

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

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

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

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

1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. Gender and Right-wing YouTube-populism

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²⁵ Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. Methodology

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Table 1. Breakdown of the two corpora

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Analysis

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁵⁹ Ibid.

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

(2) Thank you (.) madam chairman

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

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

4.2 Gendered keywords in the UKIP-c

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

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

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

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

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

⁶⁰ Ibid., 127.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.3 'Gender' in the UKIP-c

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.5 Gendered keywords in the Lega-c

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.6 ‘Gender’ in the Lega-c

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. Contrastive Discussion and Conclusions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 59.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁷⁹ Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁸⁵ Levente Pap, “Reticence in Cicero’s Discourse”, *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica*, 8.1 (2016), 117-125; Melani Schroeter and Charlotte Taylor, *Exploring Silence and Absence in Discourse: Empirical Approaches*.

⁸⁶ Matteo Winkler, “Italy’s Gentle Revolution: The New Law on Same-Sex Partnerships”.

⁸⁷ Mary Anne Case, “Trans Formations in the Vatican’s War on ‘Gender Ideology’”, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 44.3 (2019), 639-664.

⁸⁸ Corredor Elizabeth, “Unpacking ‘Gender Ideology’ and the Global Right’s Antigender Countermovement”, 621.

same-sex unions and surrogacy. It could also consider online interaction from a-synchronous audience, triangulating these discursive outputs with societal discriminatory episodes in the same time-frame.

Appendix

Transcription conventions adapted from Jefferson (2004)

- (.) pause of less than a second
 _ longer pause
 ? rising intonation
 ! intonation pitch
 <italics> transcriber comment

Grammar relation	Collocate
nouns modified by 'gender'	quota
	balance
	realignment
	confusion
	datum
	route
	study
	child
	conference
verbs with 'gender' as object	derive
	undergo
	choose
	be
verbs with 'gender' as subject	stereotype
	do
gender' and/or ...	equality
adjective predicates of 'gender'	female
	male

Table 8. Word Sketch of 'gender' in the UKIP-c

Grammar relation	Collocate
verbs with 'gender' as object	instillare
	insegnare
	sostenere
	veicolare
nouns modified by 'gender'	ideologia
	pensiero
	teoria
	sciacallaggio
adjectives predicates of 'gender'	feroce
	subdolo
	folle

Table 9. Word Sketch of 'gender' in the Lega-c