On the Margins of the *Manthropocene*:
Semiotic Violence against Women in Politics
as a form of Diamesic Creativity

Giuseppe Balirano

(University of Naples L'Orientale, IT)

Abstract

This paper aims to shed light on the impact of 'semiotic violence' on women in politics, emphasizing the importance of using language as a catalyst for positive social change in order to fight gender-based violence in all its manifestations. The study specifically investigates the role of the *Manthropocene* in perpetuating 'semiotic violence' against women in politics, with a specific focus on the recent international media use of sexist language when addressing Finland's first female Prime Minister, Sanna Mirella Marin. The analysis examines how gendered insults, slurs, and derogatory communication techniques are employed to undermine the political authority of the politician, thereby perpetuating discrimination and violence. Given this context, I argue that collective societal action is necessary to challenge and reject sexist attitudes and behaviours, including those facilitated through 'diamesic creativity'.

> *Across those tracks were paved streets, stores we could not enter, restaurants we could not eat in, and people we could not look directly in the face. Across those tracks was a world we could work in as maids, as janitors, as prostitutes, as long as it was in a service capacity. We could enter that world but we could not live there. We had always to return to the margin, to cross the tracks, to shacks and abandoned houses on the edge of town.*
> (bell hooks, 1984)

1. Introduction

The thorny relationship between language and gender-based violence has often had significant implications on the understanding of human relationships. If language has

the power to reflect the complexity of human life more than any other form of communicative channel, it must necessarily also play a fundamental role in redetermining gender balance by altering the way we and others perceive and interpret the world around us. As bell hooks (1984) states in the epigraph which introduces this paper, such tweaked interpretations have often been tailored with the aim of relegating women to the margins of society via the systemic and structural discursive forms of gender discrimination construed within a male-dominated language. Nowadays, women, irrespective of their social and economic status or background, still face violence when in public and private spaces; they are discriminated against, denied fundamental rights and often hindered by unfair norms, patriarchal culture and sexist language in a world ruled by men where capitalism and globalisation still commodify and objectify women. Language, in particular, is one of the most powerful means through which sexism, gender discrimination, harassment and the objectification of women are perpetrated and reproduced. A winning tool in the hands of those who seek to objectify women can undoubtedly be found in 'linguistic misogyny', or simply linguistic sexism against women, a venomous practice which serves a crucial political purpose in a world of men: the policing and undermining of women's public presence in order to hush their voice and authority (Cameron 2020: 1). Linguistic misogyny is often the result of language change, a core concept in sociolinguistics, which sees language as always characterised by variation and change, since there are various ways, across several languages, to express the same idea. Language change unavoidably leads to linguistic variation mainly, but not exclusively, in the lexicon and its usage within a given speech community, and this change often brings about social change. Diamesic variation – the unique way language change takes place when used across different media – specifically creates and very rapidly spreads new sexist tropes. Women are targeted on social networking systems (SNSs) for their gender and routinely face brutal gender-based cyberviolence that is often a life-threatening and marginalising form of violence. Diamesic

creativeness has the ability and strength to produce and circulate new beliefs regarding the construction and interpretation of the roles of men and women and their social relationships. Thus, linguistic variation enacted across SNSs may serve to promulgate negative and sexist discourses spawned by rapid diamesic change that subtly perpetuates sexist stereotypes. For despite the continuous and unceasing struggle that women have waged over the last two centuries to claim their rights, their own spaces and bodies, misogynistic hate is still widespread: diamesic creativeness is ultimately responsible for the linguistic fabrication of digital misogynist discourses, a severe form of verbal violence against women.

Against this backdrop, this paper will review a series of linguistic tools adopted and implemented by women in linguistics to challenge the *Manthropocene*[1]. Discursive devices have been crafted in the literature to help female politicians or, more generally, women in power, to forgo their longstanding marginalised position and become the new protagonists of change. Such female voices are the ones that will be reported and woven together in this paper with the objective of providing linguistic guidance for the interpretation of abusive and sexist discourses in diamesic variation. Moreover, since "feminist theorists are aware of the need to develop ideas and analysis that encompass a larger number of experiences" (hooks 1984: xvi), a critical approach to online misogyny will necessarily help triangulate and intersect core concepts in digital media studies in order to facilitate a more lucid reading which "will emerge from individuals who have knowledge of both margin and center" (ibidem).

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[1] Do we really need another term to describe toxic and hegemonic masculinity? Of course, we do not. The term *Manthropocene* is exclusively coined here not to add yet another fashionable category to the noxious or injurious manifestations of masculinity we are already familiar with, but simply to refer to that indefinite, timeless period in the history of humankind that saw hegemonic masculinity as solely responsible for our contemporary crisis. *Manthropocene* is thus not a term for removing agency from the responsibilities ascribed to man; it is rather a device in which history, culture and language intertwine in the creation of toxic masculinity to be understood as a prison. It is a life constraint and does not address women exclusively, but rather encompasses several representations of humanity, including other representations of masculinity, which resist patriarchal abuses.

In order to illustrate the way language change truly reflects the complexity of life, the *Cambridge Dictionary* recently expanded the meaning of the lemmas *woman* and *man*. A few months ago during an interview, the leader of the Labour Party, Sir Keir Starmer, appeared to have difficulty providing a definition for the term 'woman'; Sir Starmer showed considerable embarrassment, evidently fearing that he might express some form of discrimination against trans women. Fortunately, the well-known *Cambridge Dictionary* lent the leader of the Labour party a hand by offering him some lexicographic aid. The Dictionary has, indeed, just updated its entries for 'woman' defining the lemma as a noun referring to "an adult who lives and identifies as female though they may have been said to have a different sex at birth". Though problematic in some of its linguistic aspects,[2] throughout this paper, I will use this novel and more inclusive definition of the term 'woman' since it is an interesting linguistic attempt to generate further inclusivity in society. The linguistic practice of semantic re-signification, not exactly a taken-for-granted activity, seems to incessantly invite us all to rethink and reform the many patriarchal social, cultural, political and economic discourses that have always hindered the well-being, ambitions and self-determination of women and, to some extent, of some men or other gender non-conforming individuals. In this complex and oppressive conundrum, language change seems to play a crucial role in constructing discourses and setting up conceptions, prejudices, and stereotypes that, throughout history, have held back the rise of women in politics.

2. Of the *Manthropocene* and other *his*-stories

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[2] While the definition provided by the Cambridge Dictionary represents a step towards the recognition of trans women, it still seems to show some linguistic problems from an inclusive perspective. This is particularly the case with the part of the definition where the lexicographers state "though they may have been said to have a different sex at birth". The agency of the subject is here challenged by the official performative act of proclaiming someone as male or female, still underlining the institutional power attributed to the *Manthropocene*.

With the purposefully coined term *Manthropocene*, I mean to primarily address the indefinite era of hegemonic male power throughout which man stands as the protagonist of a long and still ongoing period of impoverishment and destruction of resources. As the sole perpetrator of social and gender inequity, the man also stands responsible for climate crises, biodiversity losses and mounting human waste. The *Manthropocene* upholds the dangerous principle that resurfaces and strengthens the asymmetrical superiority of men due to the institutionalisation of sex-role differences. This heinous practice has led to the crafting of misogynistic hate across numerous segments worldwide: a vitriolic form of hate that arises and spreads with language, words, phrases and discourses which, particularly in a diamesic perspective, lead to discrimination, violence and even death. The *Manthropocene* is the place where sexism and violence against women are rationalised and accepted, where women are constantly subjected to inappropriate behaviour seen as the legitimate right of men. Gender inequalities in the *Manthropocene* stem from multiple and intersecting factors, all of which must be tackled simultaneously to fight a partial, inexact and entirely male-centred representation of women. Misogynist hate enacted by the *Manthropocene* creeps through intersectional spaces, as Mary Bucholtz (1999, 2002, 2011) would put it, where previously invisible hegemonic categories, such as whiteness, class and heteronormativity, amongst others, converge and intersect with toxic and hegemonic Manthropocenic traits.

Misogynist hate appears to reinforce a suffocating power relationship of a patriarchal type, one which has served to emphasise, primarily through language, the overbearing and dominant role of the *Manthropocene*. Since violent crimes against women are also built upon and promulgated by linguistic creativity in the form of locker room banter, rape jokes, 'give us a smile', catcalling, and even mother-in-law jokes, this paper calls for intense linguistic research on the language of the *Manthropocene* supported by further investigation from a comparative perspective in

the social sciences. Indeed, the analysis of language change on SNSs could significantly contribute to expanding current knowledge about the intriguing success of misogynist hate which needs to be placed on the same level as other hate crimes such as racism, Islamophobia, antisemitism, homophobia, transphobia and ableism.

The current emergence of a common transnational policy aiming to promote inclusive language and the recognition of misogynist hate as a crime seems to be slowly subsiding due to the fact that such a debate tends to be marginalised within national boundaries. In the UK, for instance, the government has recently announced that all police forces across the country are soon to record crimes specifically motivated by sex or gender, thus marking misogyny as a hate crime[3]. In this respect, the EU intends to amend one of its founding texts to fight violence against women[4] more forcefully by criminalising rape, female genital mutilation, cyber violence, non-consensual sharing of intimate images on the internet, cyber stalking, cyber harassment, and cyber incitement to violence or hatred. Yet, if we look at the Italian situation, where criminal law only punishes crimes and hate speech based on nationality, ethnicity or religion (the so-called Mancino Bill), other discriminatory grounds related to sexual orientation, gender identity and disabilities are not fully disciplined. Even if some unfortunate attempts to integrate the Mancino Bill have recently failed to be granted recognition by the Italian government[5], the concept of 'hate crime' cannot be ignored any longer. To this end, on January 1, 2021, an update to the guidelines regulating the duties of journalists came into force with the aim of

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[3] The announcement regarding this initiative was reported in *The Guardian* and can be found online at https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/17/pmqs-sarah-everard-killing-must-be-a-turning-point-says-starmer (last accessed: January 5, 2023).

[4] The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is working in this direction, providing research, data, and good practices in order to make gender equality a reality in the EU and beyond. More information on the EIGE initiatives can be found online at https://eige.europa.eu/ (last accessed: January 5, 2023).

[5] See for instance the disgraceful handling of the Zan law.

encouraging at least a non-sexist use of the Italian language in newspaper articles[6]. The new guidelines strongly emphasise respect for gender differences, especially in those cases of misogyny that often characterise the numerous *Manthropocene* narratives of violence, abuse, discrimination and feminicide. Nevertheless, while reading the Italian press, we may still happen across misogynistic headlines such as those reported by Simona Rossitto in the daily newspaper of the Italian economy *Sole 24 Ore.* In her article craftily entitled "Titoli a effetto e racconti di parte: le ferite dei media alle donne vittime di violenza"[7], the journalist reports the following sexist headline titles:

1. *È stato colto da un raptus senza fine dopo l'ennesimo litigio*
   (trans.: He was seized by an endless rapture after yet another quarrel)

2. *Il dramma di un padre separato*
   (trans.: The drama of a separated father)

3. *Lui lavorava, lei stava dalla mattina alla sera al telefonino*
   (trans.: He went out to work; she spent her days on the phone)

4. *L'ho uccisa per gelosia*
   (trans.: I killed her out of jealousy)

Language is clearly not innocent here; it creates spaces of signification in which, through simple discursive expedients, the victim becomes the perpetrator. The language of the *Manthropocene*, in fact, includes innumerable forms of discrimination and bias aiming to make the female subject marginal or even invisible so as to mark the prevaricating role of men in every social, cultural, economic and occupational sphere. Moreover, as the media coverage of crimes against women has increased along with the crime rate, the coverage of violence against women tends to be unnecessarily

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[6] The document is available online at https://www.odg.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/TESTO-UNICO-DEI-DOVERI-DEL-GIORNALISTA_1%C2%B0-gennaio-2021.pdf (last accessed: January 5, 2023).

[7] Trans.: "Tabloid-like headlines and biased narratives: how the media wounds women who are victims of violence". The article is available online at https://alleyoop.ilsole24ore.com/2021/03/03/titoli-effetto-racconti-parte-le-ferite-dei-media-alle-donne-vittime-violenza/?uuid=106_IjABTDyT (last accessed: January 5, 2023).

realistic and often indulges in victim blaming. News reports focus more on the victims' activities (e.g., "she was on the phone") than on the male criminal, thereby reinforcing common biases and stereotypes against women. It has posited that language shapes thought, a consequent assumption would be to think that sexist language and linguistic stereotypes mould a sexist mind and worldview, and ultimately result in sexist behaviour. This is because language not only reflects but also reinforces cultural beliefs and social norms. Therefore, sexist language can perpetuate and reinforce sexist attitudes and behaviours. For example, the use of derogatory terms to describe women, such as 'bitch' or 'slut', will reinforce negative stereotypes about women and contribute to the devaluation and objectification of women. Similarly, the use of gendered language that reinforces traditional gender roles, such as 'man up' or 'be a real man', can contribute to the idea that men are supposed to be tough and unemotional, while women are supposed to be nurturing and submissive.

However, although *Manthropocene*-made biases are not always fully intentional, an ability to recognise them can empower news readers to filter misogynist discourses out of their contexts while thwarting a negative language change. Word connotations alone, for instance, may influence readers' interpretation of events and issues and lead them towards stereotyping practices (e.g., "he was seized by an endless rapture"). Such negative influence is often found in the coverage of political issues with the aim to shape the audience's initial perceptions, which may in turn influence political decisions (Hamborg *et al.*, 2018) and, as a result, halt the equality process.

3. Sexist language: from linguistic sexism to misogynist hate speech

Linguistic sexism was a concept that originated in the US in the 1960s and 1970s and then spread into feminist knowledge and theory around the world. Feminist scholars and linguists such as Robin Lakoff (1975) and, later, Deborah Tannen (1990) began to study language use and gender, focusing on how linguistic patterns and structures

reflected and reinforced gender-based power relations. They identified a range of linguistic practices that contributed to the marginalisation of women, such as the use of gendered pronouns, the association of certain words with gendered traits and behaviours, and the use of sexist language and slurs. The concept of linguistic sexism quickly spread beyond the United States and became a key focus of feminist knowledge and theory around the world. Feminist linguistics and language studies have since developed as a field of study aiming to understand and challenge gender-based discrimination in language use. Today, the study of linguistic sexism continues to be an important area of research and activism for feminists and other advocates of gender equality, as language remains a powerful tool for the perpetuating or challenging of gender-based inequalities.

One of the key tropes in linguistic sexism was the so-called *Deficit Model*, proposed by the linguist Robin Lakoff in *Language and Woman's Place* in 1975 (see also Lakoff 1973). Lakoff asserted that female subordination and the apparent differences between men and women could be revealed either in the way women speak, or rather how they are taught to speak, or in the way men talk *about* and *to* women; the author's contribution is still valuable today, although it has been considered somewhat inaccurate and questionable due to the fact that some of Lakoff's observations based on prejudices appear to target Lakoff herself as a victim.[8]

In 1990's *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, Deborah Tannen explored the differences in communication styles between men and women and how these differences can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts. She also discusses the ways in which language can reflect and reinforce gender roles and

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[8] In the Introduction to her book, Lakoff states the following: "[t]he data on which I am basing my claims have been gathered mainly by introspection […]. [It] is the educated, white, middle-class group that the writer of this book identifies with less worthy of study than any other?" (Lakoff 1972: 40). The author seems to forget that intuition, if left unchecked, might well reproduce specific biases linked to the worldviews of the individual. Corpus-based analyses have allowed for a better understanding of the language of men and women, thus keeping ~~given~~ preconceptions at bay. An interesting example of this is the paper by Brezina and Meyerhoff (2014).

stereotypes in social situations. For example, women may be expected to use language that is more tentative or deferential in order to avoid appearing too aggressive or confrontational, while men may be expected to use language that is more assertive and direct. Tannen's work on linguistic sexism underscores the importance of paying attention to the ways in which sexist language can perpetuate gender stereotypes and inequalities.

One of the most interesting but least known definitions of linguistic sexism was provided by the American sociolinguist Tamara Valentine (2004: 142) who in her *Language and Prejudice* clearly states that "[s]exism relates to the use of words that arbitrarily assign roles or characteristics to people on the basis of sex or gender". Valentine's definition emphasises the arbitrary nature of such assignments, suggesting that they are not based on any inherent differences between men and women, but rather on social and cultural norms and expectations. This definition also highlights the ways in which linguistic sexism can perpetuate gender inequalities by reinforcing traditional gender roles and limiting opportunities for individuals based on their sex or gender. Overall, Valentine's definition offers a useful framework for understanding the ways in which language can be used to perpetuate sexism and gender inequalities, and for developing strategies to promote more inclusive and equitable language use.

Language determines who we are, what we can do or say, what represents us or not, depending on the male/female label society assigns us, consequently linguistic variation on SNSs may help boost reform and change. Hellinger and Bußmann (2001:19) maintain that linguistic reform is not just a matter of changing certain terms in favour of 'gender-fair terminology', the real way to bring about any kind of reform should be a revolution in the relationship between sexes:

> Gender-related language reform is a reaction to changes in the relationships between women and men, which have caused overt conflicts on the level of language comprehension and production. Reformed usage symbolises the dissonance between traditional prescriptions such as the use of masculine/male generics and innovative alternatives. In most cases it explicitly articulates its political foundation by emphasising

that equal treatment of women and men must also be realised on the level of communication.

Thus, although the use of non-sexist language may be considered the true signal of a reforming and changing behaviour, it might seem overly ambitious and feminist campaigners have been accused of trying to force individuals to change their language use by openly questioning individual freedom of speech. A useful clarification to this slippery concept comes from Italian sociolinguist Vera Gheno (Sulis and Gheno 2022) who aptly defines 'linguistic sexism' as:

> […] the linguistic manifestation of the mentality, social behaviours, cultural judgements, and prejudices tinged with, or vitiated by, sexism. Languages cannot be considered intrinsically sexist, although they tend to reflect the androcentric cultures that they stemmed from. What can be sexist is the use we make of a language: sexism does not lie in linguistic structures and mechanisms, but in our choices as speakers. Italian, like other languages, contains all the linguistic tools necessary for a non-sexist use, at least while sticking to the binary view of gender; and where there are no such solutions, it is possible that over time they will be found. After all, the languages we speak vary according to our needs as speakers.

Linguistic sexism, seen as a way of stereotyping women based on the binary, asymmetrical sexual divide, has often been analysed in relation to another important discursive construct, which is prejudice (see among others: Goddard and Patterson, 2000; Coates, 2004). Prejudice underlies the choices we make when we speak, discuss, and comment. An inherent resource of prejudiced language is the ability to ignore or exclude, but also to trivialise with the aim of subjugating the Other.

Subordination and trivialisation are two key concepts for the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). These notions reinforce the subordination of women when using misogynistic discourses. Trivialisation, in particular, refers to the way in which a specific use of language makes certain concepts invisible, mainly because they are deemed to be unimportant, and their meanings are trivialised; this can be taken as an emblematic instantiation of what happens when language stumbles upon women.

When analysing gender asymmetry from a discursive semiotic perspective, one of the most significant issues remains the low representation of powerful women in the media. The visibility offered to women is, in fact, limited: women in politics, for instance, must deal with a communication system in which male subjects are always privileged and granted centre stage, women are rarely given the room they need to make themselves known, to speak, to share ideas. The effects of exclusion and restrictions on individual initiatives emerging from sexist language are significantly negative for the development of well-being.

Lakoff also reminds us that women are confronted with the old banal belief that men are more comfortable with power than women, and that it is right and natural for men to hold power while it would be odd if power were entrusted to women, since politics remains an activity that the *Manthropocene* characterises as unfeminine and, therefore, dangerous for women. The idea that men were not supposed to cry or express sadness and women were not allowed to express anger has shaped the notion that the expression of grief is an expression of powerlessness, whereas that of anger is one of power. This intensifies male power and female powerlessness, passing on this view even (or especially) into an environment such as the academic or the political one. If this mechanism allows gender stereotypes to keep women out of public and political life, the media appear to openly reserve more space for narratives about the private and domestic sphere of the women in power.

In *Language and Sexism* (2008), sociolinguist Sarah Mills examines the ways in which language is used to perpetuate sexism and gender inequality in society. She analyses the role of language in reinforcing gender roles and stereotypes, and how it can limit women's opportunities and experiences. Mills also discusses the ways in which language can be used to challenge sexism and promote gender equality. Overall, *Language and Sexism* offers a critical analysis of the relationship between language and gender and provides insights into how language can be used to create a more inclusive and equitable society. Mills states that female political characters are

most often depicted via their relationship with others, especially as mothers, daughters, or wives. Powerful women are often reduced to their private role by the media; they are nameless, and they are not narrated for their abilities or positions, they are characters that can only be identified through their relationships with others.

One of the recurring interpersonal meta-functional ploys in the media representation of women in politics is built around the figure of the neglected, resigned husband; other relations are implemented around specific places such as the kitchen – a place where women are often stereotypically consigned – as observed by Esposito and Zollo (2021) when analysing 35,000 sexist tweets addressing the MP Jess Phillips:

> Send her back to kitchen to make sandwiches for her long-suffering husband ;)
>
> Miss you have the right to get in the kitchen and cook me some dinner and after that you can drive your ass down to the hospital and have that baby[9]

Sarah Mills (2008) points out that women tend to be described for their appearance in the media, while the description of men revolves more around their personalities. The increased focus on the personal sphere emphasises the non-political aspects of women in politics, which could clearly influence how voters evaluate them as political actors. Mills states that linguistic sexism is part of 'hate speech' since sexist language is not "an individual expression" [but] "a means for a dominant group to coalesce as a group" [against the minority]. Therefore, linguistic sexism and violence against women should be treated by the legal system in the same way as other equally brutal crimes.

4. Semiotic violence against women

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[9] The examples provided here are taken from Esposito and Zollo (2021: 62).

The discursive macro category called "violence against women in politics", identified by political scientist Mona Lena Krook (2019), includes four types of violence addressing women in politics: physical, sexual, psychological violence (already enumerated in 1993 in the UN *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*), and economic violence (mentioned in the 2011 Council of Europe Convention on *Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence*). Data from around the world suggest that these four types of violence do not exhaust the spectrum of abusive acts perpetrated against women in the public sphere and even more so in the political sphere. Krook (2020: 187), at this point, feels the need to theorise a fifth type of violence against women: 'semiotic violence'.

Semiotic violence is recognisable as a form of oppression against women perpetrated through the deployment of several communication resources to harm, discipline and subjugate women to male power. A phenomenon firmly rooted in structural, cultural, and symbolic violence against women, Krook (2019; 2020; 2022) argues that 'semiotic violence' is not only a component of a broader range of violent actions, but it typifies its most pervasive, though invisible and underestimated practice. She also contends that 'semiotic violence' is deeply rooted in structural, cultural, and symbolic violence against women, and is a pervasive and underestimated practice which, through the use of gendered imagery and symbols that reinforce traditional gender roles and expectations, limits women's opportunities and experiences while contributing to a culture that devalues women. In the political sphere, semiotic violence can be used as a tool to deny women's full and equal right to participate in politics, undermining both democracy and gender equality. For example, semiotic violence can take the form of sexist language and stereotypes that undermine women's credibility and authority, or the use of gendered imagery and symbols that reinforce traditional gender roles and expectations. To combat 'semiotic violence', Krook points to a need for increased awareness and education about the ways in which language and symbols can be used to perpetuate gender inequality, as

well as the need for concrete measures such as policies and laws that protect women's rights and promote gender equality in politics and society. In the political sphere, semiotic violence serves as a tool to deny women's full and equal right to participate in politics, undermining both democracy and gender equality. The political scientist hypothesises two types of semiotic violence against women: that which renders women in politics invisible, struggling to eradicate the female presence in the public sphere symbolically; and, that which renders women incapable by "emphasising 'role incongruity' between being a woman and being a leader" (Krook 2020, 187). The concept was further developed by Eleonora Esposito (2022: 2) who suitably classifies two other forms of digital visual misogyny: "image manipulation" and "false identity attribution". These discursive ploys are characterized by the fabrication and distribution of "sexually graphic, digitally altered or misattributed images" of women in politics.

4.1 The Finnish 'party gate': A case study of semiotic violence

This section will offer different ways of instantiating the concept of digital semiotic violence against women in politics by briefly analysing a recent case of misogyny involving the first female Prime Minister of Finland, one of the most inclusive European countries. Prime Minister Sanna Mirella Marin, at the age of 34, has become a role model for the many young European women who would like to enter the world of politics and an example of how young women are indispensable in today's political landscape. However, despite her prominent role, Marin too has had to and continues to struggle against prejudices, stereotypes, and misogynist views typical of the *Manthropocene* which manifests itself through the numerous criticisms and judgments reserved for the Prime Minister's harmless behaviour and attitudes. Such a vitriolic practices plainly demonstrate that women in politics have never stopped experiencing the *Manthropocene* in all its many forms.

The "party gate" case under scrutiny here concerns a recent video which features the Finnish Prime Minister participating in a private party and having fun with her friends and other guests. The media around the world have devoted much space to this affair; in particular, the examination of the party gate as a case study of semiotic violence involves the British press and a series of articles that appeared in the online version of *The Daily Mail*, called *MailOnline*, the second largest circulated daily newspaper in Great Britain in its digital version. The first article examined, dated August 19, 2022, reports the following headline[10]:

1. Finland's Sanna Marin fights for her right to party: Married leader, 36, says 'nothing inappropriate' happens in leaked video of her dancing intimately with pop star at 4am but submits to a drug test as she defends wild night out

The article tells the well-publicised story imbued with misogynistic discourses, making good use of apparently inoffensive linguistic tools which upon closer examination, can be seen to stand as vitriolic instruments for the propagation of 'semiotic violence'. According to the *MailOnline*, Sanna Marin "fights for her right to party". The use of the war metaphor introduced by the verb *to fight* in the newspaper headline is an interesting and powerful semiotic tool which leads the readers to believe that throwing or going to a party is not an acceptable condition for a female politician who should perhaps be fighting for civil rights rather than for her private right to enjoy herself; it follows that a woman must 'fight' in order to obtain what is nothing more than personal freedom, a need common to all individuals regardless of their roles or gender. The *MailOnline* points out that Marin is a 'married leader'. As in any misogynistic narrative, Marin's marital status cannot remain unmentioned. Stressing that Sanna Marin is married in a situation where she is photographed and filmed

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[10] The article is available online at https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11127073/New-Sanna-Marin-video-leaks-showing-married-Finnish-PM-dancing-mystery-man.html (last accessed: January 5, 2023).

having fun and dancing with other people semiotically underlines the 'immoral' character of the action. Marin 'said' that nothing inappropriate had happened, but her word stands against that of others (including the reader's). By reporting Marin's exact words in inverted commas, one is left to assume that there is also the possibility that something inappropriate did in fact happen; insinuating this doubt might lead the reader to deem Marin a liar. In this cunningly crafted title, semiotic violence is also construed via adverbs, callous linguistic tools that produce a distorted and sexist narrative; note, for instance, the use of 'intimately'. Marin danced 'intimately' until four in the morning with a man who was not her husband. Her right to party, however, entails consequences and the *MailOnline* points this out in no uncertain terms, highlighting the fact that, although Marin also had to undergo a drug test, she continues to defend her 'wild night' out.

Another important reference within the interpersonal meta-function structure concerns the leader's relationship with other social actors not involved in this specific event: Sanna Marin is, in fact, also the mother of a girl.

5. Married mother-of-one said her only regret is that videos she thought were private had leaked to the public

6. The mother-of-one was first elected to the City Council of Tampere in 2012

7. When she is not working or out with friends, Marin has motherly duties to attend to with her daughter Emma

The article constantly emphasises Sanna Marin's role as a mother, reiterating not only that the Finnish leader has a daughter, but also that when she forgoes private leisure, her 'duties' as a mother await her. This is certainly one of the aspects that the media repeat the most in their narratives steeped in hatred and semiotic violence. The journalist also informs us about Marin's ability to reconcile her rise to success with her pregnancy and how she made this aspect of her life public:

8. During her rise to success in the political field she charted her pregnancy journey on her Instagram page, sharing selfies of her baby bump and even a candid breastfeeding shot.

The narrative about the role of a mother is inevitably followed by a detailed description of the first minister's physical appearance.   Further on, we read:

9. The mother-of-one wore a white dress with pink embroidery in an Aztec-style as she waved rainbow flags and walked through the streets of Helsinki.

If we read this sentence out of its context, we would not be able to understand who is being talked about since Marin is not referred to by her full name, but she is simply 'the-mother-of-one'. Moreover, the reference to the rainbow flag is also interesting as it refers to the semiotics of dissolution related to being close to certain political matters (i.e., the LGBTIQ+ rainbow flag). Finally, the phrase 'through the streets of Helsinki' also becomes a peculiar element in the hate narrative: a public space becomes an open manifestation of debauchery.

The title of the second article reads[11]:

10. EXCLUSIVE: Finland's party-loving PM Sanna Marin is forced to apologise after two female pals were pictured TOPLESS and kissing each other in her official residence.

Again, the use of verbs and adjectives is emblematic. The term 'party-loving' linked to the name and role of the Prime Minister is intended to deprecate Marin's professionalism and to emphasise her libertine and 'over-the-top' personality. Sanna Marin is also 'forced to apologise': she must apologise for what she has done, for having enjoyed herself; it is her moral obligation to apologise for photos and videos that have been published by others without her consent. This is followed by a description of the behaviour of Marin's friends who were 'topless' – written in capitals,

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[11] The article is available online at https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11138083/Finnish-PM-forced-apologise-female-pals-seen-TOPLESS-kissing-official-residence.html (last accessed: January 5, 2023).

needless to say, to visually attract the readers' attention —this detail relegates women to an erotic and sexual sphere that may attract a discrete male readership while upsetting that audience of bigoted readers who, most likely, will then turn to fabricating macho discourses on social media.

This article re-brands the role of mother, the significance of marital status, provides a detailed description of Sanna Marin's physical appearance, and constantly emphasises the amoral character of her act. The emphasis operates through the use of clickbait adjectives such as 'raunchy video', 'raunchy picture' and again 'cheeky image'. But also, through the addition of elements that are totally superfluous to the narrative and only serve to bring us back to the idea of an unchaste context full of sexual innuendo. An example of this is the description of the drawing room that "features a collection of erotic portraits of naked women on the walls". The article goes on to remind us of the relationship between her gender and professional roles and her questionable actions incompatible with her duties as mother, wife and politician by stating that "Ms Marin was said to have danced with three different men and then sat in the laps of two male companions" or that "she still goes clubbing".

What is being called into question throughout the article are precisely the abilities, intelligence and skills of the Prime Minister herself. Such misogynistic discourse is a clear example of semiotic violence in support of the stereotype that precludes women from significant political positions.

Women in power are perceived as a threat, a sort of incomprehensible danger. The media portrays women politicians as enigmatic, unpredictable, and often brash. Through a cleverly constructed apparatus of violence, the *MailOnline* has been able to create a narrative of amoral, libertine, lying, untrustworthy women and politicians who do not submit to the ideal of womanhood that the *Manthropocene* has progressively forged over time by means of diamesic creativity.

Conclusions

This paper, using critical perspectives exclusively from feminist scholars, has explored the role of the *Manthropocene* in perpetuating and reinforcing semiotic violence against women in politics. The study, by presenting a literary review of sexist language, has shown that semiotic gender-based violence can be used as a tool of power and domination, with women in politics often being subjected to violence by means of gendered insults, slurs, negative symbols and other forms of derogatory communication. This practice serves to devalue the contributions of female politicians, to undermine their authority, and to perpetuate gender-based discrimination and violence as has been illustrated in the case of the Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin.

Overall, this study has highlighted the important role that language plays in shaping the experiences of women in politics, both in terms of perpetuating violence and in offering opportunities for resistance and empowerment. By recognising the power of language and the ways in which it can be used to challenge and transform gendered power structures, one can work towards creating more inclusive and equitable political environments for women. This requires a continued commitment to challenging gender-based violence in all its forms, and to promoting the use of language as a tool for positive social change. Addressing and eradicating gender-based violence requires a multifaceted approach that addresses the underlying societal attitudes, cultural norms, and power dynamics that propagate violence. It requires education, awareness-raising, policy and legal reforms, and active efforts to promote gender equality and empower women in all aspects of society. However, since despite the progress made in the fight for gender equality, misogyny and discrimination against women continue to be pervasive in many societies, it is the role of digital platforms together with educational institutions to provide a new avenue for the prevention against the proliferation of misogynistic discourses and hate speech. This practice requires a collective effort by all members of society to challenge and reject sexist attitudes and behaviours, including the more invisible ones perpetrated through

the diamesic creativeness of the *Mantropocene* across digital platforms. As bell hooks'
initial quote reminds us, we must work to break down the barriers that divide us and
create a more equitable and just society for all.

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Bio-bibliographical note

Giuseppe Balirano, PhD in English Linguistics, is Professor of English linguistics at the University of Naples *L'Orientale*, he is the current Director of the University Language Centre. His research interests and publications lie in the fields of multimodal critical discourse studies, hate speech discourses, humour, masculinity studies, the discursive representation of organised crime, audio-visual translation and queer cinema. He is the Director of the *I-LanD*, the Italian inter-university research centre for the linguistic investigation of identity and diversity in discourse and P.I. of the Monitoring group on hate speech online at UNIOR. He is the *BeTwiXt* series director, publishing original monographs in the field of linguistics and communication studies. His most recent publications include: *Re-Defining Gender, Sexuality, and Discourse in the Global Rise of Right-Wing Extremism* (2021, co-edited with R. Borba); *Homing in on Hate: Critical Discourse Studies of Hate Speech, Discrimination and Inequality in the Digital Age* (2020, co-edited with B. Hughes); *Food Across Cultures: Linguistic Insights in Transcultural Tastes* (2019, co-edited with S. Guzzo); *Miss Man: Languaging the Gendered Body* (2018, co-edited with O. Palusci); *Self-Narratives in Organizations: Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Experiences* (2018, co-edited with P. Valerio and L.M. Sicca); *Queering Masculinities in Language and Culture* (2018, co-edited with P. Baker); Gardaí *& Badfellas: The Discursive Construction of Organised Crime in the Irish Media* (2017); *Humosexually Speaking: Laughter and the Intersections of Gender* (2016, co-edited with D. Chiaro); *Languaging Diversity* (2015, co-edited with M.C. Nisco); and *Masculinity and Representation: A Multimodal Critical Approach to Male Identity Constructions* (2014).

E-mail address: gbalirano@gmail.com