

## Discursive Constructions of the Enemy through Metonymy. The Case of CitizenGo's Anti-Genderist E-Petitions

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

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

### 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

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

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

<sup>2</sup> Elżbieta Korolczuk and Agnieszka Graff, "Gender as 'Ebola from Brussels': The Anticolonial Frame and the Rise of Illiberal Populism", *Signs*, 43.4 (2018), 797-821.

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

<sup>4</sup> Graff et al., "Introduction", 541.

<sup>5</sup> Korolczuk and Graff, "Gender as 'Ebola from Brussels': The Anticolonial Frame and the Rise of Illiberal Populism", 798.

the Right are religious, it is noteworthy that the religious Right has risen fast worldwide<sup>6</sup>. It adopts a rhetoric that foregrounds anti-genderism as a scientific and “alternative field of knowledge production” based on a Christian humanism.<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, by exploiting divergences within feminist thought about sexual differences, colonialism and classism, the (religious) Right appropriates progressive discourses for regressive ends when opposing gender, sexual and reproductive rights.<sup>8</sup>

Despite their heterogeneity, anti-genderist discourses systematically involve the semantic reconfiguration of progressive vocabulary. An indicative example is the coalition between the Holy See, Muslim leaders, and right-wing US fundamentalist Protestants who contested the meaning of certain terms included in the “Declaration and Platform for Action” discussed at the 1995 conference in Beijing. They successfully discarded the mention of “sexual orientation” as a category of protection against discrimination, on the basis that it contradicts religious and cultural values of certain states.<sup>9</sup> In particular, they argued that human rights are being semantically elasticized and degraded, because “sexual orientation” normalizes pedophilia, bestiality, incest, and adultery.<sup>10</sup> Similar reservations were also expressed against “gender”, which was framed by the Vatican as a Western imperialist attempt to colonize international human rights.<sup>11</sup> In particular, the Vatican proclaimed a “nightmarish vision” of “gender” as concealing a secret (pro-LGBTQ+) agenda that threatens the nucleus of a stable society – i.e., the “natural” sexual order and heterosexual family – by urging people to choose their gender/sexuality regardless of biological differences.<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, while articulating an explicitly anti-feminist discourse under the label “new feminism”, the Vatican distanced itself from sexism by replacing discussions of “natural subordination of women” with discussions of the “complementary differences of the sexes”, thus leaving gender hierarchies intact.<sup>13</sup> This discourse was crystalized in a lexicon<sup>14</sup> written by the Vatican as a referential clarification of “ambiguous and debatable terms” promulgating a “culture of death”. By conflating heterogeneous (mostly radical) feminist groups that draw on critical, feminist, and queer scholarship, this lexicon accused “gender feminists” of secretly spreading an unscientific, Neo-Marxist “gender ideology” through the creation of a totalitarian “Orwellian language”.<sup>15</sup>

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

<sup>6</sup> Graff et al., “Introduction”, 543.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>19</sup> Graff and Korolczuk, "'Worse than Communism and Nazism Put Together'".

<sup>20</sup> Garbagnoli, "Against the Heresy", 198.

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

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

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

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

<sup>25</sup> Borba, "Gendered Politics of Enmity".

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

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

<sup>28</sup> Eric Russel, "Les Hommes: The Language of Reactionary Masculinity", *Gender and Language*, 13.1 (2019), 94-121.

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

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

## 2. CitizenGo: The Expansion of an International Network

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

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

As a platform that enables the solidification of a wide-spanning network, CitizenGo has the potential to spread ultraconservative propaganda internationally. For instance, it supported France’s *Manif Pour Tous*,<sup>36</sup> Ireland’s anti-abortion rallies<sup>37</sup> and co-organized workshops with the World Congress of Families in Italy.<sup>38</sup> A recent campaign that caught the media’s attention was a bus with transphobic slogans that circulated through Spain, France,<sup>39</sup> Germany,<sup>40</sup> Kenya,<sup>41</sup> Chile,<sup>42</sup> and the

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>35</sup> Adapted from “Memorias HO”, *HazteOir.org*.

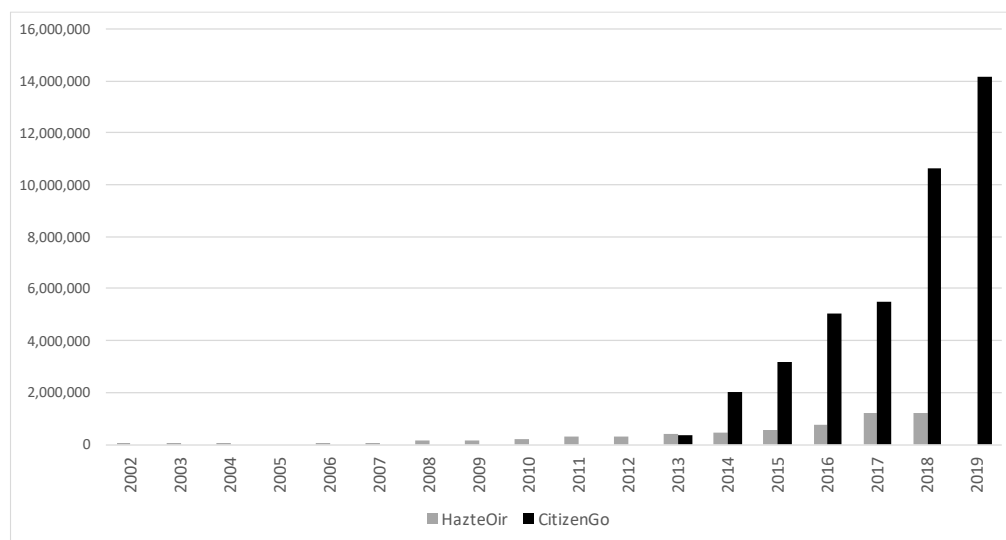
<sup>36</sup> Catherine Mallaval and Virginie Ballet, “CitizenGo, Chambre d’Écho des Bigots”, *Libération* (2016), [https://www.liberation.fr/france/2016/11/23/citizengo-chambre-d-echo-des-bigots\\_1530482](https://www.liberation.fr/france/2016/11/23/citizengo-chambre-d-echo-des-bigots_1530482).

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

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

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

US.<sup>43</sup> Probably its most well-known success was in 2013 when the EU parliament discussed the “Estrela Report” about women’s health and reproductive rights. CitizenGo collected signatures and orchestrated the sending of 200,000 threatening e-mails to politicians who supported the non-binding resolution<sup>44</sup>, which led to the unexpected rejection of the report.



**Figure 1.** Numbers of HazteOír and CitizenGo’s members

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>46</sup> Corrêa, *Políticas Antigénero en América Latina*.

### 3. Data & Method

We scraped 687 e-petitions (351,020 words) that were available in CitizenGo from 18 September 2013 (first petition) to 24 June 2019. For ease of analysis, we restricted our corpus to those petitions published under the language tab “English”. To contextually ground the analysis, we also kept the following meta-data: the petition’s URL, addressee, date, and author. Images and a few passages written in non-Anglophone languages were replaced with a tag. The corpus was then uploaded into the online software Sketch Engine<sup>47</sup> which automatically annotated the data for part-of-speech.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>52</sup> Gabrielatos, “Keyness Analysis”, 254n8.

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>56</sup> Littlemore, *Metonymy*, 19-20.

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

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

<sup>59</sup> See Biernacka, *A Discourse Dynamics Investigation of Metonymy in Talk*.

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

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

**Table 1.** Analyzed key-multiwords

#### 4. Analysis

The fact that metonymy is situated between literal language and metaphor is related to some of its “edgier” communicative functions: namely vague language, evaluation and positioning.<sup>60</sup> That is, the intended meaning (target) often remains unspecified. It constructs a vagueness that can be strategically manipulated for communicative and evaluative purposes. Alongside strategic vagueness, metonymies have been reported to have a strong depersonalizing effect<sup>61</sup> in contexts where speakers/authors want to create distance from a particular group of people, while reducing it to its most relevant attributes. From this perspective, uses of metonymy are practices of *othering* whereby a given Other is strategically framed as an out-group with specific, conveniently condensed defining properties. This function of metonymy alongside its socio-political implications has been investigated across various contexts. A large body of work has looked at the role of metonymy in the development of in-/out-

<sup>60</sup> Littlemore, *Metonymy*, 96-97.

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



group relationships in political discourse,<sup>62</sup> journalistic media,<sup>63</sup> as well as in the construction of national identity<sup>64</sup> or faith communities.<sup>65</sup> In the present section, we explore how systematic metonymic uses of the identified key-multiwords are involved in the construction of a gendered/sexual Other targeted by anti-genderist e-petitions.

Although there are a number of different typologies of metonymy suggested in the relevant literature,<sup>66</sup> the majority of them involve a PART-WHOLE relationship.<sup>67</sup> According to this relationship, the metonymic reading of a lexical item mobilizes either a whole conceptual entity or a part of it (source), in order to invoke the intended referent (target) within the same ICM. Overall, the metonymized key-multiwords found in our data fall into three broader categories, according to the type of metonymic mapping they instantiate: i.e., PART FOR WHOLE, WHOLE FOR PART and PART FOR PART. In the remainder of this section, we explore each of these types, which systematically appear as MEMBER OF CATEGORY FOR CATEGORY, CATEGORY FOR MEMBER OF CATEGORY<sup>68</sup> and DEFINING PROPERTY FOR STANCE respectively. Taking into consideration the contextually emergent metonymic meaning of the key-multiwords, as well as the nuances of each metonymization process, we will argue for the central role of these metonymies in the construction of the gendered/sexual enemy.

#### 4.1 Member of category for category

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

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

Author: CitizenGo  
Addressee: 24 European Prime Ministers/Presidents

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

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

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

<sup>64</sup> Wodak et al., *Discursive Construction of National Identity*.

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

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

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

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

them. This formulation leads to an interesting question as to what *gay lobby* is actually referring to. According to CDE, *lobby* is defined as “a group of people who try to persuade the government or an official group to do something”. From this perspective, the literal meaning of the compound *gay lobby* would refer to LGBTQ+ groups whose political activity pressures policy makers to grant them rights. However, in the majority of the remaining petitions in which *gay lobby* occurs, nowhere do the petitioners refer to specific LGBTQ+ organizations and associations with socio-political activity. Rather, in extract (1) *gay lobby* refers to a wide range of unmentioned agents, groups and individuals who support same-sex marriage, and threaten to interfere with the pro-family legislation that the aforementioned 24 countries maintain. This is similar to what previous research found when analysing mentions of *gay lobby* in the Irish<sup>69</sup> and British<sup>70</sup> press. For instance, Baker argues that it is constructed as a homogenous group of people composed of unspecified “activists, campaigners, pressure groups, protesters, and demonstrators [... as well as] radicals and militants” who were described as “strident and vociferous” in their demands for gay rights.<sup>71</sup>

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

#### 4.2 Category for member of category

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Author: Alejandra Fabris (USA)  
Addressee: Houston Mayor

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

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

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

### 4.3 Defining property for stance

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

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

Author: CitizenGo  
Addressee: BBC

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

Author: CitizenGo Europe (Spain)  
Addressee: European Parliament

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

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

<sup>73</sup> Radden and Kövecses, “Toward a Theory of Metonymy”, 37.

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

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

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

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

Author: CitizenGo  
Addressee: United Nations

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 5. Final Remarks

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

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

<sup>74</sup> Littlemore, *Metonymy*, 99.

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



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

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

Given CitizenGo's transnational network, we argue that the metonymic uses explored in the present study provide new vocabulary which helps to solidify the establishment of a borderless, ultra-conservative discourse community<sup>82</sup> constituting an “alternative field of knowledge”.<sup>83</sup> As such, metonymy is involved into a conventionalized aggregate of signs that constitute anti-genderism as a register bringing anti-genderists into a cohesive – although heterogeneous – whole.<sup>84</sup> A cross-national investigation of other metonymic/figurative configurations involved in anti-genderist rhetoric could give a better insight into how the anti-gender register is nationally contextualized and adapted to empower conservative coalitions.

<sup>76</sup> Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 42.

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

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

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

<sup>80</sup> Mayer and Sauer, “‘Gender Ideology’ in Austria”.

<sup>81</sup> Kováts and Pöim, *Gender as Symbolic Glue*.

<sup>82</sup> Littlemore, *Metonymy*, 65.

<sup>83</sup> Graff and Korolczuk, “Worse than Communism and Nazism Put Together”.

<sup>84</sup> Borba, “Enregistering ‘Gender Ideology’”.