basis of a government programme, thereby shaping part of Temer’s incumbency, framing it as conservative. In an official setting, president Michel Temer states that the country needs women to unite and take care of our children. Therefore, gender has a key role in a government programme, which means it is tied to country’s official political field explicitly. Even though Marcela Temer is now acting in the public sphere (both delivering the speech and working in the programme), her role is limited to children: she extends her maternal skills to all children - while her husband and his male ministers discuss the budget deficit and the monetary policy. Gender division and hierarchy had an impact on the impeachment and it also helped Temer to govern. It is possible to argue that Brazil moved from a more left leaning government to a right-wing one, not only due to the neoliberal reforms Temer did put forth, but also due to the conservative view of gender relations lying on the basis of a programme such as Happy Child.

Furthermore, when examining the 2018 election, we can observe that the performance of gender vis-à-vis the heterosexual matrix becomes a matter of right and wrong, and differentiates between left and right. Eduardo Bolsonaro constructs left-wing women as uncivilised people, which leads readers (and his listeners during his speech) to understand that left-wingers want to corrupt society and destroy the values of civilisation. This oversimplification of reality creates a dichotomous structure: good and evil, us and them, right and wrong, right and left, which, according to Cesarino, is systemic in the communication of team Bolsonaro.⁴¹ Moreover, Eduardo Bolsonaro’s remarks, by implying left-wing women (feminists) defecate in the streets, illustrate the points raised by Borba, about the political use of disgust, and Silva, about the use of a pattern of outrageous language (‘incendiary framing’).⁴²

This construction of political reality is consistent with fascist politics, according to Stanley (2018).⁴³ He argues that the very basis of fascist discourse is the creation of an enemy, which creates a social division between us (the good citizens) and them (the enemy). This logic is reproduced in Eduardo Bolsonaro’s speech, as he represents left-wing people as the enemy to be destroyed, on the basis of their depravity. Unsurprisingly, sexual anxiety is a key aspect for the rise of fascist politics, as “the good citizens” feel victimised by feminist and LGBTQ movements, who want to destroy traditional gender (and sexual) roles.⁴⁴ As mentioned in the introduction, hatred towards feminism and gender equality is at the heart of right-wing extremism around the globe, and it has been used strategically to gain popular support. Indeed, this rhetoric helped elect Jair Bolsonaro president and Eduardo Bolsonaro the federal congressman with the highest number of votes in Brazilian history.

Brazil has moved from a progressive, left-leaning government under Dilma Rousseff to a conservative Temer administration, and then to a far-right proto-fascist government under Jair Bolsonaro, all within 2 years. This paper has argued that the rise of such extremism has a strong element of gender, and therefore the discursive construction of the impeachment against Ms. Rousseff provided momentum for the rise of ever more radical discourses against progressive policies, especially the ones related to gender and sexuality. Furthermore, observing the movement of discourse through different contexts, the conservative view of gender, in the post-impeachment, becomes extremist incendiary far-right discourse, denouncing the left-wing as sexually depraved and, therefore, a threat. To be sure, bolsonarismo is a very complex phenomenon and this paper does not aim at

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Leticia Cesarino, “On Digital Populism in Brazil”, *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* (2019), 2.

⁴² See Borba, *Disgusting Politics*; Silva, *The Pragmatics of Chaos*.

⁴³ Jason Stanley, *Como Funciona o Fascismo: a Política do “nós” e “eles”*, trans. Bruno Alexander (Porto Alegre: L&PM, 2018).

⁴⁴ Ibid., 127.

explaining what it is or how it works; I do, however, state that the impeachment proceedings provided the socio-discursive conditions for the election of a far-right extremist. Jair Bolsonaro now openly attacks democratic institutions and flirts with demands to close down the Supreme Court and Parliament, through the use of military force. The proliferation of Nazi-fascist symbols and mottos from members of government should function as a warning: fascism is a real threat to Brazil and fighting it must be our priority.

The Vilification of the ‘Squad’. The Discursive (De)construction of Women in U.S. Far-right Media

Abstract: Back in June 2018, four first-term Democratic women of colour were elected to the 116th U.S. Congress. Known as the ‘Squad’, these women have since been fighting against racism, white rage and resentment, xenophobia, and imperialistic arrogance towards all minorities. However, their presence on the House floor has attracted intense scrutiny and fierce opposition from the conservative establishment and affiliated (far) right-wing media outlets who have been trying to demonize these liberal, nonwhite, young, female politicians through a persistent use of discursive vilification strategies. Against this background, and by using a combination of quantitative and qualitative analytical approaches, the present study explores how these strategies are expertly deployed in the headlines, images, and reader comments of the popular far-right *Breitbart News Network*, and posits that this representation of the Squad intentionally provokes a vitriolic response from *Breitbart’s* readership. The study also provides evidence that the consequences of this aggressive *stimulus-response* dynamic are symptomatic of an unmitigated antifeminist misogyny, and a wider manifestation of an extremist right-wing ideology which rejects liberalism and favors a curtailing of constitutional and human rights.

Keywords: *the Squad, Breitbart, right-wing extremism, stimulus-response dynamic, gender vilification*

The reason women are critiqued for being too loud or too meek, too big or too small, too smart to be attractive or too attractive to be smart, is to belittle women out of standing up publicly. The goal is to ‘critique’ into submission, and that applies to anyone challenging power.

Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, member of ‘the Squad’, *Twitter*, May 28, 2019

1. Introduction

On January 3, 2019, 117 women took office in the 116th U.S. Congress,¹ making this the highest number of women lawmakers on the federal ticket² since the so-called ‘Year of the Woman’ in 1992. More importantly, the victory of these women contributed to the make-up of the most diverse political class that the House had ever seen.³ Indeed, of the 102 women who won seats in the House of Representatives, 37 were elected for the first time, thus replacing men who had previously held these seats, 43 were women of colour, and 22 were caretakers or moms of small children. In the more recent 2020 elections for the 117th U.S. Congress, women make up just over a quarter of all its members, or

¹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/first-read/women-dominated-2018-primary-season-here-are-numbers-n909571>

² *History, Art & Archives, U.S. House of Representatives*, Office of the Historian, *Women in Congress, 1917–2006*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2007. “Women on the Campaign Trail”, <https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/WIC/Historical-Essays/Assembling-Amplifying-Ascending/Women-Decade/> (November 21, 2021).

³ See “One hundred twenty-five were elected to office”, *Politico* (2018), <https://www.politico.com/interactives/2018/women-rule-candidate-tracker/>; Li Zhou, “A historic new Congress will be sworn in today”, *Vox* (2019), <https://www.vox.com/2018/12/6/18119733/congress-diversity-women-election-good-news>.

144 of 539 seats; the highest percentage in U.S. history and a considerable increase from where things stood even a decade ago.⁴

Going back to the ground-breaking 2018 elections, individual Democratic candidates also achieved historic firsts: Ilhan Omar (D-Minnesota) and Rashida Tlaib (D-Michigan) were the first two Muslim-American representatives; Ayanna Pressley was the first black democratic representative from Massachusetts; Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-New York) was the youngest woman ever elected to Congress. Cognizant of their momentous role as representatives of the people, these four women set up a coalition called 'the Squad' as a testament to their victory and commitment in a heavily contested environment which mostly favors male conservative candidates.⁵

The aim of this study is to provide evidence that the overwhelming 2018 victory of a Democratic-controlled House,⁶ propelled by a significant presence of Congresswomen, confirmed in the 2020 elections, catalyzed the attention of the Grand Old Party (GOP), or the Republican Party, and affiliated media outlets, such as the far-right *Breitbart News Network*, compelling them to build a negative campaign strategy against women office-holders believed to have jeopardized conservative stronghold on an almost 80% male-dominated Congress.⁷ In particular, the study sustains that the very nature of the antagonistic response towards the election of women has become an endemic feature of right-wing mainstream parties as they have progressively opened up to far-right political interferences, but also to a generalized gender conservatism which seems to have become the lingua franca of right-wing activists in recent years.⁸ Indeed, the nationalist, misogynist, racist, and xenophobic positions of the autocratic Right are increasingly permeating mainstream conservative politics both in the U.S. and Europe.⁹ An example of this political drift can be traced in the similarities that exist across the globe of how right-wing forces demonize gender and sexuality issues by appealing to a model of male supremacy, resulting in the oppression of the social, political and economic opportunities for women.¹⁰

The above argument is developed in this study by analyzing instantiations of dangerous or aggressive language in *Breitbart's* news headlines which are a demonstration of right-wing contempt and unmitigated fear of the ubiquitous 'other', in this case, the Squad women.¹¹ This entails investigating how the GOP, by instrumentalizing¹² the network's outsized role, now boasting a number of 31 million viewers,¹³ attempts to reestablish a sense of partisan identity among its audiences in order to create powerful opinion echo chambers and protect its status-quo in the political arena. By taking advantage of this popular far-right observatory, the study especially focuses on the GOP's

⁴ <https://www.usnews.com/news/elections/slideshows/the-women-of-the-117th-congress>.

⁵ Kira Sanbonmatsu, *Where Women Run: Gender and Party in the American States* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

⁶ Ella Nilsen, "It's Official: Democrats Will Control the House", *Vox* (2018), <https://www.vox.com/2018/11/6/18024818/election-results-democrats-control-house>.

⁷ Danielle Thomsen, "Why So Few (Republican) Women? Explaining the Partisan Imbalance of Women in the U.S. Congress", *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 40.2, (2015), 295-323; Kira Sanbonmatsu, "Women's Underrepresentation in the U.S. Congress", in Nannerl O. Keohane and Frances McCall Rosenbluth, eds., *Women & Equality, Deadalus*, 149.1 (Winter 2020), 40-55.

⁸ Agnieszka Graff, Ratna Kapur and Suzanna Danuta Walters, "Introduction: Gender and the Rise of the Global Right", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 44.3 (2019), 541-560.

⁹ Jens Rydgren, "Radical Right-wing Parties in Europe: What's Populism Got to Do with It?" *Journal of Language and Politics* (June 2017), 1-12; Umut Erel, "Saving and Reproducing the Nation: Struggles around Right-wing Politics of Social Reproduction, Gender and Race in Austerity Europe", *Women's Studies International Forum*, 68 (2018), 173-182; Noam Gidron and Daniel Ziblatt, "Center-Right Political Parties in Advanced Democracies", *Annual Review of Political Science*, 22 (2019), 17-35.

¹⁰ Graff et al. *Gender and the Rise of the Global Right*.

¹¹ Majid KhosraviNik, *Discourse, Identity and Legitimacy: Self and Other Representation in Discourses on Iran's Nuclear Programme* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2015); Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear. What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (London: Sage Publications, 2015).

¹² Ruth Wodak, *Politics of Fear*.

¹³ BREITBART NEWS, "Hillary Clinton Calls 31 Million Breitbart Readers 'Racist' Klansmen", *BREITBART* (2016), <https://www.breitbart.com/politics/2016/08/25/hillary-clinton-calls-31-million-breitbart-readers-racist-klansmen/>.

averseness towards women politicians in general, and towards the Squad in particular, and attempts to provide evidence that women’s political participation, which is contingent on the intersection of a multiplicity of issues such as gender inequalities, race, ethnicity, minority rights, and faith,¹⁴ determines not only a generalized right-wing, anti-gender ideology, but also a wider manifestation of dislike towards progressive politics.¹⁵ Prompted by alliances that are further to the right on the political spectrum,¹⁶ it seems that the GOP’s priority is to distract the electoral base from other more pressing social and economic issues that they have systematically failed to address.¹⁷

It is against this background of acquiescence between mediatization of politics and structural shifts in political partisanship that the study builds its specialized corpus of discursive vilification practices against the Squad embedded in the headlines, reader comments and images collected from *Breitbart News Network*. This larger corpus was subsequently rearranged into three specialized subcorpora which were analyzed by applying a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Breitbart’s vilification of the Squad, according to the study, is realized by means of a communication strategy which is discursively formulated as a *stimulus-response* dynamic. Shown in Figure 1, this construct posits that by attacking the Squad’s personal, cultural and political identities through provocative verbal and visual stimuli contained in *Breitbart’s* headlines and images, the news network compels their readers to respond by producing hostile comments. Ultimately, *Breitbart’s* expectation is that these dialogic events will not only produce polling results in favor of the affiliated right-wing establishment,¹⁸ but also minimize the anxieties over unresolved critical issues.

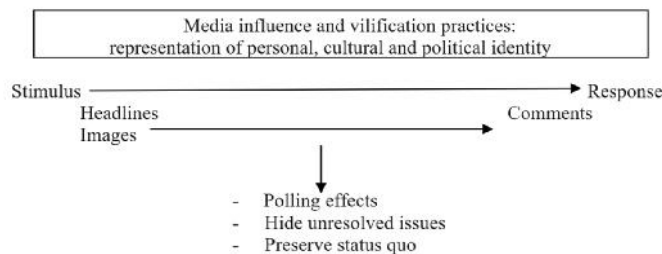


Fig. 1: The stimulus-response model fo the vilification of the Squad

By considering the above premises and the structural units of the *stimulus-response* dynamic, the study’s research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What are the linguistic and semiotic resources used by *Breitbart News Network* to discursively represent the Squad and its four members?
2. In what way do these resources contribute to the vilification of the Squad?
3. How does *Breitbart* construe a *stimulus-response* dynamic to persuade readers to engage in its vilification crusade?
4. To what extent is *Breitbart’s* behavior towards the Squad representative of the Right’s anti-gender ideology?

¹⁴ Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color”, in Martha Albertson and Roxanne Mykitiuk, eds., *The Public Nature of Private Violence* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 93-118.

¹⁵ Gidron and Ziblatt, “Center-Right Political Parties”.

¹⁶ Christopher Parker, “The Radical Right in the United States of America”, in Jens Rydgren, ed., *Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2018), 630-649.

¹⁷ Diana Z. O’Brien, “Righting’ Conventional Wisdom: Women and Right Parties in Established Democracies”, *Politics & Gender*, 14.1 (2018), 27-55; Sanbonmatsu, “Women’s Underrepresentation”.

¹⁸ Ola Ogunyemi, “Introduction. Conceptualizing the Media of Diaspora”, in Ola Ogunyemi, ed., *Journalism, Audiences and Diaspora* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1-14.

Section 2 presents a brief description of the political landscape within which the Squad's work is contextualized, of the mediatized nature of the response that the four Congresswomen have received, and of the assumptions that lie beneath the vilification practices.

2. Context of Study: The Political Spectrum and Far-right Political Shifts

The aggressive sentiment¹⁹ towards the Squad is better understood by giving a brief account of the recent right-wing political shifts and far-right pervasiveness in U.S. mainstream politics. As mentioned, both Europe and the U.S. have been witnessing an ongoing socio-political phenomenon of the emergence of far-right ideology in mainstream conservative parties,²⁰ for the most part attributable to an increasing rift between races and ethnicities, and between social classes and cultures. In fact, progressively blurred national boundaries in Western societies, mass immigration, loss of jobs, financial recession, and cultural backlash²¹ have created a growing discontent among large sectors of the population, reaching its peak especially among conservatives who increasingly fear an attack on their traditional values and on all social and political institutions, and constitute some of the main reasons why right-wing politics have pivoted toward authoritarian and extremist aspirations, such as xenophobia, misogyny, immigration control, and the defense of ethnic majority.²²

The Republican Party in the U.S., although less radical or extremist when confronted with European far-right or extreme right-wing parties, has also undergone a rightward shift especially following Donald Trump's election in 2016.²³ Trump has indeed played a pivotal role in intensifying the influence of far-right positions,²⁴ advocating issues such as political and economic protectionism, nativism, the defense of ordinary, working and middle-class people against the Washington elite, and nationalism, with his now former mantras of MAGA (Make America Great Again), and Keep America Great.²⁵ However, far-right infiltrations began long before Trump's election. Indeed, the Tea Party and the Alt-Right movements²⁶ provide insight into how extremist attitudes, such as strong animosity towards feminism, hostility towards multiculturalism and resentment towards unrestricted immigration, have encouraged the more traditional right-wingers to shift even further to the right on the political spectrum, consequently becoming an integral part of the American political landscape.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, the Democratic Party is not immune to altering its party positions.²⁷ Indeed, progressive forces within the Party, such as the Squad members and supporters, have been challenging the more centrist establishment coalition, nudging it towards more liberal positions. During the 2020 presidential elections, which ushered in Biden's moderate camp of progressive politics, democratic candidates ran on tickets that proposed a number of controversial policies, such as decriminalizing border crossings, levying higher taxes on the wealthy and offering reparations to descendants of enslaved men and women, that were clustered under the socialist label in Trump's 2016 presidential race.²⁸

¹⁹ Bo Pang and Lillian Lee, "Opinion Mining and Sentiment Analysis", *Foundations and Trends in Information Retrieval*, 2.1-2 (2008), 1-135.

²⁰ Cas Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist", *Government and Opposition*, 39.4 (2004), 541-563; Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2007); Parker, "The Radical Right".

²¹ Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, "Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-nots and Cultural Backlash", *Harvard Kennedy School RWP* (2016), 16-26.

²² Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2019).

²³ Andrew Marantz, *Antisocial: Online Extremists, Techno-Utopians, and the Hijacking of the American Conversation* (New York: Viking Press, 2019).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/keep-america-great-trump-unveils-2020-slogan-to-replace-2016-rallying-cry>.

²⁶ George Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right* (New York: Columbia U.P., 2017).

²⁷ Manifesto Project, "Project Description", <https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/>.

²⁸ US Politics and Policy, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2014/06/12/section-1-growing-ideological-consistency/>.

2.1 *The Mediatization of Politics: About Breitbart News Network*

Breitbart News Network is an American far-right provocative news platform founded in 2008 by conservative and anti-establishment commentators Andrew Breitbart and Larry Solov. Under the direction of Steve Bannon, Trump's chief adviser from January to August 2017, the website took on a more nationalist tone, but it was during Trump's 2016 presidential race that *Breitbart* received mainstream attention. *Breitbart News* has been accused of inflaming partisan tensions, formulating politically incorrect statements against minorities, and misleading readers by omitting or manipulating truthful contextualized information.²⁹ In particular, the *Breitbart* reader comments section displays an ever-expanding vocabulary of heavily connoted terms that are thought to contribute to the circulation of conspiracy theories, disinformation, hate speech, and nihilism.³⁰ Noticeably, these features are indicative of *Breitbart's* assimilation and propagation of a populist style of communication which largely depends on an *us vs. them* polarization that pits the people against a privileged elite.³¹ With specific reference to this populist turn, although not discussed within the present context, it is the study's view that the Right's reactionary behavior against neoliberalism contributes significantly to the spreading of the populist radical agenda that is against gay marriage, abortion rights, gender ideology, and the ongoing globalization process that is grounded on the building blocks of modernity and inclusivity.³²

2.2 *'Women-in-office': The Squad*

The Squad is not a monolithic voice as its founding members are four different individuals who differently contribute to the group's definition. Ayana Pressley from Massachusetts has had extensive experience working for mainstream Democratic leaders. Rashida Tlaib, an American with Palestinian roots, is mainly interested in foreign policy issues which have, however, drawn criticism for her claimed anti-Israel sentiment. Ilhan Omar, a refugee from Somalia, has been vocal about the immigrant cause and Israel's treatment of Palestinians. AOC is the Squad's charismatic leader, and her contribution to the Squad is a significantly marked outspokenness, especially expressed through her savvy use of social media and bold proposals such as the Green New Deal and health care for all. Following their reelection in 2020, the Squad opened up their membership to the newly-elected New York educator Jamaal Bowman, and Missouri nurse and activist Cori Bush. The admission³³ of these two Representatives is not surprising as Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley has always sustained that "anyone who is interested in building a more equitable and just world is a part of the Squad". However, as these two new members are at the start of their political activity within the Squad, the study focuses only on the Squad's four founding members in order to better assess the nature of the response that these women have been receiving since the institution of their special unit.

As for their sobriquet, the term 'squad' comes from the Vulgar Latin *exquadra* or 'square', referring to the shape of infantry troops historically assembled in a square to fight.³⁴ Although

²⁹ Stephen Piggot, "Is Breitbart.com Becoming the Media Arm of the Alt-Right?", *The Southern Poverty Law Center* (April 2016), <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2016/04/28/breitbartcom-becoming-media-arm-alt-right>.

³⁰ Fiorina P. Morris and Samuel J. Abrams, "Political Polarization in the American Public", *Annual Review of Political Science* 11 (2008), 563-588; Monika Kopytowska, "Introduction: Discourses of Hate and Radicalism in Action", in Monika Kopytowska, ed., *Contemporary Discourses of Hate and Radicalism across Space and Genres* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2017), 1-12; Emily Sydnor, *Disrespectful Democracy: The Psychology of Political Incivility* (New York: Columbia U.P., 2019).

³¹ Mudde, *Populist Radical Right*.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ @CoriBush (January 3, 2021). "Squad up" (Tweet) – via Twitter.

³⁴ Ben Zimmer, "'Squad': A Military Unit's Name Becomes a Political Label", *The Wall Street Journal* (2019), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/squad-a-military-unit-becomes-a-political-one->

acknowledging the militant connotations of the term, this study argues that it is more evocative of a special police detail with a specific mission to accomplish. Indeed, a police detail is part of a larger group or team, as in the case of the Squad, who are first and foremost members of Congress and, similarly to a police detail, they are trained to deal with enforcing special laws and invigilating their abidance. Yet, alongside the term’s military or police undertones, it is also quite likely that when Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, or AOC, first started using this name just after the four women were elected into office in 2018, she probably intended it to mean a ‘sisterhood’ or a strong alliance who, at the time, had to stand up against Trump’s frequent xenophobic attacks.³⁵ In fact, the Squad has notably faced discrimination directly from Trump who told them to go back to their own country³⁶ – although these women are all American citizens – implicitly associating their skin colour with non-citizen status. What is more, even their own Democratic Party has failed to give them the necessary support and criticized some of their bold policy proposals. The House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, for example, stated that the Squad had no real following in Congress, provoking a response from AOC who accused Pelosi of being “outright disrespectful” to single out newly elected women of colour.³⁷

The diversity of the Congress and of the Squad has particularly exacerbated the nativist far-right partisan politics of former President Trump whose narrative speaks of immigrants as individuals who are damaging the US economy by taking away jobs and opportunities from American citizens. Indeed, Trump’s persistent attacks on four women of colour (Figure 2) have exposed a dangerous vein of racism running through the Republican Party which has strongly criticized the Congresswomen’s positions by arguing that American values are being threatened by far-left politics.

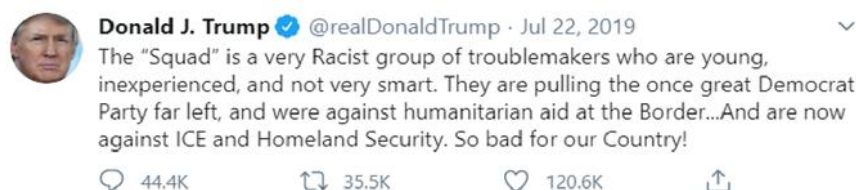


Fig. 2: Trump’s Twitter attack on the Squad

2.2.1 *The vilification of the Squad*

Judging by this political landscape, it seems that before their appointment to office the Squad women have had to overcome a double hurdle consisting in being female and running for Congress, which has been a predominantly male enterprise throughout American history.³⁸ Clearly, the 2018 and 2020 elections have increased the presence of women in the Halls of Congress, but this presence is apparently coupled by an increased number of violent responses designed to reinforce women’s traditional roles, and restrict their political participation, especially on the part of the Republican Party,³⁹ within which gender-essentialism, antifeminism and male superiority are still quite strong.⁴⁰

11563549724#:~:text=In%20Vulgar%20Latin%E2%80%94the%20amalgam,and%20%E2%80%9Cesquade%E2%80%9D%20in%20French.

³⁵ <https://www.standard.co.uk/insider/alexandria-ocasio-cortez-who-in-squad-b46342.html>

³⁶ <https://www.politico.eu/article/trump-tells-congresswomen-go-back-where-you-came-from/>

³⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/06/opinion/sunday/nancy-pelosi-pride-parade.html>

³⁸ Ian Haney-López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York U.P., 2006); Sanbonmatsu, “Women’s Underrepresentation”; Melody Crowder-Meyer, “Gendered Recruitment without Trying: How Local Party Recruiters Affect Women’s Representation”, *Politics & Gender*, 9.4 (2013), 390-413.

³⁹ Pew Research Center, “Women and Leadership: Public Says Women are Equally Qualified, but Barriers Persist” (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, January 2015).

The four Congresswomen, along with other women politicians, are victims of vilification through aggressive speech behavior which refers to a particularly goal-oriented and largely structured communicative process⁴¹ consisting in the selection of discursive strategies that include disregard, derision, threats, obscenity and falsehoods against their personal beliefs, values and judgments.⁴² Harm through aggressive language is usually inflicted on their positions on certain topics as well as on their physical appearance, which has long been used to automatically delegitimize not only their role as political representatives, but also their personal identity.⁴³ As shown in Figure 3, the Squad is often the subject of offensive cartoons that liken their behavior to that of loud, ravenous and alien-like creatures.



Fig. 3: Cartoon images of the Squad

These forms of harassment and intimidation, especially communicated through online media platforms,⁴⁴ are inherent practices of far-right political culture that serve to discourage the political participation of women and undermine their career by explicitly disregarding their opinions, contributions, and projects. This means that women are affected by intersectional discrimination,⁴⁵ or multiple forms of prejudice, such as their status as women of colour, migrant women, women from the LGBTQ+ community, and women of linguistic or religious minorities. It has been shown that these

⁴⁰ Charlotte Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2011).

⁴¹ Dominic A. Infante, “Aggressiveness”, in C. McCroskey and John A. Daly, eds., *Personality and Interpersonal Communication* (New York: Sage Publications, 1987), 157-192; Jaida Langham and Kinnis Gosha, “The Classification of Aggressive Dialogue in Social Media Platforms”, *SIGMIS-CPR'18: Proceedings of the 2018 ACM SIGMIS Conference on Computers and People Research* (Buffalo-Niagara Falls, NY, June 18-20, 2018), <https://dl.acm.org/doi/pdf/10.1145/3209626.3209720>.

⁴² Infante, *Aggressiveness*; Emma Jane, “Online Misogyny and Feminist Digilantism”, *Continuum*, 30.3 (2016), 284-297.

⁴³ Shannon Jenkins et al., *Why Don't Women Rule the World?: Understanding Women's Civic and Political Choices*, (Washington: CQ Press, 2020).

⁴⁴ Majid KhosraviNik and Eleonora Esposito, “Online Hate, Digital Discourse and Critique: Exploring Digitally-mediated Discursive Practices of Gender-based Hostility”, *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics*, 14.1 (2018), 45-68; Michele Zappavigna, “Language and Social Media: Enacting Identity through Ambient Affiliation”, in Geoff Thompson et al., eds., *The Cambridge Handbook of Systemic Function Linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2019).

⁴⁵ Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins”; Graff et al., *Gender and the Rise of the Global Right*.

identitarian representations can seriously burden gender equality and reinforce marginalization and unequal access to public and political space.⁴⁶

3. Corpus

The specialized *BreitbartNewsNetwork_Corpus* comprises a total of 1,000 headlines (28,750 words), 1,000 reader comments obtained from the headline page (13,845 words), and 100 images. The datasets were extracted by using the network's search application and the seed words *Squad*, *Pressley*, *Omar*, *Tlaib*, *Ocasio-Cortez* and her moniker *AOC*, and by filtering the time range from January 2019, the beginning of the Squad's appointment to Congress, to July 2020, a year and a half into the Squad's House activity, and five months into the coronavirus pandemic. The choice of using their names as seed words was influenced by the necessity to gain insight into *Breitbart's* response to the Squad as a unit but also as individual members. For the linguistic and semiotic analysis, this larger corpus was subsequently rearranged into three subcorpora: *Breitbart_Headlines* and *Breitbart_Comments* were used to conduct the former; *Breitbart_Images* was used to conduct the latter.

4. Methodology

Corpus-based⁴⁷ quantitative analysis was conducted by means of Sketch Engine's concordance application,⁴⁸ which is used in this study as a sentiment indicator that goes well beyond detecting the positive-negative polarization of opinion. The concordance lines, in fact, provide "the analyst with instances of a word or cluster in its immediate co-text"⁴⁹ that affords a more qualitative interpretation of the processes and qualities.⁵⁰ In the case in point, context is crucial in revealing different levels of aggressive language that can differ in the intensity of emotional tone, character, direction and force.⁵¹ For example, milder forms of aggression, that are often articulated as suggestions, insinuations, ironic expressions, rhetorical tropes, or even humoristic characterizations, can represent potentially damaging and belittling undercurrents used in mediatized political discourse that are not always straightforwardly classifiable as acts of vilification or speech aggression. In fact, they often go unnoticed, overlooked and unsanctioned, and are therefore more dangerous than those that are more evidently and transparently aggressive.⁵²

Concordance analysis was integrated with the socio-semiotic approach to MCDA⁵³ to explore the Squad's visual representation. It is this study's view that this approach particularly lends itself to the analysis of the Squad from an intersectional perspective as its metafunctions and resources go beneath the surface of the visual representation to reveal aesthetic, behavioral, and even psychological markers of identity that are expertly packaged by the media and manipulated according to their vantage point.

⁴⁶ Phyllis Rippeyoung, "When Women are Right: The Influence of Gender, Work and Values on European Far-Right Party Support", *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 9.3 (2007), 379 – 397.

⁴⁷ Paul Baker et al., "A Useful Methodological Synergy? Combining Critical Discourse Analysis and Corpus Linguistics to Examine Discourses of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the UK Press", *Discourse and Society*, 19.3 (2008), 273-306.

⁴⁸ Adam Kilgarrieff et al., "The Sketch Engine: Ten Years On", *Lexicography*, 1 (2014), 7–36.

⁴⁹ Baker et al., "A Useful Methodological Synergy?", 279.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Leonard Berkowitz, *Aggression: Its Causes, Consequences, and Control*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1993).

⁵² Margaret Rasulo, "Experience Doesn't Pay the Bills: Exploring the Identity-Populism Nexus in Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Political Activism", in Massimiliano Demata and Maria Ivana Lorenzetti, eds., "Populism and Its Languages", *Iperstoria*, 15 (2020), 119-147.

⁵³ David Machin and Andrea Mayr, *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis: A Multimodal Introduction* (London: Sage Publications 2012); David Machin, "What is Multimodal Critical Discourse Studies?", *Critical Discourse Studies*, 10.4 (2013), 347-355; Theo van Leeuwen, "Critical Analysis of Multimodal Discourse", in Carol Chapelle, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics* (London: Blackwell, 2013), 4002–4006.

Multimodal analysis draws on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL),⁵⁴ and specifically on the ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions which Kress and van Leeuwen⁵⁵ align to their own representational, interactional and compositional model that studies not only language but other semiotic modes, such as images, photographs, diagrams and graphics. In more detail, the representational metafunction identifies two kinds of structures, the narrative and the conceptual, both used to distinguish what happens in the images. Narrative structures make use of vector lines and are realized by reactional, speech and mental processes, while conceptual structures trigger classificational, analytical and symbolic processes. The interactional metafunction can be examined from three aspects: contact (demand or offer achieved through gaze), social distance (intimate, social, or impersonal size of frame), attitude (involvement, detachment, viewer power, equality and representation of power perspectives), and modality (perceived truth-value of images according to eight modality scales that deal with degrees of the articulation of detail and colour). The compositional metafunction deals with the layout of the aspects on a page in order to discern whether these create or represent a coherent and cohesive whole. It is realized through three interrelated systems: information value (given or new, ideal, or real), salience (achieved through size, colour, tone, focus, perspective, overlap, and repetition) and framing.

MCDA draws on the above seminal work, but is more critically focused on the author's underlying choices. Machin and Mayr, referring to Fairclough and Wodak's work in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA),⁵⁶ describe this focus as the adherence to "the sense of being critical",⁵⁷ and "showing more clearly how [semiotic choices] make meaning as well as what they mean",⁵⁸ which consists in knowing about the contexts where these semiotic choices were produced, the social relations, and the shared ideology.⁵⁹

Data analysis is supported by the DHA⁶⁰ whose comprehensive approach to discourses analysis (DA) fine-tunes the critical perspective as its resources focus on the identification of social, historical, political, economic, psychological and other factors relating to the verbal and non-verbal communicative events. In particular, the study draws on the strategies of nomination (the linguistic identity of the social actors involved as well as the processes and actions), predication (the qualities and characteristics attributed to social actors, processes and actions), and mitigation and intensification (the illocutionary force of the linguistic instantiations). Elements of the argumentation and perspectivization strategies are not neglected, but subsumed in the analysis of particularly embedded rhetorical devices that reveal *Breitbart's* stance, judgements and viewpoints.

⁵⁴ Michael A. K. Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (London: Arnold, 1985); Halliday and Christian Matthiessen, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, (London: Routledge, 2004).

⁵⁵ Kress Gunther and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, Second Edition (New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁵⁶ Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (London: Longman, 1995); Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak, "Critical Discourse Analysis", in Teun van Dijk, ed., *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*, (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 258-284.

⁵⁷ Machin and Mayr, *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis*, 9.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 10.

⁵⁹ Per Ledin and David Machin, "Doing Critical Discourse Studies with Multimodality: From Metafunctions to Materiality", *Critical Discourse Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

⁶⁰ Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak, "The Discourse-historical Approach", in Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, eds., *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies*, Third Edition (London: Sage Publications, 2016), 23-61; John Flowerdew and John E., Richardson, "Introduction", in John Flowerdew and John E., Richardson, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 1-10.

5. Findings and discussion

The findings are reported according to the *stimulus-response* model (Figure 1), whereby the analysis of the stimuli contained in the headlines and images precedes the analysis of the responses in the reader comments.

5.1 Analysis of the *Breitbart Headlines* subcorpus: the Squad, Ocasio-Cortez/AOC, Omar, Tlaib and Pressley

Table 1 shows the raw and normalized frequency of a total of 438 concordance hits extracted from the *Breitbart Headlines* subcorpora. Figures 4 and 5 provide a small but representative sample of the first 10 Squad concordance lines (Fig. 4), followed by Figure 5 which illustrates the first 3 lines for Ocasio-Cortez, the first 2 lines for AOC, and the first 5 lines for Omar, Tlaib, and Pressley. For ease of reference, bold font is used to indicate the analyzed linguistic features.

Seed word	Raw frequency	(per million)
Squad	133	7,432.02
Ocasio-Cortez	86	5,899.71
AOC	78	5,054.01
Omar	66	4,901.04
Tlaib	43	2,234.08
Pressley	32	2,103.07

Table 1: Frequencies of headline search

1.	</s><s>Democrat Ayanna Pressley: 'The	Squad	Is Not an Insurgent Cohort of a Gang '.
2	Across America Petition Guatemalans Protest 'The	Squad	and Nancy Pelosi: 'We Will Send You Back!</s><s>' List of Racist statements by members of the 'Squad'
3	'Squad' Demands Vote-by-Mail, Benefits for Illegal Aliens in Relief Package Meet the #	Squad	Ocasio-Cortez Crew Takes on Pelosi Members of Squad hit Democrat Leadership, Trump, America
4	</s><s>Let's Hope 'The	Squad	Is the Face of the Democratic Party 'Because That's How We're Going to Win!
5	</s><s>Stephen Miller: 'The	Squad	Detests America as It Exists' African American Obama Admin Alums Back 'Squad'; 'Nothing More Un-American ' than the Squad
6	Democrats Call for Increased Security for 'Squad' After Trump Rally 'Go back?</s><s>Omar and the	Squad	are building strength at home Donald Trump: Democrats Too 'Petrified' to Confront 'Anti-USA, Pro-Terrorist' Squad
7	Rashida Tlaib After Pressley Endorses Warren:	Squad	Is 'Stronger than Anyone Knows' 'Squad' Member Ayanna Pressley Backs Elizabeth Warren for President
8	The Squad: President Trump Is 'Afraid of Women of Color' The	Squad	Reacts to Israel Fallout. AOC Pledges to Cease Trips to Israel Ocasio-Cortez: Republican Party Is 'Scared' of Us '
9	America 'Garbage' : 'I Think That's Worse' than 'Deplorables' List of Racist Statements by Members of the	Squad	(So Far) Omar Accuses Trump of Racism, Islamophobia : 'This Is the Agenda of White Nationalists</s>
10	</s><s> 'The four people in the so-called	Squad	that have done squat in Congress: want to make illegal immigrants eligible for coronavirus aid

Fig. 4: Squad headlines

Subsequent to a first manual reading of the concordances, five main representational frames emerged which are indicative of *Breitbart's* positionings against the Squad as a unit. They are as follows.

1. *The Squad is an undeserving gang.* By using the nomination strategy, 'the Squad' is called a **cohort** or a **gang** (line 1), and a **crew** (line 3) and, by using a predicate adjective, their behavior is described as being **insurgent** (line 1). In line 4, the Squad is the **Face** (metonymic expression) of the enemy or **the Democratic Party**, which is apparently so discrediting for the Dems that the Republicans are counting on it to win the elections (**That is How We're Going to Win**). In line 10, the accusation is that the **so-called Squad** (modification), or **the four people**, has accomplished nothing or **squat** (or Squad) in Congress.

2. *The Squad is racist.* In line 2, the Squad is accused of using **racist statements**, while in line 8 they are criticized for having a **fallout** with Israel, an unforgivable anti-Semitic act emphasized by **AOC's pledge** (behavioral process) not to visit the country.

3. *The Squad encourages illegal immigration.* In line 3, the Squad **demand**s (behavioral process) vote-by-mail and benefits for **illegal aliens**. This is *Breitbart's* attempt to highlight the bullying nature of the Squad but, at the same time, it is also an indication of *Breitbart's* exclusionary strategy as they criticize the leniency shown by the Squad towards those who do not belong and have no right to vote. In fact, the term **illegal immigrants** is also used in line 10, and here too the message is that the Squad wants to claim **coronavirus aid** for people who have no right to receive it.

3. *The Squad is a terrorist organization.* *Breitbart* believes that the Squad is **Pro-terrorist** (line 6). This is confirmed in line 9 where the Squad, and Ilhan Omar, are seemingly being ridiculed for accusing Trump of **racism** and **Islamophobia**.

4. *The Squad is un-American.* Perhaps the strongest accusation that *Breitbart* moves against the Squad is that of being anti-American: the Squad **Detests America** (line 5) (intensification), is '**Nothing More Un-American**' (line 5) (modification), '**Anti-USA** (line 6) (modification), **America 'Garbage'** (line 9) (intensification).

5. *The Squad is frightening.* In line 6, through predication, *Breitbart* claims that even the Democrats are **Too 'Petrified'** (the inverted commas intensify the adjective) **to confront ... the Squad**. Also, they [the Squad] are '**Stronger than Anyone Knows**' (line 7), all the more reason to exclude them. In line 8, the Squad's claim that **President Trump is 'Afraid of Women of Colour'** is promptly picked up by *Breitbart* not only to ironize on the absurdity of this view, but also to hint at the Squad's accusations of racism.

1	Left Lashes Out at Lara Logan over AOC Critique: 'What on Earth Happened' to Her	Ocasio-Cortez	And Democrat Leaders, Suggest 'White Supremacists' Caused Violence at Riots
2	Socialist Revolution Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez: Defund the Police 'Looks like a Suburb' Alexandria	Ocasio-Cortez	supports 'Defund the Police' Movement AOC is an Anti-American Marxist
3	Twitter Hashtag Calls For	Ocasio-Cortez	to Resign Over Border Misinformation
4	Leftist 'Squad' Is 'Very Racist' Report. Alternative 'Squad' of Moderate Democrat Women Form Task Force	AOC	Slams Redskins on #BlackoutTuesday. 'Want to Stand for Racial Justice?</s><s>Change Your Name
5	Ocasio-Cortez Suggests GOP Uses Illegal Immigration to Hide Racism	AOC	Accuses Trump of Harboring 'Inherent Racism' for Years
6	Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez Rages over Reopening America Ilhan	Omar	Inexplicably Deletes Father's Day Message from 2013 Ilhan Omar's Dad Dies from Coronavirus-Related Complications
7	Democrats Stifle Leftists' Push to Defund Police: 'That's Stupid.' </s><s>Jeff Sessions, Ilhan	Omar	Spar on Twitter -- 'How's Your Brother, By the Way?</s><s>Ilhan Omar: We Must 'Reject Any Attempt to Criminalize Peaceful protest
8	'Disturbing' Trump Has Failed -- He Is 'Glorifying Violence' Ilhan	Omar	Rages: Israel's 'Destructive Polices' Are 'Rubber Stamped' by Trump Administration AOC:
9	Americans Dying from 'Pre-existing' Racism, Inequity in Coronavirus Era Ilhan	Omar	This Is Not Going to Be the Country of White People' Ilhan Omar Hits Back at 'Racist Fool' Tucker Carlson for Calling
10	<s> Israeli Deputy FM said Ilhan	Omar	, Rashida Tlaib Will Be Denied Entry into Israel
11	<s>Democrat Rashida	Tlaib	Dances with Palestinian Flag at Victory Party Video of 'Knucklehead' Rashida Tlaib Being Forcibly Ejected by Security
12	Trump Detroit Speech Resurfaces<s> Rashida	Tlaib	Releases Apologetic Statement After Booing Hillary Clinton Democrat
13	<s> Democrat Rashida	Tlaib	Celebrates Primary Win with Anti-Israel Tweets
14	'I'm Not Going Nowhere' Until I Impeach Trump Rashida	Tlaib	New Office Map: Israel Renamed 'Palestine
15	<s> Democrat Rashida	Tlaib	: 'Islamophobia Is Very Much Among the Democratic Party
16	<s> Watch - Ayanna	Pressley	The Term 'Chinese Coronavirus' Is 'Painful' for Immigrants
17	<s><s> WE Americans don't need YOUR type. Ayanna	Pressley	Trump's Handling of Coronavirus 'Akin to War Crimes' Ocasio Cortez, Pressley Boycott Trump's SOTU Address</s>
18	Dem Rep. Ayanna	Pressley	Black Folks Are 'Gutted,' 'Exhausted' — 'A Fire Hose That We're Drinking from Daily of Insult and Assault and Devastation'
19	The Ringo of the Squad Ayanna	Pressley	Endorses Warren. This isn't surprising
20	Democrat Ayanna	Pressley	Abuses of ICE' Resemble 'Auction During Slavery'

Fig. 5: Member of the Squad headlines

In lines 1 and 5 of Figure 5, the verbal process **suggest** refers to *Breitbart's* criticism of the allegations made by Ocasio-Cortez and other Democrats that **white supremacists caused violence at riots**, and that the GOP uses illegal immigration to hide racism.

The Squad's quarrelsome behavior is expressed by using material verbs. For example, AOC **slams Redskins** (line 4); she **accuses** Trump of **harboring** racism (line 5); she **rages** over reopening (line 6); Tlaib promises to **impeach** Trump (line 14).

In line 9, the strategy of fear-mongering is used to insinuate that Omar will change America which **Is Not Going to Be the Country of White People**; in line 12 Tlaib **boos** her own **Hilary Clinton, Democrat**. They are so disruptive, according to *Breitbart*, that Omar (line 10) and Tlaib (line 13) are denied entry into Israel, one of America's closest allies. *Breitbart* also reports (line 11) that Tlaib

disrespectfully danced with a Palestinian flag over her head, and that she **renamed Israel as Palestine** on her office map (line 14). In line 7, Tlaib had **a spar on Twitter** about the suspicion that she married her own brother so he could enter the US;⁶¹ in line 11, she is such **a knucklehead** at a victory event that she had to be **Forcibly Ejected** by Security. In line 19, Ayanna Pressley is called the **Ringo of the Squad**, an allusion to the famous member of the Beatles band, but probably intending the 'ring-leader of the gang.

Their anti-American attitude is claimed in diverse ways. For example, in line 2, by using existential processes that identify a person according to their qualities, ACO is a **socialist revolutionary** and an **anti-American Marxist**. *Breitbart's* anti-Americanism calls Pressley out in line 20 because she falsely stated that the **'Abuses of ICE' Resemble 'Auction During Slavery'**. In lines 8 and 18, by mentioning Omar in the former and Pressley in the latter, *Breitbart* accuses them of vilifying President Trump of committing a series of atrocities such as **glorifying violence**, allowing **Black folks** to be **gutted, exhausted**, and covered by **Insult and Assault and Devastation**. In line 7, even the **Democrats** seem to be fed up with the Squad as they try to **stifle leftists' push to defund the police**, which they think **is stupid**. *Breitbart's* stance on the Squad and its members can be summarized by the headline in line 17 where a clear *us vs. them* polarization is enacted: **WE Americans don't need YOUR type**.

As discussed above, the vilification of the Squad is not necessarily performed by using highly violent language, but it is often enacted by using allegations, insinuations, suggestions, hints and ridicule. In this case, *Breitbart's* *stimulus-response* strategy apparently consists in launching a knowingly provocative opinion as ammunition and wait for the expected vitriolic response, counting on the probability that the same opinion is left unexpressed in the minds of many right-wing voters, politicians, and far-right media readers.

5.2 Analysis of the *Breitbart* Images subcorpus

The specific MCDA resources afforded by the three metafunctions and specifically applied in the analysis of the images are as follows:

1. Representational: narrative/conceptual;
2. Interactional: vectors, gaze, smile, hand/arm gestures, high/low modality;
3. Compositional: information layout, salience, colour and tone, vestemics.

5.2.1 *The Squad*

In images 1, 3, and 4 of Figure 6, the women are pictured as a group. While this aspect usually conveys unity among social actors, *Breitbart's* intention is to convey a different view. From the interactional perspective, the women adopt what is called a deceptive gaze which consists in looking away from the viewer in sign of dismissal.⁶² Also, although they are standing next to each other, their role is delegitimized by their behavior. In fact, they are either smiling, smirking, grinning, looking down (images 1,3,4), or awkwardly looking at some other object in the distance (Tlaib in images 3 and 4). A conceptual view is also evident: the women are standing in a row which means that *Breitbart* considers them as being 'the same', on the same level, or without an individual identity.

⁶¹ Grace Panetta, "Here's Everything We Know about the Persistent but Unproven Rumors that Rep. Ilhan Omar Married Her Brother, which Trump Repeated at a Recent Rally", *Insider* (2019), <https://www.businessinsider.com/unproven-allegations-ilhan-omar-married-her-brother-explained-2019-7?IR=T>.

⁶² Andrew Bayliss and Steven Tipper, "Predictive Gaze Cues and Personality Judgments: Should Eye Trust You?", *Psychological Science*, 17 (2016), 514-520; Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*.



Fig. 6: the Squad

The headline in image 2 states that the Democrats are petrified by the Squad. In fact, although Ilhan Omar is being welcomed by Nancy Pelosi in what looks like a Hall of Congress, the hand behind Omar's back is not to be perceived as a vector⁶³ of guidance or acceptance. In fact, the Speaker of the House fails to establish eye contact with the Congresswoman who, in turn, is pictured with her back turned away from the viewer which is, once again, a delegitimation gesture towards the entire Democratic Party, also emphasized by the act of defiance or dismissal of the individuals in the crowded background who are looking away from her. From a compositional perspective, the use of vestemics⁶⁴ also captures the viewer's attention. First and foremost, Omar's Hijab is a cultural vector used by *Briebart* to foreground the Congresswoman's religious and ethnic identity rather than her role as the people's representative. Particularly revealing is the stark difference between Pelosi who is wearing an unmissable turquoise outfit with accessories, and Omar's dark and unattractive outfit, befitting for someone who is considered an 'outsider' or the 'other'.

There are two meaningful details to discuss in image 3 which is most probably a congressional hearing. Firstly, from a compositional perspective, the image presents a three-layered background where the back, the center and front layers are not meshed together, but the women placed in the middle seem to be separated from the rest. According to this code, a social actor surrounded by a series of rectangular objects or layers is usually perceived as being decontextualized compared to one that is surrounded by a series of circular enclosures which convey acceptance.⁶⁵ In the same image, the three women are not gazing at the viewer but elsewhere: AOC and Pressley are looking at the person

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

who is being interviewed; Tlaib is looking at an unknown object. Regarding the interviewee, the three women are looking at him defiantly (AOC), with a smirk (Pressley) or with disinterest (Tlaib), and the out-of-focus image of his head in the foreground is most likely *Breitbart’s* way of suggesting that their confrontational interrogation methods are similar to those used by socialists and communists, as stated in the headline.

5.2.2 Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC)

Images 5 and 6 of Figure 7 are about AOC. Image 5 contains a double picture of given and new information.⁶⁶ The picture on the left (given information) is the ironic rendition of AOC’s proposal in the headline to defund the police. In fact, according to the Representative from the Bronx, neighborhoods would look like the suburbs with a limited police force. In all response, the image presents a context that looks more like a crowded suburban street with protesters. The picture on the right (new information) is occupied by AOC’s entire face. It is a centered low-modality composition in which she is making the defunding proposal. Her hand is a vocal vector used to emphasize not only what she says, but how she says it, with a full open mouth and arched eyebrows, indicating anger or defiance. In image 6, the headline accuses AOC of not paying her taxes, but the image is a sarcastic rendition of these words. In fact, instead of being angry at this accusation, AOC is seemingly proud of what she has done, confirmed by the hand-to-ear gesture that confidently fixes her hair behind her ear. Her gaze, turned away from the viewer is, once again, a sign that she is dismissing the accusation. This is a derisive image of AOC who, according to *Breitbart*, is probably thinking she is going to get away with it.



Fig. 7: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

5.2.3 Rashida Tlaib

Image 7 in Figure 8, although seemingly innocuous, is a denigrating representation of Talib as her cultural identity is particularly under attack. In fact, the headline states that she is more Palestinian in the Halls of Congress than anywhere else, which is, according to the far-right news network, an

⁶⁶ Ibid.

unacceptable affirmation for a newly-sworn in American representative of the American people. Indeed, the background is occupied by US flags or symbolic attributives and carriers of her birth identity. In this circular composition, her arm is used as a vector towards the flags as she is swearing loyalty and service to the US on the Bible, or perhaps the Koran, which are also symbolic attributives of faith.⁶⁷ Yet, surrounding her figure, as if protecting her from the flags, is a group of people who look like immediate family members. In terms of vestemics, the woman who is assisting her is dressed in traditional Palestinian attire as if to highlight her primary identity. Once again, not only does *Breitbart* question this uncanny double identity, but also her ability to serve the US without bias or prejudice. And, if there were any doubts left in the minds of Americans, image 8 is unequivocal: Rashid Tlaib is anti-American as she hates Trump enough to sell her promise to impeach him.



Fig. 8: Rashida Tlaib

5.2.4 Ilhan Omar

Figure 9 is a double picture featuring Jeff Sessions, former Republican senator and Attorney General, and Ilhan Omar. The first salient element in this image is, once again, the compositional layout of information, but this time the low modality, inexistent background does not afford contextual clues of the communicative event that might explain the headline. Session on the left represents the known, the secure, the law and the unmistakable truth; on the right, Omar is the unknown, the new, the unruly and the untrustworthy. Indeed, the position of her tightly closed lips indicates that she is probably guilty as accused by Session, or has probably been caught red-handed. Their gaze seems to convey this dynamic as Sessions is looking straight at the viewer, while Omar is looking downward. Yet, there is another less evident element of interest in the compositional layout of the picture which speaks of racial prejudice, namely the white/black split frames. At first glance, one does not necessarily perceive it, but the vestemics of the images are revealing. The truth-searching white man in a suit and tie, white hair neatly combed back, is also wearing reassuring eyeglasses on his nose which are vectors that symbolize knowledge and search for truth. The black woman on his right has only one earring in sight and is not wearing a typical hijab as do most Muslim women, but a turban which is both a male

⁶⁷ Ibid.

accessory and a recent fashion trend in the Muslim world.⁶⁸ Thus, to the far-right reader of *Breitbart*, the turban becomes a symbol of defiance of tradition, of disrespect, and a representation of the ‘other’ who is considered not American. The same feature of un-Americanness is emphasized in the close-up shot of Omar in image 10. She is pictured without any background details and wearing a very traditional Somali headscarf,⁶⁹ gazing upwards in search of those drones that Trump is accused of sending to Somalia to spot *Jihadis*, thus suggesting that she is a member of the terrorist organization.

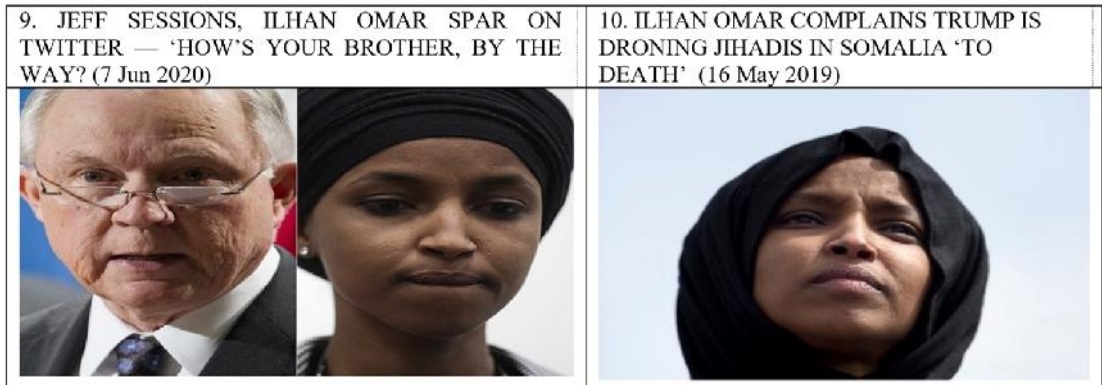


Fig. 9: Ilhan Omar

5.2.5 Ayanna Pressley

The narrative that is prevalently told in the images of Ayanna Pressley is related to her rapport with Party politics. As mentioned in the introductory sections of this paper, Pressley is the Squad member who knows her way around partisan dynamics. In image 11 (Figure 10), Pressley is a ‘minority woman’, whose lack of gaze distances her from the viewer. Indeed, as a member of a minority, she cannot be acknowledged, and an upward smirk instead of a straight full smile, the latter a typical sign of openness,⁷⁰ seems to convey *Breitbart*’s wariness of Pressley and of the constituents she represents. In addition, the ‘wave’ metaphor in the headline intensifies the image of a Democratic take-over, and specifically on the part of women politicians. With reference to her open-palm hand gesture, a pragmatic resource that usually indicates an invitation to cooperate,⁷¹ in this picture, the palms are raised and in full view as if deploying a defense mechanism, and perhaps an unwillingness to establish an understanding.⁷² In image 12, the headline content is contrasted with the visual representation of the Congresswoman. The American flags behind her clearly identify her as a political representative; her red dress and the red flag stripes are symbolic attributives which represent and intensify this

⁶⁸ Shounaz Meky, “Under Wraps: Style Savvy Muslim Women Turn to Turbans”, *Alarabiya News* (2014, updated 2020), <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/life-style/fashion-and-beauty/2014/10/09/Under-wraps-Style-savvy-Muslim-women-turn-to-turbans>

⁶⁹ Jill Leet-Otley, “(Mis)understanding the Hijab: the Spirit and Strength of Somali Girls”, *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education Studies of Migration, Integration, Equity, and Cultural Survival*, 14.1 (2020), 43-54.

⁷⁰ Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*.

⁷¹ Alan Cienki and Cornelia Müller, “Metaphor, Gesture and Thought”, in Raymond W. Gibbs, ed., *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2008), 483-501.

⁷² Adam Kendon, *Gesture: Visible Action as Utterance* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2004).

alliance. Yet, her gaze is not directed at the viewer, once again a sign of delegitimation which, according to *Breitbart*, is confirmed by the absurdity of her statement as she shuns the president's institutional role, and her own, as representatives of the American people.



Fig. 10: Ayanna Pressley

The sample images analyzed above best portray the visual stimuli that *Breitbart* expertly uses to pit their readers against the Squad. These can be coded according to the same frames that were identified in the headline analysis, namely: *the Squad members are an undeserving gang, the Squad is racist, the Squad encourages illegal immigration, the Squad is a terrorist organization, the Squad is un-American, and the Squad is frightening.*

5.3 Analysis of the *Breitbart*_Comments subcorpus

Breitbart's 31 million readers are a testimony of the network's influence on certain sectors of the general public who, through their comments and dialogic dynamic, spew an outflow of dangerous speech that often escalates into sheer hatred, as discussed in the following small but representative selection of 30 concordance lines out of the 318 extracted from the reader comments, and illustrated in Table 2. Figures 11 and 12 of the *Breitbart*_Comments subcorpus show the breakdown of the 30 lines according to the 6 seed words or the names of the Congresswomen: the first 10 lines for the *Squad*, the first 3 lines for *Ocasio-Cortez*, the first 2 lines for *AOC*, and the first 5 lines for *Omar*, *Tlaib*, and *Pressley*. As mentioned, these comments represent the response to the headlines and images previously analyzed and discussed.

Seed word	Raw frequency	(per million)
Squad	84	6,987.71
Ocasio-Cortez	75	5,184.67
AOC	51	3,527.68
Omar	45	2,881.25
Tlaib	35	2,469.64
Pressley	28	1,989.63

Table 2: Frequencies of reader comments

1	When Muslims are in the majority, there are no minority rights.</s><s>Remember Americans: The Jihad	Squad	are not here to "thank" this country. </s><s>They are here to destroy it. </s><s>
2	Q: What does (The Jihad)	Squad	Omar Ocrazio , Jihadi Jane and Taliban Tlaib have in common?</s><s>A: They all hate Whitey. </s><s>
3	These " woman of color " don't like white people Looks like the Jihad	Squad	has a plan.</s><s>Insult America repeatedly which announces their hatred for America. </s><s>
4	these days GLOBALISM means DEATH! </s><s>Bernie Sanders Endorses the	Squad	as Democrats Angle to Keep House Majority . Thanks Bernie, just in case people weren't sure that you were a loudmouth radical communist malcontent
5	Guatemalans Protest 'The	Squad	Please keep them there, We'll pay you to keep em, even furnish a couple of even furnish a couple of cages
6	TRUMP 2020 Say what you want about the squawk	Squad	, i will give credit where it is due..... they proved to Americans that any one can serve in Washington
7	I thought i had just an average intelligence , Thanks to the squawk	Squad	i feel like an intellect, for the hate they speak of i feel like Jesus
8	terrorist Women Against Trump The Tw AT	Squad	Good call!</s><s> Or Terrorist Whiners Against Trump. </s><s> I'm not sure I'd validate some of them as "women". </s><s>The Jihad Squwad
9	Remove them from their positions and expelled from the country along with all of the foreign imports that voted them into office.</s><s>	Squad	Demands Vote-by-Mail and Benefits for Illegal Aliens in Relief Package!!! And we the people "demand" three out of the four of you go back to your native country,
10	Cheating by Mail would just "elect" more anti-American rejects already on the Jihad	Squad	.. We don't need anymore members of the Jihad Squad.

Fig. 11: Comments about the Squad

The first 10 concordance lines presented in Figure 11 convey an image of the Squad as a terrorist group, which relates back to the headline and the image stimuli. By repetitively categorizing them as **the Jihad**, **Jihad Squad**, **the squawk Squad**, **the Jihad Squwad**, and even **the TwAT Squad** (nomination) (lines 1,2,3,6,8,10), the *Breitbart* reader-interlocutor cannot refrain from drawing a parallelism between the cultural identity of the four Congresswomen and their affiliation to terrorism, thus insulting all members of their respective communities. For the same reason, their names are distorted by using distinct behavioral allusions (predication), as in line 2 where Ocasio-Cortez becomes **Ocrazio** , Rashida Tlaib becomes **Taliban Tlaib**, and either Ilhan Omar or Ayanna Pressley becomes **Jihadi Jane**. The other discursive representations are realized by using behavioral verbs to denote a sentiment of hate against white people, such as: **they hate Whitey** (line 2); **These “woman of colour” don’t like white people** (line 3). In the minds of *Breitbart* readers, the Squad also seems to hate America as testified in the following lines: they are **not here to thank this country** (line 1); they are here **to destroy it** (line 1); **they insult America** (line 3); **Demands Vote-by-Mail** (line 9). Explicit predicates state that the Squad members are **racist** (line 3), **terrorist whiners against Trump** (line 8), **foreign imports** (line 9), of **average intelligence** (line 7) as **anyone can serve in Washington** (line 6), and **anti-American rejects** (line 10).

Readers are quick to take *Breitbart’s* bait as they pick up on a loaded term and formulate their comments regardless of the issue raised. For example, when discussing globalism (line 4), the comment is against Bernie Sanders whose **loudmouth radical communist malcontent** is to blame for the Democratic majority in the House. Also, when discussing the Guatemalan comment against Nancy Pelosi and the members of the Squad, instead of concentrating on the reasons behind the protest, the comment states **that cages should be furnished** for the four women (line 5). The Vote-by-mail

possibility, another cogent issue ahead of the 2020 presidential election, is seen as a **benefit for illegal aliens** (9).

1	</s><s>28 MAY 2020 Nolte:	Ocasio-Cortez	THIS BOLSHEVIC BIMBO IS A TAX CHEAT yet she wants you SUCKERS to pay MORE TAXES! How does this IDIOT survive this SCANDAL?
2	taking one freedom at a time AWAY from the citizens until they had NONE. </s><s>Meet the #Squad:	Ocasio-Cortez	Crew want reparations... and muslims enslaved white Americans in Africa. Will muslim Americans pay reperation for them?
3	America with defunded police looks like is what Africa looks like, not what the American suburbs look like	Ocasio-Cortez	sees most Americans as foreigners to neutralize
4	When you are part of the social justice sacrifice system.</s><s>	AOC	is making \$15,000 a month from taxpayers to spread her hatred for America and the NY Dems will keep voting for her over and over
5	This is a rare quality you don't see much in main stream media in over a decade.</s><s>	AOC	is a devout Stalinist. </s><s>She represents totalitarianism and wants to bring a Venezuela style socialist police state to the US
6	It seems to me William Barr should have enough evidence by now to charge	Omar	with a bunch of crimes. </s><s>This should be as easy as buying insurance from Geico.
7	They entered the U.S. ILLEGALLY claiming to be part of the	Omar	family who had been granted asylum.</s><s> she came here and we fed her, we clothed her, she got welfare, she got school, she got healthcare
8	/s><s>Ellison:	Omar	and Tlaib are Muslim Brotherhood. </s><s>They are using the same Divide and Conquer tactics they used on the Middle East
9	He's absolutely right and	Omar	is a dangerous idiot that was given power due to misguided immigration that has built up pockets of 5 th columnists
10	this is not going to be the country of white people. </s><s> " That's what the Shithole-American	Omar	haters like her should be nowhere near power in a free country!! </s><s> The Democrat party has morphed from the party of JFK to the party of terrorists
11	Another Anti-American immigrant who needs to go back where she came from Rep. Rashida	Tlaib	Just another bought and paid for lobbyist of the red lipstick industry. GTH Rashida. Git back in yer Handjob.
12	if anyone hasn't figured this out yet...</s><s>Rep. Rashida	Tlaib	(D-MI) is the ring Leader..... </s><s>Tlaib doesn't want to be the face of the group because she knows she is repulsive...
13	</s><s> What a racist, dummy	Tlaib	liar, hates America, supports terrorists,
14	We are sitting by and watching our country be taken over by one of the craziest religions ever created.	Tlaib	Supports Sharia Law EVERYWHERE! We are just a step behind England.
15	Her attack on people of faith , per se is rather an attack on a people of a certain faith. I don't think	Tlaib	would have had any problems about her own religious group praying.
16	she is free to renounce her citizenship and be Somali ambassador to US ant time she wants Calling	Pressley	a US Representative is hurtful to me. </s><s>She's not even an American.
17	Trump's Handling of Coronavirus 'Akin to War Crimes' ...Ayanna	Pressley	Oh darn! This means we won't be able to watch her sit there and roll her eyes and play with her phone like a high school drama queen?
18	Muslim immigrant Rashida Tlaib After	Pressley	Endorses Warren: 'Squad' Is 'Stronger than Anyone Knows' Strong???'</s><s>Smelling perhaps, but no other definition of the word works
19	as a woman, I am appalled at the eyebrows	Pressley	and others think look good.</s><s>They are worth a good laugh at times! 😊 Claims she alopecia.
20	the Squad Is Not an Insurgent Cohort of a Gang' Ayanna	Pressley	Get over yourselves. </s><s> OF: How about four angry, self-righteous lesbians

Fig. 12: Comments about the Squad members

Line 1 of Figure 12 establishes AOC's identity as that of a **BOLSHEVIC BIMBO** (nomination). She is also **A TAX CHEAT**, an **IDIOT**, and a **devout Stalinist** (predicate nominatives), and she **represents totalitarianism** (metonymic depiction). *Breitbart* accuses AOC of using a double standard

when dealing with issues that are important to her. For example, in line 4, her proposal to raise taxes is met with an attack claiming that she is earning a higher salary than most people, knowing the taxpayer will foot her bill. In line 1, she is accused of **evading taxes** which is unacceptable for a US Congresswoman. Also, her opinion of Americans, according to *Breitbart*, likens them to **foreigners** (line 3) who must be stopped, which is an interesting turn of phrase as this is how Trump views most immigrants coming into the country.

Conclusively, Ocasio-Cortez's **Crew** (line 2) basically takes **AWAY freedom from citizens until they have NONE** (intensification) (line 2), and this includes the **defunding of the police** proposal, which, according to the reader in line 3, makes neighborhoods **look more like Africa rather than a suburb**, as claimed by AOC. The **Crew** also wants reparations, but the comment hits back by claiming that since **Muslims enslaved white Americans in Africa**, the question is: **Will muslim Americans pay reparations for them?**

According to the *Breitbart* readers, Omar (line 6) has most certainly committed **a bunch of crimes** (intensification), including **entering the US illegally**, and **favoring her entire family** (line 7). This is based on the opinion that illegal immigrants do not only commit fraudulent acts, but are also ungrateful like Omar, who was **fed, clothed, taken care of and educated** in this country (line 7). Predication in reader comments raises the level of aggression to construct the representation of Omar as **a dangerous idiot** (line 9), and a **shithole american** (line 10), and **a hater** (line 10). The hate is not only directed at Omar, but also at the Democratic Party, which **has morphed into the party of terrorists** (line 10). Membership categorization (nomination) is also evoked by naming Omar and Tlaib as members of **the Muslim Brotherhood** (line 8).

Rashida Tlaib is **another anti-american immigrant** (explicit predicate) (line 11), although she was born in the US. In the same line, she is also accused of being **bought and paid for** by a red lipstick industry, a nod to AOC who also wears signature red lipstick. By calling her out directly, she is then told to **GTH** (go to hell), and **Git back in yer Handjob**, most probably an unfortunate misspelling of the headscarf worn by Muslim women, the Hijab.⁷³ Rashida is also **a ring-leader** (12), but not overtly, according to the toxic comment which states that her not wanting to be in the limelight is because **she is repulsive** (12), and she is **a racist, dummy and a liar** (predicate nouns). Tlaib **supports Sharia Law EVERYWHERE** (line 14), and this is probably a harsh response to the headline news which reports that she was denied entry into Israel. Continuing on the topic of religion, she is accused of attacking **people of faith** who do not belong to her **own religious group** (line 15).

Pressley is **free to renounce her citizenship** (line 16), and **be something else but not a US representative**, which, according to this comment, is hurtful (16), and **she is not even an American** (line 16). Once again, the belief that although she was born in the US, the colour of her skin probably rules out her 'Americanness' (line 16). When there is a national or local issue to discuss, the comment swerves towards the personal. For example, the Coronavirus crisis criticism against Trump is met with the denigration of Pressley's actions such as **playing with her phone** (line 17), and **rolling her eyes** (line 17), probably to indicate her dismissal of this important issue. With a series of modification and intensification devices, she is a **high school drama queen** (line 17), she is a **smelling Muslim immigrant** (line 18) and, along with her other three colleagues, **a self-righteous lesbian** (line 20). The remark in line 19 is particularly offensive as it refers to Pressley's complete loss of hair due to a serious health problem called **alopecia**.

Personal identity, culture, religion, ethnicity, and health are some of the issues that the reader-commentators bring to the surface in their vilification of the Squad. More interestingly and perhaps

⁷³ The word hijab comes from the Arabic word *hajaba*, which means to hide or screen from view or to cover. Sometimes the word hijab refers specifically to a woman's headscarf; sometimes it is used more generally to refer to the practice of wearing modest clothing in accordance with religious beliefs. <https://www.aclu.org/other/discrimination-against-muslim-women-fact-sheet>.

less evidently, by analyzing the escalation of the toxic level of the language, the intensification of negative traits and attributions (predication), and the disparaging membership categorizations (nomination),⁷⁴ the message that is perceived is that *Breitbart* aims polarize the country by instilling fear of the 'other'. As hypothesized earlier in this study, this fear is triggered by the frequent use of *us vs. them* discursive strategies which pit the Squad and their progressive agenda against the rest of the American population. Some of these expressions are: **they are here to destroy it; they all hate Whitey; We Will Send You Back; we don't need anymore members of the Jihad Squad; we are sitting by and watching our country be taken over; We'll pay you to keep em [them].**

6. Conclusion

This study contributes to the global discussion about the global rise of rightward turns by arguing that they are generated by the pervasiveness and overlap of gendered, racialized, and nativized discourses⁷⁵ which are mainly advanced by the deeply conservative and far-right political agendas of diverse institutions.⁷⁶ To corroborate this argument is the evidence provided by *Breitbart News Network* which exposed three underlying core narratives that dominate these discourses. The first narrative suggests that right-wing establishments and their media affiliations favor stability and preservation of the *status quo* over social change. The second narrative is rooted in the Right's defense of limited government intervention regarding corporate and elite strongholds such as taxation, immigration flows, and economic benefits for minorities. The third narrative, and perhaps the most recurrent, conveys the message that in all political and social matters, the Right chooses obedience and conformity (oneness, sameness, nativeness, whiteness, maleness, etc.) over freedom and difference (respect, diversity, equality, justice, gender rights etc.).

The identification of these narratives also provides insight into the Republican Party's gender conservatism which, in this case, is discursively conveyed via *Breitbart's* far-right lexicon. In fact, the study's findings indicate that vilification discourses against gender justice and equality, even when not outwardly expressed, have ferocious online articulations, also known as e-bile,⁷⁷ and should therefore be understood as a type of hate speech fueled by antifeminist and antiminority positions, supported by a return to antimodern discourse.⁷⁸

In addressing the more specific issues raised by the research question regarding the vilification strategies triggered by the *stimulus-response* dynamic, the analysis of the linguistic and visual data provides evidence that the Squad and its members are discursively represented as a clan of rejects, illegals, terrorists and Marxists. These anti-American accusations are denounced in nearly all of the headlines and images, and are used as primary stimuli for vilification, consisting of an overwhelming majority of clickbait-like allusions, provocations, allegations and other forms of linguistic and visual rhetoric that are predicated almost exclusively on attention-seeking soundbites primed to receive the vitriolic responses from the readers. In particular, the Squad images provoke a generalized sentiment of doubt, suspicion, mistrust and lack of credibility, mostly related to idiosyncratic features that include behavior, vestemics, and gestures that are aptly captured and skillfully presented. Indeed, when the social actors are women, there seems to be no possible and genuine political critique outside a discourse in which identity features, including physical appearance, are perennial objects to be

⁷⁴ Matin Reissigl and Ruth Wodak, "The Discourse-Historical Approach", in Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, eds., *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies* (London/CA/New Delhi: Sage 2016), 23–61.

⁷⁵ Kathleen Blee, "Similarities/Differences in Gender and Far-Right Politics in Europe and the USA", in Michaela Köttig, Renate Bitzan, Andrea Petö, eds., *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe: Gender and Politics* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 191-204.

⁷⁶ Graff et al., *Gender and the Rise of the Global Right*.

⁷⁷ Emma Jane, "'Your a ugly, whorish, slut': Understanding E-bile", *Feminist Media Studies*, 14.4 (2014), 531-546.

⁷⁸ Karen Stenner, "Psychological Inquiry Three Kinds of Conservatism", 20.2-3 (April-September 2009), 142-159.

evaluated, exploited and humiliated for the clear purpose of controlling the narrative on women office-holding.⁷⁹ As mentioned, the comments are an escalated version of the vilification process triggered via the headlines and images which also reveal *Breitbart's* ulterior motive, or the attempt to convince readers that everything is disintegrating. This implies that the media outlet wants their followers to feel enraged and insecure in the face of advancing socialist disaster; they want them to feel that their only hope is the intervention of conservatism in all of its political ramifications.

As a final and more general remark, the global Right, according to Graff et al.,⁸⁰ has agendas that rely on a militant, aggressive and misogynistic brand of gender politics which is largely marketed on (social) media networks. By considering the evidence presented in this case study, it seems that the red thread narratives of right-wing discourse enable media demonization of liberal, nonwhite, young, female politicians, through which the Right attempts to 'purge' America from the presence of the 'other', an entity that activates the fear of a browning America and of a female-led Capitol Hill, and sharpens the sense of loss of the country's demographic control; this is when white America becomes far more right-wing and far more anti-gender. It is a *stimulus-response* dynamic that the Squad knows only too well, and Congresswoman Pressley just about wraps up this agenda when she states: "I encourage the American people and all of us in this room and beyond to not take the bait. This is a disruptive distraction from the issues of care, concern and consequence to the American people".⁸¹

⁷⁹ Jane, "Online Misogyny"; Gill Rosalind, "Post-postfeminism?: New Feminist Visibilities in Postfeminist Times", *Journal of Feminist Media Studies*, 16.4 (2016).

⁸⁰ Graff et al., *Gender and the Rise of the Global Right*.

⁸¹ Rick Sobey, "Pressley Responds to Trump Tweet: Don't Take the Bait", *Boston Herald* (2019), <https://www.bostonherald.com/2019/07/21/pressley-responds-to-new-trump-tweet-get-off-the-ride/>.

‘Unicorns’, ‘Narcissistic Snowflakes’ and ‘Undifferentiated’ Citizens. Gender in YouTube-populism. The Case of Lega Nord and UKIP

Abstract: The present study investigates the transnational discursive representation of gender in YouTube official channels of UKIP (UK) and Lega Nord (Italy). Starting from the chameleon-like nature of right-wing populist ideas that crop up wherever social imbalances and malaise appear, the consequences of highly malleable messages diffused through 2.0 cyber-technologies inflame the opinions and attitudes of the mass audience which, when processing the message, feels legitimized to adopt discriminatory views and uncivil behaviours.

Given the complex layers of discursive formations affecting both political processes and cyber-mediated representations on gender, the methodology draws on SM-CDS (as in Majid KhosraviNik, 2017) and Corpus Linguistics (as in Paul Baker, *Corpora to Analyse Gender*, 2014), incorporating quantitative investigation of two specialized corpora with close reading of texts to elicit (micro-) linguistic and (macro-)discursive features that construct gender disparity.

Keywords: *gender studies, SM-CDS, youtube-populism, Lega Nord, UKIP*

1. Introduction

In October 2019, during a right-wing demonstration Giorgia Meloni, an Italian politician, cried out that she was a woman, a mother, and a Christian.¹ Some years earlier, former UKIP member David Coburn, who is himself gay, had declared that same-sex marriage is false bollocks that mocks Christian principles.² Although not concomitant, both speeches went viral on social media with remixes and memes that won the support of the angry and disillusioned mass agreeing with indiscriminate attacks on LGBT* people, Muslim people and immigrants. These discriminatory events happened while hundreds of people were drowning off the coasts of Southern Italy, and pro-LGBT* campaigners were struggling for a flexibilisation of strict gender norms, severely undermining the concerted efforts for effective awareness and enforcement of human rights.³

The increased focus on immigration and identity issues, embodied in these two apparently unconnected events, reflects the surging global flow of nationalism and patriarchal fundamentalism that come to justify virulent political action. Two political addresses, situated North of the Channel and South of the Alps, are here tied together as evidence of the proliferation of socially divisive views with stricter borders and barriers, and overt exclusionary violence. In particular, both right-wing populist parties UKIP (in the UK) and Lega (in Italy) share core intents in stirring up social resentment through simplistic but porous messages invariably directed against the most vulnerable groups such as gender non-conforming realities.

¹ See “Centrodestra in piazza, Meloni contro gay e lgbt: ‘Sono una donna, sono cristiana’”, *YouTube* (2019), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KmaLuGJWbEA&ab_channel=LaRepubblica

² Asa Bennett, “Gay Ukip MEP David Coburn Says Gay Marriage Supporters Are ‘Equality Nazis’”, *Huffington Post* (2014), https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2014/10/30/david-coburn-ukip-gay-mep_n_6060184.html.

³ Mark Barwick, *LGBT People, the Religions and Human Rights in Europe* (Human Rights Without Frontiers, 2013). Luca Trappolin, et al., eds., *Confronting Homophobia in Europe: Social and Legal Perspectives* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2012).

Existing research on the current eruption of anti-gender backlash has led scholars from various disciplines to examine the socio-political reasons and implications of this Global right-wing anti-gender animus. Wodak⁴ takes a discourse-oriented approach to uncover the dynamics leading Right-Wing Populism (henceforth, RWP) to become a dominant force in Europe and worldwide. She also traces the roots of how gender is encapsulated within RWP agendas that appeals to widely accepted ‘common’ female and masculine roles within a heteronormative society. Another linguistic focus is taken by Breeze⁵ who analyses discursive strategies of left- and right- wing populist leaders in the UK, evidencing the way in which UKIP leaders use a deliberately shocking style and an anti-establishment rhetoric. Taking a broader perspective, Corredor⁶ illustrates how LGBT* and feminist groups can profit from theoretical conceptualization of anti-genderism as a countermovement that mutually informs and challenges pro-inclusivity advocacy so that the latter can enhance the transformation of gender and sexual relations around the globe. Donà⁷ gives a socio-political update on the backsliding of gender-equality policies by the right-wing nationalism of the Lega party in Italy.

While the above studies have contributed to highlight gender un-evenness in RWP taking roots in national contexts and shifting its networks internationally due to galloping globalization, this study takes up such existing contributions and delves into the potentials of ‘YouTube-populism’. The focus lies on the transnational investigation in Italy and the UK, two countries that despite their long neo-liberal traditions, have seen a radical change in their political apparatuses with a mounting trend of RWP. It is no news that since the 2014-EU elections, the EU Parliament has hosted parties that oppose traditional forms of representative democracy.⁸ Among these, UKIP and Lega stand out for their common origins as niche parties that emerged to the national and international forefront during the mid-2010s. The former, whose roots trace back in to the Anti-Federalist League against the 1991 Maastricht Treaty, was led in its most successful period by Nigel Farage who fiercely guided the referendum for the UK’s withdrawal from the EU. The latter is a former ethno-regionalist party whose incumbent leader, Matteo Salvini, heavily relies on the charismatic use of social media platforms for his political campaigns.⁹ Although both parties have aroused concerns over their controversial stances on immigration, identity issues and law and order,¹⁰ it is instructive that the two countries where they originated, both EU members at the time of conducting this study, have historically been involved at the international level in pro-inclusivity agendas.¹¹

These premises call for the hypothesis on the rejection of broader gender awareness in UKIP and Lega, which, in turn, motivates the research questions (henceforth, RQs) of the present study:

- RQ1 How are anti-gender views linguistically conceptualized and discursively presented at micro- and macro-level by RWP that is witnessing a non-stop increase of consensus?

⁴ Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (London: Sage, 2015).

⁵ Ruth Breeze, “Imagining the People in UKIP and Labour”, in Hidalgo Tenorio, *et al.*, eds., *Populist Discourse: Critical Approaches to Contemporary Politics* (London: Routledge, 2019), 120-135.

⁶ Elizabeth Corredor, “Unpacking ‘Gender Ideology’ and the Global Right’s Antigender Countermovement”, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 44.3 (2019), 613-638.

⁷ Alessia Donà, “What’s Gender got to do with Populism?”, *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 27.3 (2020), 285-292.

⁸ Annie Benveniste *et al.* “Introduction. Populism: The Concept and Its Definitions”, in Lazaridis, Gabriella *et al.*, eds., *The Rise of the Far Right in Europe: Populist Shifts and ‘Othering’* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 1-23.

⁹ Daniele Albertazzi, *et al.* “‘No Regionalism, Please. We Are Leghisti!’ The Transformation of the Italian Lega Nord under the Leadership of Matteo Salvini”, *Regional and Federal Studies*, 28.5 (2018), 645-671. See also Marianna Zummo, “Performing Authenticity on a Digital Political Stage: Politainment as Interactive Practice and (Populist?) Performance”, *Iperstoria*, 15 (2020), 96-118.

¹⁰ Maria Ivana Lorenzetti, “Right Wing Populism and the Representation of Immigrants on Social Media: A Critical Multimodal Analysis”, *Iperstoria*, 15 (2020), 59-95.

¹¹ Martina Prpic and Rosamund Shreeves with Alina Dobрева, “Promoting Equality between Women and Men”, *BRIEFING EU Policies – Delivering for Citizens* (EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service, June 2019), https://what-europe-does-for-me.eu/data/pdf/focus/focus10_en.pdf.

- RQ2 What representation of gender emerges in right-wing parties Lega (Italy) and UKIP (UK)?

The structure of this paper follows a theoretical contextualization of gender un-evenness in RWP propagated through 2.0 self-edited digital spaces (section 2). Subsequently, a multi-layered methodology combining Social Media-Critical Discourse Studies (henceforth, SM-CDS) and Corpus Linguistics (section 3) leads to the quantitative and qualitative analyses that elicit underlying representations of gender, together with its (micro-) linguistic and (macro-) discursive features (section 4). To conclude, a comparative discussion explores parallels and differences between the Italian and the British cases (section 5).

2. Gender and Right-wing YouTube-populism

Although a clear-cut conceptualization that encompasses its signifying fluctuations seems difficult to achieve, Demata *et al.* concur that populism “consists in the elaboration of an antagonistic political space dominated by the struggle between the elite and the people”.¹² Within the amorphous people, a severe and undistinguished division between genuine friends *vs.* corrupted “others” favours further antagonism, together with anti-minority and xenophobic positions that create discursive formations against multiculturalism and pluralism, by undermining perceptions of pure identity and membership in a normalised community.¹³

The relevance of investigating gender in RWP stems precisely from such anti-minority positions that function as symbolic glue encompassing not only social resentment but also nationalism, and religious fundamentalism.¹⁴ Paradoxically, Graff *et al.*¹⁵ evidence how RWP has politicized some gender issues to its advantage by craftily constructing a pro-women rhetoric to secure dominant essentialised gender and sexual norms. All in all, the scholars maintain that gender conservatism has become the *lingua franca* of Global RWP, mobilising anxieties into a state of exaggerated apprehension and prolonged panic that justify the perpetration of gender imbalance and misogynist views.

Global *mauvaise* against gender flexibilisation features the solid network of transnational right-wing ties that boldly exploit affordances and enhanced visibility of social media. In particular, in the disillusioned post-politics era, populist leaders exploit the digital social environment and its proactive dynamism¹⁶ to strengthen the equation: ‘visibility/popularity is legitimacy’,¹⁷ and to centre the attention on their credibility by giving “the impression of spontaneity and matter-of-factness”.¹⁸ In the long run these two objectives have interwoven by supplanting core political practice; indeed, these viral ‘me-like-you’ contents are resulting in wide consensus and enhanced legitimation for RWP. In a context where “media-savvy performance of politics seems to become more important than the political process”¹⁹ the centrality of ‘politainment’²⁰ likewise appears to be acceptable. That is, an

¹² Massimiliano Demata, *et al.*, “Riding the Populist Wave: Metaphors of Populism and Anti-Populism in the *Daily Mail* and *The Guardian*”, *Iperstoria*, 15 (2020), 10.

¹³ Donà, “What’s Gender Got to Do with Populism?”.

¹⁴ Weronika Grzebalska and Andrea Pető, “The Gendered Modus Operandi of the Illiberal Transformation in Hungary and Poland”, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 68 (2017), 164-72.

¹⁵ Agnieszka Graff *et al.* “Introduction: Gender and the Rise of the Global Right”, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 44.3 (2019), 541-560.

¹⁶ Majid KhosraviNik and Eleonora Esposito, “Online Hate, Digital Discourse and Critique: Exploring Digitally Mediated Discursive Practices of Gender-based Hostility”, *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics*, 14.1 (2018), 45-68.

¹⁷ Majid KhosraviNik, “Social Media Techno-Discursive Design, Affective Communication and Contemporary Politics”, *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 11 (2018), 427-442.

¹⁸ Massimiliano Demata, “‘I Think that Maybe I Wouldn’t Be Here if it Wasn’t for Twitter’: Donald Trump’s Populist Style on Twitter”, *Textus*, 31.1 (2018), 73.

¹⁹ Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*, 11.

entanglement of ‘politics’ and ‘entertainment’ linking together the emphasis on self-promotion and psychological relatability of politicians during their digital performances²¹ where orators, online and offline audiences, together with sensationalistic content, constitute the political message of emotive grass-root mobilisation and safeguard of the *demos*. While Wodak²² is certainly not the first to emphasize the symbolic dimension of this ‘front-stage’ politics, she insists on the inherent need to create an attractive representation of the right-wing leader that hooks into the background culture, symbols and myths. This front-stage performance champions a celebrity culture of slick politicians that combine ordinariness and extra-ordinariness in order to embrace bad manners for defensive purposes.

As pointed out by KhosraviNik²³ and Macaulay,²⁴ it is reasonable to believe that the communicative model of social media aligns with the affective-driven and sensationalistic rhetoric of RWP. Undoubtedly, strategies such as hand-held use of the mobile, amateur self-videos and spontaneous tone aim to cut distances and deliver immediateness and (self-) connection. Therefore, the role of social media in RWP is so central that as Macaulay²⁵ refers to ‘Twitterpopulism’ it seems equally appropriate to consider ‘YouTube-populism’ as the demagogue use of YouTube in RWP. YouTube can be considered not only a social media platform but also a relatively new facet of political discourse, since it allows its users to create political messages in the participatory environment of 2.0 digital repertoire. In so doing, everyone who has a personal/institutional channel can both upload pre-recorded videos, and live-stream contents.²⁶ Subscribers to YouTube channels can also comment, like and modify videos, breaking the ‘one-to-many’ dynamics of traditional mass communication.

However, this democratic engagement of ‘prosumers’²⁷ warrants the attention to the asymmetrical power in the construction and streaming of messages.²⁸ An example can be politicians’ deliberate disregard for traditional media to the advantage of tailor-made messages, e.g., cuts, choice between solo interventions vs. turn taking. Incidentally, these ad-hoc alterations of political messages are secured by the above-mentioned empowerment paradigm that follows the logic of ‘regimes of popularity’. It is through ‘likes’, ‘shares’ and ‘follows’ that undemocratic rhetoric may be legitimated via, among other things, the development of reactionary lexis and attitudes promoting an anti-gender brand.²⁹ Such perspectives are echoed by KhosraviNik and Unger³⁰ in recognizing that the decentralization of communicative power in social media has witnessed to the emergence of a kind of political communication whose unfiltered content has given major potential to RWP to disseminate border-line discourses that more often degenerate into ‘uncivil ideas’.³¹ The latter being normalised anti-pluralist views and exclusionary discourses that would otherwise be mitigated in traditional

²⁰ Kristina Riegert and Sue Collins, “Politainment.”, in Gianpietro Mazzoleni, ed., *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication* (New York: Wiley, 2016), 974-984.

²¹ Enrique Arroyas Langa and Victoria Fernández Ilundain, “The Politics of Authenticity in Populist Discourse: Rhetorical Analysis of a Parliamentary Speech by Podemos”, in Hidalgo Tenorio, et al., eds., *Populist Discourse: Critical Approaches to Contemporary Politics* (London: Routledge, 2019), 17-33.

²² Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: what Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*.

²³ KhosraviNik, “Social Media Techno-Discursive Design, Affective Communication and Contemporary Politics”.

²⁴ Marcia Maculay, “A Short Introduction to Populism”, in Marcia Maculay, ed., *Populist Discourse* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 1-26.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Corinna Chong, et al., “Communication as Commodification: Video Technology and the Gendered Gaze”, in Karen Ross, ed., *The Handbook of Gender, Sex and Media* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 419-435.

²⁷ George Ritzer and Nathan Jurgenson, “Production, Consumption, Prosumption: The Nature of Capitalism in the Age of the Digital ‘Prosumer’”, *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 10.1 (2010), 13-36.

²⁸ Benjamin Moffit, *The Global Rise of Populism* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 2016).

²⁹ Graff et al., “Introduction: Gender and the Rise of the Global Right”.

³⁰ Majid KhosraviNik and Johann Unger, “Critical Discourse Studies and Social Media: Power, Resistance and Critique in Changing Media Ecologies”, in Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, eds., *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies*, Third edition (London: Sage, 2016), 206-233.

³¹ Michał Krzyzanowski and Per Ledin, “Uncivility on the Web: Populism in/and the Borderline Discourses of Exclusion”, *Journal of Language and Politics*, 16.4 (2017), 566-581.

media. The normalisation of such top-down aggressiveness bears the serious potential to trigger resistance to gender equality and broader reactionary practices. From this it follows that uncivil political messages can dangerously contribute to uncontrolled bottom-up processes of undemocratic actions.³²

Within a discourse-oriented perspective, linguistic and semiotic means to construct exclusionary practices that reject gender and sexual non-conforming realities, whether they have bottom-up or top-down directionality, pose a serious threat to broader gender awareness and pro-inclusivity ideas. In a Social-Media Critical Discourse Studies (henceforth, SM-CDS) framework, social media are considered as sites that form the consolidation of audience attitudes and discourses.³³ For this reason, the same scholars warn against the deleterious effects of institutional contents reproducing distorted literacy, and ordinary users changing the original message. It is precisely due to the interactivity, unreliability and unpredictability of participatory web³⁴ that powerful messages of right-wing activists remain central in terms of the Foucauldian notion of power in political and institutional discourse. Certainly, in the web-mediatised environment politicians act as experts that define, classify and create ‘domains of objects’ and ‘rituals of truth’ for disillusioned people. Similarly, YouTube contents of institutional parties reflect how discourse contributes to the global rise of RWP. These videos are to be considered as sites consolidating social attitudes and commonly-held discourses since they have the potential to set the boundaries, and to establish what can be considered legitimate vs. what is conceived as dangerous and abnormal.³⁵

3. Methodology

The dataset of this investigation consists of two small corpora transcribed³⁶ from the YouTube official channels of the two parties. Corpora breakdown is shown in the below table.

UKIP-c		Lega-c	
Title and date of the video	Words	Title and date of the video	Words
Janice Atkinson (UKIP) demolishes UK gender quotas for boards 9.3.2015	1,571	Unioni civili #centinaio a PD, cacasotto, votiamo subito 17.02.2016	1,670
Godfrey Bloom exposes the fallacy of the EU’s gender balance directive 18.9.2013	2,432	Centinaio, no alle unioni civili 27.06.2016	2,587
EU gender balance contradictions - UKIP MEP Louise Bour 8.10.2015	2,897	Unioni civili - Centinaio, Renzi indegno se mantiene emendamento canguro 16.02.2016	1,356
EU gender strategy: Ludicrous political correctness on stilts - UKIP MEP David Coburn 9.6.2015	4,763	Scuola, Fedriga: contro teoria gender trincea LEGA 8.07.2015	3,098
Gender quota system is demeaning	7,034	#Guidesi, la #LEGA dice no alle	1,387

³² Michał Krzyzanowski, *et al.*, “The Mediatization and the Politicization of the ‘Refugee Crisis’ in Europe”, *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 16.1-2 (2018), 1-14.

³³ Majid KhosraviNik and Johann Unger, “Critical Discourse Studies and Social Media: Power, Resistance and Critique in Changing Media Ecologies”.

³⁴ Michał Krzyzanowski and Per Ledin, “Uncivility on the Web”.

³⁵ Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (London: Longman, 1989); Marianne Jørgensen and Louise J. Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (London: Sage, 2002).

³⁶ To obtain the transcription of the speeches, the author used Soundflower, an extension to capture the sound coming from YouTube videos. This was combined with Web Speech API, a JavaScript generating speech-to-text output. After going through close reading, the author was helped by an Italian and an English native speaker to double check the transcriptions.

and insulting to all hardworking women - Jill Seymour MEP 9.5.2013		adozioni gay 22.01.2016	
Protecting Women in Society. Christina Simmonds, One Billion Rising 5.3.2014	6,843	Manifestazione della LEGA contro adozioni gay 22.01.2016	1,876
It's not about gender or equality, it's about control - UKIP MEP Steven Woolfe 19.6.2014	1,205	#Saltamartini, la priorità è il lavoro non i matrimoni gay 20.05.2016	2,870
Women: Not pink but red, white and blue - Janice Atkinson MEP 6.3.2015	1,796	#Saltamartini, dirò sempre no al matrimonio gay 27.05.2016	1,342
Speaking about misgendering 8.10.2017	1,601	#Rondini: “no alle teorie gender nelle scuole” 31.07.2015	1,098
David Kurten on immigration and gender 3.5.2016	3,241	#Molteni, la legge sulle unioni civili del PD è un attacco mortale alla famiglia tradizionale 31.05.2016	1,245
		#Salvini sul matrimonio gay 3.06.2016	4,315
		#Salvini - no alle adozioni per coppie omosessuali 19.01.2016	456
		La LEGA il giorno della festa della donna 8.03.2016	2,321
		Unioni civili, “azzeccagarbugli” Calderoli si esibisce in lezione regolamento aule 17.02.2016	4,554
	33,383		31,175

Table 1. Breakdown of the two corpora

To gain a representative insight into the discourse of Lega Nord and UKIP on gender matters, a key-term criterion guided the selection of speeches. Key-terms were selected on the basis of the most discussed gendered topics in Italy and the UK. Topics such as same-sex adoptions, unnaturalness of transgender people, and women’s empowerment were derived both from newspaper articles and from literature review.³⁷ Thus, each video of the data-set features a discussion on such burning themes and contains at least one key-term. For UKIP-c key-terms are: ‘gender’ and ‘women’. Key-terms for Lega-c are: ‘gender’, ‘unioni civili’ ‘gay’, ‘omosessual*’. The time frame covers 2013-2017, moving from a series of EU proposals for improving gender balance that initiated in late 2012 and served as input for broader gender awareness.³⁸

As maintained by Baker and McEnery,³⁹ both quantitative and qualitative investigations intersect in the process of gaining linguistic and discursive representation of gender. The quantitative procedure started by analysing the keywords, collocations and word sketches of the two corpora with the Sketch

³⁷ Laura Paterson and Laura Coffey-Glover, “Discourses of Marriage in Same-Sex Marriage Debates in the UK Press 2011-2014”, *Journal of Language and Sexuality*, 7.2 (2018), 175-204. See also Matteo Winkler, “Italy’s Gentle Revolution: The New Law on Same-Sex Partnerships”, *The Digest. National Italian American Bar Association Law Journal*, 25 (2017), 1-31.

³⁸ In 2012 the EU issued a proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on improving the gender balance among non-executive directors of companies. Since then, the introduction of “gender-quotas” has caused a lot of controversy and debate.

³⁹ Paul Baker and Tony McEnery, “Introduction”, in Paul Baker and Tony McEnery, eds., *Corpora and Discourse Studies: Integrating Discourse and Corpora* (London: Palgrave, 2015), 1-19.

Engine. The Sketch Engine was used for its usefulness in comparing multiple dataset,⁴⁰ and for the effect-size statistics used in the keyword extraction whose output serves critically-oriented purposes.⁴¹ This corpus-query tool establishes keywords via the simple maths parameter that looks at the ratio between the relative frequencies of words (w) in the focus corpus (C) and in the reference corpus (R).⁴² For the purpose of this study the smoothing parameter was set to $n=1$ to highlight rare words.⁴³ As Baker⁴⁴ suggests, keywords⁴⁵ can be useful to direct researchers to important concepts in a text that, in turn, may help to reveal underlying discourses or ideologies. Drawing on Baker *et al.*'s approach,⁴⁶ the most salient lexical items related to gender had been detected (tables 2,3,5 and 6). After close-reading of their concordances, keywords were grouped according to semantic domains conveying dominant topics and themes (tables 4 and 7). The analysis then moved to a collocational search. Collocations create connections⁴⁷ whereby it is possible to discern connotations and embodied assumptions of word pairs.⁴⁸ As for word sketches, these provide grammatical information on how a query term positions in relation to surrounding parts of speech.⁴⁹ However, these tools alone cannot show complex discursive constructions. Therefore, close investigation of the most salient data related to the RQs was used to elicit linguistic and discursive strategies that apply to SM-CDS.

As for the qualitative procedure, recent works on the construction of gender⁵⁰ have demonstrated that preliminary corpus findings can be tested against close investigation of (a) pronouns, (b) gendered terms for social actors, and (c) forms of address, which are micro-linguistic elements useful for detecting problematic representations of gender. Since gendered terms of social actors and forms of address retrieved via keyword analyses had a low frequency in both focus corpora, to gain further substantiation on broader gender fractals personal pronouns were investigated via odds calculation. This means that corpus data related to pronouns were not tested against the corresponding reference corpora; instead, their occurrences were counted and discussed in terms of their quantitative presence to express the gender spectrum.⁵¹ This approach follows a good number of gender scholars⁵² who

⁴⁰ Sylvia Jaworska and Karen Kinloch, "Using Multiple Data Sets" in Charlotte Taylor and Anna Marchi, eds., *Corpus Approaches to Discourse: A Critical Review* (London: Routledge, 2018), 110-129.

⁴¹ Punjaporn Pojanapunya and Todd Richard Watson "Log-likelihood and Odds Ratio: Keyness Statistics for Different Purposes of Keyword Analysis", *Corpus Linguistics and Linguistic Theory*, 14.1 (2016), 133-167.

⁴² The simple maths parameter is calculated as follows: $\frac{\text{relative frequency of w in C} + n}{\text{relative frequency of w in R} + n}$

⁴³ Vaclav Brezina, *Statistics in Corpus Linguistics: A Practical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2018).

⁴⁴ Paul Baker, "Querying Keywords: Questions of Difference, Frequency and Sense in Keywords Analysis", *Journal of English Linguistics*, 32. 4 (2004), 346-359.

⁴⁵ In this study keywords are displayed as lemmas; however, gendered lemmas are used in the Lega-c where the word form of an adjective has to match the grammatical gender of the noun. The reference corpora for keyword extractions are as follows: enTenTen15 for UKIP-c, a corpus of English web from 2015, while itTenTen16 for the Lega-c, a corpus of Italian web from 2016.

⁴⁶ Paul Baker, *et al.*, *Discourse Analysis and Media Attitudes: The Representation of Islam in the British Press* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2013).

⁴⁷ Michael Stubbs, "Conrad, Concordance, Collocation: Heart of Darkness or Light at the End of the Tunnel?", presented at The Third Sinclair Open Lecture, University of Birmingham, 2003.

⁴⁸ Paul Baker and Tony McEnery, *Corpora and Discourse Studies: Integrating Discourse and Corpora*.

⁴⁹ Laura Paterson and Laura Coffey-Glover, "Discourses of Marriage in Same-Sex Marriage Debates in the UK Press 2011-2014".

⁵⁰ Federica Formato, *Gender, Ideology and Discourse in Italian* (London: Palgrave, 2019). See also Alexandra Krendel, "The Men and Women, Guys and Girls of the 'Manosphere': A Corpus-Assisted Discourse Approach", *Discourse and Society*, 31.6 (2020), 607-630. See also Frazer Heritage, "Applying Corpus Linguistics to Videogame Data: Exploring the Representation of Gender in Videogames at a Lexical Level", *Game Studies*, 20.3 (2020), http://gamestudies.org/2003/articles/heritage_frazer.

⁵¹ Penelope Eckert, "The problem with Binaries: Coding for Gender and Sexuality", *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 8.11 (2014), 529-535.

⁵² See, among others, Alexandra Krendel, "The Men and Women, Guys and Girls of the 'Manosphere': A Corpus-Assisted Discourse Approach". See also Laura Coffey-Glover, *Men in Women's Worlds: Constructions of Masculinity in Women's Magazines* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); Laura Paterson, "'You Can just Give Those Documents to Myself':

demonstrated the choice of nominals – among these, special mention goes to gendered pronouns – can identify their referents as discourse participants. In so doing, gendered pronouns may reveal problematic assumptions on the construction of referents' gender.

At the operational level, the quantitative findings were interpreted drawing on the critically-oriented frameworks by Wodak⁵³ – who delves into linguistic and discursive strategies of RWP – and KhosraviNik⁵⁴ – who implements the main parameters of CDS with new outlooks offered by the discursive environment of social media. In particular, referential, predicational, argumentative and perspectivalised levels were highlighted in order to ascertain how RWP normalise anti-gender views.

In relation to the RQs of this study and to the medium where linguistic and discursive data are caught up, i.e., YouTube, KhosraviNik and Unger⁵⁵ acknowledge that the methodology of a MS-CDS framework must consider also potential pitfalls of this new media ecology. First of all, the poly-directional nature of the communicative flow creates meaning through the fluid interplay of multimodal elements and users' understanding. This poses a series of issues in terms of engagement, re-appropriation and consumption of the original message. Secondly, as in every Critical enquiry, the social contextualization of language is to be linked not only to contextual sensitivity, i.e., every element is influenced and affects the others, but also to the increasing corporatization of web spaces that make certain contents more visible to the detriment of others. Finally, the methodology must account also for the a-historicity of the web since platforms and contents are subject to continuous change.

Given the aforementioned complexities, although multimodal aspects and broader levels of digital interaction would bear equally fruitful results, this approach is beyond the scope of the present study. Instead, here the focus lies on the politician's primary content, strategies and potential macro-discursive consequences.

4. Analysis

This paragraph is split into six sub-sections, each presenting different parts of the analysis of the British (4.1, 4.2, 4.3) and the Italian case (4.4, 4.5, 4.6) respectively. Although the following subdivision responds to practical purposes, it is noteworthy that each analytical segment involves a great deal of moving back and forth from single concordance lines to macro-contextual elements. Indeed, it is especially in political speeches that discursive constructions do emerge not only through linguistic elements *sensu strictu* but also via macro-contextual patterns and cultural beliefs.⁵⁶

4.1 Pronouns, gendered social actors and forms of address in the UKIP-c

The below tables feature single-term and multi-word keywords respectively. These are ranked by keyness score.

Rank	Single-word	Keyness	UKIP-c
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Untriggered Reflexive Pronouns in 21st Century Spoken British English”, in Vaclav Brezina, *et al.*, eds., *Corpus Approaches to Contemporary British Speech: Sociolinguistic Studies of the Spoken (BNC2014)* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 235-255.

⁵³ Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*.

⁵⁴ Majid KhosraviNik, “Social Media Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS)”, in Flowerdew, John *et al.*, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies* (London: Routledge, 2017), 582-598.

⁵⁵ Majid KhosraviNik and Johann Unger, “Critical Discourse Studies and Social Media: Power, Resistance and Critique in Changing Media Ecologies”.

⁵⁶ John Wilson, “Political Discourse”, in Deborah Schiffrin, *et al.*, eds., *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 399-415.

	keyword		freq.
9	quota	82,610	24
10	microaggression	82,050	3
12	indoctrinate	68,920	4
12	pronoun	64,570	5
36	gentleman	43,700	18
45	sexist	39,560	3
66	mansplaining	29,720	1
89	misgendering	29,570	1
111	gaily	28,710	1
134	heteronormativity	27,440	1
146	madam	26,690	3
150	transphobic	26,400	1
168	snowflake	25,380	2
191	emancipation	23,970	3
205	misogynistic	23,300	2
259	discriminate	20,960	5
282	narcissism	19,330	1
307	macho	18,000	1
327	businesswoman	17,330	1
336	gender	17,110	32
303	sportsman	18,300	2
376	xenophobic	15,760	1
413	lady	14,510	19
436	homophobic	13,730	1
446	cameraman	13390	1
447	homosexual	13,370	3
525	homophobia	11,410	1
568	serviceman	10,580	1
639	heterosexual	9,190	1
687	spokesman	8,470	1
722	feminist	8,040	3
723	statesman	8,030	1
757	woman	7,650	112
767	chairman	7510	7
796	marriage	7,170	16
808	manpower	7,020	1
920	homosexuality	5,820	1

Table 2. Single-term keywords related to gender in the UKIP-c.

Rank	Multi-word keyword	Keyness	UKIP-c freq.
8	hate-crime	103500	7

15	gender quota	84450	3
23	gender balance	64320	3
32	political correctness	58370	4
49	biological sex	55550	2
79	traditional marriage	43940	2
191	patronizing pink debate	29720	1
273	idea of biological sex	29720	1
274	idea of traditional marriage	29720	1
275	alternative subculture identity	29720	1
330	British working man	29720	1
341	homophobic monster	29720	1
343	sexist monster	29720	1
389	sexist place	29720	1
409	gender balance quota	29720	1
431	gender route	29720	1
446	narcissistic snowflake	29720	1
541	appropriate gender balance	29690	1
565	gender-neutral job	29690	1
574	gender realignment	29690	1
583	woman subject to	29690	1
605	false marriage	29660	1
655	male politician	29600	1
683	madam chairman	29510	1
694	homosexual equality	29480	1
752	stereotypical gender	29340	1
810	gender confusion	29110	1
917	feminist research	28330	1
945	powerful lobby	28040	1
956	gay marriage	27920	1
957	female audience	27920	1

Table 3. Multi-term keywords related to gender in the UKIP-c.

Unsurprisingly, in tables 2 and 3 content words prevail as evidence of the highly targeted nature of the specialized corpus. Quantitatively, the above data reveal the presence of extremely diversified social phenomena (e.g., ‘microaggression’, ‘hate-crime’, ‘feminist research’) and actors (‘business woman’, ‘male politician’, ‘statesman’) that can be ascribed to a degree of broad gender awareness. Although these lexical items do not score high frequencies, their presence indicates a marked intention to deal with gender matters given the difference in the distribution of gender related keywords in the UKIP-c.

The first step to address RQ1 involves the analysis of keywords expressing gendered terms of social actors and forms of address. As for the former (e.g., serviceman, female audience), data indicate that male actors are numerically more represented than female subjects. Additionally, the keyword ‘British working man’ signals the normalised masculine gender, i.e., the male normativity that adheres to the role of breadwinner in British society. This quantitative disproportion speaks not only for the uneven presence of women but also for the lack of sensitivity towards the entire gender spectrum. Moreover, ‘unmarked masculines’⁵⁷ like ‘sportsman’ and ‘chairman’ legitimize the use of ‘male-as-norm’ forms, totally disregarding more inclusive forms such as ‘chair’ and ‘representative’.⁵⁸ While these masculine forms seem to create normalisation, the same is not true for the feminine counterparts which fall short of choice. Among the few alternatives, ‘business woman’ seems the only targeted term; however, from a close reading of the single concordance, the term reveals its epistemic auto-referentiality. Conversely, ‘woman’ is the most frequent lemma, but the Word Sketch shows that women are represented in homogenizing terms through vague quantifiers (e.g., ‘many’, ‘most’, ‘more’), almost always depending on others actions (‘woman’ prevalently collocates with ‘man’), and with weak agency (copular or mental verbs strike high positions). Few examples show women with a slight degree of active agency, such as the following:

- (1) Most women actually don’t want that and the system has to change but colleagues (.) UKIPS’s women’s problem trumped up by our enemies doesn’t actually exist! _ Most women MPs are spokesman or serious briefs _ Our adept chairman is a woman!

The above excerpt materializes an argumentation strategy which feeds on the *topos* that women do not want gender quotas. In addition, the unwillingness of women is perspectivised in the sense that the party ideas on the unnecessary gender quotas have strategically become the ideas of ‘most women’, referentially constructed as an essentialised and homogeneous group whose identities and claims are undifferentiated. This process features a distinct ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ contrast that comprises supporters of gender conservatism as the in-group, and advocates of gender flexibilisation as the out-group. Such a contrast also becomes visible in the lexical choice ‘enemies’ that, in turn, creates a war metaphor. Although, as stated by Baker,⁵⁹ a gender-neutral alternative to replace ‘spokesman’ might be more problematic, this term is used to refer to females in (1). A concordance analysis revealed that in several cases ‘spokesman’ applies to female actors in the UKIP-c. Addressing females as ‘spokesman’ or ‘chairman’ not only marks males as exclusively carrying out the role but it testifies to a form of erasure. In addition, this misnomer creates grammatical and semantic contradiction, and points to complete disregard of gender-sensitive forms.

⁵⁷ Federica Formato, *Gender, Ideology and Discourse in Italian*.

⁵⁸ Paul Baker, “Will Ms ever be as Frequent as Mr? A Corpus-Based Comparison of Gendered Terms across Four Diachronic Corpora of British English”, *Gender and Language*, 4.1 (2010), 125-129.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Forms of address typically come in the formulaic ‘ladies and gentlemen’, thus testifying to a normalised practice. However, the lemma ‘lady’ is also used during a speech by a female politician to directly address the audience, thus seeking common ground and gender bonding. A close-reading of the lemma ‘madam’ reveals once again asymmetry between grammatical and social gender as in:

(2) Thank you (.) madam chairman

In the above excerpt such asymmetry is even more striking if we consider that the English language offers a more inclusive alternative that has long been consolidated in socio-linguistic conventions, i.e., chair.⁶⁰ This misleading tendency is confirmed also with the presence of four hits of ‘chairman’ (out of seven) referring to a female social gender as in (2).

In relation to personal pronouns, the high presence of ‘we’ (182 hits) and ‘ourselves’ (94 hits) marks the typical resorting to common ground in political discourse.⁶¹ As for gendered third person pronouns, these stand out for denoting exclusively binary gender. An odds calculation⁶² of ‘he’ vs. ‘she’ in the UKIP-c reveals that pronouns denoting female individuals are more present if compared to male pronouns (odds value: 0.85). Thus, the UKIP-c appears to sustain ideologies that partly represent the different gendered pronouns, although the use of inclusive ‘they’ is ignored.

4.2 Gendered keywords in the UKIP-c

The second step to address RQ1 entails grouping keywords that share core discursive constructions related to gender. They are given in the below table.

Discursive construction	Keywords
Anti-inclusivity	microaggression, pronoun, sexist, mansplaining, gaily, heteronormativity, transphobic, emancipation, misogynistic, discriminate, macho, xenophobic, homophobic, homophobia, feminist, hate-crime, political correctness, patronizing pink debate, homophobic monster, sexist monster, sexist place, gender balance quota.
Aggressiveness/ verbal violence/harshness and abuse	indoctrinate, snowflake, narcissism, alternative subculture identity, narcissistic snowflake, false marriage.
Denials	marriage, traditional marriage, idea of traditional marriage, false marriage, gay marriage, biological sex, idea of biological sex.

Table 4. Gender-related keywords grouped according to discursive constructions (UKIP-c)

The first group of keywords contains lexis that normally would resonate within gender sensitivity discourses. However, in excerpts like (3) extremely complex and multi-faceted concepts – i.e., heteronormativity – are minimised, ridiculed and manipulated to construct sarcastic and derogatory images of the perceived out-group.

(3) and she said to me how dare you? how do you not understand the harm of historical heteronormativity? _ I said (.) well (.) I’m really not sure what you mean but I’ve (.) I’ve to tell you

⁶⁰ Ibid., 127.

⁶¹ Adrian Beard, *The Language of Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000).

⁶² Alexander Kopenig, “Against Statistical Significance Testing in Corpus Linguistics”, *Corpus Linguistics and Linguistic Theory*, 15.2 (2017), 321-346.

and (.) you know (.) I'll tell you (.) I know what would be good for you is that if you left your course and you go and learn how to be a mechanic because when (.) when you're 21 you'll have a skill and you'll have three years of wages and you'll be able to stand on your own two feet! good advice (.) I thought _ but it didn't go down too well _ and she had to leave and go to her safe space <laughter> sorry (.) sorry (.) <laughter> I didn't mean to upset over there you guys!

In the above excerpt the undergraduate student is referentially constructed as a gullible and weak person who can be easily taken in. On the other side, the strength and rectitude of the politician is intensified with the paternalistic and ironically benevolent advice of finding a stable and conventional job. The implicit reference to rigour and economic strength, while shifting topic and perspective, inevitably calls for consensus of the people who hold on to established values.

The second group of keywords also supports this rhetoric of virtuous democratic values threatened by subversive practices whose aggressive disapproval is strongly legitimized:

(4) the next person come up (.) and say well (.) hello my name is unicorn and my pronoun is Hin _ <laughter> because they identify as something that's new! is not a male or a female! and if you don't use the correct pronoun then you are not platformed! and people might need to go to their safe space (.) now _ okay (.) bye bye Henry _ so yes now of course this kind of thing is utter nonsense and some of these courses might just as well be called how to be a narcissistic snowflake! because <applause> people should be going to universities _ the university to learn skills and academic subjects with academic rigour! and a lot of people go to university and they come out worse off at the age of 21 than when they went in at 18!

In (4), the reference to the academic discussion on inclusive pronouns – together with the presence of ‘unicorn’ as a bonding queer icon⁶³ – is subverted via referential and predicational strategies that blame the out-group for not fitting into any normalised gender and for their vulnerability. The aggressive and offensive tone also manifests itself with the rising voice pitch, the minimizing attitude for ‘nonsense’, and through the derogatory ‘narcissistic snowflake’ that constructs a negative sense of fragility and prudery.⁶⁴ Unsurprisingly, the audience’s applause testifies to agreement towards these uncivil attitudes. Pro-inclusivity lexis is negatively intensified via sarcasm and through the recurrent figurative expression, i.e., ‘safe place’. While in (3) the same expression derides a supposedly female actor, in (4) it relates to the entire out-group that is implicitly constructed as fearful and unable to face righteous principles. Excerpts (3) and (4) share a harsh attack against universities, here entirely seen as a *locus* of inconclusive scholars who nullify supposedly healthy values such as intellectual growth and proper education to find an honest and profitable job. This mode of perspectivisation constructs a distinct ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ polarization, together with the view that universities pose a threat to genuine traditions, leading to an implicit call to discriminate their supporters and attendees.

Appeal to tradition also stands out in the third group of keywords, although this time with a reference to much vaunted scientific rigour. Distortion of reality and complete negligence of broader gender awareness are argumentatively rejected via the *topos* of science as an incontrovertible source of knowledge that denies any queer advance. However, the referential strategy of constructing ‘biological sex’ as an idea triggers the questionable and evaluative nature of ideologies that, in turn, have nothing to do with the deterministic conception of science.

(5) This idea of biological sex! _ as I said _ is being undermined! that's science and this is why I gave a trigger warning to people because science is right! there are two genders _ male and female _ which are determined by your anatomy and chromosomes! and if you say that (.) these days some people will

⁶³ Giuseppe Balirano, “Of Rainbow Unicorns. The Role of Bonding Queer Icons in Contemporary LGBTIQ+ Re-Positionings, *Ocula*, 21.22 (2020), 46-60.

⁶⁴ Andrew Murray, “Generation Snowflake?”, *RSA Journal*, 164.4 (2018), 44-47.

want to drag you before the courts and say that you're committing a hate crime! I was called a transphobic coconut for saying such a thing!

Despite the recourse to scientific rightness, as outdated as this might be, the above excerpt shows not only contradictory *topoi* but also a fallacious argumentation strategy. Excerpt (5) shares with (4) the focus on sensationalism and emotionalism to raise public attention and pathos. In these cases, the roles of victims and perpetrators are reversed through referential and predicational strategies that construct the dominant group at risk due to a perceived absurd policing system bound to corrupted elites. Perspectivized representations of non-aligned gender roles and sexualities propose the latter as dangerous scapegoats that are to blame for 'our' current woes.

4.3 'Gender' in the UKIP-c

In order to answer RQ2, the first step discusses the collocations and the Word Sketch of 'gender'. These reveal a high presence of specific terms deriving from EU recommendations and directives, i.e., 'gender quota', 'gender equality'. However, such concepts aiming to expand the gender spectrum remain harshly attacked throughout the UKIP-c, even when uttered by much affected groups such as women and gay people.

At the referential and predicational level, gender emerges as something that denaturalises and depersonalises the very people campaigning for it. This can be seen via references to young adults and children, constructed as easily-manoeuvrable and weak because they become interested in gender, and simultaneously get confused by its alarming affordances.

- (6) It also seeks to attack the traditional family and the marriage and now is going into attacking the idea of biological sex and gender itself _ as we see with the gender confusion! going on in our schools! at the moment if you believe in traditional marriage _ and it's unbelievable that the conservative party broke down the idea of traditional marriage (.) and changed the definition of marriage! _ if you believe that marriage is between a man and a woman _ you often get persecuted _ penalized _ and punished! Well that should never happen in a free society with Christian roots!

The above excerpt illustrates the representation of gender as a dangerous threat. Perspectivisation and negative intensification are highlighted by reporting 'gender confusion' among pupils, hyperbolic denaturalisation of 'traditional marriage', and the injustice of ignoring 'Christian' values. These points – feeding on emotionalism, paternalistic protectionism of the weak, and religious beliefs – are argumentatively enacted to justify the validity of the blatant criticism to broader gender awareness. Constructed as a deviant ideology *ad-hoc* manoeuvred by lobby elites, gender does not presuppose any constructive process, as evidenced by the Word Sketch and by the minimum active agency of gendered pronouns and social actors. In addition to being highly stereotyped and negatively intensified, quantitative analysis points to medicalisation of gender whose referential mode constructs it as a condition ('realignment', 'undergo').

4.4 Pronouns, gendered social actors and forms of address in the Lega-c

The tables below present single-term and multi-word keywords respectively. As for the UKIP-c, also in the Lega-c only keywords discursively related to gender are listed.

Rank	Single-word keyword	Translation	Keyness	Lega-c freq.
16	gender	gender	87.860	8

28	omofobo	homophobic	64.090	4
41	turboliberismo	turbo-liberalism	59.740	2
45	eterosessuale	heterosexual	57.140	6
54	castrazione	castration	53.040	3
56	gang	gang	51.770	4
57	spudoratezza	shamelessness	51.180	2
64	Boldrini	Boldrini	48.520	5
67	Boschi	Boschi	48.010	6
92	bestialità	bestiality	38.780	2
93	papà	dad	38.640	33
108	no	no	34.690	19
113	gay	gay	32.810	17
114	galera	prison	32.760	7
115	trans	trans	32.540	4
116	instillare	inculcate	32.090	2
118	Cirinnà	Cirinnà	31.880	2
120	omosessuale	homosexual	30.930	14
176	chiacchiere	nonsense	30.220	1
221	sindache	female mayors	29.130	1
230	lesbica	lesbian	28.910	4
233	neutralità	neutrality	28.810	1
273	natalità	birth-rate	26.710	2
279	senatrice	female senator	26.530	3
284	omofobia	homophobia	26.440	1
303	aborto	abortion	25.510	1
329	violentatore	rapist	24.150	1
331	asessuato	asexual	23.990	1
340	governatrice	female governor	23.460	1
392	etero	hetero-	21.940	2
412	subdolamente	subtly	21.160	1
413	porcate	obscenity	21.080	1
414	sconcertare	bewilder	21.050	2
437	chissenefrega	who cares!	19.920	1
448	follia	madness	19.610	10
473	pentolone	cauldron	18.600	1
490	indecoroso	indecorous	17.830	1

492	apolide	stateless person	17.760	1
504	sessista	sexist	17.270	1
505	senatore	male senator	17.260	12
525	strumentalmente	instrumentally	16.720	1
526	mercificazione	commodification	16.710	1
527	mamma	mum	16.700	43
596	femminuccia	little girl	14.330	1
614	bigotto	bigot	13.830	1
617	buonismo	self-righteousness	13.750	1
695	ledere	harm	11.330	2
696	strategicamente	strategically	11.320	1
706	ideologia	ideology	11.110	6
708	transessuale	transsexual	11.060	1
753	ministra	female minister	10.410	1
761	incostituzionale	unconstitutional	10.340	1
813	sessualità	sexuality	9.490	3
841	deputata	female deputy	9.020	1
844	casalinga	housewife	8.960	1
852	agricoltore	farmer	8.840	4
876	pompieri	firefighter	8.490	1
900	lavoratrice	female worker	8.170	3
911	matrimonio	marriage	8.020	17
913	maschietto	little boy	8.010	1
915	subdolo	subtle	7.980	1
916	travestire	dress up	7.980	1
950	Sesso	sex	7.530	10
977	fuorviante	misleading	7.200	1

Table 5. Single-term keywords related to gender in the Lega-c

Rank	Multi-word keyword	Translation	Keyness	Lega-c freq.
1	adozioni gay	gay adoptions	196.630	7
7	utero in affitto	surrogacy	92.420	4
15	asili nido	nursery school	74.580	8
24	famiglia tradizionale	traditional family	60.070	3

38	motivi medici	medical reasons	59.690	2
54	migliaia di coppie	thousands of couples	56.860	2
68	mamme lavoratrici	working mums	53.220	2
69	coppie italiane	Italian couples	53.030	2
70	scelte di vita	life choices	52.860	3
75	cittadino comune	ordinary male citizen	51.880	2
80	violenza carnale	physical violence	50.740	2
82	battaglia di civiltà	civilization battle	49.690	2
86	coppie omosessuali	homosexual couples	48.850	3
94	famiglia naturale	natural family	45.400	2
104	persona normale	normal person	42.170	2
113	unioni civili	civil unions	37.540	5
117	scuole materne	kindergarten	34.540	3
119	poteri forti	strong powers	33.710	3
134	step-child adoption	step-child adoption	30.460	6
186	beghe polemiche	contentious disputes	30.460	1
189	percorso normale	normal path	30.460	1
197	buonismo bieco	grim self-righteousness	30.460	1
268	giovani coppie italiane	young Italian couples	30.460	2
291	grave declino demografico	serious demographic decline	30.460	1
335	essere indifferenziato	undifferentiated being	30.460	1
340	famiglia senza futuro	futureless family	30.460	1
341	ideologia gender	gender ideology	30.459	3
381	famiglie di giovani coppie	young couple families	30.458	1
389	teoria gender	gender theory	30.457	1
393	giornalista bravissima	very smart female journalist	30.456	1
401	governatrice illuminata	enlightened female governor	30.455	1
408	impostazione di carattere ideologico	Ideological character formulation	30.453	1
712	sentenza folle	crazy decision	30.453	1
766	strage di diritti	rights massacre	30.450	1
847	battaglia di buon senso	common sense battle	30.340	1
862	cosiddette differenze	so called differences	30.340	1
884	ideologia folle	crazy ideology	30.340	1
942	estremo buon senso	extreme common sense	30.340	1

982	migliaia di coppie italiane	thousands of Italian couples	30.220	1
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Table 6. Multi-term keywords related to gender in the Lega-c

The keyword list reveals the typicality of female politicians' surnames and gendered terms of social actors. The former ('Boldrini', 'Cirinnà', 'Boschi') refer to key female politicians who promoted a series of actions for broader gender recognition in the Italian Parliament and society. The latter feature a wide variety, ranging from feminine institutional positions ('ministra', 'senatrice') and masculine blue-collar jobs ('agricoltore', 'pompiere'), to names of family members ('mamma', 'papà'). Overall, the data reveal reference to an ongoing burning debate ('beghe polemiche', 'battaglia di civiltà') that incorporates different social groups ('omosessuale', 'eterosessuale') and ages ('giovani coppie italiane', 'cittadino comune', 'maschietto', 'femminuccia').

The first step directed to RQ1 implies the discussion of keywords expressing gendered terms of social actors and forms of address. The former show wide gender spectrum with quantitative predominance of female subjects ('sindaca', 'governatrice illuminata', 'giornalista bravissima') and of family members ('mamma', 'papà', 'mamme lavoratrici'). Kinship occurrences serve to reinforce the discursive construction of the traditional family model, to which RWP appeals to form a counter discourse of gender progressivism that conceives mothers also as workers (Graff *et al.* 2019). Nonetheless, to these allegedly emancipated examples follows the most credible 'undivided whole' (Macaulay 2019) of simple and down-to-earth individuals that take shape in 'cittadino comune', or in 'casalinga' and 'agricoltore'. What is more, the high presence of female actors does not seem to testify to greater inclusivity since women are either inhibited subjects of indulgent benevolence, or depicted as tireless ordinary caregivers that conform to a patriarchal *status quo*. The numerous occurrences of male and female job titles, rather than embodying inclusiveness, in some cases tend to perpetuate benevolent sexism (Glick and Fiske 2001) whereby positive compliments to female individuals constitute only a façade (e.g., 'bravissima giornalista', 'governatrice illuminata'); in other cases, the female title creates contentious oppositions with the resulting ridiculisation of women. The latter is clearly exemplified below:

- (7) io sono il primo sindaco della Toscana! E ribadisco _ sindaco! alla faccia della Boldrini che vorrebbe chiamarci sindache e vorrebbe imporre le quote rosa _ Lei vorrebbe imporre le quote rosa perché non prende i voti della gente! non sa prendere le preferenze! vorrebbe essere imposta solo perché donna! Ma le donne quando sono capaci _ e l'abbiamo dimostrato io e Anna in due feudi rossissimi da 70 anni _ vincono! Sono fiera oggi di rappresentare il primo sindaco eletto nella Toscana rossa! perché abbiamo aperto una diga (.) aperto un varco _ li stiamo accerchiando!

[I am the first (male) mayor of Tuscany! And I repeat _ mayor! in spite of Boldrini who would like to call us (female) mayors and would like to impose the pink quotas _ She would like to impose the pink quotas because she does not take the votes of the people! she can't take preferences! she would like to be imposed only because she is a woman! But when women are capable _ and Anna and I have proved it in two Red areas that have been Red for 70 years _ they win! I am proud today to represent the first elected (male) mayor in red Tuscany! because we have opened a dam (.) opened a passage _ we are surrounding them!]

The above excerpt referentially materializes rejection and mocking of the female title 'sindaca'. The female politician constructs an argument against gender quotas by predicationally building an aggressive dichotomy between 'our' abilities and 'her' incompetence. This attack is directed to former President of the low chamber Laura Boldrini, whose surname is preceded by the non-inclusive use of

determinative article.⁶⁵ Perspectivized representation of red Tuscany, together with the battle metaphor at the end, helps the orator position and legitimize her arguments.

The limited presence of forms of address on the one hand reveals the informal and non-formulaic style of orators; on the other hand, this lack is compensated with the numerous examples of gendered social actors, no matter how self-referential the female presence may be. Keeping with the rupture of established norms, in the Lega-c forms of address tend to communicate contempt and sarcasm.

- (8) Contrariamente al signor Renzi _ a cui piace mamma e mamma _ papà e papà _ e genitore A (.) genitore B _ noi siamo papà (.) mamma (.) figli_ La famiglia tradizionale è quella prevista dalla Costituzione italiana (.) che Renzi anche ieri ha calpestato alla faccia di tutti gli italiani! In un momento nel quale il paese va a picco (.) le borse crollano e le imprese chiudono (.) la disoccupazione non diminuisce _ la sinistra ha l'unico obiettivo di distruggere la famiglia e scrivere per legge che i bambini non hanno più diritto ad avere un papà e una mamma!

[Contrary to Mr. Renzi _ who likes mom and mom _ dad and dad _ parent A (.) parent B _ we are dad (.) mom (.) children_ The traditional family is the one envisaged by the Italian Constitution (.) that Renzi yesterday trampled over the teeth of all Italians! In a moment where the country is sinking (.) the market collapses and businesses close (.) unemployment does not decrease _ the left has the sole objective of destroying the family and writing by law that children no longer have the right to have a dad and a mom!]

At the referential and predicational level excerpt (8) highlights the negative qualification of gendered social actors related to family members such as 'genitore A' and 'genitore B'. These are opposed to normalised 'papà' and 'mamma', aptly conforming to conservative gender roles. Instead of religious *topoi*, the attack is argumentatively constructed by resorting to the authoritative nature of the Italian Constitution whose paternalistic protection seems to be solely devoted to a certain type of family. Even if throughout the entire corpus there is no overt evidence, traditional family – founded by a man and a woman and consecrated by marriage – is predicationally opposed to same-sex unions as much as 'genitore A'/'genitore B' emerge as the de-humanised counterparts of 'mamma'/'papà'.

As for the presence of personal pronouns, the high figures of 'noi' [we] (234 hits) and 'io' [I] (115 hits) reveal the intent of consensus seeking, and the focus on each single politician respectively. With reference to singular forms of gendered third person pronouns, the odds value of 'lui' [he] vs. 'lei' [she] – i.e., 1.24 – indicates that in the Lega-c male individuals are statistically more present if compared to female individuals. It is noteworthy that this result has been calculated by excluding from the count instances of 'Lei' as polite form in the Italian language. Therefore, at the quantitative level the Lega-c appears to sustain ideologies which give visibility to masculine forms while underrepresenting, if not ignoring, the different gendered pronouns and the inclusive 'loro'.

4.5 Gendered keywords in the Lega-c

The below table shows the second step to answer RQ1. Here the rest of the keywords are grouped according to the discursive constructions they point to.

Discursive construction	Keywords
Extreme polarization	no, chiacchiere, porcate, chissenefrega, scelte di vita, cittadino commune, percorso normale, famiglia naturale, persona normale, poteri forti, step-child adoption, beghe polemiche

⁶⁵ Paolo D'Achille, "Architettura dell'Italiano di Oggi e Linee di Tendenza", in Lubello, Sergio, ed., *Manuale di linguistica italiana*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016) <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110360851-009>. See also Cecilia Robustelli, *Donne, Grammatica e Media*, GIULIA giornaliste (Roma, 2014).

Provocation	Omofobo, castrazione, galera, omofobia, sessista, bigotto, cosiddette differenze
Danger	gang, bestialità, natalità, follia, violentatore, mercificazione, instillare, aborto, buonismo, sconcertare, subdolamente, subdolo, adozioni gay, utero in affitto, violenza carnale, grave declino demografico, famiglia senza futuro, sentenza folle, strage di diritti, ideologia folle
Promiscuity	turboliberismo, spudoratezza, neutralità, asessuato, pentolone, indecoroso, apolide, travestire, fuorviante, essere indifferenziato

Table 7. Gender-related keywords grouped according to discursive constructions (Lega-c)

Various predicational and referential themes account for keywords presenting extreme polarization. These range from dichotomy-driven normalisation of the in-group *vs.* negative intensification of the out-group to nationalistic revival of genuine traditions. Apart from the opposition ‘normal’ *vs.* ‘gay’, a recurring argument of disinterest emerges.

- (9) Onore alle famiglie che credono in un percorso normale! _ con rispetto di tutte le coppie (.) gay (.) lesbiche (.) Vuoi parlare di diritti? Ti discriminano i patti gay? Sono dei deficienti _ Perché c'è un giornalista che ha fatto un libro (.) in base al quale se i miei collaboratori sono omosessuali _ a parte il fatto che io non lo sono _ e non me ne frega un accidente! io non so se chi lavora con me (.) va con uomini (.) va con donne (.) va con chi vuole lui! non mi interessa! se è bravo lavora con me (.) poi di notte fa quello che vuole!

[Honour to families who believe in a normal path! _ with respect for all (.) gay (.) lesbian couples (.) Do you want to talk about rights? Do the gay pacts discriminate? They are morons _ Because there is a journalist who wrote a book (.) according to which if my collaborators are homosexual _ apart from the fact that I'm not _ and I couldn't care less! I don't know if those who work with me (.) go with men (.) go with women (.) go with whoever they want! I do not care! if he's good, then he works with me (.) then at night he can do what he wants!]

Although the focus rests on the collaborators' capacity for hard-work, the careless attitude outstrips the orator from potential gay collaborators. However, even if carelessness in relation to the collaborators' gender and sexuality is overtly mentioned, these are referenced only with masculine gender. Moreover, the politician strengthens the gap between himself and gay people by specifying that he is not part of the out-group. The reiterated argument “it's not my business” underlies reticence for an unknown and perceptibly unsafe topic.

Arguments against the much contested ‘step-child adoption’ and ‘host uterus’ are spread throughout the whole Lega-c, feeding discursive constructions of contentious provocations and irrational fears. Keywords intentionally aimed at provocation derive from pro-inclusivity lexicon that is systematically subverted both to favour extremist views and to ridicule opponents.

- (10) Però un conto è la libera scelta e il rispetto di tutti che è dovuto, un conto è imporre degli egoismi di una minoranza come modelli per la maggioranza! io a questo mi opporrò fino a che avrò voce _ Se mi mettono in galera perché sono omofobo (.) mi metteranno in galera perché sono omofobo! _ e venite a trovarmi! <laughter>

[But one thing is the free choice and respect of all that is due, another one to impose the selfishness of a minority as a model for the majority! I will oppose this as long as I have a voice _ If they put me in jail because I am homophobic (.) they will put me in jail because I am homophobic! _ and you come and see me!]

The above excerpt provides an example of calculated ambivalence to avoid being legally or politically prosecutable. The mitigation and the covert attack to the selfish minority *vs.* the intensification of broad majority outclasses any view on gender inclusivity. Relatedly, this opposition argumentatively justifies sarcasm to what opponents might perceive as homophobic attitudes, and feeds on negative exaggeration that ridicules the insensate prospect of going to jail.

As for keywords that discursively construct an atmosphere of danger and fear, these draw on referential and predicational categories that explicitly denigrate certain practices, criticize their insanity, and, simultaneously, invoke disaffection, pessimism and disgust.

- (11) la Lega dice no alla pratica dell'utero in affitto! _ no alla mercificazione del corpo femminile! _ no alla pratica che lede la dignità della donna! Oggi la lega voterà contro! convintamente contro! questo governo indegno! Indecoroso! e vergognoso! Votiamo contro la fiducia e votiamo contro questo provvedimento! Questo è un governo debole! un governo irresponsabile! servo dei poteri forti!

[Lega says no to the practice of surrogacy! _ no to the commodification of the female body! _ no to practices that damage women's dignity! Today Lega will vote against! firmly against! this unworthy government! Undignified! and shameful! We vote no-confidence and we vote against this measure! This is a weak government! an irresponsible government! slave of strong powers!]

In (11) opposition and danger are perspectivised by the triplet of 'no', pejorative adjectives, and predicational themes that attribute annihilating impacts to the surrogacy. The major fault of the latter seems to be that of subverting the common order, as well as degrading the roles of women. Both the attempt to endorse a pseudo-emancipatory policy for women, and the argumentation of 'going against nature' serve to attack the institutionalized power for its weaknesses and its submission to corrupted elites.

From the opposition commonsensical/normal *vs.* insane/abnormal stems another polarization related to the discursive construction of promiscuity and unreliability for non-aligned gendered and sexual realities.

- (12) una nuova antropologia dove (.) al posto dell'uomo c'è l'essere indifferenziato! l'apolide! il cittadino asessuato del mondo! La verità _ che teorie pericolose vorrebbero imporci e che trovano spazio grazie agli atti che adottate _ non è quella che il bambino sente e tocca su di sé da quando è nato la neutralità del genere! I sostenitori dell'ideologia del gender _ a cui vi piegate (.) sostengono l'idea di una neutralità iniziale! dell'essere umano in materia di sesso! il sesso (.) il sesso in realtà noi sappiamo che è deciso dalla fecondazione e voi invece fingete di credere all'innocenza di un pensiero! un pensiero che vorrebbe imporsi e trovare cittadinanza

[A new anthropology in which (.) instead of the man there is the undifferentiated being! the stateless! the asexual citizen of the world! The truth_ that dangerous theories which they would want to impose on us and which find space thanks to your deeds_is not that the child has heard and experienced on himself the neutrality of gender since he was born! The supporters of the gender ideology_to which you submit (.) they sustain the idea of an initial neutrality! of the human being in matter of sex! sex (.) sex in reality we know that is decided since the insemination instead you pretend to believe to the innocence of a thought! a thought which would like to impose and find citizenship]

Through reference to biological and supposedly scientific knowledge, the above excerpt evaluates gender and sex neutrality as a fault. Such perspectivized representations construct an impudent and dissolute reality whose nature escapes normalised positions and labels, which are the usual *topoi* of order and safety. Therefore, this unfitting category is once again linked to danger and, subsequently, to promiscuity that refers not only to sex and gender but also to different social and legal aspects such as citizen rights – (13) –, family members – (8) – and job skills – (9). The striking *topos* related to the worthiness of being a citizen is strategically exploited and linked to gender and sex fluidities. The

simile with citizenship, and the explicit reference to the asexual citizen associate gender-fluid practices and immigrants. Predicationally, the former receive the same ‘othering’ representation that is used to stigmatize marginalized groups through a deficit framework.⁶⁶ Ultimately, both non-normalised practices and actors are negatively qualified and constructed as impostors that usurp the rights and, metaphorically, the citizenship of worthy people.

4.6 ‘Gender’ in the Lega-c

The answer to RQ2 starts from the analysis of extended collocations and the Word Sketch. These seem to support the representation of gender as something dangerous and biased that ranges from an ideology, a theory, to a more discretionary thought. The Word Sketch evidences how referentials and predicates qualify the deceit and foolishness of gender, whose supporters are on the one hand criticized, on the other pitied for their carelessness in advocating such inconclusive views – as in (12) and (13).

At the predicational level, recurring images, co-occurrence of ad-hoc terms, and metaphors tend to associate gender with conventionally blamed issues such as immigration and assisted reproductive technologies.

- (13) Perché noi riteniamo che la legge _ e in particolare il comma 16 della legge sulla buona scuola _ rappresenta in sostanza un cavallo di troia attraverso il quale veicolare quelle teorie gender! Vedete (.) noi crediamo che vi sia un filo rosso che collega il vostro porvi di fronte alle diverse questioni che risolvete con atti che vanno tutti in una direzione delle politiche sull’immigrazione! che potremmo definire invasione assistita! al tentativo di degradare la famiglia qualcosa di indistinto! È evidente che questi atti rispondono ad un programma dettato da quella ideologia che ha quale obiettivo la formazione di persone tutte uguali! i cittadini del mondo!

[Because we think that the law_in particular subparagraph 16 of the law Buona Scuola _is a Trojan horse through which gender theories are spread! You see (.) we believe that there is a *fil rouge* that connects the way you put yourself in front of different issues, which you solve with deeds that go towards the single direction of the immigration policy! which we may define as assisted invasion! to the attempt of degrading the family to something indistinct! It is clear that these deeds respond to a program dictated by that ideology which has as its objective the making of people all the same! citizens of the world!]

The above excerpt exhibits metaphors that construct deception and an underlying battle between reasonable *vs.* deceitful and insane groups. At the semantic level, referential themes and figurative language tend to conceptually unify gender with distorted visions on immigration, which is conceived as an indistinct invasion. From this intensified indistinctness derives the association of gender to shameful promiscuity that is claimed to degrade not only single individuals, conceived uniquely as citizens, but also the family model in its normalised conception. As in (12), the semantic juxtaposition of gender and immigration is highly visible in *ad-hoc* combinations of terms, i.e., ‘invasione assistita’, bringing together harshly criticized *topoi* such as invasion from threatening forces and individuals, unjust appropriation, and any form of contested reproductive technology. Constructed as an indistinct conundrum, gender is something to avoid and treat with reticence. Macro- and micro-structural levels point to denigration of gender, presented as a foolish and devious construction that denies any genuine common sense of the people.

⁶⁶ Fred Dervin, “Discourses of Othering” in Tracy, Karen et al., eds., *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction* (Malden, MA: JohnWiley and Sons, 2015), 1-9.

5. Contrastive Discussion and Conclusions

This study has opened with the initial assumption on broader anti-gender animus in UKIP and Lega, which has led to the investigation of the linguistic and discursive representation of this non-inclusive view (RQ1), and to the representation of gender (RQ2).

The development of RQ1 involves a series of steps. First, in-depth analysis of gendered terms of social actors shows heteronormative male dominance in the UKIP-c through the use of unmarked masculines,⁶⁷ which perpetuate the male-as-norm, and marked feminines⁶⁸ which present the unexpected female actors in either stereotyped or essentialised terms, i.e., all women are the same. It is noteworthy that in the Lega-c female terms stand out. However, this prevalence in some cases betrays benevolent sexism (Glick and Fiske 2001) that inhibits gender flexibilisation by perpetrating a rewarding but subtle model whose effect subjugates women's empowerment to the will and presence of male subjects. In other cases, the issue of feminisation of social roles in grammatical gender languages (i.e., Italian) is brought to the fore. Indeed, coupling Formato's⁶⁹ work, in the Lega-c derogative resemantisation is associated to the use of marked feminines that reflect gender-conservative views on women as weak, emotional and prone to error. This notwithstanding emancipatory advocacy for the use of feminine terms to "(re-)claim the new positioning of women in institutional public spaces".⁷⁰

Secondly, forms of address indicate non-inclusive language in the UKIP-c and rejection of formulaic conventions in the Lega-c. Overall, their low frequencies, especially in Lega-c, testify to the move towards more informality and colloquialism that is linked to RWP.⁷¹

Thirdly, the quantitative presence of gendered pronouns proves different degrees of underrepresentation, especially in the Lega-c. Further, although inclusive forms exist in both languages, these are ignored, favouring a conservative representation of gender identities that exclusively privileges binary forms to the detriment of neutral options.

As for the discursive constructions materialized through gender-related keywords, these underlie lack of inclusivity and polarization that, in turn, legitimize anti-gender views.

In order to understand how these views normalise discriminatory and uncivil practices some terms and discursive strategies are discussed by drawing on Baker,⁷² Wodak,⁷³ and Graff *et al.*⁷⁴

With regard to gender-related terms, in spite of keywords evidencing attempts at gender-sensitive language, such occurrences reveal at the macro-discursive level either sarcasm and humiliating intent, or alignment to pseudo-emancipatory policies that perpetuate patriarchal views. Relatedly, the most striking examples of underlying discrimination and gender conservatism are 'homosexual'/'omosessuale' vs. 'heterosexual'/'eterosessuale' whose nominal use signals negative semantic prosody.⁷⁵ To this we can add the presence of non-normalised gendered social actors such as 'gay' and 'trans' that stand as mere epistemic referents. In addition, some keywords referred to social actors share the same keyness score, thus pointing to highly targeted lexis, and to the same degree of rareness when the occurrences of these terms are compared to a reference corpus. Therefore, although statistically present in both corpora, non-aligned gender identities are backgrounded, if not ignored, lacking any sign of semantic agency.

⁶⁷ Federica Formato, *Gender, Ideology and Discourse in Italian*.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 59.

⁷¹ Marianna L. Zummo, "Performing Authenticity on a Digital Political Stage. Politainment as Interactive Practice and (Populist?) Performance".

⁷² Paul Baker, *Public Discourses of Gay Men*.

⁷³ Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*.

⁷⁴ Agnieszka Graff *et al.* "Introduction: Gender and the Rise of the Global Right".

⁷⁵ Paul Baker, *Public Discourses of Gay Men*.

Among the most diffused discursive strategies to justify gender un-evenness we can certainly distinguish the ‘victim-perpetrator reversal’⁷⁶ in (5), (8), (10), (12) and (13). This strategy aims to blame the scapegoat – e.g., the out-group – while excusing the saviours of the people. The dataset evidences that this reversal easily matches with argumentative resort to hegemonic common sense,⁷⁷ which – as in (5), (8), (10) and (12) – constructs an underlying reference to ‘normal’ people, in opposition to ‘abnormal’ people’s irrational and ultra-conciliatory attitudes that are harshly attacked. In particular, in the Lega-c abnormality of gender non-conforming developments emerges in the form of traits of promiscuity and dissolute nocturne lifestyle.

Emphasis on emotionalism, dramatization, and the subsequent creation of irrational anxieties transformed into legitimate apprehension⁷⁸ emerge in (3), (4), (5), (8), (11), (12), and (13). Exaggeration of inner fears, together with nostalgic calls to the heartland and past traditions are part of the ‘politainment’. This is evident in the dataset via the prominence of slogans, and roaring defiance to gain support from the *demos* while siding with it. Furthermore, the emotional intensification of genuine social demands serves both to legitimize offensive language, and to shift the attention while backgrounding thorny issues, as in (5) and (8).

Constructions of anti-establishment animus and conspiracy theories⁷⁹ stand out in (1), (4), (5), (8), (11), (12), and (13). These strategies, together with enhanced sensationalism, rejection of mainstream politics and defence of nativist identities build up the disruption of the established order. Therefore, they are usually accompanied by frequent denials – as in (1) and (12) – and authoritative references to deterministic conceptions of science – as in (5) and (12). The data also exhibit an attack on education in (4) and (13). These account for the undifferentiated RWP default norm that very often conceives institutions such as schools and academia as parts of the corrupted establishment.⁸⁰ Therefore, the education section poses a further threat to the genuine management of the system, irrespective of its functional and training role.

Another striking discursive strategy concerns the distortion of concepts and terms advocating broader gender awareness,⁸¹ as in (3), (4), (5), (7), (8), and (10). This subverted re-appropriation interweaves with the use of sarcasm and irony, which are crucial to seek cognitive and political consensus from audience.⁸² Indeed, in UKIP-c and Lega-c sarcasm and irony legitimize orators on anti-pluralist and uncivil views, while winking at the complicity of both the attending panellists and the asynchronous cyber-users. Sarcastic rejection of *prima facie* utterances features especially when dealing with non-aligned sexualities – (4) – and women – (7). In (4) and (13) also war and battle metaphors are intermingled with the double intent of creating oppositions while empathetically legitimizing the orator.

The discussion conducted so far on gender-related keywords may be challenged by their low frequency in the focus corpora. However, if we consider hegemonic anti-gender animus in RWP⁸³ and the aforementioned discursive strategies, then it seems wise to connect the infrequent linguistic evidence to a reticent but powerful discourse that does not have to be overtly invoked because it is

⁷⁶ Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*.

⁷⁷ Michelle Lazar, “Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis” in Flowerdew, John and Richardson, John, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of critical discourse studies* (London: Routledge, 2018), 372–387. See also Jay Mackenzie, *Language, Gender and Parenthood Online: Negotiating Motherhood in Mumsnet Talk* (London: Routledge, 2018).

⁷⁸ Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Massimiliano Demata *et al.* “Riding the Populist Wave. Metaphors of Populism and Anti-Populism in the Daily Mail and The Guardian”.

⁸¹ Agnieszka Graff, *et al.*, “Introduction: Gender and the Rise of the Global Right”.

⁸² Andreas Musolff, “Metaphor, Irony and Sarcasm in Public Discourse”, *Journal of Pragmatics*, 109 (2017), 95-104.

⁸³ Agnieszka Graff, *et al.*, “Introduction: Gender and the Rise of the Global Right”.

mutually recognised despite its poor linguistic presence.⁸⁴ In both focus corpora reticence appears to speak more than meaningful presence since it attracts the attention of the in-group – for the mutual intelligibility of the unsaid – and the out-group – for the un-confronted absence.⁸⁵

With reference to the representation of gender in the two study corpora (RQ2), in the UKIP-c gender is discursively represented as a negatively-laden ideology that goes against science, religion and the natural order. Such annihilating representation of gender occurs also in the Lega-c, although with some distinctions. In the British case gender denaturalizes people to the extent that some groups become unacceptable ‘snowflakes’ whose weaknesses are perceived as dangerous for themselves and for their inherent socio-economic implications. In the Italian case, the same denaturalising scope creates foolish and promiscuous individuals who are to be pitied and blamed at the same time. Although contempt emerges in both corpora, in the Lega-c gender is vilified for its indistinctness, which, in its turn, feeds further reticence and overt disinterest, thus signalling a cultural vacuum and uncivil disregard for gender awareness. It is also for this reason that figurative language and metaphors abound to the detriment of direct references. In particular, the perceived deleterious nature of gender is repeatedly compared to the threat of immigrants, to a worthy citizenship paradigm, and to the decline of procreation and traditional family models.

The *topos* of the traditional family, strongly linked to that of marriage, recurs in both corpora. However, it is in the Lega-c that the high number of expressions referring to traditional families stands out for its pivotal connection to gender representation. This can be motivated by the public debate related to the Cirinnà Law on civil partnerships (Monica Cirinnà, whose surname appears in table 5, is the politician who presented the bill on same-sex partnerships) happening during the same time-frame of corpus data. This discussion was clearly palpable throughout the entire law’s drafting process that centred the debate around the much-contested possibility for same-sex couples to adopt children.⁸⁶ Overall, the *topos* of the traditional family is strongly opposed to alternative family formations. These are claimed to threaten centuries-old family discourses which correspond to the normative rightness of the cherished national heritage, and whose unity is composed of a man and a woman.⁸⁷ Hence, any liaison escaping the normalised male-female union is legitimately denied, degraded and despised. Such exclusionary mechanism justifies violent criticism, and the underlying contraposition of ‘traditional’, i.e., true and uncontaminated, vs. ‘untraditional’, i.e., false and promiscuous. Referring back to reticence, it is noteworthy that in the Lega-c the term ‘matrimonio’ is never used for same-sex unions, arguably for its ideological and religious correlation that unifies “biological sex, gender identity and heterosexual orientation”.⁸⁸

To conclude, notwithstanding its inherent limitations – e.g., small size of the two corpora, time-consuming activity for transcription, data thinning for qualitative analysis – this study has shown how YouTube-populism discursively perpetrates fear, anti-inclusivity and dichotomy-based views. Relatedly, gender is constructed as a denaturalising devious force manipulated from corrupted elites. In the UKIP-c the emphasis rests on its medicalisation, while in the Lega-c the focus lies on its promiscuous and deceitful nature. These discursive formations have the dangerous potential of encouraging not only online uncivil and discriminatory discourses but also offline violence. Further research could focus more deeply on the discursive construction of harshly contested practices such as

⁸⁴ Melani Schroeter and Charlotte Taylor, “Introduction”, in Schroeter, Melani and Taylor, Charlotte, eds., *Exploring Silence and Absence in Discourse: Empirical Approaches* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 1-21.

⁸⁵ Levente Pap, “Reticence in Cicero’s Discourse”, *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica*, 8.1 (2016), 117-125; Melani Schroeter and Charlotte Taylor, *Exploring Silence and Absence in Discourse: Empirical Approaches*.

⁸⁶ Matteo Winkler, “Italy’s Gentle Revolution: The New Law on Same-Sex Partnerships”.

⁸⁷ Mary Anne Case, “Trans Formations in the Vatican’s War on ‘Gender Ideology’”, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 44.3 (2019), 639-664.

⁸⁸ Corredor Elizabeth, “Unpacking ‘Gender Ideology’ and the Global Right’s Antigender Countermovement”, 621.

same-sex unions and surrogacy. It could also consider online interaction from a-synchronous audience, triangulating these discursive outputs with societal discriminatory episodes in the same time-frame.

Appendix

Transcription conventions adapted from Jefferson (2004)

- (.) pause of less than a second
 _ longer pause
 ? rising intonation
 ! intonation pitch
 <italics> transcriber comment

Grammar relation	Collocate
nouns modified by 'gender'	quota
	balance
	realignment
	confusion
	datum
	route
	study
	child
	conference
verbs with 'gender' as object	derive
	undergo
	choose
	be
verbs with 'gender' as subject	stereotype
	do
gender' and/or ...	equality
adjective predicates of 'gender'	female
	male

Table 8. Word Sketch of 'gender' in the UKIP-c

Grammar relation	Collocate
verbs with 'gender' as object	instillare
	insegnare
	sostenere
	veicolare
nouns modified by 'gender'	ideologia
	pensiero
	teoria
	sciacallaggio
adjectives predicates of 'gender'	feroce
	subdolo
	folle

Table 9. Word Sketch of 'gender' in the Lega-c

Populism against Same-Sex Marriage in Taiwan. Integrating Stance-taking and Framing in Facebook Posts and Comments

Abstract: Populist discourse represents a singular ‘people’ against ‘the elites’. To elucidate such discursive representation in Coalition of Happiness for Our Next Generation’s (CHONG, 下一代幸福聯盟) Facebook posts against same-sex marriage (SSM) in Taiwan, this Interactional Sociolinguistic study integrates the ‘stance triangle’ (evaluation-positioning-alignment) and frame theory. Discourse analysis of texts and images on CHONG’s Facebook page (2017-2019) demonstrates how CHONG transformed its anti-SSM stance into populist movements under democratic guise before and after the 2018 referendum. CHONG negatively evaluated SSM to position the government in opposition to ‘the people’ and deter SSM legislation. The ‘referendum’ is equated with ‘the will of the people’, thereby positioning the anti-SSM stance as ‘democratically sanctioned’. Subsequently, the object of comment evaluations shifted from marriage-oriented to government-directed, indicating commenters’ increasing alignment with CHONG’s populist framing of SSM in legal terms. Findings contribute to theorizing online populist movements in Asia.

Keywords: *same-sex marriage, referendum, populism, stance, framing, Facebook comments*

1. Introduction

The legalization of same-sex marriage (SSM) in Taiwan on 17 May 2019 headlined local news and attracted worldwide attention as the liberal beacon of Asia’s LGBT rights. However, on the same day, a major anti-gay organization in Taiwan, 下一代幸福聯盟 (‘Coalition of Happiness for Our Next Generation’, CHONG), denounced the legislative decision as undemocratic by citing the 2018 referendum results. Claiming to represent the people of Taiwan, CHONG decried the government’s violation of the ‘will of the people’ by passing SSM legislatures. To untangle this debate, I analyze CHONG’s Facebook presence throughout the referendum cycle. I argue that CHONG utilized the affordances on Facebook to disseminate a populist discourse that delegitimizes SSM and marginalizes sexual minorities by vilifying multiple government sectors. In doing so, their Facebook page serves as an online venue for collective stance-taking, which leads to the social construction of competing realities pertinent not only to the right to marriage but also to whether it is legitimate to influence policymaking in a democratic society.

In recent years, the term populism (民粹, *míncuì*) is gaining currency in Taiwan, albeit being used pejoratively and thus rendered an unfavorable epithet that “serves more to stigmatize than to analyze”.¹ However, as I show below, it is imperative to acknowledge its analytical value in order to “deepen our understanding of democracy”² under exigent circumstances of anti-SSM movements that can be observed around the world, such as *Sentinelle in piedi* (‘Watchman Standing’) in Italy and *la Manif pour tous* (‘Demonstration for All’) in France. In CHONG’s case, its populist discourse pits the followers against the ruling party and democratic institutions. The present analysis seeks to advance

¹ Rogers Brubaker, “Why Populism?”, *Theory and Society*, 46.5 (2017), 358.

² Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 11.

the current research by examining right-wing populism as a social movement against sexual pluralism in Asia.

With the prominent role of social media in public participation, this study focuses on the mediated aspect of populism that undergirds previous studies, i.e., political claims in the media to represent the people.³ To elucidate such mediated dynamics in the online interaction, the analysis combines stance-taking and frame theory in Interactional Sociolinguistics to analyze Facebook posts and comments, i.e., the text-based interaction in computer-mediated communication (CMC).⁴ This framework builds on Herring and Androutsopoulos' postulate that "written language constitutes the primary resource for creating social reality".⁵ Right-wing extremist discourses create a reality that oppresses sexual pluralism and sexual citizenship,⁶ an increasingly salient intersection among European academics.⁷

This integrated framework uses discourse analysis (DA) to illuminate how words are not merely descriptive but performative and 'action-oriented'.⁸ Analytically, discourse both reflects social order and shapes individuals' (inter)action.⁹ It is for this reason that Bourdieu and Wacquant assert that language as a symbolic system is not only an instrument of knowledge but one of domination.¹⁰ Facilitated by social media, this oppression is taking place across the globe and manifesting as a global 'web of hate'.¹¹ To contribute to the extant research on SSM in Taiwan,¹² this paper adopts stance-taking for "its indexical property that connects local language use to the knowledge system in the society".¹³ The analysis shows that while populist sentiments can be stoked up on Facebook or other social media platforms, participating in online commenting is an active way to neutralize its negative impact.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 *Populism*

Populism entails three core elements: (1) 'the people' who are morally pure, (2) 'the elite' who are corrupt, and (3) the antagonistic representation between them. 'The people' is constructed as a homogenous group, or an empty signifier,¹⁴ because it is retroactively defined by who the enemy is.¹⁵

³ Gianpietro Mazzoleni, "The Media and the Growth of Neo-Populism in Contemporary Democracies", in Gianpietro Mazzoleni, Julianne Stewart and Bruce Horsfield, eds., *The Media and Neo-Populism: A Comparative Analysis* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 7.

⁴ Ping-Hsuan Wang, "Stance, Framing, and the Construction of Reality in Facebook Comments about Taiwan's Same-Sex Marriage Bills", *Discourse & Society*, 31.2 (2020), 218-234.

⁵ Susan Herring and Janis Androutsopoulos, "Computer-Mediated Discourse 2.0", in Deborah Tannen, Heidi Hamilton and Deborah Schiffrin, eds., *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 139.

⁶ Diane Richardson, "Rethinking Sexual Citizenship", *Sociology*, 51.2 (2017), 208-224.

⁷ Gabriele Dietze and Julia Roth, *Right-Wing Populism and Gender: European Perspectives and Beyond* (Bielefeld: transcript-Verlag, 2020); Michaela Köttig, Renate Bitzan and Andrea Petö, *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

⁸ Jonathan Potter, *Representing Reality: Discourse, Rhetoric and Social Construction* (London: Sage, 1996).

⁹ Adam Jaworski and Nikolas Coupland, "Introduction: Perspectives on Discourse Analysis", in Adam Jaworski and Nikolas Coupland, eds., *The Discourse Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 3.

¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 13.

¹¹ Mojca Pajnik and Birgit Sauer, *Populism and the Web: Communicative Practices of Parties and Movements in Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

¹² I-Ching Lee and Wei-Fang Lin, "Us Versus Them: The Debates on the Legislation of Same-Sex Marriage (1994 - 2015) in Taiwan", *Journal of Homosexuality*, (2020), 1-22; Xuekun Liu, "'But If Taiwan Legalizes Same-Sex Marriage...': Discourses of Homophobia and Nationalism in a Chinese Antigay Community Online", *Critical Discourse Studies*, (2020), 1-16.

¹³ Wang, 229; John Du Bois, "The Stance Triangle", in Robert Englebretson, ed., *Stancetaking in Discourse* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007), 139-182.

¹⁴ Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005).

¹⁵ Francisco Panizza, *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy* (London: Verso, 2005).

By contrast, ‘the elite’ refers to the political, economic, or cultural group that disregards or works against the ‘general will’.¹⁶ Given this foundation, populists espouse a democratic representation that symbolically relies on their construction of the ‘real people’, a call that bypasses democratic procedures.¹⁷ For the present analysis, I follow the discursive/ideational approach to populism, which maintains that the discursive practices under examination meet the three aforementioned criteria. This is consistent with the Interactional Sociolinguistic view of discourse as “a collection of inherently contextualized units of language use”.¹⁸ Therefore, the meaning of ‘discourse’ becomes twofold: it refers to text, speech, and other expressions in general on the one hand and “any complex elements, in which relations play a constitutive role” on the other.¹⁹

Populism comes in a plentitude of forms, from left-wing parties to right-wing organizations, each exhibiting a cause by which ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ are demarcated. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser explain that populism’s malleability comes from its being a ‘thin-centered ideology’ that needs to be combined with other ‘host ideologies’.²⁰ For example, when attached to socialism, left-wing populism criticizes socioeconomic inequality, whereas, when connected to nativism, right-wing populism supports anti-immigrant policies. What the different iterations have in common is alleging an absolute representation of the imagined ‘people’, which imperils the representative and constitutional foundation of a liberal democracy (i.e., a representative democracy where individual liberty is protected by rule of law). Thus, by focusing on the online mobilization in Taiwan, this paper argues that the anti-SSM populism is a danger to democracy because it “speaks the language of democracy values”²¹ to exact exclusionary measures and oppress sexual minorities.

In presenting the case of anti-SSM movements in Taiwan, this paper aims to contribute to populism research by addressing three areas that have not received sufficient attention. First, many studies have focused on ‘charismatic leaders’ with the rise of right-wing populist leaders in this century.²² However, populism, the discursive approach stresses, provides an organizing principle for public movements, e.g., Occupy Wallstreet²³ and the Tea Party,²⁴ realizing bottom-up enactments of populism. In similar veins, CHONG’s anti-SSM movements were grassroots initiatives without a strong and clear top-down hierarchy. As CHONG calls for a referendum with the principle that only heterosexual couples stake the claim to marriage, implying that “a *part* of the people *is* the people”, it is de facto populist.²⁵

Also, while scholars are seeing populism as a global phenomenon,²⁶ Asia is still sometimes left out of the discussion with the ‘Atlantic bias’, which pays more attention to (Western) European and (North) American politics. Joining other studies that examine populism in Asia,²⁷ this study relates CHONG’s populist movement to those in other parts of the world, thereby highlighting the ‘transnational connections’ of populist politics, a spatially-informed perspective with “transnational people against

¹⁶ Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2017).

¹⁷ Müller, *What Is Populism?*, 27; Albert Weale, *The Will of the People: A Modern Myth* (London: Polity, 2018), 3.

¹⁸ Deborah Schiffrin, *Approaches to Discourse* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994), 39.

¹⁹ Laclau, 67.

²⁰ Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism*, 21.

²¹ Müller, *What is Populism?*, 6.

²² John Judis, *The Populist Explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics* (New York: Columbia Global Reports, 2016).

²³ Emil Husted, “From Creation to Amplification: Occupy Wall Street’s Transition into an Online Populist Movement” in Julie Uldam and Anne Vestergaard, eds., *Civic Engagement and Social Media: Political Participation Beyond Protest* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 153-173

²⁴ Rachel Meade, “Populist Narratives from Below: Occupy Wall Street and the Tea Party”, *IdeAs*, 14.14 (October 1, 2019).

²⁵ Müller, *What is Populism?*, 22 [*italics in the original*].

²⁶ Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 2016).

²⁷ Youngmi Kim, “Digital Populism in South Korea? Internet Culture and the Trouble with Direct Participation”, *Korea Economic Institute*, 3.8 (2008); Thomas Pepinsky, “Migrants, Minorities, and Populism in Asia”, *SSRN* (June 5, 2019).

transnational elites”.²⁸ Specifically, this paper considers how sexuality arises as a debated issue amidst global anti-SSM populist movements.²⁹

Finally, despite the growing concern about homophobic populism,³⁰ most accounts remain descriptive without meaningfully engaging with the three criteria of populism as laid out above. DA treats populism as “a language” that seeks to mobilize ordinary people against the “self-serving and undemocratic” elites,³¹ and has provided the “empirical vigor” that Hawkins calls for.³² For instance, Wodak has written on how right-wing populism in Europe instrumentalizes the language of fear to construct dangers and scapegoats.³³ This paper scrutinizes CHONG’s homophobic populism to broaden the scope of the literature.

2.2 Integrating Stance and Frame for Analyzing Online Comments

In Interactional Sociolinguistics, the notion of stance-taking can be traced back to Ochs’ works,³⁴ in which she propounds that the relation between the language and gender is not direct but mediated by social constructs such as stances. Among them, a stance is defined as “a display of a socially recognized point of view or attitude”³⁵ through the use of (para)linguistic features such as lexical items and intonation. The study of stance-taking, then, probes the complex relations of social meanings that constitute “domains of social reality”.³⁶ DA approaches stance-taking not as a cognitive process or a psychological state but as a public and intersubjective achievement that indicates the speaker’s position and their relationship with others in the interaction.³⁷ This study adds to recent research that applies this framework to examine online communication.³⁸

Building on the intersubjective aspect of stance-taking, Du Bois (2007) proposes the ‘stance triangle’, a theoretical model in which a stance-taker evaluates the stance object, positions the subject (the self), and aligns with another subject either convergently or divergently (Figure 1). When one takes a stance toward a certain topic, the present stance can be linked to the previous one and the subsequent one. This results in ‘stance accretion’, where stances accumulate to form a larger network

²⁸ David Featherstone and Lazaros Karaliotas, “Populism”, *Soundings*, 72 (2019), 44.

²⁹ Romana Kuhar and Edme Ajanović, “Sexuality Online: The Construction of Right-Wing Populists’ ‘Internal Others’ in the Web”, in Mojca Pajnik and Birgit Sauer, eds., *Populism and the Web: Communicative Practices of Parties and Movements in Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Eric Louis Russell, *The Discursive Ecology of Homophobia: Unraveling Anti-LGBTQ Speech on the European Far Right* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2019).

³⁰ Rachel Savage, “Rising Populism Stokes Homophobic Hate Speech across Europe – Rights Group”, *Reuters* (February 4, 2020); Tim Wyatt, “Rising Populism Is Stoking Homophobia across Europe, Say Campaigners”, *The Independent* (February 4, 2020).

³¹ Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell U.P., 1995).

³² Kirk Hawkins, “Is Chávez Populist?: Measuring Populist Discourse in Comparative Perspective”, *Comparative Political Studies*, 42.8 (2009), 1040-1067.

³³ Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (London: Sage, 2015).

³⁴ Elanor Ochs, “Indexing Gender”, in Alessandro Duranti and Charles Goodwin, eds., *Rethinking Context: Language as an Interactive Phenomenon* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1992), 335-358.

³⁵ Ochs, “Constructing Social Identity: A Language Socialization Perspective”, *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 26 (1993), 288.

³⁶ Ochs, “Indexing Gender”, 343.

³⁷ Elise Kärkkäinen, “Stance Taking in Conversation: From Subjectivity to Intersubjectivity”, *Text & Talk*, 26.6 (2006); Scott Kiesling, “Stance in Context: Affect, Alignment and Investment in the Analysis of Stancetaking”, presented at the iMean conference (Bristol: The University of West England, April 15, 2011).

³⁸ Ping-Hsuan Wang, “Opposition to Gender Equity Education in Taiwan: A Linguistic Perspective on Social Conservative Language on Facebook”, in Caleb M. Clark, Alexander C. Tan, and Karl Ho, eds., *Taiwan: Environmental, Political and Social Issues* (New York: Nova Science, 2021), 299-330; Cynthia Gordon and Didem İkizoğlu, “‘Asking for Another’ Online: Membership Categorization and Identity Construction on a Food and Nutrition Discussion Board”, *Discourse Studies*, 19.3, (2017), 253–271; Kiesling, Umashanthi Pavalanathan, Jim Fitzpatrick, Xiaochuang Han, and Jacob Eisenstein, “Interactional Stancetaking in Online Forums”, *Computational Linguistics*, 44.4 (December 2018), 683–718.

of meanings.³⁹ The stance triangle centers on the public and dialogic nature of stance-taking by including the concept of alignment into the theoretical model, thus underscoring the erstwhile point that one's relation to discourse and others is mediated through likened or differentiated interpersonal alignment.⁴⁰

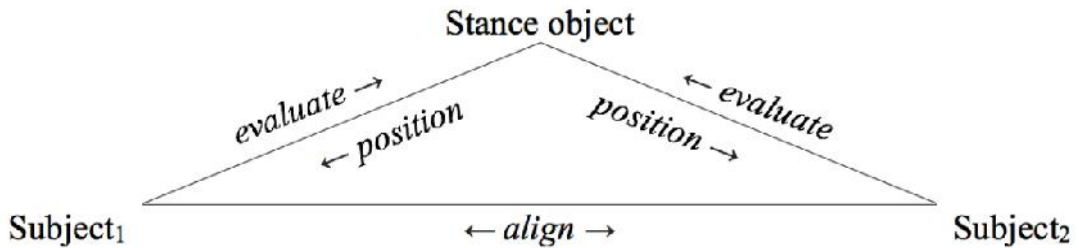


Fig. 1: The stance triangle⁴¹

The idea of frame is often accredited to Goffman's micro-sociological theorization of interactants' ongoing engagement in and understanding of events in everyday social interaction.⁴² As a metacommunicative message that organizes participants' perception,⁴³ a frame is defined as "a definition of the situation" that is "built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events".⁴⁴ Tannen and Wallat incorporate this framework into Interactional Sociolinguistics to describe "what is going on in interaction",⁴⁵ accounting for how participants construct meanings and negotiate relationships based on their knowledge of the topic. While Interactional Sociolinguistic research continues to delve into the moment-by-moment interaction, studies in other disciplines, including political communication, have noted how frames are instrumental in the public's understanding of policy and their interpretation of reality.⁴⁶

Scholars have since compared stance and frame,⁴⁷ illustrating the common theme of participants' active role in defining the situation as they navigate their relationships to the discourse and to one another. Consequently, alignment is key to bridging the micro-level realization of participant involvement in CMC through language use and macro-level consequences of sociocultural representation in populist movements. Building on the idea that alignment is "an integral part of every

³⁹ Du Bois, "The Stance Triangle", 157.

⁴⁰ Asif Agha, *Language and Social Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2007).

⁴¹ Du Bois, "The Stance Triangle", 163

⁴² Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1974).

⁴³ Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972).

⁴⁴ Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 10.

⁴⁵ Deborah Tannen and Cynthia Wallat, "Interactive Frames and Knowledge Schemas in Interaction: Examples from a Medical Examination/Interview", in Deborah Tannen, ed., *Framing in Discourse* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1993), 59.

⁴⁶ Alberto Ardèvol-Abreu, "Framing Theory in Communication Research. Origins, Development and Current Situation in Spain", *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 70 (2015); Merlijn van Hulst and Dvora Yanow, "From Policy 'Frames' to 'Framing': Theorizing a More Dynamic, Political Approach", *The American Review of Public Administration*, 46.1 (2016), 92-112.

⁴⁷ Ping-Hsuan Wang, "Co-Constructing Complex Frames Using Repetition and Evaluation in Family Dinner Talk", *Working Papers of the Linguistics Circle of the University of Victoria*, 28.1 (2018), 26-46; Cynthia Gordon, "Framing and Positioning", in Deborah Tannen, Heidi Hamilton and Deborah Schiffrin, eds., *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 324-345; Alexandra Jaffe, *Stance: Sociolinguistic Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2009); Kiesling, "Stance in Context".

act of evaluation and positioning” through which meanings are shaped by the participants,⁴⁸ I present an integrated framework developed in earlier work.⁴⁹ The integration is designed to explain online interaction by closely examining online users’ active role and the social corollary of the dynamics arising from the interactions between users (Figure 2).

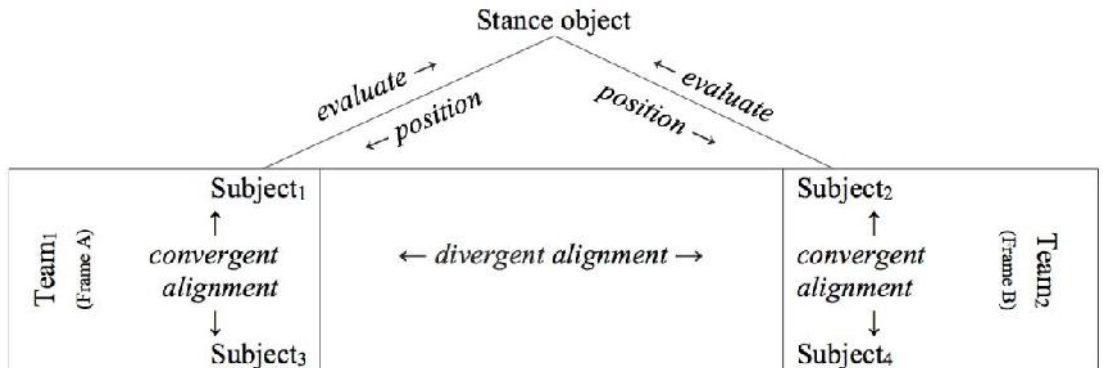


Fig. 2: Sustaining competing frames through alignment in the stance triangle

Synthesizing Goffman’s elaboration of ‘performance team’,⁵⁰ frame, and participant alignment (which he terms ‘footing’),⁵¹ this integrated framework outlines how participants of the same team collaborate to project an agreed-upon definition of the situation, i.e., a frame, and how this frame is susceptible to change when the alignment shifts. This alignment comes from stance accretion and recruits stance-takers as ‘teammates’, whose collaboration sustains the frame.⁵² Therefore, matching evaluations and positionings of similar stances result in convergent alignments that uniformly define a situation. Conversely, opposing stances from counter positions lead to divergent alignments that divide participants into different teams, each fostering a competing frame in which participants generate “a reality of [their] choice”.⁵³ This theoretical integration aims to encapsulate the relational dimension of stance-taking, for a frame is “involved in the evaluation of the messages it contains”.⁵⁴ Thus, gauging alignment becomes paramount in investigating the conflictual relationship that essentially defines populism.⁵⁵ In sum, this framework allows for a close-up view of how populism as ‘a language’ creates antagonism at the micro level.

3. Data

The Civil Code of Taiwan stipulated that marriage be an agreement made between “the male and the female parties” (Article No. 972). In response to a petition for constitutional interpretation on SSM (20

⁴⁸ John Du Bois and Elise Kärkkäinen, “Taking a Stance on Emotion: Affect, Sequence, and Intersubjectivity in Dialogic Interaction”, *Text & Talk*, 32.4 (2012), 441.

⁴⁹ Ping-Hsuan Wang, “Negotiating Racialized Sexuality through Online Stancetaking in Text-Based Communication”, in Nicole D. Farris, D’Lane R. Compton and Andrea P. Herrera, eds., *Gender, Sexuality, and Race in the Digital Age* (New York: Springer, 2020), 187-203.

⁵⁰ Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959).

⁵¹ Goffman, *Forms of Talk* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

⁵² Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*.

⁵³ Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 5.

⁵⁴ Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 188.

⁵⁵ Judis, *The Populist Explosion*, 15.

August 2015), 14 grand justices of the Judicial Yuan (司法院) made Interpretation No. 748 (24 May 2017), in which Article No. 972 was ruled unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court (CC).⁵⁶ The ruling set a two-year deadline, by which time either the Civil Code should be amended or new laws be enacted to ensure equal rights to marriage for same-sex couples. This ruling heralded the legalization of SSM in Taiwan but CHONG promptly condemned the ruling on its Facebook page and proposed three ‘pro-family’ referendum questions (Case 10 and 12; Case 11, on gender equity education, outside the purview of this paper). In turn, pro-SSM organizations proposed a ‘marriage equality’ referendum question (Case 14).

Table 1: 2018 referendum questions and outcomes on legalizing SSM in Taiwan.

Number	Referendum Question	For		Against	
		n	%	n	%
Case 10	Do you agree that marriage defined in the Civil Code should be restricted to the union between one man and one woman?	7,658,008	72.48	2,907,429	27.52
Case 12	Do you agree to the protection of the rights of same-sex couples in cohabitation on a permanent basis in ways other than changing of the Civil Code?	6,401,748	61.12	4,072,471	38.88
Case 14	Do you agree to the protection of same-sex marital rights with marriage as defined in the Civil Code?	3,382,286	32.74	6,949,697	67.26

The referendum results came out on 24 November 2018 as a victory for CHONG and a defeat for the pro-SSM camp (Table 1). By the Referendum Act, Case 14 was vetoed and, per Case 12, CHONG submitted a bill that limited the rights for same-sex couples with legal terms such as ‘cohabitation of relatives’ in place of ‘marriage’ and ‘spouse’. In contrast, the Executive Yuan (行政院), led by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), drafted another bill in February 2019. It applied articles from the Civil Code *mutatis mutandis* (apply where applicable) pursuant to Interpretation No. 748. The bill was passed at the Legislative Yuan (立法院) on 17 May 2019 and went into effect one week later. CHONG rallied against the Executive Yuan’s version by accusing the DPP of dismissing the ‘will of the people’ (WOTP) as shown in the referendum results, despite Bill Case 12’s contradictory preposition to Interpretation No. 748.

Similar civic initiatives have been taken worldwide, such as *Aliancia za rodinu* (AZR, ‘Alliance for the Family’) in Slovakia and *U ime obitelji* (UiO, ‘On Behalf of the Family’) in Croatia (Table 2). However, anti-SSM popular votes per se are not populist. Related movements become populist only when referendum outcomes are equated with the WOTP and leveraged against the government to hijack policymaking.⁵⁷ Although some studies examine past instances leading up to the referendums,⁵⁸ few follow up the campaigns post-referendum. To illustrate how the referendum in Taiwan was exploited to a populist end, this paper analyzes posts and comments on CHONG’s Facebook page from 2017 (pre-referendum) to 2019 (post-referendum).

⁵⁶ Judicial Yuan of Taiwan, “No. 748 Same-Sex Marriage Case”, (May 24, 2017), <https://cons.judicial.gov.tw/jcc/en-us/jep03/show?expno=748>.

⁵⁷ Weale, *The Will of the People*, x.

⁵⁸ Veronika Valkovičová, “‘Regrettably, It Seems That Breaking One Border Causes Others to Tumble’: Nationalism and Homonegativity in the 2015 Slovak Referendum”, *Politique Européenne*, 55.1 (2017), 86-115.

Table 2: States, years, and outcomes of recent popular votes on SSM.

State	Year	Response %		Result
		For	Against	
Croatia	2013	33.72	66.28	Amended*
Slovakia	2015	4.13	94.50	Vetoed**
Ireland	2015	62.07	37.93	Adopted
Slovenia	2015	36.49	63.51	Vetoed
Bermuda	2016	31.64	68.54	Vetoed
Australia	2017	61.60	38.40	Adopted
Romania	2018	6.60	93.40	Vetoed**

*Croatian Constitution was amended to ban same-sex marriage.

**The voter turnout fell below the required threshold.

Both CHONG's posts and comments in reply are publicly available, i.e., anyone with or without a Facebook account can access and read the content. Except for CHONG, commenters have been anonymized with assigned pseudonyms. The texts were translated from Mandarin Chinese into English by the author before being coded by semantic themes, with similar ones conglomerated into aggregated tags (e.g., 'constitution' and 'separation of powers' fall into 'government'). The analysis focuses on the textual and visual representation of events in the referendum cycle, showing how CHONG equated the referendum outcome with the WOTP, eventually turning the ruling party into "the enemy of democracy".⁵⁹

4. Analysis

In this section, I analyze two junctures across the referendum cycle to illustrate how CHONG created polemics between 'the people' and a given establishment, from the grand justices during the interpretation stage to the DPP after the passage of the SSM bill. In the first two instances, I present CHONG's textual descriptions and cartoon illustrations that portray the grand justices as authoritarian. In the third instance, I demonstrate that commenters have adopted CHONG's formulation: that the referendum results should be taken as the WOTP and, by implication, the basis upon which policies should be made.

4.1 *The Judicial Elites vs. the People*

After the grand justices gathered for the CC on 25 March 2017, CHONG's post depicted the meeting as exclusionary. The textual description and a cartoon illustration labeled the grand justices as 'judicial elites' (司法菁英, *sīfǎ jīng yīng*).

⁵⁹ Weale, *The Will of the People*, x.

Excerpt 1: ‘One-voiced constitutional court’ (29 March 2017)

【憲法法庭一言堂】

在憲法法庭的同婚討論中，並未充分考量貿然修改婚姻制度對全民的影響，少數司法菁英的意見將凌駕整體全民的聲音。

#司法菁英凌駕全民

#少數意見竟多過多數意見

【One-Voiced Constitutional Court】

In the Constitutional Court’s discussion of SSM, the effects on the people of hastily changing the institution of marriage have not been thoroughly evaluated. The opinions of a few judicial elites will override the voice of the people.

#JudicialElitesOverrideThePeople

#MinorityOpinionsSurprisinglyOutnumberMajorityOpinions

CHONG’s post negatively evaluates the CC by describing it as an establishment that ignores the constituency whose voice is silenced in the SSM debate. The title of this post ‘one-voiced hall’ (一言堂, yīyántáng), an idiom in contemporary Mandarin Chinese that refers to a dictatorial style of decision-making, echoes CHONG’s anti-institutionalist stance. Adverbials, ‘hastily’ (貿然, màorán) and ‘not thoroughly’ (未充分, wèi chōngfēn), are expressive of CHONG’s dismissive stance toward the grand justices’ decision. CCs in modern democracies “protect basic political rights and preserve pluralism in politics and society”,⁶⁰ but CHONG’s evaluation positions it in opposition to ‘the people’. In contrast, ‘the people’ (全民, quánmín, literally ‘all people’, often used in legal context) stands for a homogenous entity that is excluded and, therefore, disadvantaged. While the grand justices are dubbed the ‘judicial elites’, ‘the people’ is positioned through ‘victimization’,⁶¹ where the group is affected by the change that would ensue should SSM be legalized.

⁶⁰ Müller, *What is Populism?*, 55.

⁶¹ Kuhar and Ajanović, “Sexuality Online”.



Fig. 3: 'One-voiced constitutional court' (29 March 2017)

The antagonistic relationship is visually represented in Figure 3: the CC keeps out the 'the dissenting opinion' (反方意見, fǎnfāng yìjiàn), with the issue of SSM discussed only among a few stakeholders. A glass jar separates the meeting attendees from 'the people' outside. Sitting at the table are three persons marked by the titles above their heads: the non-governmental organization (NGO), the government sector, and the grand justice (left to right). The NGO representative, while dressed in white, has a rainbow symbol on one sleeve, implying support for gay rights. Across the table is the grand justice in the official Taiwanese court dress for judges. With the government representative seated in the middle also in formal attire, the outfits not only highlight the respective roles of the three participants but distinguish them from the 'outsiders' in plain clothes, who are meant to personify ordinary citizens.

Excerpt 2 are illustrative comments in reply to this post. Commenters highlight different facets of the issue by evaluating gay rights activism and the CC. Negative evaluations position some of them opposite the grand justices, thus creating a convergent alignment with CHONG.



下一代幸福聯盟

說這專頁讚 · 2017年3月29日 · 編輯紀錄 ·

【憲法法庭一言堂】

在憲法法庭的問辯討論中，並未充分考量貿然修改婚姻制度對全民的影響，少數司法菁英的意見將凌駕整體全民的聲音。

#司法菁英凌駕全民

#少數意見竟多過多數意見

🔥 請連署一天一妻公投：<https://goo.gl/kFeFSt>

🌲 相關報導

幸福盟：同性婚姻釋憲言詞辯論只有同運的聲音
<https://taiwanfamily.com/101843>

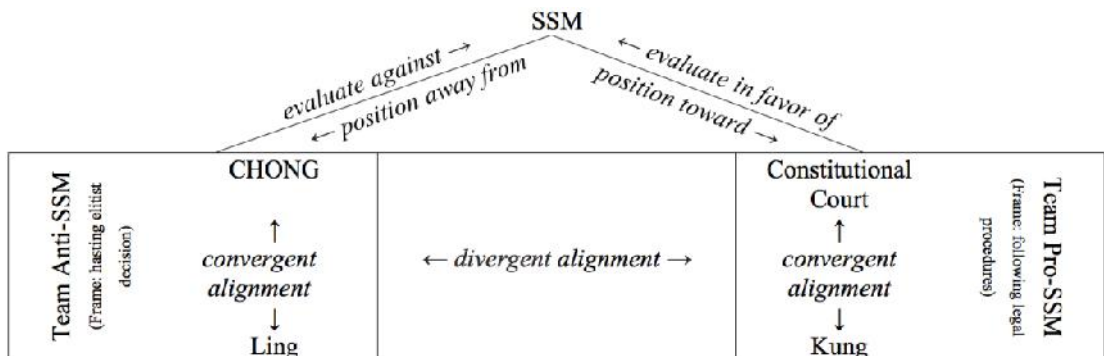
兒童不應淪為政治正確下的白老鼠
<https://taiwanfamily.com/101148>

歐美研究：同性戀家庭子女較易跨性別 且性傾向較不確定
<https://taiwanfamily.com/101602>

Excerpt 2: Comments in reply to ‘One-voiced constitutional court’.

Comment types	Examples
Gay rights	<p>Tang: 為什麼同連團體在反同婚聲浪日益高張時來訴請釋憲法庭?因為他們在歐美國家就是按照這種模式而操作成功。只要把同婚的焦點牽制在人權, 平等, 成功的機率提高很多。</p> <p>Why did gay rights activists petition for constitutional interpretation at the height of anti-SSM backlash? It's because those in the European and American countries succeeded by taking this strategy. With the focus pinned on human rights and equality, the success rate increases considerably.</p>
Government	<p>Ling: 我不相信大部分法官看不出來同婚完全是意識形態的問題。數以百計千計的法條同時要修改, 怎可能對社會毫無影響?這是很明顯的謊言!我認為真相是, 這個法足以傾覆國家!</p> <p>I don't believe the justices can't tell that SSM is entirely ideological. With hundreds or thousands of laws to amend, how can it exert no influence on the society? A blatant lie! I think the truth is this law is enough to subvert the country!</p> <p>Kung: @Ling 你是不是好好的去了解法律程序再來談, 不然看起來真的滿好笑的, 這是釋憲, 不是什麼公聽會</p> <p>Could you try to really understand the legal process before discussing this, otherwise you sound ridiculous, this is constitutional interpretation, not some public hearing</p>

Tang mentions the peculiar timing of the petition and the CC in an unfriendly climate to SSM. The ‘rights discourse’ is invoked to develop an ‘us-versus-them’ differentiation, emphasizing different ideas and divergent outcomes.⁶² Also, by relating Taiwan’s pro-gay activism to that in the West, Tang concomitantly traces a transnational anti-gay conservatism. Ling questions the ruling and warns of the threat to the country. Evaluating against SSM, Ling is self-positioned as a ‘concerned citizen’, masking the homophobic stance with a nationalist discourse that buttresses opposition to SSM.⁶³ Replying to Ling’s comment, Kung clarifies that the CC is a due process at the highest level, especially for the petitioner, rather than a public hearing, whose legal nature involves direct citizen’s participation at the local level. Kung’s evaluation acknowledges the legitimacy of the CC, positioning away from the anti-SSM stance and disaligning with CHONG. The stance-taking in the commenter interaction can be illustrated using the integrated framework (Figure 4), in which the convergent alignment between CHONG and Ling, and that between the CC and Kung widens the schism between the two teams. This echoes the increasing bipolar views regarding SSM observed by Lee and Lin.



⁶² Lee and Lin, “Us Versus Them”.

⁶³ Liu, “‘But If Taiwan Legalizes Same-Sex Marriage...’”.

Fig. 4: Stancetaking and framing in Excerpt 2

In sum, the CC is attacked for addressing the SSM controversy while ‘the people’ are placed on the same side as CHONG in opposition to SSM. The disalignment emerges accordingly in text-based CMC at the micro level that gradually gains momentum and ramifies in the referendum votes at the macro level.

After Interpretation No. 748 was made, CHONG posted an image, denouncing the Judicial Yuan for “colluding with the gay rights activists” on legalizing SSM.

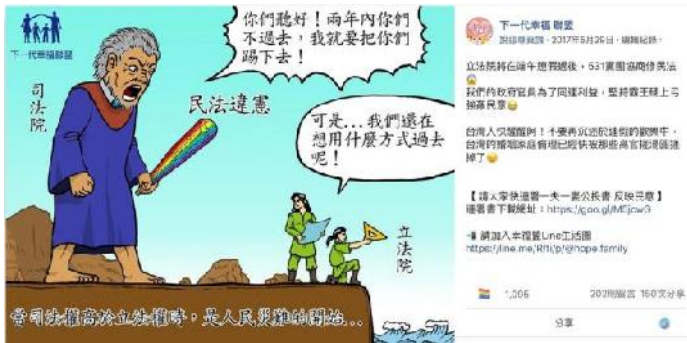


Fig. 5: ‘Cross it in two years’ (Judicial Yuan: Listen up! Cross it in two years or I’ll kick you off!/ Legislative Yuan: But...we’re still figuring out a way to cross it!/ Caption: When the judicial branch overpowers the legislative branch, a disaster begins for the people..., 29 May 2017).

The grand justice (left) is dressed in the official court robe in Taiwan to highlight his institutional role as part of the Judicial Yuan. He is pictured with a menacing look and an overbearing posture, with a telling age difference and disproportionate size to the two persons (right) in the position of the Legislative Yuan. Moreover, the two directives (你們聽好, *nǐmen tīng hǎo* and 兩年內不過去, *liǎng nián nèi bù guòqù*) are conveyed in a screaming speech bubble, indicated by the jagged outline. This phrasing oversimplifies Interpretation No. 748 and exaggerates the magnitude of the authority. Contrarily, the legislative figures’ reply is included in a regular speech bubble, with ellipsis signaling hesitation⁶⁴ or even disagreement and confusion.⁶⁵ Both the image arrangement and the linguistic features resonate with the caption at the bottom (司法權高於立法權, *sīfǎ quán gāo yú lǐfǎ quán*), foreboding a predicament for ‘the people’ (人民, *rénmín*, often used in everyday context).

The structure where ‘the people’ are positioned in an antagonistic relation to ‘the elite’ is palpable. Here, populism as a thin-centered ideology is embodied by an anti-SSM ideology. Like that of AZR and UiO, a ‘pro-family’ stance with respect to the one-man-one-woman definition of marriage reinforces the heterosexual hegemony that invalidates same-sex couples’ right to marriage. The grand justices are presented as colluding with the gay rights activists. This characterization is evidenced in the illustration by the rainbow-shaded wooden bat held by the grand justice. Without resorting to

⁶⁴ Erika Darics, “Relational Work in Synchronous Text-based CMC of Virtual Teams”, in Rotimi Taiwo, ed., *Handbook of Research on Discourse Behavior and Digital Communication: Language Structures and Social Interaction* (Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference, 2010), 830-851.

⁶⁵ Kenneth Keng Wee Ong, “Disagreement, Confusion, Disapproval, Turn Elicitation and Floor Holding: Actions as Accomplished by Ellipsis Marks-only Turns and Blank Turns in Quasisynchronous Chats”, *Discourse Studies*, 13.2 (2011), 211-234.

explicit hate speech or homophobic remarks,⁶⁶ CHONG manages to propagate its approved definition of marriage by persistently positioning the grand justices as the self-serving elites working against ‘the people’. CHONG’s posts so far exemplify how discourse can be used “to provide continual indices of who they are and what they want to communicate”.⁶⁷ This also sets up the condition for its commenters to (dis)align, thereby shaping how the event is framed and understood.

Of the 202 comments written in reply to this post, a number of them (N = 75) evaluate gay rights issues as the stance object (Table 3), including homosexuality itself and SSM (Excerpt 3). However, equally prominent in the thread are comments on the government, including its branches and officials. Judging from the comment composition, CHONG’s populist discourse is taking effect in combining the anti-SSM views with the anti-elite sentiments. When commenters express discontent with the government and the grand justices’ ruling, they simultaneously disapprove same-sex couples’ right to marriage. To delegitimize SSM, CHONG’s homophobic populism bases its strategies on villainizing the government.

Table 3: Numbers and percentages of comments in reply to ‘Cross it in two years’ (N = 202).

Topic	Gay rights		Government		CHONG		Political party	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Negative	47	23.3	31	15.4	15	7.4	13	6.4
Positive	28	13.9	40	19.8	9	4.5	12	5.9
Unclear	0	0.0	3	1.5	4	1.9	0	0.0
Total	75	37.1	74	36.6	28	13.9	25	12.4

Next, Excerpt 3 presents some examples to show how commenters attend to different aspects of the SSM issue. Ultimately, with their respective evaluations and positionings, the commenters align with CHONG convergently or divergently.

⁶⁶ Der-Lan Yeh, “Good Words Hurt Too: The Cyberdiscourse against Same-sex Marriage in Taiwan”, *Journal of Archaeology and Anthropology*, 86 (2017), 69-110.

⁶⁷ Schiffrin, *Approaches to Discourse*, 133.

Excerpt 3: Comments in reply to ‘Cross it in two years’.

Comment types	Examples
Gay rights	<p>Ming: 說實在的，就讓那些亂搞的去玩吧~這些人生病之後，社會就安靜多了 Honestly, let the promiscuous play around~ once they're ill, the society will be much quieter</p> <p>Hsieh: @Ming 糟糕的是這些人染愛滋還是照玩不誤 Worse still, these people keep on playing even when infected with AIDS</p> <p>Shang: @Ming 異性戀也會得愛滋病，別再推給同性愛了，好嗎？ Heterosexuals get AIDS too. Stop scapegoating same-sex love, okay?</p>
Government	<p>Cheng: TMD 原來過去幾十年來，我們被違憲的法律錘制著。快，再審視其他，還有沒有違憲的 Dammit. Turned out for the past decades we've been muzzled by unconstitutional laws. Hurry, check if there's more unconstitutional ones</p> <p>Dan: 司法院又不凌駕於民意之上~ It's not like the Judicial Yuan's above the WOTP~</p> <p>Shih: 你們到底懂不懂權力分立?你們再造謠生事，才是災難的開始 Do you even understand the separation of powers? If you keep starting rumors, that's the real beginning of a disaster</p>
CHONG	<p>Tsui: 下一代幸福加油!婚姻家庭全民決定加油! Support CHONG! Support 'Marriage, family, people decide'!</p>
Political party	<p>Yang: 等等，什麼時候冥晝搖開始擁護憲法了。 Hold up, since when did DPP start supporting the constitution</p> <p>Chi: @Yang 嘿，只要把一切問題推給民進黨就不用繼續思考，這樣的人生也挺輕鬆的啦 Yeah, just blame everything on DPP and give up thinking, that's a pretty easy life</p>

Ming characterizes non-heterosexuals as ‘the promiscuous’, a common anti-gay judgment based on moral values related to sex.⁶⁸ Similarly, the association with HIV, which is corroborated by Hsieh, draws on the stereotype of non-heterosexuals as sexually active and, therefore, prone to sexually transmitted diseases.⁶⁹ This moralist framing excludes same-sex couples’ sexual citizenship by imagining an ideal relationship in which the partners do not ‘play around’. Shang counters by saying that heterosexuals are just as susceptible to HIV and identifies the moral judgment as unfounded and wrongly stigmatizing non-heterosexuals.

Cheng mocks the ruling by remarking the seemingly spontaneity of determining whether a law is constitutional or not. In response, Dan notes that the Judicial Yuan’s, and by extension the grand justices’, actions are not unchecked by the people. Shih chimes in to locate CHONG’s accusation in the post and the discussion in the comments in terms of the separation of powers. The interrogative structure in Mandarin (V-not-V) and the intensifier ‘even’ (到底, dàodǐ) serve the rhetorical function of refuting the attack on the CC and its ruling. Also, in CMC, recycling the phrase in CHONG’s illustration ‘beginning of a disaster’ (災難的開始, zāinàn de kāishǐ) redefines the situation not as faulting the government’s inadequacy but as displaying ignorance of government division, thus signaling a derisive shift in the emotional stance toward CHONG, the cited speaker.⁷⁰ Through direct reply, their respective stances accrue to form competing frames (Figure 8).

Tsui voices support for CHONG and its cause by repeating the anti-SSM slogan ‘marriage, family; people decide’ (婚姻家庭, 全民決定, hūnyīn jiāting, quánmín juédìng), which again invokes the concept of ‘the people’ and traditional family values, imbued with an anti-establishment view. The favorable evaluation of this message disputes the legitimacy of SSM (upholding the marriage definition that excludes same-sex couples) and the Judicial Yuan’s authority (entrenching the antagonistic relationship between ‘the people’ and the government). This slogan later went on to

⁶⁸ Yeh, “Good Words Hurt Too”, 80.

⁶⁹ Lee and Lin, “Us Versus Them”, 4.

⁷⁰ Wang, (2020), 230.

materialize as CHONG mobilized its followers in a 2018 march protesting against Central Election Commission (中央選舉委員會, zhōngyāng xuǎnjǔ wěiyuánhui) pre-referendum (Figure 7). Clearly, support for CHONG does not simply stay on Facebook; tangible actions transpire through constant issue framing on social media, catalyzed by digital affordances like commenting and sharing.



Fig. 6: A screenshot of a video showing CHONG’s march with participants raising ‘marriage, family; people decide’ signs (20 March 2018)

The text-based interaction can be understood in Figure 8. Commenters who negatively evaluate SSM convergently align with CHONG, which renders a team cooperation that fosters a frame.⁷¹ Within this frame, the situation is defined as ‘the judicial elites colluding with gay rights activists to dismantle the values of family and marriage’. Contrariwise, commenters who positively evaluate SSM convergently align with the government by affirming its legitimacy. The convergent alignment between pro-SSM teammates builds a different frame, maintaining a definition of the situation that ‘the grand justices’ ruling is part of a properly functioning government that strives for marriage equality’. Amidst the competing framing of Interpretation No. 748, CHONG purports to stand with ‘the people’ by alluding to a government that repudiates the WOTP.

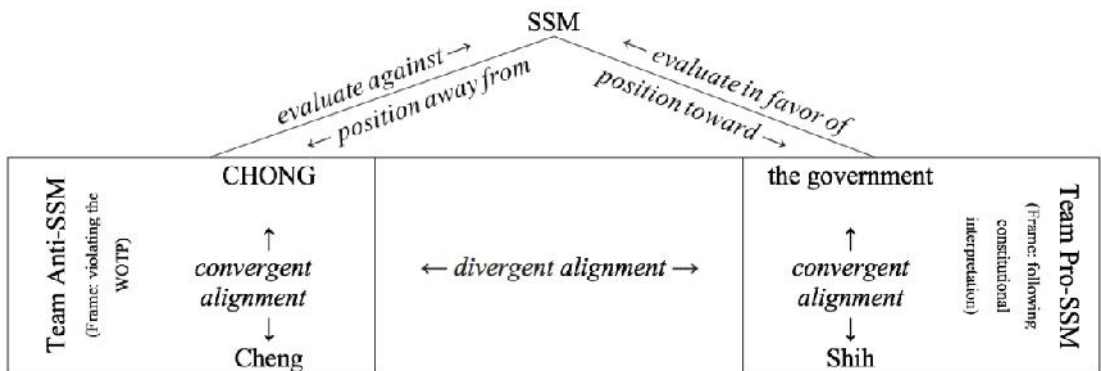


Fig. 7: Stance-taking and framing in Excerpt 3

⁷¹ Goffman, *The Presentation of Self; Frame Analysis*.

This raises two critical points. First, framing is a powerful discursive strategy that influences how the audiences interpret the event. Though Müller mentions populists' distrust of the media for "distorting political reality",⁷² they in fact exploit media and the affordances to advance their messages and policy preferences. Qualifying this anti-SSM movement as a populist one is that CHONG has successfully transformed the SSM issue into a governmental crisis in which 'the people' suffer the consequences. This is reflected in the online discussion of SSM where the concern with governmentality catches up with that of sexuality. Even when both negative and positive comments are present, they are nonetheless oriented in the same direction. The second point, however, suggests that, albeit reactive to CHONG's initial framing, the comments can still gain enough traction to form a competing frame and make a counterclaim. Given that messages are defined "by virtue of their sharing common premises or mutual relevance",⁷³ to prevent online populist rhetoric from exerting 'symbolic violence' that dominates,⁷⁴ commenters can and should play an active role in shifting the discourse.

4.2 *The WOTP vs. SSM*

On 17 May 2017, when the Executive Yuan's SSM bill was passed in the Legislative Yuan, CHONG continued to provoke the populist sentiment by citing the referendum results and criticizing the DPP's decision to legalize SSM.

The referendum is a common theme in the discussion of populism, especially after Brexit in 2016, because it fits into the populist view that it is an unmediated expression of the WOTP. What CHONG conjures is an imaginary form of participatory democracy, i.e., the populist idea of popular sovereignty that comes from "exercise[ing] direct and decisive control over the making of government policy".⁷⁵ In other words, populists, who are anti-institutionalist and "impatient with procedures," request for referendums not to "start an open-ended deliberation among actual citizens" but to ratify and justify their own cause.⁷⁶

Excerpt 4: 'The darkest day' (CHONG, 17 May 2019).

慟！民主史上最黑暗的一天！執政黨違反公投結果、強推同婚法案
 今（17）日立法院就同婚相關草案進行表決，執政黨祭出黨紀，動員立委以坦克車壓陣，以絕對多數之優勢，強硬通過違反公投民意的同性婚姻法案，使得 517 淪為台灣民主史上最黑暗的一天。
 去年愛家三公投平均獲得 700 多萬票，公投第 12 案要求用「民法婚姻以外之其他形式」保障同性二人共同生活之權益，公投第 10 案要求「民法婚姻應限定在一男一女的結合」。綜合兩公投案之主旨，執政黨應該用「非婚姻」制度，而不是用「結婚」等相當於「婚姻」之文字，去規範同性共同生活。
 執政黨對外宣稱，大法官釋憲位階等同憲法，高於公投，所以要推動同婚法案，還選這個同婚法案取名為「司法院釋字第 748 號解釋施行法」，執政黨執意用「婚姻」或「結婚」去規範同性二人之共同生活關係，內容還不斷「準用」民法婚姻，其實是變相修改民法婚姻規定，已嚴重違反公投第 10 案和公投第 12 案之精神，踐踏 700 多萬公投民意！
 Disheartening! The darkest day in the history of Taiwan's democracy! Against the referendum results, the ruling party forced through the SSM bill.
 Today (17 May) the Legislative Yuan made a decision on the SSM bill. The ruling party mobilized its legislators and, with a majoritarian advantage, forcefully passed the SSM bill that violated the WOTP in the referendum. 17 May is thus the darkest day in the history of Taiwan's democracy.
 Last year, the three pro-family referendum questions garnered an average of over 7 million votes. Case 12 demanded that the right to cohabitation between two people of the same sex be ensured 「in ways other than changing of the Civil Code」. Case 10 demanded that 「marriage in the Civil Code be restricted to the union of one man and one woman」. Based on them, the ruling party should regulate same-sex cohabitation using 「non-marriage」 institution rather than 「getting married」 and words that equal 「marriage」.
 The ruling party claims that the grand justices' constitutional interpretation has an equal ranking to the Constitution above the referendum, applying 「mutatis mutandis」 the marriage in the Civil Code, which actually alters the marriage in the Civil Code. This has seriously violated the spirit of referendum Cases 10 and 12, trampling the WOTP as in over 7 million votes in the referendum!

⁷² Müller, *What Is Populism?*, 22.

⁷³ Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 188.

⁷⁴ Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*.

⁷⁵ Weale, *The Will of the People*, 70.

⁷⁶ Müller, *What is Populism?*, 29.

CHONG's anti-SSM discourse may appear idiosyncratic when juxtaposed to its counterparts elsewhere. For example, AZR in Slovakia employed a nationalist rhetoric in 'cleavage-building' between 'depraved Europe' and 'pure Slovakia' in its referendum campaign;⁷⁷ the *Sentinelle* in Italy situated itself as normative and protective of traditional family values whereas homosexuality was associated with negative attributes.⁷⁸ In comparison, CHONG underpinned its anti-SSM movement with a populist framework, in which they defended the referendum results as the legal principle for policymaking. Hence, the government was blamed for dereliction of fulfilling the WOTP when SSM was legalized contra CHONG's demand.



Fig. 8: 'The darkest day' (CHONG, 17 May 2019).

Not only has CHONG reconfigured its homophobic animus into continuous invectives against the government sectors, but its consistent stance-taking on Facebook recast its followers' anti-SSM sentiments in a populist formation that took on a partisan character and reviled the DPP. The positioning became recurrent and invited commenters to align convergently, thus framing the SSM issue as a legal conundrum and the governmental procedures as failing 'the people'. This right-wing populism manifests in the transition in comment composition (see Table 4): the percentage of gay rights-related comments declined (13.8%) while that of government-related disputes rose (46.6%), followed by attacks on the DPP (32.8%). The opposition to same-sex couples' sexual citizenship is built less on the moral ground than on a legal one. Instead of blatant aggressions based on religious values, CHONG's populist mobilization conceals its homophobia with an illusion about policy by the people, which confuses democracy (institutionalized debates under the rule of law) with a populist regime (direct mandates from the people).⁷⁹ The referendum, then, allows "unchecked majoritarianism" to oppress sexual minorities, as is the case in Slovakia, Slovenia, etc.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Valkovičová, "Regrettably, It Seems".

⁷⁸ Russell, *The Discursive Ecology of Homophobia*.

⁷⁹ Weale, *The Will of the People*, xi.

⁸⁰ Elżbieta Kuźlewska, "Same-Sex Marriage – A Happy End Story? The Effectiveness of Referendum on Same-Sex Marriage in Europe", *SSRN*, 46.1 (July 11, 2019), 15.

Table 4: Numbers and percentages of comments in reply to ‘The darkest day’ (N = 399).

Topic	Government		Political party		Gay rights		CHONG		Others	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Negative	122	30.6	129	32.3	35	8.8	9	2.3	7	1.8
Positive	57	14.3	2	0.5	13	3.3	9	2.3	0	0.0
Unclear	7	1.8	0	0.0	7	1.8	2	0.5	0	0.0
Total	186	46.6	131	32.8	55	13.8	20	5.0	7	1.8

Next, Excerpt 5 shows the interaction between both pro- and anti-SSM commenters debating over the role of the government in the decision of legalizing SSM.

Excerpt 5. Comments in reply to ‘The darkest day’.

Hsiao: 冥盞洞就是扭曲第十二條啊
 DPP forced SSM by distorting Case 12
 Huei: @Hsiao 內容跟民法的婚姻法一模一樣 整個拷貝民法內容
 The content is identical to that of the Marriage Chapter, copying the Civil Code.
 Yong: @Huei 然後呢 動了民法了嗎 如果你不知道憲法為最高階 與其抵觸都無效的話麻煩去重讀國中好嗎
 So what? Did they change the Civil Code? If you don't know that the Constitution is the highest in ranking and that contradicting it would invalidate laws, please retake middle school civics courses
 Guo: @Huei 同婚通過害你損失了什麼? 別人能結婚礙到你什麼? 你還是異性戀吧? 日子照樣過不是嗎?
 What do you have to lose when SSM is legalized? Are you still heterosexual? Life as usual?
 Joyce: 公投的第 12 條專法=不歧視, 卻不等於同性結婚, 敗壞風俗!
 Case 12 – non-discrimination, not the same as SSM and corrupting traditions!
 Jun: @Guo 全亞洲沒有一個國家認同同婚, 你的意思是全亞洲都很狹隘全亞洲都在壓迫同運嗎? 台灣民主儼然被民進黨糟蹋的一文不值
 No country in Asia recognizes SSM. Are you saying that all of Asia is narrow-minded, all of Asia is oppressing gay rights movements? DDP disparages Taiwan's democracy till there's nothing left
 Chien: @Jun 如果公投可以超越憲法才是把民主法制踐踏的體無完膚
 Should the referendum supersede the Constitution, that'd be the real destruction of democracy

Hsiao's and Huei's comments illustrate CHONG's legal framing of SSM. Between them is a convergent alignment when they make a matched evaluation that the legalized SSM bill “distorts” the referendum because it shares the same terms as the Civil Code. This refers to the *mutatis mutandis* approach taken by the DPP, where, instead of creating new laws, existing ones are borrowed. CHONG and its supporters interpret this as changing the Civil Code and infringing on Case 12. The populist stance epitomizes its anti-pluralist essence, which insists on the legal exclusivity of heterosexual couples and denies “the status of certain citizens as free and equal”.⁸¹ Yong counters with a rhetorical question, suggesting that the Civil Code has in fact remained intact and declaring that the Constitution has the highest order in legal matters.

In comparison, the homophobia in Joyce's and Jun's comments reveal how, within this frame, the anti-SSM stance is neither a form of discrimination nor oppression. Whereas Joyce distinguishes between Case 12 that does not discriminate and SSM that “corrupts traditions”,⁸² Jun rejects equating the absence of SSM in Asia with oppression.⁸³ As the sentence construction detaches their anti-SSM

⁸¹ Müller, *What is Populism?*, 82.

⁸² Yeh, “Good Words Hurt Too”, 90.

⁸³ Liu, “‘But If Taiwan Legalizes Same-Sex Marriage...’”, 4.

stance from the discriminatory and oppressive connotation, it also connects their language use to the tradition on a societal level and SSM recognition on a regional/global level. Meanwhile, the DPP is held accountable for it apropos referendum and democracy. Oppositely, Guo and Chien endorse the legality of SSM respectively by stressing its banality and restating the Constitution’s status above the referendum.

The analysis of comment-to-comment interaction reifies online stance-taking as a “distributed action”,⁸⁴ where interactants across successive turns/comments can nonetheless achieve alignments through affordances such as tagging.⁸⁵ The discursive relationships can be represented in Figure 8: because of stance accretion, anti-SSM teammates/commenters’ alignment maintains a frame in which the DPP’s effort is undemocratic for ignoring the referendum results,⁸⁶ whereas pro-SSM team’s cooperation frames the same event as constitutional for adhering to Interpretation No. 748.

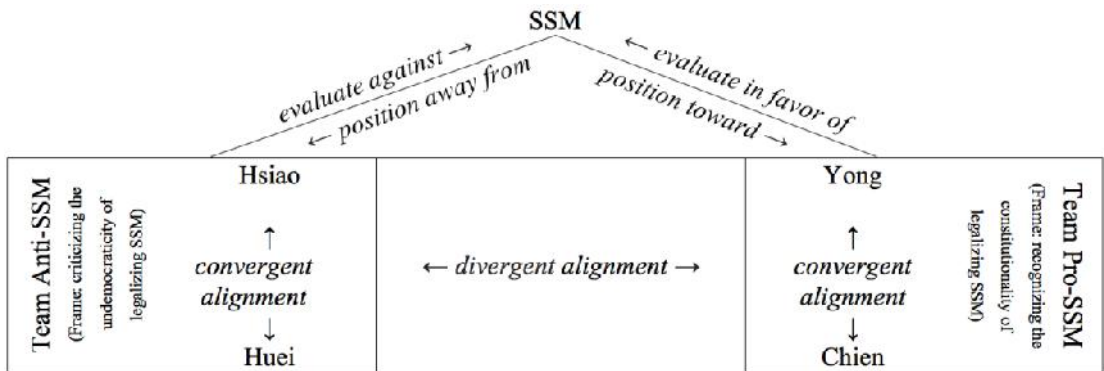


Fig. 9: Stance-taking and framing in Excerpt 5

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have demonstrated how an anti-SSM organization in Taiwan promotes a conservative stance on Facebook by leveling populist sentiments at the government, thereby increasingly grounding its opposition in legality rather than morality. The analysis of the phenomenon illustrates a veritable example of mutualism: populism as a thin-centered ideology is substantiated by homophobia to attack the authority while resistance to equal sexual citizenship is shored up by the populist framework to disguise itself as democratic. The examination of CHONG’s Facebook posts and the comments in reply accentuates the role of populism as a new medium of homophobia in Asia, connecting the global right-wing oppressions of sexual minorities.⁸⁷ Using the integrated framework in DA, this study teases out how the emerging legal/political framing transpires through collective stance-taking in Facebook comments while concealing homophobic biases. CHONG’s anti-SSM message is embedded not only in textual descriptions that antagonize ‘the elites’ but in polemical images that tokenize ‘the people’.

Alternatively, commenting is a way of continuous engagement with the populists.⁸⁸ It can be seen that, while the referendum is used to perpetuate intractable conflict, leaving an indelible mark on the path to legalizing SSM, pro-SSM commenters can reaffirm a constitutionalism democracy (e.g.,

⁸⁴ Du Bois and Kärkkäinen, “Taking a Stance on Emotion”, 441.

⁸⁵ Wang, 2020.

⁸⁶ Liu, “‘But If Taiwan Legalizes Same-Sex Marriage...’”, 9.

⁸⁷ Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism*.

⁸⁸ Müller, *What Is Populism?*; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism*.

separation of powers). With the rise of social media, active participation in online comments can effect societal change, for alignment is a “key dimension of the social construction of intersubjectivity”.⁸⁹ After all, Rousseau’s “general will” means “enlightened self-interest,” i.e., voters in an election or a referendum “should not be thinking about [their] own interest but about the common good”⁹⁰ and should not use the praxis of “majority rule to circumvent minority rights”.⁹¹ By presenting Taiwan’s case of homophobic populism, this paper highlights the importance of recognizing the constitutional foundation of a democratic society as the debates move online. The integrated model illustrates how right-wing populism against sexual pluralism can be contained with online commenting that reframes the issue not through more antagonism but through more meaningful alignment.

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⁸⁹ Du Bois and Kärkkäinen, “Taking a Stance on Emotion”, 440.

⁹⁰ Weale, *The Will of the People*, 25.

⁹¹ Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism*, 83.

Thomas Karshan and Kathryn Murphy, eds., *On Essays: Montaigne to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 400 pp., ISBN 978-0-19-870786-8

Reviewed by Lellida Marinelli

Thomas Karshan and Kathryn Murphy's *On Essays: Montaigne to the Present* is a collection that brings together seventeen scholarly contributions on the essay as a form. As the editors acknowledge, the twenty-first century has seen a revival of interest in the essay and non-fictional genres. *On Essays* is the most recent among a series of forthcoming companions and histories such as *The Edinburgh Companion to the Essay*, *The Cambridge Companion to the Essay*, *The Cambridge History of the American Essay* and *The Cambridge History of the British Essay*.

Working with the essay implies having to tackle the "long history of problems" that the definition of the object has and this collection well reflects the polyvalent and protean nature of this form by providing many angles from which to gain more knowledge on its long tradition. The introduction, co-written by the editors Karshan and Murphy, reflexively begins by stating the paradoxical unnecessary of introductions, resuming Theodor Adorno's well known phrase: "[the essay] starts [...] with what it wants to talk about; it says what occurs to it in that context and stops when it feels finished rather than when there is nothing to say" (Adorno, "The Essay as Form", cit. in *On Essays*, 1). Yet the co-editors manage to provide a very complete introduction to the collection and to the essay as a form by making use of the essay's own tropes. For example, the choice of the title *On Essays*, as well as the titles of the subsections in the introduction follows "the essay's own titular habit, which implies at once its tendency to be *about* something, to have in view something which is its subject; while at the same time incorporating an awareness of the writer's intentionality, the taking up of an angle, rather than a claim to definitiveness or completion" (19). The editors provide key information on the essay's tendency towards self-reflexivity; they present the etymology of the word *essai* by recalling how it has been noticed that using this type of evidence may be considered a cliché in essays on the essay, which are often those providing the richest insights. They also focus on reading, which is central to essay writing. Montaigne's essays, for instance, are imbued with his readings of classical authors to whom the history of the essay can be retraced – as the anthologies *The Art of the Personal Essay* (1994) edited by Philip Lopate and *Lost Origins of the Essay* (2009) edited by John D'Agata testify. As Karshan and Murphy mention these two and other influential collections and works, they illuminate another key aspect of the approach to this complex object of study: the existence of a number of curated anthologies makes their respective introductions part of a solid body of theoretical work on the essay. For the editors, the most substantial history of the English essay is still Hugh Walker's *The English Essay and Essayists* (1915). They also discuss more recent contributions, noticing how they are either arranged by topic or by historical period.

Differently from other collections on the topic, Karshan and Murphy's follows the chronology of the essayists on which each chapter focuses, with the exception of the first two chapters, which serve as further introductions. In Karshan's "What is an Essay? Thirteen Answers from Virginia Woolf" (31-54), "Street Haunting", in which Woolf concentrates on the history of the essay and its themes by way of the essay itself, is used as a map to guide the reader and illustrate some of the characteristics of the essay. The second chapter, by Warren Boutcher, is instead dedicated to "The Montaignian Essay and Authored Miscellanies from Antiquity to the Nineteenth Century" (55-77). Reading the works of the critic Isaac D'Israeli (1766-1848), Boutcher argues that contemporary criticism has lost the perception of the fact that the essay was embedded in the broader tradition of "heterogeneous, occasional, spontaneous, irregular [...] writing attributable to a single, authorial 'Miscellanist'" (59) that preceded, included and then followed Montaigne.

The chronology begins with Montaigne and the relevance of experience (Kathryn Murphy, “Of Sticks and Stones: The Essay, Experience, and Experiment”, 78-96) to then move to the eighteenth century – when the papers published on *The Spectator* became the most prominent examples of English essays (Markman Ellis, “Time and the Essay: The Spectator and Diurnal Form”, 97-113). Other interesting contributions deal with the philosophical essays by David Hume (Fred Parker, “The Sociable Philosopher: David Hume and the Philosophical Essay”, 114-131), and with the essayistic features of Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (Scott Black, “Tristram Shandy, Essayist”, 132-149). The collection then touches on the Victorian age with Bharat Tandon’s “‘Strips of Essayism’: Eliot, Hardy, and the Victorian Periodical Essay” (258-276) to then focus on the more contemporary twentieth century with Michael Wood’s essay exploring the contaminations of the essay in the novel after Borges (Michael Wood, “Rational Distorsions: Essayism in the British Novel after Borges”, 277-292). The chapter “Creative Non-Fiction and the Lyric Essay: The American Essay in the Twenty-First Century” (293-312) by the late Ned Stuckey-French focuses on the American lyrical essays of writers such as Eula Biss and Claudia Rankine, ascribing its emergence within the broader context of creative nonfiction, in the late nineties, to John D’Agata. Worth of mention is also the last chapter by Christy Wampole, “Dalí’s Montaigne: Essay Hybrids and Surrealist Practice” (323-347), which is on the “conjunction of image and text in essayistic hybrids such as the photo essay, essay-film, and video essay and explores the possibilities of estrangement [...] that emerge from the encounter between visual and verbal expression” (323).

Despite embracing a broad chronological range, the collection manages to give the reader more than just a taste of the complexity of the essay. The choice of different approaches and perspectives, from broader analyses of cultural and literary phenomena to chapters focused on one essayist, is an added value of this collection. While it is certainly not intended to be a handbook, the attentive reader will be able to retrace the history of the genre in it. Each chapter, in fact, is both a specialised account of the individual topic, and a study on the essay more in general. Overall, this collection is precious to researchers who aim to specialise on the essay, providing a great starting point for the beginners in the study of the essay and essay writing while also being stimulating to those who are more familiar with the genre.

C. Bruna Mancini and David Punter, eds., *Space(s) of the Fantastic: A 21st Century Manifesto* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2021), 165 pp., ISBN 978-0-367-68030-5

Reviewed by Lellida Marinelli

Space(s) of the Fantastic: A 21st Century Manifesto, edited by Bruna Mancini and David Punter is a collection of essays that could be placed at the disciplinary intersection between studies on the fantastic and the thriving spatial turn, itself an intersection between human geography and literary studies. It fits well within the interdisciplinary discourse and several of the contributions dialogue both with classic studies such as Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1957) and with more recent but indeed significant works such as *Space and the Postmodern Fantastic in Contemporary Literature: The Architectural Void* (2015) by Patricia García, who is also one of the contributors to this volume.

Each chapter presents a different take on using spatiality as an interpretive tool for reading literary texts. As the subtitle of the introduction – “Of Margins, Transgressions, Abnormalities” – suggests, the underlining motifs linking the chapters illustrate how different spaces and non-spaces, alongside the idea that the fantastic itself challenges the idea of reality, represent “threshold[s] between known and unknown” (16).

The aim of the book is to provide readers with an understanding of fantastic literature through the lens of literary geography. As a term, ‘literary geography’ dates back to the beginning of the 20th century. As a discipline, however, it moves along a spectrum of possibilities and involves different approaches to text. In the introductory volume of the specialised journal *Literary Geographies*, scholar Neil Alexander explains how literary geography for some “is about generating maps from quantitative data as a means of correlating genre with geography or charting the lineaments of a narrative trajectory” (Neal Alexander, “On Literary Geography”, *Literary Geographies*, 1.1 [2015], 3-6). Such is the interesting case of the essay “Rambles in the Fantastic: Digital Mapping Mary Shelley’s *Last Man*” (85-95), where David Sandner argues that both *Frankenstein* and *Last Man* are “‘rambles’, travelbooks in which the main characters trek across real-life landscapes” (85). His contribution is complementary to a map he created with the program VisualEyes5 (see <http://www.viseyes.org/visualeyes/?1967>). The map is a representation of the places Lionel Verny, the main character of Shelley’s *Last Man*, a dystopian novel set between 2073 and 2100, travels to over a span of fifteen years (from 2080 to 2095) and it aims at showing how geography and geopolitics are closely related.

For others, instead, space is a category against which to read certain aspects of the definition of identity. An example is provided by David Punter in “*Magissatopia: The Place of the Witch*” (3-14), an interesting presentation of a typical character and archetype of fantastic literature. David Punter argues that the history of witches is to be read as a history of female abjection and of “communal injustice” (3) on the part of the patriarchal society. But, he continues, there is more: the “question of the witch” (4) is a reminder of the experience all have, of liminal and transient states, which has passed “under the sign of repression” (4). However, as his overview of a variety of texts shows, what Punter defines as *magissatopia*, the space of the witch, is a space the characters need to conjure up for themselves as an extreme solution to create a space of shelter, or to be identified as a place on the

threshold between two continents and the territory of a quest for identity, as in Celia Rees's *Witch Child* (2000).

A further take on the subject is provided by Bruna Mancini's chapter "Spaces of the Fantastic, the Fantastic of Spaces". Referring to Patricia García's *Space and the Postmodern Fantastic in Contemporary Literature: The Architectural Void* (2015), Mancini points to a lack of a "comprehensive model for analysing space in relation to the Fantastic" (17). Of course, literary criticism and comparative literature have focused on space, and Mancini does recall methodologies on space by Bachelard, Foucault and Moretti, and studies on space as an element of narrative by Philippe Hamon and Blanchot, among the others. Nevertheless, according to Mancini, studies on the "'fantastic space' essentially focus on space as a metaphor, not on space as a physical dimension (re)created in the Fantastic texts" (17). Interpretation and metaphor are key aspects of literary expression, and writers, Mancini states, have always had a certain fascination for maps. And as interpretations of space, maps are not neutral – they are the visual and verbal expression of a subjectivity. The interesting connection Mancini makes allows her to introduce the concept and discipline of psychogeography, which some see concerned with the personality of a place, while for others it is a "detailed multilevel examination of select locales that impact upon the writer's own microscopic inner eye" (21). The two texts she analyses, *Lud Heat* by Iain Sinclair (1975) and *Hawksmoor* by Peter Ackroyd (1985), both deal with the mystery that lies behind architect Nicholas Hawksmoor's London churches; and, exploring the city while walking, she argues, is an act of transgression in our contemporary world dominated by speed and fast transportation. (22)

Mystery, myth and uncanny also come forward in Patricia García's "The Literary Motif of the Devil Architect: Where Built Space Meets the Fantastic" (38-53). She aims at showing how, in the biographies of the Devil, space had been reduced to neutral, not significant, setting. A historical-anthropological overview of the origins of the idea of the Devil as an architect in medieval folklore is followed by the analysis of some variations of this motif in several 20th and 21st century novels and short stories. Taking the move from Todorov's consideration of space as "nothing more than a situational dimension" (40), a container for the unfolding of events over time, García's readings, instead, foreground the notion of space. The Devil creates places unsuitable for human habitation or that have an effect on the characters, as in the interesting example of Doménech's short story "La escalera del Sarto" (1980), where a staircase with absurd features defies the laws of physics, strongly recalling *Relativity* (1953), Escher's famous lithograph. Space, thus, becomes and *is* the diabolic element, having an agency and active role in the *dénouement* of the narration.

According to Todorov's classic definition of the fantastic, one of the conditions is the reader's, but also the character's hesitation "between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described" (Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, Press of Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, 1973, 33). Such hesitation, alongside "the pleasure of fear, of transgression, of the uncanny to go ahead" (2) to which the editors refer in the introduction, may be identified as a factor which moves the narration forward. As David Ian Paddy shows in "Home Is Where the Dark Is: A Literary Geography of Daphne du Maurier's Disturbing Genres" (96-114), it is possible to re-think spatiality as "occupying a similar location of hesitation between the psychological-imagined and the supernatural-real" (103). Hesitation also comes forward in texts which question genre-belonging such as *The Fifth Season* (2015) by Nora K. Jemisin and *This Census Taker* (2016) by China Miéville, analysed by Nicoletta Vallorani in "Of Borders and (W)holes: Porous

Geographies of the Fantastic in China Miéville and Nora K. Jemisin” (144-157). Vallorani re-reads the concept of borders and border-crossing in the narratives where void is a metaphor and where space is not a place built for protection. A different type of border is the mirror, or, more interestingly, the frame, which, as Maria Teresa Chialant argues in “Border Imagery in Victorian ‘Supernatural’ Short Stories”, is an architectural threshold between the living and the dead, and is for this reason a “perimeter of the fantastic” (76). In the three short stories by Le Fanu, Oliphant and Hardy, she focuses on the physical representation of the individual portrayed in the picture, partly following Deborah Manion’s critical position according to which the exchange of perspectives between viewer and viewed in Victorian fiction is a means to contest issues of power relations in spheres of the human which will only be theorized much later in the twentieth century.

Spatial analysis of literary genres (“Place and Space in the Literary Utopia”, 115-130); reading chronotopes against the grain of Bakhtin’s definitions to show the use of the supernatural to alter characters’ experiences of time and space (“Time and Space in Fantastic Theory and Fiction of Charles Nodier’s *Trilby*”, 54-69); identifying the new perspective and political significance of portal fantasy quest narratives which breach the conventions of time and space (“Seeing Things: Competing Worlds in Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* and China Miéville’s *The City and the City*”, 131-143); these all enrich the debate on a topic that has been and is still of primary interest.

On the whole, despite the fact that a less specialised reader would have benefited of a more detailed introduction, the remarkable advantage of this edited collection is the way it stimulatingly expands knowledge on the fantastic and on literary geographical studies.

Giuseppe Balirano and Bronwen Hughes, eds., *Homing in on Hate: Critical Discourse Studies of Hate Speech, Discrimination and Inequality in the Digital Age* (Napoli: Paolo Loffredo Editore, 2020), 300 pp., ISBN 978-88-32193-59-6

Reviewed by Annalisa Raffone

“It is a matter of infinite difficulty [...] to determine what a man’s *motive* may have been for this or that particular action”, English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote about more than 200 years ago in his *Contributions to Southey’s Omniana* (in Heather J. Jackson and James R. de J. Jackson, eds., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 1 [Princeton, NJ: Princeton U.P., 2019], 310).

Some years after the publication of this collection, Coleridge delivered a series of lectures in which he discussed Iago’s misogynous and racist verbal behaviour in Shakespeare’s *Othello* by describing his actions and personal conduct as “ *motiveless malignity* [emphasis added]” (in *Lectures 1818-1819 on Literature*, vol. 1, ed. by Reginald A. Foakes [Princeton, NJ: Princeton U.P., 1987], 315). As a matter of fact, through this statement, the poet wanted to underline how the Bard’s most sinister villain had no real reason or even physiological need to pronounce discriminatory sentences towards Othello like “Even now, now, very now, an old black ram / Is tuppung your white ewe” or, talking to Desdemona, women in general, as “You are pictures out of doors, bells / In your parlors, wild-cats in your kitchens, saints in / Your injuries, devils being offended, players in your / Housewifery, and housewives in your beds”. Coleridge instead underlined how Iago’s desire to show intellectual superiority or power cannot be attributed to a progressive health decay but the “inconsistency of the character itself” (*The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 1, 310).

Thus, Iago seems to adopt this behaviour simply for the fun of it and because he is driven by a completely irrational hatred against Othello. This type of unreasonable, extreme delivery of hostility language (that more often also turns into acts of physical violence) is something people deal with every day and that goes under the label of ‘hate speech’.

Hate speech lies in that invisible suspended space that connects the “freedom of expression” to the “freedom from discrimination” (Giuseppe Balirano and Bronwen Hughes, “Introduction”, v). In the recent publication *Homing in on Hate: Critical Discourse Studies of Hate Speech, Discrimination and Inequality in the Digital Age*, edited by Giuseppe Balirano and Bronwen Hughes, these “two conflicting principles” (v) are comprehensively investigated and profoundly analysed by looking, in particular, at how “specific forms of harassments [...] possess [their] own set of ever-evolving rules and codes” (ibid.) that especially manifest themselves in online environments.

In fact, today’s digital communication represents a double-edged sword since if on one hand it allows connecting different groups, cultures, and societies on a large scale, thus positively affecting fields like economy and education, on the other hand, the anonymity given by the screen may lead to derogatory negative behaviours. As the editors point out, the concept of ‘freedom’ lies at the foundation of democratic societies and “the idea of restricting free speech stands as a threat to an open exchange of thoughts, opinions and views” (vi). Nevertheless, due to the growing prevalence of diverse hate speech behaviors (e.g., trolling, cyberbullying, revenge porn, etc.), not only governments and internet providers are increasingly trying to understand how to prevent, limit, and punish such forms of activity, but also research on the theme has intensified, providing a great impact on the study of the phenomenon.

As a result, the book edited by Balirano and Hughes provides a consistent analysis of different kinds of discriminatory discourses, specifically focusing on hate speech both in the context of mass media and from a legal and institutional point of view. Starting from a theoretical framework mainly founded on Corpus-based Discourse Analysis and Appraisal Linguistics, the volume aims to unveil the linguistic strategies employed by haters to perpetrate their negative behaviors.

Much has been and continues to be written around the ‘war against Others’, and many approaches have been taken to display the wide-ranging features of this phenomenon. Nonetheless, the authors’ choice of (Digital) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) lies in the fact that the framework developed within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) by Michael Halliday allows to analyse the key functions played by language in communication: “the experiential function of enacting experience, the interpersonal function of negotiating relationships, and the textual function of organizing information” (15).

The book is divided into two main strongly inter-related sections respectively entitled “Hate Speech and the Media” and “Hate Speech, Institutions, and the Law”, both describing – from multimodal perspectives – how hate speech occurring in virtual environments does not vanish like a soap bubble but rather has tremendous real effects on the individuals experiencing it.

Online fat-shaming is the core of Chapter 1, entitled “Fat Chance! Digital Critical Discourse Studies on Discrimination against Fat People”, in which Balirano and Hughes – by building up two inter-related and multilingual corpora (i.e., FAT and GROSSE, respectively in English and French) through the extrapolation of trending hashtags connected to the English and French terms ‘fat-shaming’ and ‘grassophobic’ – identify and analyse what they define as “‘self-deprecatory’ and/or ‘other-deprecatory’ macrocategories” (16), strictly interconnected with gender, ethnicity, and social class. As a result, they demonstrate how fat-shaming discourses are linked to previously established hate-based beliefs against minority groups, especially regarding women and race.

Radio Stations can also be vehicles of discriminatory speeches as shown by Angela Pitassi’s analysis in Chapter 2, entitled “Discriminatory Speech in Ethnic Radio Talk Shows: The Case of the Spanish-Language Radio Station WKKB FM Latina 100.3”, in which she investigates gender ideologies regarding heteronormative discourses by building up and examining what she has defined the ‘Dj Gato’ (named after his host, a Latino male in his 50s) and ‘El Mañanero’ corpus (the former collected between 2018-2019, the latter between 2020-2021). Pitassi’s research demonstrates that despite the presence of isolated cases in which the conversation appears to show some instances of social change, still the discourses seem to be “in a need to maintain a status quo of hegemonic masculinity” (70).

Disability is the theme of Chapter 3 by Maria Cristina Nisco, entitled “Online Abuse and Disability Hate Speech: A Discursive Analysis of Newspaper Comment Boards on Harvey’s Law”, which takes into account Katie Price’s petition “to make trolling a crime” (81). Price’s battle resulted in a series of attacks perpetrated towards her disabled son Harvey that Nisco collected in her ‘Harvey-law Corpus’ over a time-span ranging from 2017 to 2019. By identifying three macro-categories of comments (i.e., ‘against Katie Price’, ‘on quitting social media,’ ‘supporting Katie Price’s petition and condemning HSO against Harvey’), Nisco shows that “hate speech is more than harsh words as it is embedded in customs and actions intended to vilify, humiliate, or incite hatred, and as such, it can occur both online and offline” (90).

Hate-based right-wing populism is the foundation of Chapter 4 by Angela Zottola, entitled “When Freedom of Speech Turns into Freedom of Hate: Hateful Speech and ‘Othering’ in Conservative Political Propaganda in the USA”, in which she investigates eight live-streamed lecture-videos of the

conservative political commentator Ben Shapiro held between 2016-2019. According to Zottola's analysis, Shapiro uses both verbal and non-verbal cues "to construct the dichotomy of 'us' vs. 'them'" (109) in which "'we' are good and 'they' are bad", thus turning free speeches into hateful discourses.

The COVID-19 outbreak has eventually changed people's lives from several points of view. Katherine E. Russo's "Hate Speech and Covid-19 Risk Communication: A Critical Corpus-based Analysis of Risk and Xenophobia in Twitter" in Chapter 5 investigates how epidemics could turn in potential places for intolerance discourses in Twitter's micro-blogging world. In particular, Russo's work starts from the assumption that media communication of Covid-19 risks often recurs to eco-social insecurity feelings that may result in hate speech discourses towards the affected population. Through an in-depth analysis of a specialized twitter corpus collected from March 1 to March 15, 2020, Russo shows that hate speech especially occurred in connection to established "specific strategies of representation" (137) of the groups affected, in particular Chinese people and migrants so that "hate speech [was] based on preservation of the in-group, [while] closure and discrimination towards the out-groups".

Terrorism and hate crime are at the base of Margaret Rasulo's "'To the Streets': Deploying the City as the Object of Hate Crimes in Terrorist Discourse" in Chapter 6. Rasulo combines Multimodal Analysis and the Conceptual Theory of Metaphor to show how Jihadists construct their hate-based narratives through the metaphor of the city. In doing so, she investigates a corpus of 300 images and 260 freely accessible articles released in the final year of publication of their magazines (i.e., *Dubiq* and *Rumiyah*), between 2016-2017. Both the verbal and visual resources contain a great number of elements connected to the city plus "religious quotations, profiles of fighters depicted as glorious heroes, and real battlefield success stories that give the magazines and the militant group a sense of credibility and existence" (163), thus depicting the city "as a space *to conquer* and a space *to destroy* [emphasis in the original]".

The militarization of digital political language in the post-Brexit era is the core of Massimiliano Demata and Marianna Zummo's "'The war is over': Militarising the Language and Framing the Nation in Post-Brexit Discourse" in Chapter 7. According to the authors, "Brexit also represented a surge in intolerance and hatred, which is particularly evident in social media, where opposing groups delegitimize political dissenters by using abusive language" (169). By starting from Nigel Farage's tweet 'The war is over' on December 20, 2020 – showing how he employs the metaphor of the war "to emphasize the idea of power, strength and group membership" (170) – Demata and Zummo investigate a corpus of 158 comments and 1375 replies to Farage's tweet collected between December 24-26, 2020. The study reports that the digital exchanges following Farage's tweet are not "instances of political communication" (183), but they find their existence in political notions "one being the concept of nation" so that "discursive strategies [...] include continuity in history, cultural values, and differentiation from opposing groups, the EU or other British citizens".

A study on the impact of anti-hate legislation is provided by Mariavita Cambria's "'BOOM HATE SPEEEEEEEEEEECH': Languaging anti hate speech legislation in Ireland" in Chapter 8 in which she studies comments-on-the-article section of a series of Irish online newspapers on the people's attitude towards the publication of a document attempting to create a basis for hate crime legislation in the Republic. The investigation shows that if on one side the term 'hate' is treated with a sarcastic and ironic viewpoint, on the other hand, a legislation for hate crime is perceived "as an act of censorship" (203).

Chapter 9 opens with Raffaele Pizzo's "When Hate Reaches its Peak. The Italian Case: Hate Comments Against the Anti-discrimination 'Zan' Draft Law" in which he investigates how Italian

Facebook users comment the new anti-discrimination Zan Law. Pizzo analyses two corpora (i.e., Zan I and Zan II) by looking at the linguistic patterns of the comments and posts by both right-wing and left-wing politicians underlying “the power of hate speech to create [...] and destroy online communities of belonging” (225).

Maria Grazia Sindoni’s “Resisting Hate Speech: A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of the Stop Funding hate Boycott Campaign in UK” in Chapter 10 aims at analysing how the platform launched in the UK in 2016 countered discriminatory discourses created by British media outlets to increase their sales. Through a multimodal investigation, she underlines the powerful strategies adopted by the ‘Stop Funding Hate’ website aiming at “making hate unprofitable” (228).

Finally, in Chapter 11, Stefania Taviano’s “The Migrant Invasion: Love Speech Against Hate Speech and the Violation of Language Rights” takes into account how Italian and British politicians hate-based discourses in online newspaper articles contribute to affecting the representation of migrants’ identities and language rights. At the same time, the chapter also underlines the need for ‘love speech’ to conceptualize “migration and the world we live in” (248).

What emerges from the authors’ analyses on the different modalities of perpetrating hate speech is that – whether online or offline – discriminatory discourses may cause serious psychological effects and their ability of spreading faster and faster finds its *raison d’être* in previously established and embedded representation of peoples, cultures and societies. Moreover, as Balirano and Hughes state, the growing availability of emerging technologies (together with the instant communication provided by today’s social networks) has not simply transported discriminatory discourses in a diverse environment but “has honed the very nature of hate speech through specific forms of harassment” (v).

As a result, by accounting the most distinct social, cultural, and political contexts and investigating them from multifaceted perspectives, the volume represents, on one hand, a powerful tool to raise awareness among people around hate-based discourses and the way they are constructed – especially if contextualized and used for educational purposes – and, on the other hand, it sheds light on the need of national and supranational legislation to contrast all forms of online abuse.

Notes on Contributors

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Annalisa RAFFONE is currently adjunct professor of English Language and Linguistics at the University of Naples “L’Orientale” and the University of Campania “Luigi Vanvitelli”. She received her PhD (Innovative Industrial Doctorates) *cum laude* in *Digital Storytelling and Digital Gaming for EFL* and the title of *Doctor Europaeus* from “L’Orientale” in 2020. Her research work mainly fits the field of Digital Humanities, with a particular interest regarding English Language teaching and learning and English linguistics.

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