

At War with an Invisible Enemy

A Critical Feminist Analysis of the Covid-19 Pandemic Narrative

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Abstract

This thesis aims to investigate the narrative created around the covid-19 virus as a security threat during the first months of the pandemic. Speeches made by three political leaders, namely Emmanuel Macron, Boris Johnson and Angela Merkel, held in March 2020 are analysed in depth using a feminist narrative framework. The overall purpose is to investigate how a gendered reading of the portrayal of the covid-19 pandemic as a security threat can contribute to the already existing feminist research on how gender is both part of, and affected by, the construction of security narratives. The research questions concern whether the pandemic was militarised by political leaders, and if so, how this is done through the construction of the narrative. Furthermore, it is investigated how masculinity and femininity come to expression within the narrative of covid-19 as a security threat, and how this differs from the gendered hierarchies in relation to “traditional” security threats already outlined in previous feminist research on security. The result of the analysis shows that the pandemic is clearly being militarised. Traditional gender constructions are however altered, for example when feminine roles are assigned to groups traditionally not perceived as feminine. The result shows the flexibility of gender roles, but also the need to sustain a division between some groups as feminine and some groups as masculine. The very existence of hierarchies is seemingly more important than which physical bodies take place within that hierarchy.

Key words: Feminist Security Studies, Covid-19, Narrative Analysis, Gender, Security

Concepts and definitions

Sex

The biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women.

Male and female are sex categories.

Gender

The socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women. Masculine and feminine are gender categories.

Gender essentialism

The belief that gender roles, stereotypes and characteristics are a natural and fixed consequence of the biological difference between men and women.

For example, the belief that women in essence are feminine.

Gender as social construction

The belief that gender is constructed in social environments. Individuals will conform to gender roles on the basis of how they perceive the social world and themselves in it. Gender is thereby changeable over context and time.

Masculinity

A set of socially constructed attributes, behaviours, social roles or meanings traditionally associated with men. Can be broken down into different types. **Hegemonic masculinity** refers to the dominant definition of masculinity valued as superior to other masculinities. **Toxic masculinity** refers to certain cultural norms that are associated with harm to society and to men themselves.

Femininity

A set of socially constructed attributes, behaviours, social roles or meanings traditionally associated with women.

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1. Introduction

Within the field of Critical Security Studies, extensive research has been done by feminist scholars on the gendered power relations inherent to the construction of (in)security, threats and disasters (e.g. Hansen 2000, Enloe 2007, Wibben 2011, Åhäll 2015). Since security is understood as a function of discourse within feminist security studies (Wibben 2018, p.139), the militarised discourse dominating the political field has limited the understanding of security threats to only include military threats posed towards states. Undoubtedly, the focus has therefore been issues that can be understood as “traditional security threats”, both related to military institutions and to war.

However, as our contemporary society faces new types of crises, military threats can no longer be singled out as the sole way to understand threats towards societies and individuals. Climate change and global pandemics are discursively constituted as major problems and thereby prioritised on the security agenda, making the gender structures and hierarchies of power already outlined by feminist scholars seem less sufficient in explaining the modern world of (in)security. To understand the construction of narratives about new security threats, what is known about gender hierarchies needs to be reconsidered.

At the time of writing, we are still in the midst of the covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic and the turbulent year of 2020 has made quite an impact, as it has dramatically affected the lives of many people. As an alleged threat to the security of states, societies, and individuals, the narrative created around the covid-19 pandemic seems unprecedented - especially considering the response taken to prevent the spread. The way in which epidemiologists, political leaders, and the media portrayed the pandemic played a major role in the construction of this new type of threat. The rapid way in which the pandemic spread across the globe seemed to require a type of response never before seen in our modern world. As one state after another started to shut down societies completely, political leaders referred to it as a way to fight the “war” against the invisible “enemy” that was the virus.

Feminist organisations, with Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) taking the lead, were quick to raise critical voices and concerns about the militarised discourse in relation to the covid-19 pandemic (Enloe 2020). As argued by feminist scholars for many years, the normalisation of militarised language in everyday politics and in society overall

facilitates a legitimate use of military measures and violence (e.g. Enloe 2007 or Wibben 2018). Once the threshold is reached, military measures cease to be questioned, whether they are used to prevent the spread of a virus or whether they are used to kill.

A. Research problem

Historically, the security sector has been understood as exclusively part of a masculinely dominated political sphere (e.g. Cohn 1987 or Enloe 1990). All issues related to security have thereby been affected by the way in which the sector itself is masculinely coded, including the way in which we perceive and think about security. Feminists have for example investigated how a gendered language plays an important role in shaping the security field (Cohn 1987), and how a long history of masculine domination within the field has silenced other perspectives on security (Kronsell 2006).

The security sector has however evolved and developed in many ways, some might say broadened (referring especially to the broadened security agenda, originally by Buzan, Waever, Wilde 1998), which has made the way in which security is constructed more flexible. Yet, the gendered norms and power hierarchies that feminists have long argued affects the security sphere are slow to change since they are such an inherent part of the field. This study therefore intends to look at the covid-19 pandemic as one example of a situation in which security is being constructed. What is specifically surprising with the covid-19 pandemic is the way in which it seems to be described as something beyond a health crisis. As argued by organisations such as WILPF there seems to be a need to describe the pandemic in militarised terms (Enloe 2020), which makes it an interesting subject for further investigation. The research puzzle serving as a starting point to this study is therefore the initial reaction to the covid-19 pandemic around the world, and the puzzlement lies within the dramatic and unprecedented response.

Evidently, many lives have been affected by the covid-19 pandemic. It is therefore necessary and highly relevant to properly understand the initial narrative that came to shape the way the world perceived the virus. As feminists have long argued (e.g. Wibben 2011), highlighting hidden power dynamics is necessary in order to properly understand the world and actions taken by individuals. The dynamics that came to play during the first stages of the pandemic are therefore interesting to look closer at, to uncover gender and power hierarchies. It is crucial to critically reflect about security, and to carefully consider who is in a position to portray

something as worthy of a place on the security agenda. Most importantly; for whom is it security, for whom is it *insecurity*, and security from what?

The contribution of this thesis is on the one hand related to the relevance of the subject in these times. The world has faced pandemics before, but the covid-19 outbreak in 2020 is unprecedented in many ways and therefore highly relevant to investigate. On the other hand, this study will also contribute to feminist research regarding the construction of security threats and its effect on gender relations. Of importance is that this study does not rely upon a gender essentialist foundation, and treats the sex of physical bodies as completely irrelevant. By looking at how the idea of masculinity and femininity change with the construction of new security narratives, un-related to physical bodies labelled as “male” or “female”, this study will investigate how flexible our understanding of gender is when constituted in situations completely unprecedented.

B. Purpose and research questions

This study will investigate the construction of new security threats, by looking at the narrative presented in three political speeches about the covid-19 virus held by President Emmanuel Macron, Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel. A critical feminist lens will be used to discuss in what way the pandemic is being narrated as a security threat when European states are reached by the virus in March 2020. The scope is thereby limited to the early stages of the pandemic, in order to analyse the initial portrayal of the health crisis. Furthermore, by looking at gender as a social construction, this study aims to contribute with a more complex understanding of how notions of masculinity and femininity are constructed in new ways when societies are posed with new types of security threats.

By that means, the overall purpose is to investigate how a gendered reading of the portrayal of the covid-19 pandemic as a security threat can contribute to the already existing feminist research on how gender is both part of, and affected by, the construction of security narratives. The theoretical argument will be exemplified by an empirical focus on the covid-19 pandemic, which leads to the following three research questions:

- Was the covid-19 pandemic militarised by political leaders, and if so, how?
- How does gendered constructions of masculinity and femininity come to expression

within the narrative of covid-19 as a security threat?

- How does the gendered hierarchies in the narrative of the covid-19 pandemic differ from gendered hierarchies in relation to “traditional” security threats?

On the basis of the analysis, the potential implications and consequences of the findings will also be discussed and reflected upon towards the end of the thesis. Noteworthy is that the third and last research question will be discussed in relation to previous literature on “traditional” security threats, since the scope and research material investigated in this study is limited to the covid-19 pandemic. The findings of the analysis will therefore be compared to the theoretical framework which accounts for previous research within feminist security studies, in order to answer the third research question.

C. Situatedness

In critical theoretical studies and feminist studies in particular, it is plausible to address how knowledge is situated within different social, cultural and political contexts. Cynthia Cockburn (2010, p.141) is one of many feminist researchers who emphasises how important it is to be completely transparent about ones situatedness in order for the research to be truly reflexive. Especially when a study is aiming to investigate social constructions, it is important that the bias, interests and power structures that are inherent to the study itself are clearly addressed since indeed no research can ever be objective. Only after such a reflection can a study be considered reflexive.

As a student and researcher, my personal experience of the covid-19 pandemic has been highly present throughout this research project, and has therefore affected some of the decisions and the analysis. The initial choice to study this particular subject would for example most probably never have come to be if I had not first been influenced by my surroundings, the somewhat turbulent situation I found myself in during the early stages of the pandemic, and my perception of this time. In the end of February 2020, I moved to Geneva for an internship with Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). As an NGO with a long history, founded already in 1915, WILPF works towards a clearly defined goal: feminist peace. The political grassroots approach and critical analysis of patriarchal structures, militarism and neo-liberalism that is imbued in all of WILPF’s work has inevitably come to influence my perspective as a researcher.

As the coronavirus started to spread in early March, the WILPF International Secretariat office closed shortly after my arrival and me and my colleagues worked remotely from our homes during the spring. Even if working remotely, I yet found myself part of an international NGO that would come to reorganize its entire work for the upcoming months to focus all efforts on critically analysing the global response to the pandemic. The theoretical lens through which I see the covid-19 pandemic is therefore influenced by my work with WILPF, and will come to benefit the critical feminist reading of political narratives that is the core of this research. As feminist theory is a theoretical perspective often permissive of a political agenda and aiming to achieve social and political change (Åhäll 2015), it is highly suitable that this goal is evident throughout this thesis.

Furthermore, it almost goes without saying that this thesis, written at a Swedish university, comes from a perspective highly influenced by the global north and western academia. By choosing to limit the research material to the European context however, potentially problematic attempts to explain the construction of security in other parts of the world is avoided. Nevertheless, the situatedness leads to that this particular study will be highly limited to one perspective on the covid-19 pandemic, while the experience looked very different in other contexts.

D. Delimitations

With the theoretical stance adopted for this research comes certain natural limitations to the result of the study. When using a feminist critical perspective as the core of the theoretical framework, a natural consequence is that all findings must be deemed as highly related to the situatedness. Any narrative is to be understood as constantly fluid, and any given meaning cannot be treated as overreaching or applicable to other situations and contexts. However, there is undoubtedly value to investigating the early narrative of the covid-19 pandemic, as the first reaction to the pandemic says a lot about what would come to be prioritised in the response, even if that narrative might be subject for change during later stages.

An additional aspect which also narrows the scope of this study is the focus on the *construction* of security narratives. The constitution of something as an alleged security threat would however involve multiple other dynamics. Starting with the discursive framing of the threat,

various actions might then be triggered in terms of response and management of the situation, potentially involving different actors on different levels of society. Finally, the consequences of the entire process will have various effects, making an impact within all groups and levels of society. The focus of this research is however limited to the construction of the covid-19 pandemic as a threat, leaving it to future research to further investigate if this narrative was at all accepted by the audience and what the potential consequences of such a narrative might be. This will only briefly be touched upon in the discussion chapter of this thesis, when the structural implications of the findings are analysed in comparison to already existing feminist research on the subject.

Further delimitations that are directly related to the choice of theory, method and material are discussed when presenting the theory, method and material respectively.

E. Disposition

The structure of this thesis can be divided into five chapters. Following the introduction chapter, the theoretical framework on which the study is based upon will be accounted for in-depth together with a presentation of previous research within the field. Previous research is divided into studies on the construction of “traditional” and “modern” threats respectively, with the latter limited to research on gender structures in climate and environmental disasters as well as pandemics. The third section is dedicated to the methodological framework. The narrative analysis which is used as a method to execute the analysis will be described in detail, followed by an overview of the three speeches that will be investigated as research material. The fourth chapter consists of the empirical investigation, which is divided into five parts in accordance with the narrative analysis framework. The fifth and last chapter of the thesis is dedicated to some concluding remarks, a broader discussion of the conclusions, and suggestions for further research on the topic.

2. Theoretical framework

In the following section, the theoretical framework on which this study is based is explained in depth. The first part is focused on the theoretical aspect, by introducing the basis of Feminist Security Studies. Thereafter, previous research about security construction is accounted for in two different parts. Starting by presenting previous feminist research on the construction of “traditional” security threats, an overview is thereafter secondly given of feminist research on the construction of “modern” security threats. Due to limitations to the scope of this thesis, “modern” threats are in this case narrowed down to climate change and pandemics.

A. Feminist Security Studies

In order to properly understand Feminist Security Studies, a good starting point is to look at its critique of the traditional field of Security Studies. By focusing on power structures, feminist researchers outline gender differences and how gender come to affect security. Although the constructivist feminist standpoint from which this study is written rejects the idea of gender as connected to the biology of bodies, it is worth mentioning that some feminists make the argument that this is where the division of gendered characteristics originates. Connell (1995, p.71) is one researcher who explains how gender comes from a historical process of what different bodies could and could not do. Eventually however, this became a social project and a structure which influences power relations within society completely unrelated to the biology of bodies (ibid). Nevertheless, the hierarchy remains that masculinity is constructed as valued superior to femininity.

Another characteristic that serves to construct the two genders as opposites is femininity as inherently peaceful, whilst masculinity is perceived as violent. This has come to be referred to as the women and peace thesis, yet again an understanding that equates the biological nature of women with characteristics related to femininity (Wibben 2016, p.5). Masculinity is constructed as not only violent but also as a gender of active agency, enabled to act as “heroes” to save those attributed with femininity on the other part of the gender spectrum. This is related to the myth of protection, a concept established by feminist researchers to explain how the feminine is constructed as passive and in need of protection (Åhäll 2015, p.13). Furthermore, the fact that femininity is understood as both inferior and passive has resulted in that those who are perceived feminine are associated with the private sphere of society. Individuals with

feminine attributes (women) have historically been restricted to the home, and thereby also to a great extent been excluded from the public (and political) arena (Rashid 2009, p.570).

With this basic outline of how the concepts masculinity and femininity can be understood, the theoretical assumption of their relationship to the construction of security threats can be discussed in more detail. Feminists have presented many historical examples of how the myth of protection affects the general understanding of security. Those perceived as feminine in the very own nation state are understood as in need of protection from an outside enemy, or alternatively, they are used to legitimise foreign intervention. One example of how those perceived as inheriting feminine attributes (often women and children) are used as a motivation to this type of action has been investigated by Nadjie Al-Ali and Nicole Pratt (2009). They argue that the US invasion of Iraq was motivated necessary in order to liberate and protect Iraqi women (ibid).

An additional important layer of the myth of protection is who the feminine is in need of protection from. Femininity remains a passive, peaceful agent who is restricted to the private sphere, whilst both the “hero” doing the protection and the “villain” posing the threat are traditionally understood as masculinities. However, this is where the division of us and them becomes important. The masculinity that is threatening is perceived as equally active and violent as the “hero”, but constructed as a threat simply because it is ejected as the other. This is often connected to orientalism, as the other is narrated as uncivilised or a barbarian (See for example Clisby and Enderstein 2017).

To build on the argument by Connell about gender as a consequence of what bodies can and cannot do, which was presented earlier, femininity is also constructed as closely related to maternal reproduction. Those who are perceived as feminine are not only seen as biological reproducers, but also as reproducers of national identity, social norms and values (Åhäll 2015: 13). This further strengthens the idea that the feminine inhabitants of a country needs to be protected in their manifestation as symbols of the *motherland*, in order to secure the national identity from outside security threats (ibid).

Figure 1. (developed by the author)

Masculinity	Superior	Violent	Rational	Active	Protector	Public
Femininity	Inferior	Peaceful	Emotional	Passive	Protected	Private

Seen above in figure 1 is an extremely simplified version of the characteristics ascribed to the two traditional versions of masculinity and femininity as outlined by feminist theory. However, the spectrum is somewhat more complex than this. An important aspect of feminist analysis in general, is not to generalise experiences and draw overreaching conclusions. For example, there is extensive research on the different types of masculinities, which among themselves can be organised in hierarchical structures (Connell 1995, p.78).

The most discussed type of masculinity within feminist research is undoubtedly military masculinity. This is closely related to militarism, which can be understood as the normalization of militaries within society serving to create a general acceptance of military solutions and measures as natural, rational and legitimate (Wibben 2018, p.141). As the international system has been historically understood as dangerous and competitive, militaristic values and attitudes have been prioritised when nation-states rely on military logistics (ibid). Military masculinities are intertwined with the process that makes militarization of societies possible. Since the military as an institution strongly depends on its personnel not to question their cause but blindly believe in military response as the best solution, the military training aims to achieve the un-natural and ideal-type of masculinity in a systematic manner (ibid, p.143). Military masculinity is part of the constructed gender relations that strengthen militarization, and as famously stated by Cynthia Cockburn (2010, p.149) “makes war thinkable”. In turn, as militarism is normalized within societies, other processes are facilitated. Eriksson Baaz and Stern (2018, p.305) has for example defined war as an exception-state, in which the normal rules of civilizations no longer apply. In times of peace on the other hand, clear rules are set out on what type of violence is legitimate and what type is not.

Furthermore, military masculinity is a somewhat extreme form of masculinity in its enunciated opposition to femininity. As declared by Eriksson Baaz and Stern (2013, p.20), to be part of the military is equivalent to being non-feminine, and when trained into becoming a soldier it is necessary to “kill the woman inside”. In relation to other more marginalized masculinities, the military masculinity is very much a myth in its ideal type. A fulfilled military masculinity is in

its role more violent, more active, and better at protecting than any other gender stereotype. Any masculinity that does not fulfil the ideal type, especially within military institutions, risks being seen as feminine or failed. When women join the military, they too are equally drawn into the institutionalisation and expected to embrace masculine norms and values (Bastick & Duncanson 2018, p.559). The difference between male and female is of less importance within the military, as female bodies are seemingly adapting to military masculinity as well (ibid).

B. Previous research

i. “Traditional” security threats

In line with the critical feminist approach to security, feminist authors strive to question the very essence of security: what is meant by security, security for whom - and security from what? These questions can be approached in multiple ways. There are some studies within the field that investigate the difference in the approach to various security threats between men and women as biological binaries (e.g. Wagnsson, Olsson, Nilsen 2020, Smith 2020, Finucane et al, 2000). Interesting findings show for example that gender identity affects what an individual prioritises in terms of security, as women and men have different perceptions of threats (Wagnsson, Olsson, Nilsen 2020). This research is supported by the concept of “white male effect” which has been studied by Finucane et al. (2000) and has come to influence the field of security and disaster research. Arguing that white men estimate security threats to be overall of lower risk than any other group, they conclude that white men perceive the world in general as a safer place (ibid, p.170). Finucane et al. see this as a result of socio-political factors, but nonetheless fail to mention how structures of power and masculinity are key aspects that will come to affect and shape dynamics such as the white male effect in a normative sense. While these studies show interesting findings about the gender dynamics at play when constructing security threats, it has already been outlined that this thesis dissociates from any essentialist bearings and aims to avoid treating individuals as anything else than bodies being constantly constructed as gendered.

Multiple feminist researchers have explored the relationship between the militarization of security threats, masculinity and state power. Drawing on research by Marion Young, Deylami (2019) argues that when entering an allegedly “extraordinary” situation framed as a “state of war”, power discourses shift so that masculinity is relying more on the role as protector in its claim to domination, rather than those structures that ensure masculine domination normally.

Deylami (ibid, p.759) goes on to argue that this power structure is expanded to go beyond biological differences and is framed within the context of that nation-state. All citizens are being constructed as in need of protection and thereby feminised, by the security apparatus that serves as the protector (ibid). This enables gender roles to be flexible, even when women act as “heroes” and take action to protect the nation from foreign threats, feminine characteristics are erased or adapted for the good of the nation (ibid).

As the field of Security Studies has developed, so has the perception of security come to be expanded to include more. This expansion can be understood both in terms of what is deemed to be a security issue and on which level it has an effect, i.e. not only state level but also on individual or groups levels. The broadened security agenda is most famously connected to the Copenhagen School and Securitization Theory (Buzan, Waever, Wilde 1998). Although the theory was ground-breaking in how it opened up for new ways to think of security, it has still been widely criticised, for example concerning the ethical dilemmas it might lead to (see for example Elbe 2006). Furthermore, the western influence on the way in which security is understood is still very evident in the theory. Steven Ratuva (2016) for example argues that security needs to be analysed in relation to contextual circumstances, and not generalised according to a western understanding. Taking the human security approach within the United Nations as an example, Ratuva (ibid, p.218) discusses the challenges of generalising security threats and crises. Since the way the same crisis unfolds will most likely vary in different part of the world, it is important to consider local conditions among other things.

The traditional security perspective has also been criticized by feminist researchers for ignoring the fact that security is not always expressed by language. In an extensive critique of the Copenhagen School and their famous Securitization theory, Lene Hansen (2000) uses the concept of gender performativity to investigate “security as silence” and “subsuming security”. The first entails that (in)security can be performed rather than spoken, especially by those who are ignored in the public discourse or are unable to speak up about security to begin with. The latter, subsuming security, means in simple terms that security is being perceived differently for each individual, depending on for example national or religious identity (ibid, p.287). Security issues that are too closely related to individual experience, and thereby fail to produce an image of a referent object that threatens a bigger collective, is simply dismissed as not belonging on the security agenda (ibid). In relation to Judith Butler’s work, Lene Hansen (ibid,

p.287-288) makes the argument that the concept of security should involve the role of practice as a key element. The relationship between what is spoken and what is performed in terms of state security is exemplified by Hansen (*ibid*, p.302), when she presents a situation of enemy tanks crossing the border, allegedly to “protect” the population. This shows a clear example of a situation when practice and speech about security does not align (*ibid*).

Within security studies as a whole, performativity has been applied to the analysis of states, national borders and militarised spaces, among other things, in order to explain how constructions of identities come about. Cynthia Weber (1998) is one researcher who has investigated the performativity of states in relation to the construction of their sovereignty. Using Butler’s argument about how identity is constantly constituted by performance, Weber (*ibid*, p.90) argues that states produce their identity in relation to other states when practicing foreign relations and policy, and concludes that “the identity of the state is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results”. Taking the example of international intervention, these can be justified when the state in which the international community intervene lacks resources to constitute itself as sovereign when performing their identity, according to Weber (*ibid*, p.92-93).

ii. “Modern” security threats

With the modern, globalized and interconnected world follows that new issues such as climate change, environmental disasters and pandemics are being constructed as security threats. As previously explained, this necessitates investigation of the gender dimensions inherent in the construction of these new threats. Some feminist studies have been conducted on the subject, but Enarson and Pease (2016) for example argue that more extensive research is needed specifically on masculinity in relation to (environmental) disasters. In order to fully understand the dynamics on all levels and in varying contexts, it is important that the research is not framed around the binary of women as vulnerable and men as powerful, or even the reversed scenario, as this will give an insufficient understanding of how the structures are organised (*ibid*, p.11).

Martin Hultman (2020) is one researcher who has looked into this further, arguing that masculine norms and the idea of dominating nature is something that influences the construction of climate change as a security threat. According to Hultman (*ibid*), behaviour associated with masculinity can have a bad impact on the climate and therefore contribute to

the threat of global warming. For example, eating a lot of meat or driving a big car is associated with masculinity, but also leads to carbon dioxide emissions that clearly affects the environment negatively. In this scenario, masculinity is no longer the protector but rather the trigger of a security threat. Habits associated with femininity on the other hand are seen as the solution to the environmental crisis, which makes it even more interesting to look at the gendered construction in relation to these types of “modern” security threats. Cohn and Duncanson (2020) build on this perspective by further arguing that the climate breakdown is a consequence of patriarchal and capitalist structures, and that gender constructions stand in the way of any sustainable change. Centralized, technocratic, and “rational” solutions associated with masculinity are prioritised over grassroots and local efforts associated with femininity, since the latter is understood as contesting the current structure (ibid).

Another researcher who specifically explores masculinity in relation to environmental disasters is Duke Austin (2016). The contribution by Austin is important since it includes different layers and types of masculinity, as he investigates how “hyper-masculinity” comes to expression in a case-study of hurricane Katrina. His conclusion is that expressions of hyper-masculinity are used to cope with the situation following the hurricane. The hyper-masculinity is something that is both enabled as a consequence of, and made legitimate when, traditional structures of power that normally ensures gender domination have been toppled (ibid, p.52). When the obvious hierarchical position of masculinity is threatened, it tends to be compensated by this extreme hyper-form of masculinity.

Except for climate issues, something that has been constructed as a security threat in recent years are pandemics. In a study from 2019, Bloodsworth-Lugo and Lugo-Lugo (2019) looks at the response to two types of security threats within a US context, namely global pandemics and terrorism. They argue that since 9/11, both global pandemics and terrorist threats are handled with similar types of militarised response. This is motivated by the idea that both types of threats lack a clear target, meaning that “the war against terror” or “the war against the virus” is not a war against a clearly defined enemy, and it is therefore unsure at what given point in time that enemy is defeated (ibid, p.96). This study clearly proves that pandemics are militarised in the same way the more traditional security threat of terrorism is militarised. Further analysis of this claim is therefore well needed, in order to look more closely at how the militarised response to a pandemic is gendered.

Another feminist researcher who has investigated the construction of a pandemic, namely the HIV/AIDS pandemic, is Maria Jansson (2017). Looking at how UN peacekeeping missions have been legitimised, Jansson argues that the Security Council struggled to make issues that are unrelated to military agendas or traditional security threats prioritised for peacekeeping forces. The conclusion from the study is that the idea of masculinity and the relationship between protector and protected was used to legitimise the narrative of HIV/AIDS as a security threat, and thereby it was more widely accepted to use peacekeeping forces for the sake of a health issue (ibid). This clearly shows how closely intertwined gendered structures are within the understanding of security, and how new threats can be twisted and constructed to fit the hierarchies and dynamics normally found in traditional security settings.

Although the covid-19 pandemic is still very much ongoing, some research has been conducted on it already. Palmer and Peterson (2020) shows evidence of a correlation between masculine toughness and negative feelings towards wearing a mask, proving that the resistance to wear a surgical mask to prevent the spread of the virus is rooted in gender identity. Tyler Reny (2020) also looks at masculinity in relation to the pandemic, focusing on the data which suggests that men are more likely to die from the virus. Reny concludes that masculine norms lead to that these individuals engage in more risky behaviour and are generally more resistant towards seeking medical help, which explains why men were more likely to contract and die from the virus.

The amount of female political representatives during the press briefings concerning the covid-19 pandemic in the UK is something that has been investigated by Jessica Smith (2020). The result of her study shows that only 2 out of 56 briefings were led by a woman, and 23 briefings did not have a single woman at all in the line-up of politicians and experts (ibid, p.4-6). Smith resorts to discuss the potential consequences of this, as the lack of female representation might have a long-lasting effect on women's engagement in politics. However, Smith leaves many questions unaddressed, for example about how the power dynamics between masculinity and femininity might come to play in this situation. The narrative in this case is being constructed by individuals who are perceived as masculine, and fulfil their masculinity further by expressing themselves as experts in the public and political sphere. This thesis will contribute by digging deeper into these aspects and its role in constructing a security narrative.

3. Methodology

This chapter starts by explaining the basic core assumptions adopted for the research in terms of ontology and epistemology. Thereafter, the narrative analysis which will be used as a method to investigate the material is described in detail. The choice of research material and its suitability to answer the research questions is then finally accounted for.

A. Ontological and epistemological assumptions

The research design that will be used for this thesis is based in anti-naturalist ontology, meaning that the world is understood as socially constructed and constantly affected by norms, culture, and values (Wight 2012, p.44). This ontological assumption is the basis of most feminist research, as social constructions of power are the very core of analysis (Åhäll 2015, p.5). As structures of power are always essentially constructed by language and performance, it is important that it is treated as nothing else than a construction - always contextual, fluid and subject for potential change. Hence, the result of this study can only be read as a contribution to the feminist understanding of security narratives and its gendered dynamics in the specific context of the covid-19 pandemic.

Following the anti-naturalist ontological assumption, the epistemological stance in this research project is normative. When investigating any given subject, but especially when investigating something which is per definition subjective such as social constructions, objectivity is an impossibility since the interpretation of those constructions is highly influenced by both situatedness and context. Not even the subject-matter (“security threat”) can be treated as an objective concept in itself. Especially suitable is then the feminist approach, since it opens up for critical questions about security threats in themselves. By applying a normative perspective, the underlying meanings to the creation of any concepts are emphasised, and the belief is that research must be done from within rather than claiming an outside perspective (Wight 2012, p.38). This is almost a given when writing a paper using feminist theory, as power relations are exposed easiest by looking at the underlying meanings.

Following both the ontological and epistemological assumptions, the approach when conducting this research will be interpretive and paired with a flexible research design. As is highly appropriate and very common within interpretive research, the researcher approaches the subject with an open mind (Bevir & Rhodes 2016, p.18). To be aware of however, is the

risk of a “double meaning-making process”, since the world is made sense of in two steps: an interpretation of the world is expressed in the material under investigation, and then again when analysed by the researcher (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012, p.39). For the political speeches in this case, the leaders interpret the world to create their story about the situation, which is then interpreted in the analysis of this thesis. However, since the research questions are aimed to investigate the construction of a political narrative, the double meaning making is rather an advantage than a disadvantage. The wording and content of the political speech in itself is under investigation, rather than any reason to why the three political leaders end up creating this specific narrative. The narrated story which is being told to the citizens is the matter of interest, unrelated to why the specific content came to be or how it is perceived by the audience.

B. Method

The strategy for the analysis will be abductive, meaning that the process will go back and forth between the material and the theory (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012, p.27). This method has been adopted in order to make the analysis as closely related to the theory and previous research as possible, which in turn helps ensure reflexivity. As previously discussed, it is of major importance when conducting an interpretive study to be aware of one's own position as a researcher and how this affects the research, i.e. being reflexive (ibid, p.100). By constantly linking the findings to theory in a completely transparent manner, the trustworthiness of this thesis will be increased.

In accordance with the research questions, it is appropriate to use a narrative framework in order to investigate potential militarisation and gendered dynamics in the construction of covid-19 as a security threat. Narrative analysis differs from other types of content analysis by its focus on meaning-making (Haste et al. 2018, p.310). In *Feminist security studies: a narrative approach*, Annick Wibben (2011) argues that knowledge is being constantly produced, and the way in which meanings are created within a context does not actually mean anything real until we engage with it and interpret it. Furthermore, narratives shape the world and what is possible within it, which leads Wibben to the conclusion that narratives are deeply political in its production of meaning (ibid). As such, the political narrative is a combination of both the content and the way in which it is presented by the actors (Haste et al. 2018, p.310).

Drawing on the narrative approach by Bal (1997), Wibben (2011, p.46) explains that narratives consist of three layers: the text, the story and the fabula. In this case, the text is not more complicated than the actual transcript of the speech. However, the person presenting the narrative will come to shape the character of the text (ibid, p.47). The fact that the speeches in this case are addressed to the nation and made by political leaders will give the text a formal character in the first place, and the use or non-use of pronouns can further impact the format of the text. The second layer, the story, relates to how the text is presented through a certain focalization. Focalization is described by Wibben (ibid, p.48) as the relationship between the content and the vision through which it is being presented. The focalizer can either be a character embedded within the story, or it can be the same character who narrates and presents the story. Since this study does not concern fictional material, the focalizers are the political leaders. However, paying attention to the identity of the narrators, and how this affects the vision through which they present the story is of great importance. The meaning of the story will be affected by the focalization, and if the audience to a high degree identifies with the focalizer, they are less likely to question the story (ibid, p.50). The fabula is the third and last layer of the narrative. This can be arranged simply as the beginning, the middle and the end of the narrative, and can in other words be understood as the content (ibid).

Despite the importance of all three layers, this thesis will be focused mainly on the story level. When looking at the construction of narratives, the story comes to affect both the text and the fabula. As argued by Wibben (2011, p.59) herself; “Of particular interest to an analysis of the framing of a narrative is the story level. It concerns the manipulation of the text through ordering, which produces a perspective or point of view and is decisive for the meaning of the fabula.” The story level is thereby where to look for underlying meanings, and the most suitable level when conducting a critical constructivist analysis. Below in table 2 is one example given of an ordering process which is helpful to unfold the story level of the narrative (ibid, p.48). This framework will be used as a starting point for the analysis of the speeches. The text and fabula levels will be discussed briefly, as they are somewhat embedded in different aspects of the story. However, the analysis will be structured in accordance to the elements presented in the table below.

Table 2.

<i>Elements</i>	<i>Processes at story level</i>
Events	The events are arranged in a sequence that can differ from the chronological sequence.
Time	The amount of time that is allotted in the story to the various elements of the fabula is determined with respect to the amount of time that these elements take up in the fabula.
Actors	The actors are provided with distinct traits. In this manner, they are individualized and transformed into characters.
Locations	The locations where events occur are also given distinct characteristics and are thus transformed into specific places.
Relationships	In addition to the necessary relationships among actors, events, locations, and time, all of which were already describable in the layer of the fabula, other relationships (symbolic, allusive, traditional, etc.) may exist among the various elements.
Points of view	A choice is made from among the various “points of view” from which the elements can be presented. The resulting <i>focalization</i> , the relationship between who perceives and what is perceived, produces subjectivity.

Source: Wibben 2011, p.48.

The first step of the analysis will be a close reading of all three political speeches. In accordance with the narrative ordering process described above in the table by Wibben, each element will be looked for in the stories while constantly keeping theory and previous research in mind. To give a simple overview of the findings, the chapter dedicated to the analysis will be clearly structured after the different elements, with only one exception. The element “relationships” should not be understood as anything else than how the different elements are related to each other. Therefore, this element will be discussed throughout the analysis of the other elements to facilitate the reading and understanding of the analysis.

While the narrative ordering process is very beneficial to follow as it is clearly structured around the various elements of the story, a structured classification scheme also has certain disadvantages. An analysis which follows a very limited framework can be very reductive and risk leaving little room for further critical thinking outside of that framework. For that reason, Wibben (2011, p.51) argues that the use of the ordering process needs to be carefully balanced in relation to the research questions and the aim of the study.

With the use of the narrative framework follows that the focus of the research will be limited to the narrator, i.e. the political leader, and not to the audience in question. Thereby, it is

impossible to say anything about how the narrative is being perceived. Merely the attempt to constitute a gendered narrative is investigated, without any claims on whether they succeeded in their attempt to implement said narrative. It can certainly be questioned whether the security narrative matters if nobody listens. However, in accordance with most feminist researchers (e.g. Hansen 2000, Enloe 2007, Wibben 2011, Åhäll 2015), it is important to pay attention to security in all its forms. An attempt to create a security narrative, even if not successful, says a lot about the power structures surrounding the agenda of political leaders. Furthermore, the narrative is nevertheless interesting to analyse in terms of potential silencing of topics, i.e. what is said and what is intentionally or unintentionally left out. Since the political leaders investigated in this study have been chosen because they are highly influential, it is even more important to critically evaluate the narrative they chose to portray.

C. Material

In order to answer the research questions about the construction of narratives in the early stages of the covid-19 pandemic, the transcription of three speeches will be analysed in depth. The data is collected using an abductive approach, in order to ensure that the material is suitable for the research questions, the theory and what has been outlined by previous research. The three political leaders that have been selected are President Emmanuel Macron, Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel. The investigation is thereby limited to a European context, which leads to both advantages and disadvantages. The main drawback of this somewhat limited amount of material is that it potentially says very little about the construction of narratives concerning security threats in society overall, as it leaves three political leaders as representatives for the general discourse. It is therefore important that the result of the study is treated for what it is, and that there is no claim to universal generalisations. On the other hand, it enables a more in-depth analysis of the speeches, which is crucial when investigating power dynamics and gendered hierarchies that are hidden within narratives.

Keeping in mind the limits to the scope of the study, the three leaders nevertheless serve as a sufficient selection to analyse the dominant narrative of covid-19 in Europe, for multiple reasons. The research material has been chosen consciously since it meets certain criteria which makes it suitable to answer the research purpose and questions outlined. Great Britain, France and Germany are three countries with a lot in common, being the three largest European states in terms of population and economy, with relatively big influence over the European region.

All three countries are liberal democracies, and all currently part of the European Union and NATO (at the time the speeches were held, Brexit was still in progress). Furthermore, the geographical proximity entails a closely intertwined social and cultural history. None of the three countries are currently engaged in any war, and hasn't been since the Second World War, which is relevant when considering their tendencies for a militarised or non-militarised narrative. Because of all these similarities, the three countries make up a suitable collection of source material to analyse the dynamics of militarisation and gender within the narrative created by the political leaders on covid-19 as a threat.

To ensure that the speeches are comparable in its format, speeches that are all labelled as an official "address to the nation" within the state in question have been picked out. Emmanuel Macron held an Adresse aux Français on 16 March. Two days later, Angela Merkel followed, and the Address to the nation made by Boris Johnson was held five days later, on 23 March. Multiple statements were made by Boris Johnson before this, but in order to make the selection of resource material as consistent as possible, the more extensive speech on 23 March was chosen even if it was performed a couple of days later. The format of the "address to the nation" means that the political leaders are speaking directly to their populations. All speeches were aired on tv, which means that there was a broad and public reach. Additionally, the speeches all contained some kind of exhortation or encouragement, aiming for a direct impact on the behaviour of citizens.

It almost goes without saying that things changed fast during the first weeks of the covid-19 pandemic, and the timing of any material related to the development of the situation will thereby have a huge impact. To enable an accurate analysis of the narratives within the political discourse of the three respective countries, speeches by each leader which were held as close as possible in time have been chosen. All speeches were held in March, a specific point in time which has been chosen in order to capture the first impulse of leaders and the first narrative that was presented when posed with the pandemic. This gives an overview of how the virus initially provoked a security threat-type of response. However, the fact that the speeches were all held close together in time makes it impossible to say anything about if the narrative was sustained throughout the pandemic, or if it even lasted longer than the first reaction. At any other given point in time, the narrative could potentially have looked completely different.

The three states that will be investigated do also cover the three major languages within the European region, which gives the resource material an even wider spread and enables the investigation of a narrative which is spread across Europe. However, one potential drawback is that the speeches by Macron and Merkel will be translated to English before being analysed, since the original speeches were delivered in French and German respectively. This could entail that certain linguistic concepts and specific underlying meanings that are difficult to translate are lost. The official English translation of Merkel's speech which is available on the government website will be used, and for that reason potential misinterpretations could be dismissed as unlikely. However, there is no official English translation of Macron's speech, which increases the risk of incorrect translation.

In the investigation of the three speeches, it is important to point out that this study does not at all aim to compare the narratives that are presented. The purpose of looking at three speeches instead of only one is simply to have more source material and enable a broader understanding. As already argued, the three countries have been chosen because the circumstances are very similar, and the narrative presented should therefore be somewhat consistent across the material. Throughout the analysis, the speeches are hence treated as one unit. However, a short reflection on the differences between the speeches will be made in the discussion chapter of the thesis, however unrelated to the analysis and only for the purpose to open up for future research.

4. Empirical investigation

The analysis is organised in five different parts, according to the narrative ordering process presented in table 2. The first section looks at how events are presented in the story, and how the ordering of these events helps reinforce the narrative. This is followed by an analysis of the locations, the actors, and points of view that play part in the narrative. Finally, the amount of time dedicated for each aspect of the story, and what kind of effect it has on the narrative, is analysed. Since the element “relationships” concerns how the different elements relate to each other, this will not be analysed in a specific section of its own. Rather, the way in which the elements relate to each other will be continuously discussed throughout the analysis.

A. Events: In a full-scale war

The overall striking theme, returning throughout all three speeches, is the narration of the virus as an existential security threat towards society and all its functions. All three leaders are emphasising the seriousness of the situation, repeatedly claiming that this pandemic is something beyond the normal and that it requires the immediate attention of all citizens. It is thereby narrated as a national security threat, sometimes more subtle and indirect, and other times very direct. Angela Merkel (2020) for example, makes a direct comparison to two historical events: “Since the German reunification, no, since the Second World War, there has not been a challenge for our country in which action in a spirit of solidarity on our part was so important.” This historical analogy is very contextual, and therefore likely to have a strong effect on the German population. The events are important parts of German history, and the audience probably has a personal relationship to the events and can relate to them. It therefore plays an effective part in creating a narrative of seriousness. The pandemic is portrayed as an event to be compared with the Second World War, and it is thereby clearly positioned within the scope of traditional and military national security.

The war theme is furthermore very clear throughout the speech by Emmanuel Macron. No less than six times does he explicitly state that “we are at war” (2020, my translation). When talking about the decisions that will be taken, he argues further that “Never before has France had to take such decisions - obviously exceptional, obviously temporary - in times of peace.” (ibid). This quote implies that the times of peace are certainly over. This is also a clear example of how war is being constructed as a state of exception. When Macron implicates that these are

not times of peace, he also implies that it is a situation out of the ordinary and that normal rules and laws no longer apply.

The order in which events are described also plays an important role in creating and strengthening the narrative. In this case, the events can be organised around three themes which are sequenced as different points in time, namely the current situation, the worst-case scenario, and what needs to be done to avoid the worst-case scenario. This serves as a consistent way of structuring the arguments in the speeches by all three leaders. The first way of ordering events is simply to describe how the situation is evolving at the very moment of the speech - the “now”. This story about the current situation is characterized by its instant urgency, which leaves no time to think of anything else. It has become vital to act, and to act now, which is expressed for example by Macron (2020, my translation): “Until then, the epidemic was perhaps for some people a distant idea, it has become an immediate, pressing reality.” Boris Johnson (2020) also addresses the current situation, but without the same explicit indication of stress. Rather, he points to how the current situation leaves no options for the future: “But at present there are just no easy options. The way ahead is hard, and it is still true that many lives will sadly be lost.” (2020). What this presentation of the current situation leads to is mainly to help strengthen the narrative of an exception state. There seems to be no doubt that this unprecedented crisis requires unprecedented measures. This is further pushed for when Merkel (2020) describes the current situation as impossible to solve in any conventional way: “[...] the most intensive research is being conducted around the world, but there is still neither a way to treat the coronavirus, nor is there a vaccine.”

The second category in which events are ordered, is around the worst-case scenario. The leaders describe what would happen in the worst imaginable future if we do nothing to stop the virus. By talking about the worst-case scenario, the basic foundation on which everything else can be legitimised is laid out. All extraordinary measures, decisions and requests made by the political leadership which are completely out of the ordinary can be presented without further questioning. The worst-case scenario is depicted in for example the following quote:

Without a huge national effort to halt the growth of this virus, there will come a moment when no health service in the world could possibly cope; because there won't be enough ventilators, enough intensive care beds, enough doctors and nurses. (Johnson 2020)

Another way in which the worst-case scenario is painted out, is the emphasis on how uncertain and unknown this future scenario is. Merkel (2020) says for example: “The situation is serious, and the outcome uncertain.”, which is very similar to the statement by Macron (2020, my translation): “My dear compatriots, France is going through a very difficult time. No one can predict precisely how long it will last.” This in itself can be perceived as a way to inflict negative emotions among the audience, as people are likely to be cautious of the unknown. By emphasising the uncertainty of the future, the threatening nature of the situation is thereby reminded of. Furthermore, it is difficult to prepare for something that is unknown, and an enemy without a face is easier to construct in a way that best suits the narrator. This reasserts the narrators’, in this case the political leaders’, control of the situation. However, this also makes the request by the leaders somewhat contradictory as they are asking their populations to prepare for something they do not know what it is. That would potentially open up for questions and scepticism among the audience, yet in this case the strong war narrative most likely outweighs this potential problematisation.

The third and last way of categorizing the development in time, is the description of the actions that are needed. This is portrayed as an alternative scenario to the worst case, an alternative which leads to a much brighter future. In this scenario, the virus is stopped, and life can get back to normal. However, it is coupled with a huge sacrifice of all citizens and societal functions. This is exemplified for instance when Macron (2020, my translation) says: “All the action of the Government and Parliament must henceforth be directed towards the fight against the epidemic. Day and night, nothing must distract us from it.”

In resemblance to the first ordering of events (that of the current situation) this third option is also portrayed as inevitable. The decisions that are taken about the measures, simply must be put into place and should therefore not be questioned. Johnson (2020) says for example “No Prime Minister wants to enact measures like this.” The leaders are declaring that there is no alternative, which is motivated by putting it in comparison to the worst case alternative in different ways: “But believe me, this effort that I am asking you to make, I know it is unprecedented, but circumstances oblige us to do so.” (Macron 2020, my translation).

The ordering of these events helps to enforce the narrative of a serious, war-like state in which no normalities can be taken for granted. The presentation of the inevitability of the situation is

then followed by phrases that serve to give a positive outlook on the future, such as: “We will win, but this period will have taught us a lot.” (Macron 2020, my translation). Hence, the audience is encouraged to keep the hope up despite the dull presentation of what must be done.

B. Locations: Sacrifice on the frontline and warring from the couch

The comparison with war is a returning theme in the portrayal of the pandemic, as already discussed. An important aspect to this is how locations, both real and metaphorically speaking, are used to strengthen the narrative. Health care workers are for example referred to as “on the frontline in a fight that will require energy, determination and solidarity” (Macron 2020, my translation). The use of the frontline as a metaphor for the location where the fight against the pandemic is played out can be found in strikingly similar versions also in the other two speeches. Boris Johnson (2020) says “I want to thank everyone who is working flat out to beat the virus. Everyone from the supermarket staff to the transport workers to the carers to the nurses and doctors on the frontline.”, and Angela Merkel (2020) uses a similar choice of words when she concludes that “You are on the front lines of this fight for us.” Except for how this metaphor supports the narrative portraying the pandemic as a war, the use of the specific word frontline creates an image of a location on which the narrative can be built. The location is in that way given distinct characteristics and made into a place that can be visualised for the audience.

Choosing to use the word enlisted is another play on the war-image: “But in this fight we can be in no doubt that each and every one of us is directly enlisted.” (Johnson 2020). This creates a narrative that reminds people of enlisting for military service. In this case all citizens are directly enlisted, according to Johnson, which perfectly shows how the militaristic thinking is overreaching and affecting everyone in society. Nobody is excluded, as all bodies that are part of the nation state are being equally militarised in light of the pandemic. All citizens are thereby imbued as part of the overreaching military institution where individuality does not matter, but only the individual’s sacrifice for the good of the nation.

Another location that is repeatedly appearing in the speeches are national borders. This gives a hint of how the threat is a national issue that will be treated within the nation, and the audience is reminded that they are indeed listening to an address to the nation which they are part of. Merkel (2020) says for example: “This is why, since the beginning of the week, more intensive

border controls and restrictions on entry for a number of our most important neighbouring countries have been in force.” With this quote, it is somehow implied that neighbouring countries are part of the threat, they are being painted out as part of the problem and controls need to be issued towards them to prevent the spread of the virus. A similar statement is made by Macron:

We are at war. As I told you on Thursday, in order to protect ourselves and contain the spread of the virus, but also to preserve our health care systems, this morning we Europeans took a joint decision. As of noon tomorrow, the borders at the entrance to the European Union and the Schengen area will be closed. (Macron 2020, my translation)

The difference here is that Macron is positioning himself together with the rest of the Europeans. He is careful to let the audience know it was a joint decision, which implies that the countries are coming together on the same side to fight the virus. The lack of internal borders which is such a proud attribute to fortress Europe seems to be the focus of Macron, as he chooses not to mention any border restrictions to neighbouring countries within the EU. The narrative of the rest of the world as allies, facing the pandemic together, is also similarly emphasised by Johnson (2020): “The coronavirus is the biggest threat this country has faced for decades – and this country is not alone. All over the world we are seeing the devastating impact [...]”

In all three speeches, the political leaders also position themselves in relation to neighbouring countries and the rest of the international community by comparing their capacity. Both Merkel and Johnson explicitly compare their country to others: “Germany has an excellent healthcare system, perhaps one of the best in the world. We can take solace in this.” (Merkel 2020). Much similarly, Johnson (2020) also portrays the UK as a country with excellent health care: “[...] there will come a moment when no health service in the world could possibly cope [...] And as we have seen elsewhere, in other countries that also have fantastic health care systems, that is the moment of real danger.” Both Merkel and Johnson are here comparing themselves to other countries that also have fantastic health care systems, arguing that this does not rid them from facing real danger. By doing so, they are claiming that their countries are not to be understood as exceptionally “weak”, as if there is a need to assert oneself and prove their own strength and capacity. This indicates that throughout this crisis, structures of power in the international system are still important to sustain. It is not exclusively their health care system that cannot handle the crisis, rather it concerns all countries equally, all over the world.

Except for the frontline and the national borders, another location that keeps returning throughout the speeches is the home. However, the portrayal of the home is not the traditional private, non-active, feminine sphere it is usually understood as. Boris Johnson (2020) says for example: “And therefore I urge you at this moment of national emergency to stay at home, protect our NHS and save lives.” The home is thereby portrayed as another location in which the battle is taking place. Citizens are encouraged to participate in the fight against the virus and save lives by staying in their homes.

From another perspective, the home can be seen as portrayed exactly in line with the feminine sphere, and more in accordance with how it is valued traditionally. For example, Macron (2020, my translation) describes it as a huge sacrifice to be limited to the home: “I know that I am asking you to stay at home. I am also asking you to keep calm in this context. I have seen, in the last few hours, phenomena of panic in all directions.” In this case, limiting people to the home is to question their individuality. The private sphere is traditionally occupied by those with feminine traits, who are also traditionally lacking agency. By emphasising what a huge sacrifice it is to stay at home, the inferior position of the home is clearly evident. It is also interesting that staying at home is associated with feelings of panic, since irrationality and strong emotions often are declared as feminine characteristics. By asking all people to stay at home, everyone is directed to the private sphere, stripped of their agency and in that way feminised.

While citizens are asked not to leave the home, this is not all that is asked from them: “While staying at home, take care of the relatives who are in your apartment, in your house.” (Macron 2020, my translation). This further shows the clear connection between the private sphere and the role of femininity as reproducer and maintainer of life. The narrative presented by this depiction is very similar to how the feminine (women) have been expected to participate in traditional wars. Women have historically not been expected to participate in the warring, but rather to contribute to the good of the nation by staying in the home and care for the social and cultural legacy, or by taking care of the wounded. In this case, all citizens are asked to take on the caregiver-role.

C. Actors: Mobilising the troops

Any war narrative is dependent on certain dynamics, as already outlined in the theory section. One of those dynamics, which is also another returning theme in the speeches, is the creation of groups. One group is created by the direct encouragement for people to come together (visually speaking in this case) to prevent the spread of the virus. This is done by referring to an overall feeling of solidarity, for example, “Let's show solidarity and a sense of responsibility.” (Macron 2020, my translation), or by referring to the community and sense of responsibility for each other, “We will prove, as a community, that we will not abandon one another.” (Merkel 2020). The narrative within all three speeches are evidently created around an idea of becoming stronger together. It is repeatedly argued that the only way to fight the virus is together:

Each and every one of us is now obliged to join together. And I know that as they have in the past so many times. The people of this country will rise to that challenge. And we will come through it stronger than ever. We will beat the coronavirus and we will beat it together. (Johnson 2020)

Furthermore, an idea of how a good citizen should behave is painted out by exemplifying what is not a good citizen: “Panic buying, as if there’s no tomorrow, is pointless and, at the end of the day, shows a complete lack of solidarity.” (Merkel 2020). The ideal citizen is supposed to show companionship and solidarity with others. Irrational actions and resistance to follow the rules are frowned upon. Very similar to the ideal type of military masculinity, the image of an ideal soldier in this war against the virus is created. To make the resemblance to how troops mobilize for a war even more clear, Macron (2020, my translation) even uses the word “compatriots” to describe his audience: “My dear compatriots, I am aware of the impact of all these decisions on your lives. Giving up on seeing your loved ones is heart-breaking; stopping your daily activities, your habits, is very difficult.” Much like soldiers, the citizens are asked to sacrifice everything for the nation.

However, unlike the soldiers within the military, the ideal citizen is in this case not simply expected to blend into the military institution as just another body used to win the fight, but also expected to take responsibility and owe up to their own agency. Merkel (2020) says for example: “I firmly believe that we will pass this test if all citizens genuinely see this as THEIR

task.” By this quote, the responsibility is put on each and every one to take the matter in their own hands.

In the endeavour to mobilise citizens, multiple references are made to different groups of actors within the narrative which serves to create divisions between an “us” and a “them”. By playing on dynamics of othering, all three political leaders further mobilise the audience, more or less explicitly. Perhaps the most important form of othering in this case is the construction of the virus as the other. The virus is portrayed with distinct traits, individualized and made into a sort of character. Boris Johnson (2020) for example refers to the virus multiple times as an “invisible killer”. Whilst this description maintains the virus difficult to grasp, as the fact that it is invisible makes it very hard to visually imagine it, the portrayal nevertheless humanizes the virus and makes it into a distinct enemy. This is even more explicit in the speech by Macron (2020, my translation) when he says: “we are not fighting against an army, nor against another nation. But the enemy is there, invisible, elusive, advancing.” The image of a clear enemy helps mobilise people and strengthen the construction of an imagined us. The two opposing parties, us and the threatening enemy, is very much in line with what is necessary in any traditional war. The fact that the virus is invisible makes it more threatening in this narrative rather than the opposite, simply because the unknown seems more frightening than the known.

In comparison to the horrible, threatening, and much unknown other, the us is depicted much more graphically:

These [patients suffering severe symptoms] are not just abstract numbers in statistics, but this is about a father or grandfather, a mother or grandmother, a partner – this is about people. And we are a community in which each life and each person counts. (Merkel 2020)

With this type of phrasing, Merkel makes it possible for the audience to clearly visualise and create an emotional connection to their own side of the conflict. Furthermore, the speeches tend to continuously link the responsibility for fellow citizens with obligations to one's family, potentially because the family is known as a social group of strong bonds and feelings: “As families, and as a society, we will find other ways to help each other.” (Merkel 2020). The us which needs to be mobilised in response to the enemy, is just as closely connected as a family.

The story told by the political leaders is thereby also focused around the need to protect those who are most vulnerable within society. Which groups are specifically highlighted as vulnerable has an important impact on the creation of the narrative, as it lays the foundation to power structures. One group which is specifically mentioned are the elderly: “Ideally, we should avoid all contact with the elderly, because they are particularly at risk.” (Merkel 2020). This group is portrayed as in a completely helpless position, in need of help to manage even the most everyday tasks: “People are assisting the elderly who cannot themselves go shopping.” (ibid).

Boris Johnson (2020) also takes on a vulnerability narrative when mentioning how individuals already in contact with the National Health Service (NHS) because of previous medical conditions are particularly vulnerable: “To put it simply, if too many people become seriously unwell at one time, the NHS will be unable to handle it - meaning more people are likely to die, not just from Coronavirus but from other illnesses as well.” In this quote, Johnson is not limiting the security threat to the pandemic itself, but he takes it one step further. The pandemic is threatening the security of the country because of its snowball effect. More people will come to die from other illnesses when the consequences of the virus comes to have a long-term effect on society.

All leaders do also in one way or another mention how isolation and the lack of social life can make people vulnerable in itself. Merkel (2020) says for example;

Millions of you cannot go to work, your children cannot go to school or kindergarten, theatres and cinemas and shops are closed, and, perhaps what is most difficult, we all miss social encounters that we otherwise take for granted. (Merkel 2020)

It is made even more clear by Macron (2020, my translation) that the measures put in place might inflict even more insecurity for some groups: “For the most precarious, for the most destitute, for isolated people, we will ensure, with the major associations, with local communities and their services, that they can be fed, protected, that the services we owe them are provided.” This implies in a way that an active decision is taken. By protecting citizens towards one threat, the invisible killer, some groups are intentionally made even more insecure in light of mental health, access to food and public services, etc. A prioritisation seems to be

made, which is easier to motivate and legitimise when presenting it as part of a clear war narrative which portrays the situation as exceptional.

Another division can be found between the health care staff and other citizens. The distinction of these two groups is made clear once again by a separation between good and bad, exemplified especially in this quote from Macron:

But at the same time, even as the medical personnel in the intensive care units were alerting us to the seriousness of the situation, we also saw people gathering in parks, crowded markets, restaurants and bars that did not respect the closing instructions. (Macron 2020, my translation)

In this way, the hospital staff are portrayed as more knowledgeable. They are portrayed as superior to the rest of the citizens in their expertise and it is emphasised that they need to be listened to because they are more educated on this specific security threat. If the virus is portrayed as the enemy in this war setting, the medical staff are rather painted out as the heroes in this scenario. In their roles, they are acting as protectors stepping in to save the citizens. Much like the military on the frontline, health care staff are portrayed as deserving of respect and praise, as their sacrifice makes them superior to the rest of the citizens. Compared to the portrayal of military masculinities in a traditional war however, what is valued in this case is medical knowledge and ability to save lives, rather than physical strength and ability to kill.

Furthermore, the vulnerability of hospital staff is bundled together with the need to protect other essential staff within different sectors of the labour market: “Those working as supermarket cashiers or restocking shelves, who are currently doing one of the most difficult jobs that there are at the moment.” (Merkel 2020). However, the vulnerability of essential staff and health care workers differs from the vulnerability of the elderly on an important aspect. In comparison to the elderly, essential staff are portrayed as vulnerable because of their agency - not due to their lack of it. They are not at all helpless in this narrative, rather they are portrayed as strong and capable, but to a certain limit: “This is the only way to protect vulnerable people, to have fewer fellow citizens infected and thus to reduce the pressure on the resuscitation services so that they can provide better care and treatment.” (Macron 2020, my translation). Their very active agency thereby helps create a narrative of these groups as deserving of protection in a different way than elderly. Boris Johnson (2020) specifically mentions the importance of protecting the National Health Service (NHS): “And therefore I urge you at this

moment of national emergency to stay at home, protect our NHS and save lives.” Medical staff are thereby ascribed both the role of the protector and the protected at the same time, seemingly both feminised and masculinised as a group. Even if medical staff are without hesitation narrated as the saviours in this pandemic, the traditional feminisation of hospital personnel seem to linger which creates a conflicting narrative.

However, the medical staff are also at the same time put in an inferior position as they are very much dependent on peoples help. Emmanuel Macron even goes as far as comparing health care workers with children:

We are at war. The Nation will support its children who, as health care workers in the city, in the hospital, are on the front line in a fight that will require energy, determination and solidarity from them. They have rights over us. We obviously owe them the means, the protection. We will be there. (Macron 2020, my translation)

This comparison removes agency from the health care workers, which is further proved when Macron states that the nation will provide them with protection. The traditional image of the nation as the protector of its people is reinforced, making the image of the health care workers somewhat contradictory. This can be made sense of by a comparison to how war veterans are treated in many parts of the world. Their sacrifice for the nation makes them deserving of praise, putting them in a superior position to everyday citizens - but nevertheless, they are part of the military institution as an extension of the state. In this case, Macron can be understood as portraying medical workers as superior to everyday citizens, but still in the hands of the state. It is a way of showing how all individuals are merely part of the bigger system in which the nation has full control.

Something that is interesting to point out is that men, as biological sex, are not at all mentioned as vulnerable. According to statistics from UN women (2020), men are at higher risk to catch the virus compared to women. This is not at all mentioned even if some studies indicate that men have a greater tendency than women to die from the coronavirus. Since there is not much research to support and further nuance this claim, especially not in March at the time of the speeches, this could however simply be a caution taken by the leaders not to make false claims. On the other hand, it could also be an indication that it is easier for the leaders to portray elderly as the group in need of special protection, who are already by many perceived as quite exposed to sickness because of their age, than to portray men in this way. Although not certain, the

silencing of who is statistically affected by the virus might be a consequence of strong patriarchal structures, evident in their effect on the narrative.

Quite contradictory to the depiction of some groups as particularly vulnerable, all three leaders go on to emphasise how the virus can come to affect anyone equally in society. Macron (2020, my translation) says for example that even the youngest can be affected; “[...] not only are you not protecting yourselves - and recent developments have shown that no one is invulnerable, including the youngest - but you are not protecting others.” Merkel (2020), further talks about the virus as indiscriminate: “As indiscriminately as each one of us can be affected by the virus, each and every one of us must help.” While it is quite clear that all people are equally in the risk zone of the virus, it is interesting that the narrative is yet so strongly created around some groups as more vulnerable than others, as previously proven. The traditional roles that can be found in a war are seemingly created despite the conflicting indication that they do not apply at all. All people are seemingly equal when facing the virus, but there is still a need to emphasise hierarchies and power relationships. The reason for this can only be speculated in. It could potentially be a legacy of the ways in which security have been discussed for many years, and a proof of how the militarisation of society still affects any security narrative. Alternatively, it could potentially be more of an active choice. Knowing that an image of someone who is weak and in need of protection is more effective when appealing to the good will of people, the political leaders might intentionally create a narrative which clearly differentiates people from each other.

D. Points of view: No time for democracy in the nanny state

The point of view from which the narrative is presented in all three speeches will come to both shape and limit the story. As one point of view is prioritised, the story is focalized to the vision through which the narrative is presented, which plays a part in creating and producing the specific subjective understanding of reality.

One aspect which affects the point of view is the symbolic relationship between the state and its citizens. The power relationship between the two is sometimes allusive and sometimes very explicitly expressed. By positioning the government in a traditional governing role, the decisions taken in response to the pandemic are legitimised. The audience is constantly reminded of the state monopoly on violence, surveillance and control: “If you don’t follow the

rules the police will have the powers to enforce them, including through fines and dispersing gatherings.” (Johnson 2020). The overall narrative in all three speeches is constructed around a threatening situation out of the ordinary, presenting this ruthless killer that will jeopardise the safety of the most vulnerable and loving family members - all leading up to the legitimisation of the measures that will be enforced. The narrative thereby helps to leave the measures unquestioned, and when Macron (2020, my translation) argues that the government can fully implement their power to reprimand citizens, this seems nothing but appropriate: “Any violation of these rules will be punished.” This point of view serves to portray the state as overprotective and overgenerous, leaving the citizens in a helpless position of dependency.

The narrative of a strong state, there to provide support in times of crisis, is further strengthened by constant reminders of how the political leaders will continue to be there for their citizens. Macron (2020, my translation) says for example that “I will speak to you regularly. Each time, I will tell you, as I have done, as the Government does, the truth about the evolution of the situation.” With a similar perspective on the role of the government, Johnson (2020) declares “And I can assure you that we will keep these restrictions under constant review. We will look again in three weeks, and relax them if the evidence shows we are able to.” The citizens are thereby told not to worry, and to trust in those who are in power. The expression of state power in that way infantilizes the citizens, telling them not to worry as all matters are taken care of.

An additional way in which the power between states and citizens is legitimised, is by constantly referring to science and experts. The measures that are put in place are explained as relying on thoughtful consideration; “They were taken with order, preparation, on the basis of scientific recommendations with a single objective: to protect us from the spread of the virus.” (Macron 2020, my translation). This takes away part of the responsibility from the state and puts it on the experts instead, leaving the political leaders with a clean conscience for any potential consequences to their actions. In a way, the leaders are saying that if the audience doesn’t trust them, they can at least trust the scientists.

Another interesting theme is, again, the contradiction in the line of argument. While constantly emphasising that there is no other way to solve the crisis, the leaders nevertheless also imply that they know how incorrect their decisions are: “No Prime Minister wants to enact measures like this. I know the damage that this disruption is doing and will do to people’s lives, to their

businesses and to their jobs.” (Johnson 2020). Multiple times, the leaders are also showing complete transparency by addressing the linkage between the implementation of the measures and its impact on democratic rights. Merkel mentions for example the freedom of movement:

Allow me to assure you that, for someone like me, for whom the freedom of travel and the freedom of movement were a hard-fought right, such restrictions can only be justified if they are absolutely imperative. (Merkel 2020)

Democratic rights, and even human rights, are hereby touched upon. Since the security narrative has already been laid out, and the situation has been declared out of the ordinary, the political leaders motivate their decisions to be legitimate and necessary under the circumstances. Some democratic rights thereby seem to be valued more highly than others. Merkel (2020) mentions for example: “This is part of what open democracy is about: that we make political decisions transparent and explain them. That we justify and communicate our actions as best we can, so that people are able to understand them.” In this way, the discussion on democracy is twisted and seems to be focused on transparency and the right for all people to properly understand what is going on, rather than the freedoms normally taken for granted. The power relation among citizens from this point of view is indecisive, at the expense of a greater division of power between those in control and the citizens whose freedoms are limited. The prioritisation of these new relationships of power is further deepened when Merkel resorts to focalize the vision to the self-image: “I know how invasive the closures that the Federation and the Länder have agreed to are in our lives, and also in terms of how we see ourselves as a democracy.” (Merkel 2020). This indicates the contradiction with the traditional perception of a democratic state.

The narrative is also created around another aspect of democracy, which further removes focus from the invasion of democratic rights. By mentioning fake news as a threat to democracy, the truth is portrayed as something important at stake in this crisis. Macron (2020, my translation), mentions for example:

“False information must not be allowed to circulate at all costs. [...] And avoid the spirit of panic, of believing in all the false rumours, the half experts or the false saints.”
(Macron 2020, my translation)

By portraying fake news and rumours as a problem in this situation, it is brought up as something that can have a severe impact and threaten the allegedly democratic response to the

pandemic. The emphasis on truth and knowledge serve to portray a narrative telling people to worry more about the spread of rumours than the consequences of the measures imposed by the government. The point of view is clearly that the government is presenting the truth, and the citizens are asked to take an active role in defending this point of view.

In the case of France, it is not only the freedom of movement that is affected by the decisions taken in light of the pandemic. Macron (2020, my translation) declares that all current reforms will be suspended, and that the municipal elections will be postponed. Again, a prioritisation is being made, as democratic procedures are put aside to implement the pandemic restrictions. Thereby, in terms of democracy, the leaders in general create a narrative in which transparency, truth, and scientific or medical knowledge is prioritised over otherwise important aspects of democracy such as elections and freedom of movement. This prioritisation is being legitimised by constant reminders of the “state-of-war”, in which the government is obliged to step in and take control of the situation for the sake of its citizens.

E. Time: Tug-of-war between health and economy

Something that comes across when looking at how much time is spent on different aspects in the story, is the focus on the economy. For a health crisis, the emphasis on the economic impact seems almost disproportionate. Throughout all three speeches, a clear theme is the effects on the economy overall but also on small businesses: “Things are already very difficult for the economy, for major companies, and also for small businesses, for shops, restaurants and freelancers.”(Merkel 2020). The economy is narrated as in a position of great risk when the invisible enemy is threatening the economic welfare of states.

The economic aspect is evidently challenging the focus on public health within the narrative, and the speeches show clearly how the two are being treated as opposites. The leaders create a narrative in which a choice must be made, either prioritising public health or the economy. This thereby enables critical questions about whether the right choice is being taken, and if it is really worth sacrificing the economy for the sake of public health. By spending so much time on portraying the choice as such a difficult one, the role the economy plays in society is made evident. It is somehow implied that the economy is out of human control, it is narrated as something bigger, thriving and developing on its own, making it devastating for people to try and intervene and put a halt to it. Individuals are portrayed merely as game pieces who are

working for the grand economy, leaving it an open question if it should not rather be the *economy* working as a service to enhance the lives of *people*. The sacrifice of the economy is being strongly motivated by the extraordinary nature of the situation, instead of simply motivating it with a focus on the well-being of individuals.

Very much in similarity to the conscious decision to “sacrifice” some groups who will be worse off under the measures, a conscious decision to sacrifice the economy seems to be taken by all leaders. No matter how important the economy is portrayed, yet it still needs to be shut down:

“I know the damage that this disruption is doing and will do to people’s lives, to their businesses and to their jobs. And that’s why we have produced a huge and unprecedented programme of support both for workers and for business.” (Johnson 2020)

The unwillingness to shut down the economy can also be connected to the dominator role, outlined by researchers who have looked into masculinities in connection to the climate. People have full control of the economic system as it is, when the goal is to constantly have a steady development and a thriving economy. To put the economy to a halt completely contradicts these goals so deeply rooted in liberal economies and forces the dominator to let go and give in to unexplored territories. The need to be in control of the economic system seems to be of utmost importance, and only this extraordinary situation could ever force the leaders to give up their power of the economy. As the leaders let go of their domination, they also give up a capacity that assert their hegemonic masculinity as leaders within the political sphere.

However, the political leaders make an effort to turn the narrative around, making it clear that there is still a possibility to do something in order to protect the economy: “We will be there to ensure that our economy is preserved during this difficult period and that all workers can have this security in terms of purchasing power and continuity of life.” (Macron 2020, my translation). The economy is thereby portrayed as still in the hands of the government, in an attempt to maintain the hegemonic claim of power over the system. This is quite a good example of how important it is for the leaders to remain in a dominator role, at least in the eyes of its citizens. Macron ensures that he is still in control and that the citizens can count on him to solve the crisis.

5. Concluding remarks

In this last part of the thesis, some final conclusions from the analysis will be presented. The conclusion will contain clear answers to the three research questions presented at the beginning of the text. Thereafter, the broader implications from the result of the analysis will be discussed, and finally some subjects for future research will be suggested.

A. Conclusion

Three research questions were posed, to be answered within this thesis. The first one was to investigate if the covid-19 pandemic was militarised by political leaders, and if so, to explore how. The analysis of the three addresses to the nation has shown that the pandemic was clearly militarised by continually being referred to as a war, and by the use of metaphors and words linked to the military. The depiction of a killer enemy that threatens the very existence of peaceful and organised societies further helped strengthen the war-narrative, and continuous arguments for how the situation required measures out of the ordinary were raised.

The second research question concerned the construction of gender, and how masculinity and femininity come to expression within the narrative. It was made clear that multiple hierarchies of power were present at the same time within the narrative, some very clearly linked to the portrayal of the pandemic as a war. Citizens in general, and elderly in particular, were rid of their agency and feminised as they were asked to stay within the private sphere of the home and leave the “fighting” to the health care staff. The health care staff in turn were portrayed both as heroes with very active agency, but at the same time as a vulnerable group in need of protection. This can be read as the result of a conflicting merger of masculinity and femininity: medical staff who are normally so strongly connected to femininity were now supposed to be the saviour. To balance it out, it is seemingly necessary to still also mention their dependence of protection.

The third and last question to be answered in this thesis was how the gendered hierarchies in the narrative of the covid-19 pandemic differ from gendered hierarchies in relation to "traditional" security threats. In short, the result can be summarised in that militarised gendered hierarchies are all the same present throughout the narrative, even if the pandemic differs greatly from any traditional war setting. The analysis has shown for example that the ideal type of military masculinity is being reflected in the image of the ideal citizen. To prevent the spread of the pandemic, the ideal citizen should much like a soldier prioritise what is best for the

nation, show companionship, and sacrifice their individuality for the bigger cause. Much like in a traditional war, it does not matter who this ideal citizen or heroic saviour is. Men and women are subjects equally capable to fulfil this role. A difference, however, is what is being ascribed as the ideal, heroic characteristics. Rather than the active agency usually seen as a crucial part of military masculinity, non-action is the ideal to prevent the spread of the virus. This way of participating in a war by being passive is a new way to think of actors and their relationship to threats. No action is portrayed as the right action.

Another difference comparing to a traditional war-setting, is that in this case seemingly all citizens are enlisted to fight the war against the virus. No clear distinctions are made, making it even more important to emphasise other power relations. One such relation is that between the vulnerable elderly and the rest of the population, another the divide between the state and its citizens. Political leaders emphasised the responsibility the government has to take in order to guarantee safety for its citizens and reminded of the means that can be used by the state for that end. Transparency, truth and the importance of following the advice given by those with scientific and medical expertise, motivated the lockdown of societies and thereby deprioritised other aspects of a democratic state. While the individuality and power hierarchies among citizens were reduced into one giant troop of ungendered combatants in the fight against the invisible killer, the power division between the state and its citizens was made greater than ever.

B. Discussion

When a narrative comes to dominate the public discourse, little place tends to be left for alternative points of view, making a critical feminist lens all the more important. This study has taken a ledge in feminist curiosity and asked the questions that nobody else seem to ask. The findings of this thesis have shown how roles traditionally seen as feminine, such as the need of protection or the association with the private sphere of the home, have proven to go beyond the division of men and women as biological sexes. This implicates that when posed with different threats, the role of the protected (feminine) can be assigned to other groups than women, in this case to a great extent elderly people. This implicates the flexibility of gendered roles, and how adaptable they can be for various situations. However, the findings have also at the same time shown the need to sustain a separation of some groups as feminine and some

groups as masculine. The very existence of hierarchies seems to be of more importance than who takes place within that hierarchy.

The result also showed how the pandemic can be understood as a situation which twists the normal expectations on gender roles. The masculine (men) who are normally the strong protectors, seem to be more exposed and statistically face a higher risk of dying from the virus. While at the same time, behaviours that are normally expected from the feminine (women), are celebrated as the solution to the crisis, such as being a good and obedient citizen, prioritising the communal over self-interest, staying in the home and using all energy for the care of others. Generally speaking, the measures that are put into place seem to comply with feminine traits, as masculinity and mask-wearing apparently does not mix well. Rather than finding an acknowledgement of how the pandemic has turned gender roles on the flip side, this study shows that political leaders fall back on the familiar war narrative. The fact that men are more likely to die from the virus is being silenced, and although health care staff (traditionally feminised) are celebrated for their heroism and agency, they are nevertheless still portrayed as in need of protection.

As outlined within previous research, de-masculinisation of groups that normally find themselves in a privileged position can come to backlash and lead to extreme forms of masculinity. In the case of the covid-19 pandemic, this could potentially be the very root cause of the use of the war narrative in itself. By bringing the health crisis into a traditional war narrative, control of the situation is regained as traditional and familiar gender roles are reinforced - simply because a narrative leading to any other contesting hierarchies is unthought of. When groups normally in a superior position of hegemonic masculinity find themselves on the verge of losing control, the war narrative helps bring masculinity back into the “dominator role” and reassert its position, as the narrative reinforces power structures beneficial to the hegemonic masculinity. Any alternative ideas that would suggest this war narrative to be uncalled for, is being silenced since it could risk emasculating the masculine project.

From a feminist perspective, there are some additional consequences which are potentially problematic following the narrative around the covid-19 pandemic, which cannot go unmentioned. To a great extent, the war narrative makes it difficult to hold governments accountable for their measures and actions. As shown in the analysis, democratic rights and

civil liberties are deprioritised for a more authoritarian political approach. The war narrative makes everything else seem secondary, and political leaders are less likely to be questioned in their decisions. The ability to question political leaders and hold them accountable for their decisions are keys to any functioning democracy.

Another aspect that needs to be problematised is the construction of groups during a crisis such as the pandemic. The narrative is complicated in how it on the one hand encourages solidarity and focuses on the strength in coming together as a community, and on the other hand leads to greater divisions between people when citizens are asked to keep an eye on each other to follow the rules. Coupled with the war narrative, it might even seem unpatriotic to question what is now being normalised. This is what potentially will lead to the spread of concepts such as pandemic guilt. Furthermore, the portrayal of some societal groups and individuals as heroes might also lead to problematic consequences. By emphasising the heroic work of hospital staff, which is being performed under such difficult conditions and high risk, their sacrifice is normalised and not questioned. An appropriate question to ask might be why their heroism is needed in the first place, and what efforts can be made to immediately minimize the risks of their work. By focusing on their sacrifice, for the good of the nation, little room is left for critical questions about whether a state should make these kinds of requests from its citizens.

One last interesting reflection to make when analysing the speeches is the very slight, but still evident, difference between the three political leaders. As already declared, the analysis does not attempt to compare the speeches, but only to look at them as one narrative, wherefor this reflection is made only out of interest. Overall, Merkel is using few concepts that can be related to war, while Johnson and Macron do it to a much greater extent. Furthermore, it is clear to see that Merkel tends to focus a lot more on social aspects and mentions relationships within families and how to stay connected to each other in difficult times. Solidarity is called upon, with reference to human kindness and social responsibility. Macron is also calling for solidarity, but always clearly in reference to the war narrative and the duty towards the state. This difference between male and female leaders leads to further questions, related to speculations during the early stages of the pandemic about how women's leadership style was more suitable to handle the crisis (e.g. Horsford & Jerlström 2020). Feminine (female) leaders were claimed to be doing well simply because they were more aware of risks and decided to issue shut-downs more quickly than male leaders, a claim very much in line with the white-

male effect mentioned in previous research. Although this has later been proven to be a spurious relationship (Piscopo 2020), the speculations and discussions about gender as a reason to different leadership styles is an interesting topic for further investigation.

C. Contribution and future research

This thesis has contributed to the field of feminist security studies, by looking at how gender plays part in the construction of security narratives. By investigating gender as a social construction, this study has contributed with a more complex understanding of how notions of masculinity and femininity are constructed in new ways when societies are posed with new types of security threats. Thereby, the findings of the thesis offer new perspectives on how a gendered reading of the perception of security threats can contribute to the already existing feminist research on how gender is both part of, and affected by, the construction of security narratives.

The scope of this study has been limited to the construction of security narratives at an early stage of the covid-19 pandemic. A lot has happened since March 2020, and future research could investigate if this portrayal has remained or if it was merely the first reaction. It would also be interesting to look further into the consequences of such a narrative, how it affects individuals and the reactions it triggers. Any dominant narrative will naturally outcompete other alternative narratives. An interesting future topic for analysis could therefore be the resistance to the war-narrative, and how any alternative narratives are expressed or silenced.

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