

## POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GENDER DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: ON THE POPULIST FEATURES OF METAPHOR USE

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This study aims to show how different political leaders combine metaphor use with the populist sentiment in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic. To analyse the populist nature of the recurrent metaphor use, 17 leaders' national lockdown speeches from different countries were collected and analysed within the theoretical framework of critical metaphor studies and frame semantics. Procedurally, metaphors in the collected speeches were identified by applying Pragglejaz Group's MIP (2007) and coded into thematic categories via NVivo 12.0. Overall, four thematic codes (470 metaphorical expressions) were established, and their content analysis has demonstrated specific differences in the leadership style with regard to populism. It has been clarified that the male political leaders tend to prioritise the arousal of negative emotions discursively expressed through the antagonism between the collective Self and the collective Other (the virus), and a heightened sense of unpredictable (economic) future. By contrast, the female political leaders overwhelmingly focused on their affinity with the collective Self in the context of social accountability and mutual trust.

**Keywords:** political discourse, metaphor, populism, lockdown speeches, COVID-19 pandemic, gender

## ПОЛИТИЧКОТО ЛИДЕРСТВО И ПОЛОТ ЗА ВРЕМЕ НА ПАНДЕМИЈАТА НА КОВИД-19: ПОПУЛИСТИЧКИТЕ ОДЛИКИ НА МЕТАФОРИТЕ

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Ова истражување има цел да покаже како различните политички лидери ја комбинираат употребата на метафорите со популистичкиот сентимент во нивниот однос кон пандемијата на КОВИД-19. За да се анализира популистичката природа на повторливата употреба на метафорите, беа собрани и анализирани говори на 17 политички лидери од различни земји, во кои најавуваат воведување карантин, во рамките на теоријата за критички проучувања на метафората и на семантичките рамки. Процедурално, првин беа идентификувани метафорите во собраните говори со употреба на процедурата за идентификување метафори (ПИМ) на Праглџез груп (2007) и потоа беа кодирани во тематски категории со NVivo 12.0. Во целина, беа утврдени четири тематски групи (470 метафорични изрази), а содржинската анализа покажа специфични разлики во стилот на лидерите во однос на популизмот. Она што произлезе од истражувањето е дека машките политички лидери го фаворизираат подигањето на негативните емоции дискурзивно изразени преку антагонизмот меѓу колективното „јас“ и „другиот“ (вирусот), и зголеменото чувство за непредвидливата (економска) иднина. Од друга страна, пак, женските политички лидери премногу се фокусираат на својот афинитет за колективното „јас“ во контекст на општествената одговорност и на споделената доверба.

**Клучни зборови:** политички дискурс, метафора, популизам, говори за воведување карантин, пандемија на КОВИД-19, пол

## 1 Introduction

In discourse studies, the analysis of the intricate relationship of power and subjectivity has been particularly emphasized (Angermüller et al. 2014; Fairclough 2013). The complex nature of this relationship is best illustrated by the analysis of political discourse practices and their ideological restructurings (Fairclough 2001). In Fairclough's (2013) view of discourse, meaning is a product of social practice and is dependent on the social context, while meaning in political discourse is particularly complemented by an expression of power relations, conflict and dominance (Wilson 2015). Despite the fact that there are numerous discourse mechanisms of how power relations can be manifested, conceptual metaphor has been particularly acknowledged for activation of the unconscious meaning (Lakoff 2012) and emotionally appeal to the system of shared values and beliefs (Charteris-Black 2017; Musolff 2016; Breeze 2020).

The importance of the ideological nature of metaphor has been emphasized within the cognitive studies of metaphor in critical discourse studies (Chilton 2004; Charteris-Black 2011). The power of metaphor lies within its capacity to operate at the levels of language, ideology and power in political discourse (Breeze 2020; Musolff 2016 2021). As a cognitive mechanism (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999; Lakoff 2012), metaphor can shape, reinforce, remodel various public perceptions, when used in specific social and political contexts. In political discourse, the ideological power of metaphor (Musolff 2016; Breeze 2020) is identified in its narrative structure that offers evaluation and always expresses emotions, also known as the persuasive power of metaphor (Charteris-Black 2011).

The current study focuses on the populist features of gender-related metaphor use in the first national lockdown addresses delivered by seventeen political leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. This genre of political discourse has been purposefully chosen for its binary ideological nature, namely political leaders' attempt 1) to unite the nation in the face of the pandemic, and 2) to legitimise their national public health strategy curtailing certain individual freedoms of movement and choice. To analyse the ideological nature of political metaphor, it has been aimed to identify, evaluate and compare populist features of metaphor use between male and female political leaders.

As based on the psychological insights and the ongoing research about the discursive nature of populism (Mudde 2016, Macaulay 2019, Palaver 2019), it has been hypothesized that political leaders will use metaphorically expressed populist political symbols (Laclau 2005) aimed to create a sense of belonging and national unity in the time of crisis. To test this hypothesis, the following research questions have been raised: (1) What are the populist features of metaphor use in the collected data sample? (2) What are the gender-related aspects of the metaphorical production of populism in the delivered national lockdown speeches?

To address these issues, the paper is structured in the following way. In the rest of this paper some of the literature on the nature of populism and political metaphor during the COVID-19 pandemic is outlined. Then data and methods are introduced, and the most recurrent types of populism metaphor use by male and female political

leaders are overviewed. Finally, the ideological nature of populist metaphor use is reflected on.

## 2 Populism and Metaphor

Despite the fact that populism remains a contested concept, its analysis in political discourse has received close attention in both social sciences and humanities. It has been established that populism can be realised through the narrative construal of the ‘people’ (Mudde 2016) as an “undivided whole” (Macaulay 2019: 6), politicians’ leadership style and their ideological positioning to the collective identity, and antagonism of the collective ‘Self’ to the collective ‘Other’ (Wodak 2015; Palaver 2019). The concept of populism is viewed here as a discursive representation of a thin-centred ideology (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2018) that is centred on the topics of popular sovereignty, pure people, corrupt elite, and dangerous others (Engesser et al. 2017) with different contextual targeting.

Ideological antagonism has become a noticeable trend in public and political discourse during the migration crisis in 2015, with politicians spreading the ideas of Euroscepticism and populism and raising the sentiment of unpredictable, uncertain and fearful changes (Wodak 2021). The Eurosceptic and nationalist attitudes are deeper entrenched with Donald Trump becoming the U.S. president and the Brexit referendum in 2016 (Inglehart & Norris 2016).

In populist discourse, political leaders’ narrative for the collective Self is generally constructed around the concepts of the “native people” (Mudde 2016), “national pride”, “sacred past”, “nostalgia for the glorious past” (Mudde 2016; Pető 2017; Elçi 2022). By contrast, the collective ‘Other’ is given a role of ‘invaders’ or ‘enemies’ challenging and bringing chaos to the ‘established social order’ (Mudde 2016, Wodak 2015; 2021). Such populist attempts by political leaders are accompanied by the arousal of negative emotions that stimulate social division and polarisation.

As based on the above studies of populist features in political leaders’ narrative, the following four concepts were taken into account while analysing the identified metaphorical expressions, namely (1) collective identity of the ‘Self’ (Wodak 2015, Palaver 2019), (2) collective identity of the ‘Other’ (Wodak 2015; Palaver 2019), (3) antagonism (Macaulay 2019; Mude 2016; Mudde & Kaltwasser 2018) and (4) uncertainty (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2018). The construal of these concepts is identified through the ideological underpinnings of the linguistic metaphorical expressions derived from the representative source domains.

## 3 Political Metaphor during the COVID-19 Pandemic

In this study, political metaphor is viewed as a linguistically realised cognitive mechanism that, due to its ideological function, results in high level of persuasiveness (Charteris-Black 2011, Musolff 2021). The ideological effects of metaphor use are reflected in the most recurrent metaphorical linguistic patterns (Goatly 2007) that are driven by specific conceptualisations (i.e., source domains of the conceptual metaphor). In addition to their ideological nature, the persuasiveness of

metaphors in political discourse is explained by their created sense of familiarity and emotional appeal (Mio 1997). In most cases, political leaders' use metaphors to legitimise their stance (Tyler 2006) and raise their credibility in the public eye.

The metaphorical construal of the COVID-19 pandemic in political discourse is mostly recognized for its military narrative. The study of the WAR political metaphor has pointed out to such ideological functions as national mobilisation against a common threat and the maintenance of collective morale (Seixas 2020). The military narrative evoked by the WAR metaphor has allowed political leaders to legitimise the national lockdown measures in the time of public health crisis at the expense of individual losses (Bhaumik et al. 2020). Despite its legitimisation narrative, the WAR metaphor has been also viewed as more controversial and counter-productive in political discourse (Semino 2021, Panzeri et al. 2021, Wicke & Bolognesi 2020).

In addition to the military framing, public political discourse has been discursively enacted by spatial metaphors. The ideological use of the CONTAINMENT, MOVEMENT IN SPACE, CENTRE/PERIPHERY metaphors has been linked to the psychological phase of denial of how critical to public health the current situation is (Kremer 2020). According to Charteris-Black (2021), the metaphor of Containers As Bounded Spaces has become a symbol of the COVID-19 pandemic, representing government attempts to literally create spatial separation with its metaphorical extension to social relationships. At the same time, the CONTAINER metaphor, can be ideologically positive, when people perceive an idea of containment within the spatial bounds of their own home as integral and self-reliant to their own being (Craig 2020).

Despite certain positive entrenchment by the WAR and CONTAINMENT metaphors, the militarised perceptive to the pandemic of 2020 has contributed to ideological polarisation within societies worldwide. The current study will focus on the prevalent metaphor use by male and female political leaders in their first national lockdown speeches, with the main aim to identify gender-specific characteristics of the populist sentiment. As indicated above, the populist sentiment is expressed through the following concepts of 1) the collective 'Self', 2) the collective 'Other', 3) antagonism, and 4) uncertainty.

#### **4 Research Procedure**

Seventeen political leaders were selected for this study: eleven male and six female for the purposes of comparison. The sample was designed to include as many political leaders as possible, representing different countries and different political regimes. All of the selected leaders delivered their first national addresses to announce a national lockdown during the pandemic in 2020 (February-April). More specific detail about the collected data sample is provided in the chronological order below.

**Table 1.** Research data

Nr	Speaker	Timeline	Word count
1	CN President <b>Xi Jinping</b>	February 3, 2020	4625
2	US President <b>Donald Trump</b>	March 11, 2020	1296
3	AU Prime Minister <b>Scott Morrison</b>	March 12, 2020	612
4	LT President <b>Gitanas Nausėda</b>	March 15, 2020	416
5	CA Prime Minister <b>Justin Trudeau</b>	March 16, 2020	1204
6	AR President <b>Alberto Fernández</b>	March 19, 2020	1732
7	GR Chancellor <b>Angela Merkel</b>	March 19, 2020	1746
8	SE Prime Minister <b>Stefan Löfven</b>	March 22, 2020	740
9	UK Prime Minister <b>Boris Johnson</b>	March 23, 2020	898
10	NZ Prime Minister <b>Jacinda Ardern</b>	March 23, 2020	4655
11	SC Prime Minister <b>Nicola Sturgeon</b>	March 23, 2020	1059
12	IN Prime Minister <b>Narendra Modi</b>	March 24, 2020	1866
13	RU President <b>Vladimir Putin</b>	March 25, 2020	2087
14	EU President <b>Ursula von der Leyen</b>	March 26, 2020	2285
15	UKR President <b>Volodymyr Zelenskyy</b>	April 1, 2020	999
16	<i>Queen Elizabeth II</i>	April 5, 2020	525
17	FI Prime Minister <b>Sanna Marin</b>	April 29, 2020	1590
			<b>Total 28, 335</b>

The national lockdown speeches were delivered in the time period of three months (February-April) in 2020 by sixteen political leaders representing such countries as the US (President Donald Trump), the Russian Federation (President Vladimir Putin), Lithuania (President Gitanas Nausėda), the UK (Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Queen Elizabeth), China (President Xi Jinping), India (Prime Minister Narendra Modi), Sweden (Prime Minister Stefan Löfven), Ukraine (President Volodymyr Zelenskyy), Canada (Prime Minister Justin Trudeau), Australia (Prime Minister Scott Morrison), Argentina (President Alberto Fernández), the EU (President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen), New Zealand (Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern), Finland (Prime Minister Sanna Marin), Scotland (Prime Minister Nicola Sturgeon), and Germany (Chancellor Angela Merkel). Due to the lower number of the speeches by the female leaders, the national address by the Queen Elizabeth II was also added to the list. Besides, the speech by the Queen Elizabeth II was delivered during the period of time (i.e., April 5, 2020), when most of the first lockdown speeches were announced by the national leaders, i.e., the period of three months from February to April in 2020.

The sample was collected by following two main criteria: (1) genre – all the speeches are the first national lockdown addresses; (2) time span – all the speeches were delivered during the months of February, March and April in 2020. The coding of the speeches was carried out in the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12.0 by procedurally implementing MIP (Pragglejaz Group 2007). More specifically, a three-step procedure was followed. First, metaphorical patterns in

the collected data were identified. The metaphor analysis was carried out within the framework of two theoretical approaches to metaphor: (1) cognitive perspective or metaphor as thought-based (Fillmore 1982; Gibbs 1992; Lakoff & Johnson 1980 1999; Kövecses 2017); (2) discourse perspective or metaphor as discourse-based (Cameron 2013; Goatly 2007; Charteris-Black 2011; Musolff 2016).

Both perspectives on metaphor analysis are closely intertwined and complement each other, as the discourse-based view is inspired by the cognitive view and emphasizes the need for “the importance of the metaphorical use of language in context” (Cameron 2013: 342). Within the critical approach to metaphor use, the metaphorical expressions were deconstructed into their representative source domains. The most prevalent source domains were compared by politicians’ gender in terms of their populist features, namely the following references to (1) the collective identity of the ‘Self’/ ‘the people’, (2) the collective ‘Other’, (3) antagonism, (4) uncertainty.

The content analysis of metaphor use was carried out via NVivo 12.0, whereby all the speeches were coded, and compared in terms of coded references (i.e., the overall frequency of metaphorical instances per speaker). In addition, frequency lists were generated and considered for each political leader.

## 5 Results

Before moving on to the findings of the content analysis of the prevalent metaphor use, frequency word lists for all political leaders with minimum length of three and five letters were generated and considered as a starting point to overview general reference trends. The frequency lists help to identify recurrent words and their possible role in meaning construction, as indicated in Table 2 below.

**Table 2.** Word frequency lists by speakers’ gender

	Political leaders	WF lists (min. 3)	WF lists (min. 5)
<b>FEMALE</b>			
<b>GR</b>	Angela Merkel	Now (11)	<b>Everyone (7)</b>
		Also (9)	<b>Government (7)</b>
		One (9)	<b>Virus (6)</b>
		<b>Everyone (7)</b>	Every (5)
		<b>Government (7)</b>	Everything (5)
<b>NZ</b>	Jacinda Ardern	New (19)	<b>Essential (13)</b>
		Now (17)	Level (12)
		<b>Essential (13)</b>	<b>Covid (11)</b>
		Level (12)	Cases (10)
		<b>Covid (5)</b>	<b>Services (9)</b>

UK	Queen Elizabeth	<b>Many (4)</b> <b>Children (3)</b> Come (3) Time (3) <b>Together (3)</b>	<b>Children (3)</b> <b>Together (3)</b> Across (2) Country (2) Disruption (2)
FI	Sanna Marin	<b>Crisis (17)</b> <b>Measures (17)</b> <b>Finland (14)</b> Also (13) <b>Government (13)</b>	<b>Crisis (17)</b> <b>Measures (17)</b> <b>Finland (14)</b> <b>Government (13)</b> <b>Situation (13)</b>
EU	Ursula von der Leyen	<b>Europe (27)</b> <b>European (13)</b> <b>Help (9)</b> <b>Must (9)</b> <b>Lives (8)</b>	<b>Europe (27)</b> <b>European (13)</b> <b>Lives (8)</b> Member (8) <b>People (8)</b>
SC	Nicola Sturgeon	<b>Essential (11)</b> Now (6) <b>People (6)</b> <b>Enforcement (5)</b> <b>Must (5)</b>	<b>Essential (11)</b> <b>People (6)</b> <b>Enforcement (5)</b> <b>Advice (6)</b> <b>Health (5)</b>



	<b>Political leaders</b>	<b>WF lists (min. 3)</b>	<b>WF lists (min. 5)</b>
<b>MALE</b>			
<b>AR</b>	Alberto Fernandez	<b>Health (13)</b> Face (8) Need (8) <b>Value (8)</b> <b>Contagion (7)</b>	<b>Health (13)</b> <b>Value (8)</b> <b>Contagion (7)</b> Lives (7) People (7)
<b>UK</b>	Boris Johnson	<b>People (10)</b> <b>Home (9)</b> <b>Lives (5)</b> Many (5) <b>HNS (5)</b>	<b>People (10)</b> <b>Lives (5)</b> <b>Disease (4)</b> Including (4) <b>Coronavirus (3)</b>
<b>US</b>	Donald Trump	<b>Virus (14)</b> <b>Health (10)</b> <b>Americans (9)</b> <b>Actions (7)</b> <b>Take (7)</b>	<b>Virus (14)</b> <b>Health (10)</b> <b>Americans (9)</b> <b>Action (7)</b> <b>States (6)</b>
<b>LT</b>	Gitanas Nausėda	<b>Lithuanian (7)</b> Own (7) Today (6) <b>Our (4)</b> However (4)	<b>Lithuanian (7)</b> Today (6) However (4) <b>Actions (4)</b> <b>Lithuania (3)</b>

CA	Justin Trudeau	<b>Health (13)</b> <b>Canada (11)</b> <b>Canadians (11)</b> Time (8) Keep (7)	<b>Health (13)</b> <b>Canada (11)</b> <b>Canadians (11)</b> <b>Canadian (6)</b> <b>French (6)</b>
IN	Narendra Modi	Days (15) <b>Corona (14)</b> <b>Friends (14)</b> <b>People (13)</b> <b>Countries (12)</b>	<b>Corona (14)</b> <b>Friends (14)</b> <b>People (13)</b> <b>Countries (12)</b> Country (11)
AU	Scott Morrison	<b>Australia (9)</b> <b>Australians (8)</b> <b>Health (7)</b> <b>Virus (7)</b> Now (5)	<b>Australia (9)</b> <b>Australians (8)</b> <b>Health (7)</b> <b>Virus (7)</b> <b>Support (4)</b>
SE	Stefan Lofven	<b>People (9)</b> <b>Responsibility (7)</b> <b>Everyone (6)</b> <b>Society (6)</b> Also (5)	<b>People (9)</b> <b>Responsibility (7)</b> <b>Everyone (6)</b> <b>Society (6)</b> Beings (5)
RU	Vladimir Putin	For (30) <b>People (20)</b> What (19) <b>Russia (18)</b> Now (17)	<b>People (20)</b> <b>Russia (18)</b> Momentarily (17) <b>Support (14)</b> Situation (13)

UKR	Volodymyr Zelenskyy	Ukraine (12)	Ukraine (12)
		Also (8)	Citizens (7)
		Citizens (7)	People (7)
		People (7)	Coronavirus (5)
		Coronavirus (5)	Thank (5)
CN	Xi Jinping	Epidemic (85)	Epidemic (85)
		Control (76)	Control (76)
		Prevention (67)	Prevention (67)
		Necessary (37)	Necessary (37)
		Must (36)	Strengthen (30)

As indicated above, the reference to “people” is found in two female political leaders’ speeches - Ursula von der Leyen’s Nicola Sturgeon’s, and six male speakers (i.e., Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Vladimir Putin, Stefan Lofven, Narendra Modi, Boris Johnson and Alberto Fernandez). A patriotic sentiment to the collective Self is also enacted to such references as “Australians” (Scott Morrison), “Americans” (Donald Trump), “Canadians” (Justin Trudeau), “Lithuanian/s” (Gitanas Nausėda). It should also be noted that the collective identity has been expressed by both genders via the specific reference to their country.

With regard to metaphors, four most recurrent source domains (i.e., thematic metaphorically used fields by both male and female political leaders) with their populist features were identified and analysed in terms of their content of use, as summarised below.

**Table 3.** Gender recurrent metaphor use and their populist features

Source domain	Male CR	Populist categories	Female CR	Populism categories
1. WAR	116	The collective ‘Other’ Antagonism	32	The collective ‘Self’
2. MOVEMENT	113	Uncertainty	87	The collective ‘Self’
3. THREAT	47	Uncertainty Antagonism	19	The collective ‘Self’
4. ONENESS	29	The collective ‘Self’ Antagonism	27	The collective ‘Self’
<b>Total</b>	<b>305</b>	(1) The collective identity of the ‘people’ (2) The collective ‘Other’ (3) Antagonism (4) Uncertainty	<b>165</b>	(1) The collective identity of the ‘people’

It has been determined that all political leaders, while discussing their national health policy and lockdown measures, relied on the metaphors of WAR (116 coding references or CR for the male use and 32 CR for the female use), MOVEMENT (113 CR for the male and 87 CR for the female), THREAT (47 CR for the male 19 for the female), and ONENESS (29 for the male and 27 for the female). The content analysis of the identified metaphor use has demonstrated marked differences in their leadership styles with regard to populism. Gender-related aspects of each of these metaphors will be discussed in the following sub-sections.

### 5.1 The WAR metaphor

The ideological role of the WAR metaphor in both male and female political leaders' first lockdown speeches is undeniably that of mobilising the collective morale during the pandemic and ascertaining national readiness to face the challenges posed by the pandemic. Nonetheless, there is an ideological divide between the two genders in terms of how populist those mobilisation messages are. In the case of the male political leaders, they discursively enact the mobilisation image-schema and reduce it to as simple "us vs. virus-as-enemy" dispute. By doing so, male political leaders legitimise lockdown measures in their fight against the collective enemy, e.g.:

#### WAR (MALE)

- (1) *It's a battle against an invisible enemy to save lives/ We're going to mobilise all our forces as an Argentine community/ Coronavirus attacks us all (Aberto Fernandez, 15 references). <> To fight the disease/ But in this fight we can be in no doubt that each and every one of us is directly enlisted (Boris Johnson, 7 references). <> And if you know someone who is working on the frontlines (Justine Trudeau, 2 references). <> The ray of hope to combat Corona/ I am confident that every Indian will not only successfully fight this difficult situation but also emerge victorious (Narendra Modi, 6 references). <> The example of a successful and timely fight against the virus (Gitanas Nausėda, 3 references). <> We have mobilised all the capabilities and resources for deploying a system of timely prevention and treatment (Vladimir Putin, 10 references). <> To confront a foreign virus in modern history/ we'll ultimately and expeditiously defeat this virus (Donald Trump, 12 references). <> Joint preparation for the operational deployment of mobile hospitals (Volodymyr Zelenskyy, 8 references). <> The people's war for epidemic prevention and control was launched/ resolutely win the fight against the epidemic (Xi Jinping, 52 references). <> Targeted local recovery plans (Scott Morrison, 1 reference).*

#### ENEMY/KILLER (MALE)

- (2) *The virus will not have a chance against us (Donald Trump, 2 references)/ But we must not forget that in addition to fighting the invisible enemy, we*

*have a war in eastern Ukraine (Volodymyr Zelenskyy, 2 references)/ the devastating impact of this **invisible killer** (Boris Johnson, 2 references).*

The WAR metaphor in male political leaders' national lockdown speeches has recurrent populist features discursively realised together with the all-inclusive "we" (see underlined expressions in (1)), as "Coronavirus attacks us all" (Alberto Fernandez), "each and every one of us is directly enlisted" (Boris Johnson) and leaders' appeal to a "people" (De Cleen & Stavrakakis 2017) defined on the level of the nation-state, as in "an Argentine community" (Alberto Fernandez), "every Indian" (Narendra Modi), "people's war" (Xi Jinping). Less explicit populist rhetoric is observed in the ideological purpose of the WAR metaphor used by male political leaders, who implicitly describe it as their national threat (e.g., Donald Trump's "foreign virus"), enemy or a killer, as in (2).

By contrast, female leaders tend to use the WAR metaphor in its more generic meaning without any specific ideological features by recurrently using the "fight" metaphorical expressions, as in (3).

#### WAR (FEMALE)

- (3) *I want to pay tribute to the women and men **leading that fight** (Ursula von der Leyen, 8 references) <> **Fight** this virus (Nicola Sturgeon, 1 reference) <> Alongside the controlled **dismantling** of restrictive measures (Sanna Marin, 2 references) <> **Frontline** (Queen Elisabeth II) <> In the **fight** against COVID-19/ will help give our healthcare system a **fighting** chance (Jacinda Ardern, 14 references) <> The most effective means of **combating** the virus spreading too quickly/ at the **forefront** of this struggle (Angela Merkel, 5 references).*

The analysis of the WAR metaphor in political leaders' public announcements also supports Charteris-Black (2021) and Mussolf's (2022) ideas about its legitimization purposes. In most cases, both male and female leaders used this metaphorical projection to rally support for the national health policy during the pandemic. However, in the context of the collective mobilisation only male political leaders raised a populist sentiment through antagonising and othering a virus (1 and 2).

## 5.2 The MOVEMENT metaphor

Despite the fact that the MOVEMENT metaphor semantically activates an image-schema of action and change (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999), male political leaders use this metaphor with the populist intention of emotional appeal to uncertainty. This is done by their emphasis of how unpredictable the virus and its projection on the economic consequences are:

#### MOVEMENT (MALE)

- (4) *The Coronavirus pandemic is **expanding at tremendous speed** in many countries/Reducing the **speed** of contagion/ We will discourage people from jumping into their cars and **circulating** (Alberto Fernández, 10 references). So it's vital to **slow** the spread of the disease/ We are*

*accelerating* our search for treatments (Boris Johnson, 6 references). Covid-19 **spread** around the world at an even **faster pace**/ The economic impact of this pandemic is **shifting** hourly/ We can still **slow the spread** of this virus (Justin Trudeau, 8 references). The Coronavirus is **spreading** at such a **rapid pace**/ Citizen of these countries have fully adhered to the government rules and hence, these countries now are **heading towards overcoming** this pandemic (Narendra Modi, 11 references). The quick **spread** of this disease/ reduce the **speed** (Vladimir Putin, 8 references). This virus **began** in China/And as our economy **bounces back** (Scott Morrison, 4 references). The infection is **spreading** in Sweden/ to prevent the **spread** of infection (Stefan Löfven, 5 references). Testing and testing capabilities are **expanding rapidly**/We made a **life-saving move** with early action on China (Donald Trump, 10 references). We are working to **provide space** for the mandatory observation of Ukrainian citizens/ But sooner or later coronavirus will **pass** and the quarantine will **end** (Volodymyr Zelenskyy, 4 references). We fundamentally **reverse the spread** of the epidemic across the country as quickly as possible/ the **route** of transmission/ It is necessary to **accelerate** the release of emerging consumption potential/ **drive** the consumption of 5G mobile phones and other terminals (Xi Jinping, 38 references).

As seen from the examples above, male political leaders use the MOVEMENT metaphor in the context of changes that can be both negative and positive. The negative meaning is implied by the use of such metaphorical expressions as “pandemic is **expanding at tremendous speed**”, “**reducing the speed**” (Alberto Fernández), “it’s vital to **slow the spread** of the disease” (Boris Johnson), “Coronavirus is **spreading at such a rapid pace**” (Narendra Modi), “the **quick spread** of this disease” (Vladimir Putin) etc. In these examples, the use of the MOVEMENT metaphor evokes a semantic frame of unpredictability caused by the spread of the virus that cannot be externally controlled.

By comparison, a positive change is implied when this metaphor is used by male political leaders in the economic context to imply possible positive economic changes, as in “**accelerate** <...> the consumption” (Xi Jinping), “our economy **bounces back**” (Scott Morrison) or political decision-making, as in “we made a life-saving **move** <...> on China” (Donald Trump), “we are working to **provide space** for mandatory observation” (Volodymyr Zelenskyy).

As opposed to their male counterparts, the female political leaders used the MOVEMENT metaphor mainly in their reference to “slowing down the spread”, as illustrated below:

#### **MOVEMENT (FEMALE)**

- (5) *As long as this is the case, there is only one thing we can do, and that is **to slow down the spread** of the virus, **stretch it over** the months and thus gain time. (Angela Merkel, 3 references). We will **move** to Alert Level 3 nationwide/ But these new measures can **slow** the virus down/ **to stop** community **transmission**/ We will **get through** this together (Jacinda*

*Ardern, 21 references). It presents an opportunity to **slow down** (Queen Elisabeth, 2 references). We have also succeeded in **slowing down the progression** of the disease/ **navigating** abnormal everyday life/to **curb the progress** of the epidemic in Finland/ **moving** to the next stage (Sanna Marin, 26 references). We can **slow down the spread** of the virus/a successful European response can only be **coordinated**/to **spread** hope through all Europe/ Europe is now really **stepping up** (Ursula von der Leyen, 27 references).*

The emphasis on “**slowing down the spread**” was also paralleled with the collective response evoked by the female leaders, as in “**get through this together**” (Jacinda Ardern), “there is only one thing we can do <...>” (Angela Merkel), “we have also succeeded in **slowing down the progression** of the disease” (Sanna Marin). In the female political leaders’ lockdown speeches, the MOVEMENT metaphor is never used in the economic context but mainly with its references to the spread of the disease and the necessity of the collective effort to tackle it. By doing so, female political leaders evoke the frame of the collective identity of the ‘Self’ and its role in “slowing down the spread”.

By contrast, the male political leaders used the MOVEMENT metaphor in their reference to the disease and the economic challenges. In the context of the disease, differently from their female counterparts, they evoked the concepts of “rapid pace” and “speed” that contribute to raising the feeling of uncertainty and unpredictability of the situation.

### 5.3 The THREAT metaphor

Another difference is observed with the use of the THREAT metaphor in the collected data sample. The male leaders show a more expressed tendency towards the politics of emotion, with fear being manipulated the most. In the case of the national lockdown speeches, fear of the unknown is raised by using the THREAT metaphor and such metaphorical expressions as “in the face of this threat”, “great risk”, “real danger”, “hidden danger”, as illustrated below:

#### THREAT (MALE)

- (6) *The world is **facing a threat** and Argentina is also **at risk**/ We are co-responsible **in the face of this threat**. (Alberto Fernandez, 10 references). The biggest **threat** this country has faced for decades/ that is the moment of **real danger**. (Boris Johnson, 2 references). A **dangerous** pandemic/ great **risk**/put your life at **great risk** (Narendra Modi, 3 references). Poses a major **hidden danger** to public health **safety** (Xi Jinping, 3 references).*

By contrast, the female leaders ideologically reverse the politics of fear into the politics of hope, where the metaphor of THREAT is realised by the use of metaphorical expressions with the focus on taking actions and protecting their community against “the threat”:

## THREAT (FEMALE)

- (7) *The federal government and the levels of government are doing to **protect** everyone in our community (Angela Merkel, 2 references). To **protect** New Zealanders from the worst (Jacinda Ardern, 2 references). To **protect** the capacity of the healthcare system and to **protect** people (Sanna Marin, 1 reference). This is for the **protection** of each and every one of us/ the **protection** of yourself, your loved ones, your community and our national health service (Nicola Sturgeon, 5 references). Because if there is one thing that is more contagious than this virus, it is love and compassion. And **in the face of adversity**, the people of Europe are showing how strong that can be. (Ursula von der Leyen, 9 references).*

As seen from the examples in (7), the female political leaders clearly demonstrate their ability to manage crisis communication with empathy. In case of the THREAT metaphor, they do not only emphasize their readiness to protect against the threat, but they also communicate their social and ethical responsibility to behave empathetically. This communicative stance is achieved through such metaphorical expressions as “protect everyone in our community” (Angela Merkel), “the protection of yourself, your loved ones, your community” (Nicola Sturgeon), “one thing more contagious than this virus, it is love and compassion” (Ursula von der Leyen). By contrast, the male political leaders, who also evoke the “protection against the threat” frame, emphasize their need to protect against economic threats, by thus shifting their focus onto “financial safety”, e.g.

## THREAT (MALE)

- (8) *At the same time, our government is doing everything it needs to do to **keep you safe—to keep your family safe, and to keep our economy strong**. (Justin Trudeau, 11 references). **Secure** Australians’ jobs and livelihoods (Scott Morrison, 2 references). Life, health and **jobs are threatened/ to protect** as many people’s lives, health and **jobs**, to every extent possible (Stefan Löfven, 3 references). To handle any **threat** that comes our way/ To ensure that working Americans impacted by the virus can stay home **without fear** of financial **hardship/ we will significantly reduce the threat** to our citizens (Donald Trump, 9 references).*

Thus, the female political leaders’ emotional safety is replaced by the male political leader’s messages of “economic safety”, being illustrated by such metaphorical expressions as “keep our **economy strong**” (Justin Trudeau), “jobs are **threatened**”, “**protect** jobs” (Stefan Löfven), “financial **hardship**” (Donald Trump).

#### 5.4 The ONENESS metaphor

The ONENESS metaphor, unlike the previous metaphors, is aimed at raising public morale and establishing a positive emotional connection with the audience. This communicative style is also known as the politician’s discourse strategy of the United We Stand Myth for making appeals to the audience to gain public support



in challenging times (Charteris-Black 2011, Umar & Rasul 2017). Despite being unifying for both genders, the analysis of the ONENESS metaphor has also revealed a few differences with regard to populism. The ONENESS metaphor is evoked in the context of a collective Self that is bound by affinity, and can have populist intentions, as in the case with the male political leaders, e.g.:

#### **ONENESS (MALE)**

- (9) *Our destiny depends on **each and every one of us**/ We are **one** community/ a **united** Argentina to face this challenge (Alberto Fernández, 4 references). **Each and every one of us** is now obliged to **join together**/ We will beat the coronavirus and we will **beat it together** (Boris Johnson, 2 references). The strength of our country is our capacity to **come together**/ To discuss the work we're doing **together** on preparedness and mitigation efforts/ We **pull together** and we **look after each other** (Justin Trudeau, 5 references). **Each and every** Indian **comes together**/ to put forth **united efforts** to deal with it/ the private sector is **standing shoulder to shoulder** with fellow citizens in full capacity during this crucial time (Narendra Modi, 4 references). We will **win by acting together**/ We will overcome the pandemic and come out of this test more **united** (Gitanas Nausėda, 2 references). We need the state, society and the people to **work together**/ if we are in it **together**/ it is this sense of **solidarity** (Vladimir Putin, 3 references). You help your neighbours shop <...> That is **solidarity** in practice/ You show that when times are at their toughest, **our unity** is at its strongest (Stefan Löfven, 2 references). We will **overcome together** as a nation and as a world/ Emerge from this challenge stronger and **more unified** than ever before/ We must put politics aside, stop the partisanship, and **unify together** as **one nation** and **one family** (Donald Trump, 4 references). Broad masses of the people **united**/ Show the spirit of **unity** and **solidarity** of the Chinese people (Xi Jinping, 2 references).*

In the context of their speeches, male political leaders use the ONENESS metaphor to popularise their stance on solidarity and unity, as a necessary mobilisation factor. This is mainly done through the use of such metaphorical expressions as “**one** community”, “a **united** Argentina” (Alberto Fernández), “**each and every-one of us**” (Boris Johnson), “the work we’re doing **together**” (Justin Trudeau), “**united** efforts” (Narendra Modi), “**solidarity**” (Vladimir Putin, Stefan Löfven, Xi Jinping), “**unify together**” (Donald Trump).

We can also find this metaphor in the context of the leaders’ appeal to “a people” on the level on the nation state, also known as populist expressions of nationalism (De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017), illustrated with the following metaphorical expressions: “we need the state, society and the people to work **together**” (Vladimir Putin), “we will overcome **together** as a nation and as a world”, “**unify together** as one nation and one family” (Donald Trump), or “Show the spirit of **unity** and **solidarity** of the Chinese people” (Xi Jinping). Besides, the ONENESS metaphor is also used in the context of mobilisation efforts against the virus (i.e., the WAR metaphor), as in the examples “**Each and every one of us** is now obliged to join

**together/** We will beat the coronavirus and we will beat it **together**” (Boris Johnson), “the private sector is standing shoulder to shoulder with fellow citizens **in full capacity**” (Narendra Modi).

By comparison, the female political leaders mainly focus on the collective action in the context of the pandemic. This collective inclusion does not mobilise the listeners against a common threat, but it rather frames their role of active engagement into cooperative measures, e.g.:

### ONENESS (FEMALE)

- (10) *That depends so much on **our joint solidarity**/ We can now, resolutely, **all react together**/ We can accept the current limitations and **stand by each other** (Angela Merkel, 8 references). **Together**, we must stop that happening, and we can/ Your actions will be critical to our **collective ability**/ We will get through this **together**/ What we need from you, is **support one another** (Jacinda Ardern, 10 references). If we remain **united and resolute**/ join with all nations across the globe in a **common endeavour** (Queen Elizabeth, 2 references). **Joint** coordination and **joint** action/ to cooperate extensively and seek solutions **together** (Sanna Marin, 3 references). We must work closer together than ever before/ Let us do the right thing **together** – with **one big heart**, not 27 small ones/ And our role as Europe’s institutions, policy makers and leaders is to show that same trust, that same **unity** and that same leadership (Ursula von der Leyen, 5 references).*

As seen from the examples above in (10), the ONENESS metaphor is realised via such metaphorical expressions as “our **joint solidarity**”, “all react **together**” (Angela Merkel), “get through this **together**” (Jacinda Ardern), “do the right thing **together**” (Ursula von der Leyen). However, unlike their male counterparts, female political leaders emphasize the importance of cooperation that constitutes vulnerability and empathetic engagement. This is clearly seen in the use of the following metaphorical expressions: “work closer together”, “do the right thing **together** - with **one big heart**”, “show that same trust, that same **unity**” (Ursula von der Leyen), “cooperate extensively and seek solutions **together**” (Sanna Marin), “our **collective ability**”, “**support** one another” (Jacinda Ardern), “**stand by** each other” (Angela Merkel). Such concepts as ‘trust’, ‘cooperation’, ‘support’ contribute to creating a social arrangement between political leaders and their listeners based on vulnerability and social empathy (Larios & Paterson 2021).

## 6 Conclusions

In response to the raised research questions, the analysis has confirmed the following. The most recurrent metaphors (WAR, MOVEMENT, THREAT and ONENESS) used by male and female political leaders discursively enacted different leadership styles with regard to populism. It has been determined that male political leaders’ speeches integrated all four components of populist discourse: 1) the collective ‘Self’, 2) the collective ‘Other’, 3) antagonism, and 4) uncertainty. By contrast,

female political leaders foregrounded the collective ‘Self’ in all of the identified metaphors. This marked ideological difference of the metaphor use between the two genders pointed out to a higher degree of ideological polarisation in the male data sample.

According to the results, the WAR metaphor in the speeches by the male political leaders evoked more negative associations related to the concepts of mobilisation, confrontational defence and antagonism with regard to the virus. By contrast, the female leaders used this metaphor in the most generalised sense of “the fight”. Moreover, there were instances of the male political leaders shifting all the blame onto the metaphorical enemy/killer – the virus. This kind of strategy heightens the panic against a marked enemy and gives more sense to the frame of militarisation that the male leaders were focusing on in their speeches.

The metaphor of MOVEMENT was used by the male leaders in the context of unpredictability and a lack of control over the “spread” of the virus. By comparison, the female leaders unitedly focused on the collective action of “slowing down the spread”. Similarly, the THREAT metaphor was used by the male leaders with their emphasis on the unpredictability of the situation and economic issues. By contrast, the female leaders focused on the thematic aspect of “protection” with their calls to collective action and social empathy.

Finally, the metaphor of ONENESS pointed out to different thematic aspects raised by the political leaders. The male leaders used this metaphor to raise a collective morale for mobilisation against the virus and other upcoming “threats”. By contrast, the female leaders again tried to establish emotional connection and trust with their audience by prioritising the collective self in the context of social empathy and accountability.

Additionally, the male political leaders expressed their pandemic policies in a more competitive manner, by thus making their attempts to raise the public morale for their national superiority in their “fight against the virus”. The male leaders’ reference to the “people” as an empty signifier (Laclau 2005) and their projection of “people’s love for homeland” contribute to their populist intentions of sounding right.

This study admittedly has its limitations, as the established metaphorical patterns and their populist features are a tendency rather than a representative view. Methodologically, the collected data sample was limited only to the first national lockdown speeches delivered by various political leaders during the time period of three months – February, March and April in 2020. The delivery of subsequent speeches by the same leaders could point out to how their communicative styles have developed over time in terms of enacted metaphor use and populist symbols. In addition, the extension of the data corpus would be consistent with the application of any corpus-based method for generating semantic domains (Stefanowitch 2006; 2020) and establishing a more accurate metaphorical narrative of populist sentiment.

Despite the above, analyses of gender-related metaphors and their populist features can contribute to a greater awareness of political leadership style in times of crisis, and the role of populist sentiment in interpreting social and political reality.

Finally, this study has confirmed the idea that populist sentiment is underpinned with the negative emotions of fear and uncertainty (Rico, Guinjoan & Anduiza 2017), being the constituent elements of the politics of fear (Wodak 2015; 2021), as the examples of metaphor use by the male political leaders have demonstrated.

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