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Performances of Populist Radical Right and Political Masculinities: A Comparative Study of Orbán and Wilders

ABSTRACT

Recent years have witnessed a growing interest in the study of populism, with increasing scholarly attention to the discursive, stylistic and performative aspects of different populisms. This study discusses the “discursive and stylistic turn”¹ in populism studies and highlights the centrality of performances of masculinities to the populist repertoire. Upon this framework, we explore the ways in which masculinities play out in shaping the discursive, stylistic and performative repertoires of European populist radical right (PRR). The conceptualisation of political masculinities is used as an analytical lens that helps us see the gendered structure of discourses and performances in two dissimilar cases of PRR leaders, namely Viktor Orbán, the Prime Minister of Hungary and Geert Wilders, the leader of the Party for Freedom (PVV) of the Netherlands. We employ a comparative perspective so as to identify how performances of masculinity work in radical right populisms of dissimilar historical trajectories in terms of the location of gender in culture. We focus on Orbán’s and Wilders’ narrations of themselves; of their understanding of ‘the people’ whom they claim to represent; and of their relation with ‘the people’. A re-reading of the use of narratives, metaphors, gestures, emotions through an analysis of the two leaders’ interviews, speeches, texts and media performances reveal their masculinist ‘brave bad boy’ performances, the ways they draw boundaries between ‘outsiders and insiders’, and the ways in which they claim to embody the people, and to be ‘men of the people’.

Keywords: populist radical right; political masculinities; populist repertoire; Viktor Orbán; Geert Wilders

1 Rogers Brubaker: Why Populism?, in: *Theory and Society* 46 (2017), pp. 357–385, here p. 360.

Introduction

‘Being under threat’ has always been a powerful discursive tool for nation-states. Invoking a discourse of the ‘nation being under threat’ has been utilised by ‘founding fathers’ especially in the aftermath of nation-building processes. For decades, the discourse of fighting against a variety of ‘enemies’ such as communism, capitalism, terrorism, contributed to processes of re-configuration of the nation-state and in the nationalist discourse, especially, it found ready acceptance. In contemporary European politics, radical right-wing populism has been gaining ground, especially during the past three decades, and has been mainstreaming its political stance through an anti-immigrant discourse that constitutes immigrants—particularly Muslim immigrants—as threats to the integrity of the nation, as well as to European culture. Thus, nativism surfaces as the host ideology of radical right-wing populism, situating the ‘pure people’ in ethnic and cultural terms. Such construction and positioning have also re-revealed masculinist codes that glorified virility, toughness, patriotism and bravery. As Nagel aptly highlighted “the intimate historical and modern connection between manhood and nationhood”, which is constructed through “the interplay between masculine microcultures and nationalist ideology”², become more crystallised in the discourses of Europe’s populist radical right (PRR hereafter) parties, as well as in the political styles and performances of PRR leaders.

This study takes the discursive, stylistic and performative aspects of the PRR as interrelated, and explores these aspects with a particular focus on the performances of political masculinities by PRR leaders. The scholarship on the PRR has produced a substantial amount of work on their gendered discourses, particularly in two registers that reveal a profound contradiction of these discourses: First, the literature underlines the PRR’s instrumentalisation of an ostensibly liberal defence of women’s rights and gender equality in the attempt to mainstream Islamophobic, anti-immigrant and exclusionary views³; and second, it demonstrates the PRR’s approach to issues such as politics of family, reproduction, and the roles attributed to ‘native’ women, usually

- 2 Joane Nagel: *Masculinity and Nationalism: Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations*, in: *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21:2 (1998), pp. 242–269, here p. 242.
- 3 Ulrike M. Vieten: *Far Right Populism and Women: The Normalization of Gendered anti-Muslim Racism and Gendered Culturalism in the Netherlands*, in: *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 37:6 (2016), pp. 621–636, here pp. 621–625; Catherine Kinvall: *Borders and Fear: Insecurity, Gender and the Far Right in Europe*, in: *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 23:4 (2015), pp. 514–529; Sara R. Farris: *Femonationalism and the ‘Regular’ Army of Labor Called Migrant Women*, in: *History of the Present* 2:2 (2012), pp.184–199; Liz Fekete: *Enlightened Fundamentalism? Migration, Feminism and the Right*, in: *Race and Class* 48:2 (2006), pp. 1–22.

with anti-feminist undertones.⁴ However, the gendered and embodied performances of PRR politicians have received less scholarly attention. Exceptional studies which take such performances as central to understanding the PRR, have focused on the paternalistic conceptual metaphors that they use to amplify their authority⁵, their bodily performances of masculinity⁶, and the role of masculinities in the leaders' narrations of themselves and the nation.⁷

This study aims to contribute to the literature by comparatively exploring the ways in which masculinities play out in shaping the discursive, stylistic and performative repertoires of European PRR. We look into two cases of PRR politicians, Viktor Orbán, the Prime Minister of Hungary and Geert Wilders, the leader of Party for Freedom (PVV), in comparative perspective so as to identify gendered discursive, stylistic and performative aspects of radical right-wing populisms of different historical trajectories, in different social and political contexts which display profound dissimilarities in terms of the location of gender in culture. We choose these two cases because even though both Orbán and Wilders adopt the main tenets of nativist, exclusionary PRR discourses, such as provoking anti-immigrant and Islamophobic sentiments, and constructing antagonistic groups of 'insiders' and 'outsiders'; they are profoundly different with regard to the ways in which they incorporate gender into their narratives of 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. Orbán is explicitly anti-feminist and against LGBTI⁸ rights, hence feminists and LGBTI individuals are excluded from his imagination of the pure, authentic Hungarian nation, whereas traditional gender roles are endorsed in

- 4 Cas Mudde: *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, New York 2007. Stefanie Mayer/Edma Ajanovic/Birgit Sauer: *Intersections and Inconsistencies. Framing Gender in Right-Wing Populist Discourses in Austria*, in: *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 22:4 (2014), pp. 250–266; Tjitse Akkerman: *Gender and the Radical Right in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis of Policy Agendas*, in: *Patterns of Prejudice* 49:1–2 (2015), pp. 37–60; David Paternotte/Roman Kuhar: *Disentangling and Locating the “Global Right”: Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe*, in: *Politics and Governance* 6:3 (2018), pp. 6–19.
- 5 Ov Christian Norocel: *Romania is a family and it needs a strict father: Conceptual metaphors at work in radical right populist discourses*, in: *Nationalities Papers* 38:5 (2010), pp. 705–721.
- 6 Ruth Wodak: *The politics of fear: What right-wing populist discourses mean*, London et al. 2015; Marion Löffler: *Populist attraction: The symbolic uses of masculinities in the Austrian general election campaign 2017*, in: *NORMA* 15:1 (2020), pp. 10–25.
- 7 Betül Ekşi/Elizabeth Wood: *Right-wing populism as gendered performance: Janus-faced masculinity in the leadership of Vladimir Putin and Recep T. Erdogan*, in: *Theory and Society* 48:5 (2019), pp: 733–751, here p.741.
- 8 Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex people. While Queer Theory is re-reading heteronormative norms and discusses how sexuality is fluid and fragmented, queer is still a challenging term for many LGBTI persons. For more information, see: https://www.ilga-europe.org/resources/glossary/letter_q. (accessed on 3 March 2021).

his nativism. On the other hand, Wilders incorporates the defence of gender equality, women's rights and freedoms, and LGBTI rights into his anti-immigrant and Islamophobic discourse by constantly claiming that these inherently belong to European and Dutch cultures, and should be defended against 'threats' coming from Muslim immigrants. In other words, Wilders' 'insiders' include those who defend a transformation in gender roles and fluid gender identities. Our research looks into the political performances of these two PRR politicians and investigates whether, despite their different perspectives on gender, there are commonalities in their performances of political masculinity. By doing so, we attempt to locate the role of political masculinity in the European PRR's discursive, stylistic and performative repertoires.

This study first attempts to re-read the intersection of radical right-wing populism and political masculinities. Second, it defines the rationale behind the case selection and methodological background. The third part discusses the contextual background and analyses different populisms in Hungary and the Netherlands. This study, then, examines the tripartite structure of analysis of

1. the leaders' narrations of themselves;
2. 'the people'; and
3. their relation to 'the people'.⁹

The Intersection of Radical Right-Wing Populism and Political Masculinities

Recent years have witnessed a growing interest in the study of populism, yet the concept itself is a contested one. Some scholars define populism as an ideology, albeit a thin-centered one¹⁰, hosted by and combined with thicker ideologies. Accordingly, populism "almost always appears attached to other ideological elements".¹¹ Yet, there is a core, defining content common among different populisms: conceptualizing society in two antagonistic groups as 'the pure people' vs. the 'corrupt elite', and politics as the expression of the "general will" of the people.¹² According to this approach, the ways in which "pure people" are defined change according to the ideological elements

- 9 We borrow the idea for this tripartite analysis from Betül Ekşi/Elizabeth Wood: Right-wing populism as gendered performance.
- 10 Cas Mudde: *The Populist Zeitgeist*, in: *Government and Opposition* 39:4 (2004), pp. 541–563, here p. 544.
- 11 Cas Mudde/Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser: *Studying Populism in Comparative Perspective: Reflections on the Contemporary and Future Research Agenda*, in: *Comparative Political Studies* 51:13 (2018), pp. 1667–1692, here p. 1669.
- 12 Cas Mudde: *The Populist Zeitgeist*, p. 543.

to which a given version of populism is attached. For example, in radical right-wing versions of populism, nativism has predominated the political arena, which has increasingly been the case, particularly in Europe, considering the surge of anti-immigrant discourse among Europe's PRR.¹³

This flexible and popular definition of populism has proved useful in terms of accounting for populisms of different ideological orientations. However, there has recently been a “discursive and stylistic turn”¹⁴ in the study of populism that draws attention to the form, rather than the ideological content of populism, in an attempt to understand different manifestations of populism in different contexts, and to conceptualise it beyond ideological orientations.¹⁵ This “turn” entails the conceptualisation of populism as a stylistic discursive repertoire¹⁶, and as a “political style”¹⁷ that underlines its performative aspects. Benjamin Moffitt, who takes populism as a style that is “performed, embodied and enacted”¹⁸, defends the significance of understanding the performative aspects of populism, as contemporary political landscape is increasingly defined by styles, images and performances rather than ideological divisions. He further contends that populist ‘performance’ is not merely a shallow act of trying to look like ‘the people’, but it is also an attempt to define and construct ‘the people’ that populist leaders claim to represent. Therefore, looking into the stylistic and performative aspects of populism also helps us understand the content of populist politics. According to the discursive-stylistic thread in the populism literature, the core aspects of populist repertoire¹⁹, in broad strokes, can be grouped as follows: First,

- 13 Cas Mudde/Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser: *Studying Populism in Comparative Perspective*, p. 1669. For an analysis of the exclusionary dimensions of populist radical right in Europe, see: Cas Mudde/Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser: *Exclusionary versus inclusionary populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America*, in: *Government and Opposition* 48:2 (2013), pp. 147–174.
- 14 Rogers Brubaker: *Why Populism?*, p. 360.
- 15 Benjamin Moffitt: *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style and Representation*, California 2016.
- 16 Rogers Brubaker: *Why Populism?*, p. 360.
- 17 Benjamin Moffitt/Simon Tormey: *Rethinking Populism: Politics, Mediatization and Political Style*, in: *Political Studies* 62:2 (2014), pp. 381–397, here p. 387; Michael Bossetta: *Fighting Fire With Fire: Mainstream Adoption of The Populist Political Style in the 2014 Europe Debates between Nick Clegg and Nigel Farage*, in: *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 19:4 (2017), pp. 715–734, here pp. 717–722; Benjamin Moffitt: *The Global Rise of Populism*.
- 18 Benjamin Moffitt: *The Global Rise of Populism*, p. 3.
- 19 Even though focusing on these aspects of the discursive frames and performative repertoire is useful for tracing the commonalities among different populisms, populism research should also be sensitive to the flexible ways in which populist discourses and performances can respond to different political, cultural and social contexts. For a discussion of the significance of capturing such flexibilities, see: Mats Ekström et al.: *Right-wing populism and the*

populists locate themselves as close to the ‘ordinary people’, the ‘silent majority’, protecting them against the dominance of ‘the elite’ and the “marginal minorities”, which can take various forms. In nativist forms of PRR, the “marginals” are usually defined as immigrants who are constructed as ethnically and culturally different from, and threatening to, an alleged native majority.²⁰ Second, in their claim to be close to ‘the people’, populists perform direct and raw communication, uninhibited by political correctness or regard for nuanced, complex argumentation. This may sometimes take the form of ‘bad manners’, such as use of slang²¹ and/or highly dramatised stances for emotional appeal.²² The third main aspect of the populist performative repertoire is the emphasis on crisis and threat, that calls for urgent and direct action as opposed to intricate debate and policy negotiation.²³

The studies that are invested in a conceptual defence of the stylistic and performative approach to populism have acknowledged the role of performances of masculinity in the populist repertoire, however, they have avoided locating such performances as a central aspect of this repertoire. For example, Rogers Brubaker, while enlisting the elements of this repertoire, mentions the “bad boy” demeanor performed by populist politicians in their attempt to constitute themselves as “authentic”.²⁴ Benjamin Moffitt elucidates how populist leaders, of different ideological convictions, adopt certain performances of masculinity in their attempt to prove that they embody ‘the people’, to show that they are the reflection of the strength of the people.²⁵ Moffitt further explains how populist leaders perform “bad manners” in the form of virility, and machismo, even to the point of using inappropriate sexual comments about female political rivals.²⁶ However, he still avoids taking the performance of masculinity as a central aspect of populist performances, apparently in an attempt to account for the performances of female populist leaders, who have combined “girlish” performances of sexual appeal²⁷ (that is, appeal to the male electorate) with an emphasis on mother-

dynamics of style: A discourse-analytic perspective on mediated political performances, in: *Palgrave Communications* 4:1 (2018), pp. 1–11.

- 20 Rogers Brubaker: *Why Populism?*, p. 365; Benjamin Moffitt/Simon Tormey: *Rethinking Populism: Politics, Mediatisation and Political Style*, p. 391; Mats Ekström et al.: *Right-wing populism and the dynamics of style*, p. 4.
- 21 Benjamin Moffitt/Simon Tormey: *Rethinking Populism: Politics, Mediatisation and Political Style*, p. 392.
- 22 Mats Ekström et al.: *Right-wing populism and the dynamics of style*, p. 3.
- 23 Benjamin Moffitt/Simon Tormey: *Rethinking Populism: Politics, Mediatisation and Political Style*, pp. 381–397; Michael Bossetta: *Fighting Fire With Fire*, p. 721; Mats Ekström et al.: *Right-wing populism and the dynamics of style*, p. 3.
- 24 Rogers Brubaker: *Why Populism?*, p. 367.
- 25 Benjamin Moffitt: *The Global Rise of Populism*.
- 26 Benjamin Moffitt: *The Global Rise of Populism*, p. 73.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 74.

hood, “to reinforce an image of themselves as vessels of national renewal”.²⁸ Contrary to Moffitt, we contend that such performances of femininity do not contradict the centrality of masculinity to populism. They even further confirm it because female populist leaders are carving themselves out a place in the masculine stylistic repertoire of populist politics by appealing to the assumed masculine desires and approval.

Upon this framework, we explore the ways in which masculinities play out in shaping the discursive, stylistic and performative repertoires of European PRR. We argue that nativist ideological content, and stylistic and performative repertoires are both useful and complementary to understanding the PRR. In line with taking performativity as a “constant reiteration of expressions”²⁹ we operationalise it as a tool to re-read their reproduction of identities. Echoing Dorit Geva, we aim to look beyond the discussion of whether populism is an ideology or a style, by focusing on gendered symbolisms and performances.³⁰ In line with Geva, we maintain that these symbolisms and performances—through displays of virile power—link nativist discourses of the PRR that claim superiority of national identities and cultures, to the performances of populism embedded in the claim to embody and protect the ‘ordinary people’³¹.

Focusing on the performative aspect of ‘doing politics’ marks the significance of the interplay between micro cultures of masculinities and macro political processes. In this study, we take political masculinity in a broad sense, as an analytical lens that helps us see the gendered structure of political processes, networks, discourses, institutions and performances. Starck’s and Sauer’s definition of political masculinity encompasses

any kind of masculinity that is constructed around, ascribed to and/or claimed by political players. These shall be individuals or groups or persons who are part of or associated with the political domain, i. e. professional politicians, party members, members of the military as well as citizens and members of political movements claiming or gaining political rights.³²

- 28 Robert Mason: *Pittbulls and Populist Politicians: Sarah Palin, Pauline Hanson and the Use of Gendered Nostalgia in Electoral Campaigns*, in: *Comparative American Studies: An International Journal* 8:3 (2010), p. 190 (cited in: Benjamin Moffitt: *The Global Rise of Populism*, p. 74).
- 29 Ov Christian Norocel/Tuija Saresma/Tuuli Lahdesmaki/Maria Ruotsalainen: *Performing ‘us’ and ‘other’: Intersectional analyses of right-wing populist media*, in: *European Journal of Cultural Studies* (2020), p. 6.
- 30 Dorit Geva: *Daughter, Mother, Captain: Marine Le Pen, Gender, and Populism in the French National Front*, in: *Social Politics* 27:1 (2020), pp. 1–26.
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 Kathleen Starck/Birgit Sauer (eds.): *A Man’s World? Political Studies in Literature and Culture*, Newcastle Upon Tyne 2014, p. 6.

This broad definition takes politics as a dynamic gendered field of power relations in which agents seek positions of legitimation through gendered narratives. The different constructions and performances of masculinities, as well as the interactions among different types of masculinities, structure the gendered field of politics. Indeed, the literature on political masculinities enables us to discuss not only performances of the ‘male body’ in politics, but also shows us the power interplay in the encounters of male, female and queer bodies. Hence, employing a ‘political masculinity’ lens is not only useful for analysing masculine performances, or how masculinist body politics works. It has a much broader scope, as it also helps us see the relational gendered power dynamics at play in the field of politics and develop analyses sensitive to “*bodily emotions*—shame, humiliation, timidity, anxiety, guilt—or *passions* and *sentiments*—love, admiration, respect”³³ (emphasis original), which, according to Bourdieu, normalises the relations between the dominant and the dominated.

As Starck and Luyt aptly argue “the concept of political masculinities can usefully be applied in instances in which power is explicitly either being (re)produced or challenged”.³⁴ Hence, the conceptual lens of political masculinities can be applied to different political and social contexts. The hierarchical power relations, networks, actors and discourses in politics is inherently connected to masculine themes of virility, patriotism, toughness. As masculinism is “an ideological expression of excessive masculine values, of masculine hegemony, and male-centered view of social relationships”³⁵, the discursive ground of radical right-wing populism offers a crystallised example, as it is based on masculinist concepts of domination, hegemony and uniformity that manifest themselves in the (re)construction of nation³⁶, family³⁷, the people³⁸ etc.

Yet, the normative conceptualisations of masculinities do not remain static, but are rather created and re-created in an active process “through (...) the articulation of masculine micro (everyday) and macro (politics) cultures”.³⁹ Radical right-wing populisms actually contribute to the construction of new hegemonic masculinities while

33 Pierre-Yves Bourdieu: *Masculine domination*, Stanford et al. 2001, p. 38.

34 Kathleen Starck/Russell Luyt: *Political Masculinities, Crisis Tendencies and Social Transition: Toward Understanding of Change*, in: *Men and Masculinities* 22:3 (2019), pp. 421–443, p. 435.

35 *Ibid.*

36 Ov Cristian Norocel: “Give us back Sweden!” A Feminist Reading of the (Re)Interpretations of the Folkhem Conceptual Metaphor in Swedish Radical Right Populist Discourse, in: *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 21:1 (2013), pp. 4–20.

37 Ov Christian Norocel: *Romania is a family and it needs a strict father*, pp. 705–721, *passim*.

38 Betül Ekşi/Elizabeth Wood: *Right-wing populism as gendered performance*, pp.733–751, here pp. 739–743; Marion Löffler: *Populist attraction*, pp. 10–25, here pp. 12–14.

39 Joane Nagel: *Nation*, in: Michael S. Kimmel/Jeff Hearn/Robert W. Connell (eds.): *Handbook of studies on men and masculinities*, Thousand Oaks et al. 2005, pp. 397–413, here p. 397.

challenging the dominance of other forms of masculinities. In other words, while right-wing populist masculinities claim to defend their constructions of ‘the people’ against ‘the elite’, they perform a certain type of masculinity, and build their discursive and stylistic repertoire in relation to this performance. Some tenets of PRR masculinities may be the positioning of a charismatic/extraordinary leader⁴⁰, identification with the nation through the metaphor of the father of the state⁴¹, an overtly virile performance⁴², and aggression.⁴³ For instance, according to Löffler “populist political masculinity thus is characterized by aggressive rhetoric, breaking taboos and pushing the boundaries of the politically sayable and thinkable.”⁴⁴ On the other hand, other (alternative) forms of masculinities may be revealed in different populisms, as well. For instance, most of the populist masculinities possibly tap into a heteronormative hegemonic structure while some others may manifest themselves in a discourse of defending (sexually diverse) others.⁴⁵

Case Selection and Methodological Background

In this study, we attempt to read the gendered political performances and discourses of European radical right-wing populisms through the broad lens of political masculinities in two cases. We focus on Viktor Orbán, the Prime Minister of Hungary and Geert Wilders, the leader of the Party for Freedom (PVV) of the Netherlands. Even though both leaders employ discourses of anti-immigration and Islamophobia, which are usually common among European PRR, they also display profound differences that become more crystallised with a gender lens. For instance, whereas Orbán is well-known for his anti-feminism, hostility to discourses of gender equality and LGBTI rights; Wilders, on the contrary, positions himself as the defender of gender equality,

- 40 Ruth Wodak: *The politics of fear*, pp. 157–161; Marion Löffler: *In Defense of Democracy? Masculinist Reasoning, Homophobia, and the Impossibility of Gender Democracy in Thomas Mann’s Mario and the Magician*, in: *Masculinities: A Journal of Identity and Culture* 9:10 (2018), pp. 6–29, here pp. 10–13.
- 41 Ov Cristian Norocel: *Romania is a family and it needs a strict father*, pp. 705–721, *passim*; Kathleen Starck/Russell Luyt: *Political Masculinities, Crisis Tendencies and Social Transition*, pp. 421–443, *passim*.
- 42 Valerie Sperling: *Sex, politics, and Putin: Political legitimacy in Russia*, Oxford et al. 2014; Betül Ekşi/Elizabeth Wood: *Right-wing populism as gendered performance*, pp. 733–751, *passim*.
- 43 Marion Löffler: *Populist attraction*, pp. 10–25, here pp. 16.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- 45 Ov Cristian Norocel: *“Give us back Sweden!”*, *passim*; Ov Cristian Norocel et al.: *Discursive constructions of white Nordic masculinities in right-wing populist media*, in: *Men and Masculinities* (2018), pp. 1–22, here p. 51.

women's rights and LGBTI rights against the 'threat' of Islam, which he portrays as being the enemy of all liberties that are allegedly inherent to Western civilisation. Hence, tracing the performances of masculinity by these two PRR politicians, who promote substantially different ideologies and policy agendas on the issue of gender, helps us flesh out different trajectories in which political masculinities unfold in European radical right-wing populisms. By sampling these two cases, we explore the commonalities and differences between the performances of masculinities by radical right-wing populist leaders of two different social, political and cultural contexts. What is the place of gendered discourses, performances, and metaphors in their narratives of themselves, their political position, and 'the people' whom they claim to represent?

In order to answer these questions, we analyse the two PRR politicians' discursive and stylistic repertoires and explore their constructions of masculinities in these repertoires through a discourse analysis of their speeches, interviews, written documents and media performances. It is widely argued that masculinity is constructed through discourse, and "language lies at the heart of understanding men and masculinity".⁴⁶ In line with Ernesto Laclau, we understand discourse not just as written and spoken text, but as an "ensemble of the phenomena in and through which social production of meaning takes place".⁴⁷ In this framework, it is significant to account for the political context and also the existing cultural repertoires at work. Hence, our analysis includes performances that manifest themselves through the use of metaphors, gestures, and emotions displayed by the two PRR politicians under scrutiny, as well as written and spoken text. In addition to their stylistic and performative manifestations, the interviews and speeches are re-read to trace their constructions of political masculinities. In the case of Wilders, we focus on his years between 2006 and 2017, starting from the year in which he established his party, PVV, turned towards radical right populism, and accentuated his crude and provocative position against Islam until the election in 2017. For Orbán, we focus on his period as a Prime Minister after 2010, when his populist tone and his construction of a 'nurturant/benevolent parent' became more apparent. We ended our textual analysis regarding Orbán in 2018, when the last national election was held. A caveat is in order: We do not read Dutch or Hungarian, so our data is limited to those written documents originally in English, and also speeches and televised performances of the leaders for both national and international audiences for which it is possible to find subtitles in English. In order to compensate for this

46 Nigel Edley: *Analysing masculinity: Interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas and subject positions*, in: Margaret Wetherell/Stephanie Taylor/Simeon J. Yates (eds.): *Discourse as Data: A Guide for Analysis*, London/California/New Delhi 2001, pp. 189–229, here p. 191.

47 Ernesto Laclau: *Populist Rupture and Discourse*, cited in: Paris Aslanidis: *Is populism an Ideology? A Refutation and a New Perspective*, in: *Political Studies* 64 (2015), pp. 88–104, here p. 98.

caveat, and to keep our work up-to-date with recent empirical developments, we also use secondary sources, such as scholarly analyses of each case, as well as biographies, newspaper articles and blogs. In our analysis, we focus on the two leaders' narrations of themselves; of their understanding of 'the people' whom they claim to represent and identify with; and of their relation with 'the people'.⁴⁸

Contextual Background

The development of radical right-wing populism in the Netherlands has been built on the critique of multiculturalism, which has been entangled with a discourse of defending gender equality and sexual freedoms against Islam.⁴⁹ The far-right politician Pim Fortuyn, who was murdered in 2002, is argued to have "played a central role in entangling antipathy towards Islam with the politics of sexual freedom".⁵⁰ As a self-identified gay politician, he established sexual freedoms and gay rights as an inherent part of Dutch national culture, which should be protected against 'backward' Muslim culture, legitimating an Islamophobic discourse through an emphasis on civil liberties. Geert Wilders built his rhetoric on Fortuyn's heritage, only to carry it further in terms of giving it a cruder anti-Islamic edge.⁵¹ Wilders has turned to a radical right populism after he left the conservative-liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) in 2004 (over his refusal to accept the possibility of Turkey's membership in the EU) and established the PVV in 2006. Koen Vossen argues that Wilders' radical right populism is underpinned by radical Islamophobia, anti-immigrant rhetoric, dislike of supra-national cooperation, emphasis on national pride, and defence of more direct forms of democracy as opposed to the dominance of the political elite.⁵² In terms of the performative and stylistic aspects of his leadership, he has been resorting to a more vulgar rhetoric since 2006, to the point of calling for a ban of the Qur'an and insulting his political opponents and the government as being "bonkers", for "having a spine of whipped cream" on the issue of immigration.⁵³ Even though Wilders uses discursive and stylistic tropes that are common in radical right-

48 Betül Ekşi/Elizabeth Wood: Right-wing populism as gendered performance.

49 Paul Mepschen et al.: Sexual Politics, Orientalism and Multicultural Citizenship in the Netherlands, in: *Sociology* 44:5 (2010), pp. 962–979; Rogers Brubaker: Between Nationalism and Civilizationism: The European Populist Moment in Comparative Perspective, in: *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40:8 (2017), pp. 1191–1226, *passim*.

50 Paul Mepschen et al.: Sexual Politics, Orientalism and Multicultural Citizenship in the Netherlands, p. 968.

51 Rogers Brubaker: *Between Nationalism and Civilizationism*, p. 1197.

52 Koen Vossen: Classifying Wilders: The Ideological Development of Geert Wilders and His Party for Freedom, in: *Politics* 31:3 (2011) pp. 179–189.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 185.

wing populisms, his defense of diverse sexualities, gay rights, same-sex marriages, and abortion rights makes him an outlier with regard to the PRR family in various other national contexts.⁵⁴ PVV, the party that Wilders leads, has entered the Dutch Parliament as the second largest party represented in the House of Representatives in the 2017 elections.

Unlike Wilders, who is speaking from a point of opposition to the government, Viktor Orbán, the Prime Minister of Hungary, has been in power since 2010. His term has been defined as a process of de-democratisation⁵⁵, referring to the series of changes he brought to Hungary's political regime, such as limiting the power of the Constitutional Court, bringing the Electoral Commission under government control, and curbing media freedom, which have effectively weakened the checks on the power of the government.⁵⁶ He openly expresses his will to build an illiberal state based on a "special national approach to democracy."⁵⁷ Orbán has been a well-known figure of Hungary's political scenery since 1989, due to the speech he gave at the reburial ceremony for Imre Nagy and those who were killed in the 1956 uprisings, in which he demanded that Soviet troops leave Hungary. He was among the founders of the Fidesz Party, which he has steered in a nativist, conservative direction since he became its leader in 1993. When Fidesz won 53 per cent of the votes and came to power under his leadership in 2010, he labelled his electoral success as a "revolution"⁵⁸, and claimed that this success was a demonstration of the people's desire for a fundamental re-organisation of the state.⁵⁹ Similar to Wilders, Orbán also taps into a criticism of the European Union (EU), implying a collaboration between "the corrupt elite" and "Brussels bureaucrats".⁶⁰ He has also been invested in an Islamophobic position, especially after the 2015 mass migration to Europe following the forced displacement

54 Tjitse Akkerman: *Gender and the Radical Right in Western Europe*, pp. 46f.

55 Matthijs Bogaards: *De-democratization in Hungary: Diffusely Defective Democracy*, in: *Democratization* 25:8 (2018), pp. 1481–1499, *passim*.

56 Miklós Bánkúti et al.: *Hungary's Illiberal Turn: Disabling the Constitution*, in: *Journal of Democracy* 23:3 (2012), pp. 138–146, *passim*.

57 Attila Mong: *Amid government crackdown, Hungary's journalists look for new ways to work*, at: *Committee to Protect Journalists*, 9 October 2014, URL: <https://cpj.org/2014/10/amid-government-crackdown-hungarys-journalists-look/> (accessed on 12 March 2020); Honor Mahony: *Orbán wants to build 'illiberal state'*, at: *euobserver*, 28 July 2014, URL: <https://euobserver.com/political/125128> (accessed on 12 March 2020).

58 Anna Szilágyi/András Bozóki: *Playing It Again in Post-Communism: The Revolutionary Rhetoric of Viktor Orbán in Hungary*, in: *Advances in the History of Rhetoric*, 18:sup1 (2015), pp. S153-S166, here p. S164.

59 András Körösenyi/Gábor Illés/Attila Gyulai: *The Orbán Regime: Plebiscitary Leader Democracy in the Making*, New York 2020.

60 Robert Csehi: *Neither episodic, nor destined to failure? The endurance of Hungarian populism after 2010*, in: *Democratization* 26:6 (2019), pp. 1011–1027, here p. 1016.

of the Syrian population. According to Cathrine Thorleifsson, “an Islamophobic layer emerged in the (Hungarian) radical right’s grammar of exclusion that traditionally has targeted the country’s Roma minority and Jews”.⁶¹ Yet, whereas Wilders bases his anti-Islamic stance on a discourse of defending “secular and liberal Western values”, Orbán emphasises a defense of traditional Christian values.⁶² This profound difference between the two PRR political actors also manifests itself in their approaches to the issue of gender. Wilders recurrently claims that Islam is essentially oppressive of women and sexual minorities. He uses this claim to bolster his argument that Islam is threatening to Western civilisation, hence endorses sexual freedoms through a “civilizational” rhetoric⁶³ rather than promoting nativist or religious stances on the issues of gender and sexuality. On the other hand, anti-LGBTI rhetoric and the promotion of “traditional family values” rooted in Christian ideology⁶⁴, are central to Orbán’s nativist politics.

Despite their differences, Wilders’ and Orbán’s commonalities manifest themselves in three dimensions that are defined by the performative aspects of their political style. First, they both construct their image on the basis of a claim of courage and bravery to be ‘politically incorrect’, to act without regard for conventions, to “speak people’s minds”, and to take risks to ‘tell it like it is’. Second, they draw boundaries between ‘ordinary people’ whom they claim to represent, as opposed to ‘outsider’ immigrants and insider ‘corrupt elites’ collaborating with the EU elites. They galvanise this anti-immigrant position by stressing an urgent direct threat from immigration that they metaphorise as a ‘flood’ and ‘invasion’, against which they stand as ‘heroic’ defenders. Third, they define themselves as the embodiment of the ordinary people, and perform ordinariness by claiming to have first-hand knowledge of ordinary people’s struggles. These three registers relate to performances of masculinity as they play on notions of bravery; emphasise their ‘bad boy’ demeanour; and claim to be protectors of national (Orbán) and civilisational (Wilders) boundaries. In analysing these three dimensions, we adopt the tripartite structure of analysis suggested by Betül Ekşi and Elizabeth Wood⁶⁵, and look into Wilders’ and Orbán’s narrations of themselves, of ‘the people’, and of their relation to ‘the people’ respectively in the following sections.

- 61 Cathrine Thorleifsson: Disposable Strangers: Far-right securitisation of forced migration in Hungary, in: *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale* 25:3 (2017), pp. 318–334, here p. 318.
- 62 Mijat Kostic: *Civilizationism and European Identity: Two Arguments for Anti-Immigrant Mobilization* (unpublished Master’s Thesis), Budapest 2019.
- 63 Rogers Brubaker: *Between Nationalism and Civilizationism*, pp. 1191–1226, *passim*.
- 64 Borbála Juhász: Orbán’s politics – a gender perspective, in: Friedrich Ebert Foundation Budapest (March 2012), at: http://www.fesbp.hu/common/pdf/Nachrichten_aus_Un-garn_1_2012.pdf (accessed on 12 March 2020).
- 65 Betül Ekşi/Elizabeth Wood: *Right-wing populism as gendered performance*, pp. 733–751, here p. 735.

Narratives of the Self: Performing ‘brave bad boys’

Benjamin Moffitt, who takes the populist leader as “the central performer of populism”⁶⁶, argues that populist leaders need to strike a balance between performances of ordinariness and extraordinariness, in order to present themselves both as one of ‘the ordinary people’, and also as their leader.⁶⁷ Both Wilders and Orbán, while presenting themselves as close to the ordinary people, perform extraordinariness through claiming extraordinary courage, and frame courage as the element of continuity in their narratives of the self.

Wilders presents the narrative of his life as the crystallised example of the ‘threat’ posed by Islam and Muslim immigrants to Dutch—even European—populations. What forms the backbone of his self-presentation is having personally experienced the ‘dangers’ of Muslim immigration and having been targeted by radical Islamists and *Marked for death*, as the title of his book declares, along with the subtitle *Islam’s War Against the West and Me*. After the Dutch film maker Theo van Gogh was murdered by a radical Islamist in 2004, Wilders was given full time police protection and has been living in safe houses since then. Drawing analogies between his condition and imprisonment, Wilders persistently argues that he is selflessly paying a price for ‘speaking out’, and portrays himself as a beacon of self-sacrifice and courage:

I do not pretend to be a man who knows no fear, but when I heard about Van Gogh’s murder, I can honestly say that I felt anger, not fear. I defiantly proclaimed to the journalists that I would not allow anyone to intimidate me into silence [...] [the international media] portrayed us⁶⁸ as having run away like cowards [...] In reality, we had found ourselves practically imprisoned in our own country for the mere fact that we had spoken out against the enemies of the West.⁶⁹

I live in a government safe house. I am driven every day to my office in an armoured police car. I have even lived in army barracks and prison cells just to be safe from assassins. I am threatened because I am a critic of Islam.⁷⁰

66 Benjamin Moffitt: *The Global Rise of Populism*, p. 55.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

68 By “us”, Wilders refers to former Member of Parliament, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who was also put under police protection due to death threats.

69 Geert Wilders: *Marked for Death: Islam’s War Against the West and Me*, Washington, D.C. 2012, pp. 15f.

70 Geert Wilders: Islamification of Western societies threatens everyone’s freedoms, at: *The Australian*, 18 February 2013. URL: https://www.theaustralian.com.au/subscribe/news/1/?offset=ta_4for4_premium&sourceCode=TAWEB_WRE170_a_GGL&dest=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.theaustralian.com.au%2Fnational-affairs%2Fopinion%2Fislamification-of-western-societies-threatens-everyones-freedoms%2Fnews-story%2F7a94cbc73bc82e242ed4a28c414935-

Similarly, Orbán frequently refers to the notion of bravery as a masculine value. This notion functions as an element of continuity in his narrative of transformation from a young activist who stood up against Soviet troops in the name of freedom, to an incumbent politician known for curbing freedoms, and enlisting Russia and China as inspirations.⁷¹ His contemporary performance of bravery relies on the image of himself as daring to speak what other conservative right-wing politicians in Europe cannot:

When I stand up and say something, I don't make any compromise just because I have a coalition partner or limited media background. I am the only lucky man among European politicians, among conservatives who can say what I think [...] They are at the same level committed to national pride, to national sovereignty, and freedom and so on, like me, or like us, so there is no difference. But [...] they simply cannot afford to say what they think. [...] In Hungary we were lucky enough in 2010 to get a two-third majority, having a background from the anti-communist resistance movement, which results in a natural inclination to say what we think [...] [T]he number one precondition to be successful in politics is braveness. Bravery to take the risk. If you don't stand up and don't say what you think whatever the consequences may be, you will never be a leader, and you will never have a big party.⁷²

In Orbán's self-presentation, bravery meets a 'bad boy' demeanour at the intersection of speaking what he thinks and being the "black sheep"⁷³ of Europe, which he seems to take pride in. He keeps a very confident and relaxed body language even in tense confrontations with other leaders of the EU. For example, when Guy Verhofstadt confronts him at the European Parliament in a speech full of fervent accusations of dam-

a&memtype=anonymous&mode=premium&adobe_mc_sdid=SDID%3D1B58E23A-D570E64A-3E6FAF5863E2689D%7CMCORGID%3D5FE61C8B533204850A490D-4D%40AdobeOrg%7CTS%3D1614811534&adobe_mc_ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com (accessed on 1 June 2020).

71 Viktor Orbán's speech in the Tusványos Free University in Romania on 26 July 2014 marks an important milestone in his political career and is also known as the 'illiberalism speech'. Full text of the speech at: Budapest Beacon, URL: <https://budapestbeacon.com/full-text-of-viktor-s-speech-at-baile-tusnad-tusnadfurdo-of-26-july-2014/> (accessed on 1 June 2020).

72 Viktor Orban: Interview at International National Conservatism Conference, Rome (Interviewer: Christopher DeMuth), February 2020, published at: Remix News, URL: <https://rmx.news/article/article/full-interview-viktor-orban-at-the-national-conservatism-conference-in-rome> (accessed on 12 March 2020).

73 Ibid.

aging democracy in 2017.⁷⁴ Or when he is openly, (in jest) called “dictator” in front of the cameras by the (then) President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker in 2015, followed by an unusual slap in the face (in jest, again), instead of a handshake.⁷⁵

Wilders, on the other hand, presents himself as the sole political leader in his country who openly voices “the threat of Islam”, who has the courage to be politically incorrect and “break the mold” of constitutional guarantees on religious freedom in his country⁷⁶, as opposed to other leaders whom he blames for being cultural relativists, and cowards. A grammatical analysis of Wilders’ speeches suggests that he uses a very clear and direct language, permeated with strong adjectives and claims to speak plain, objective facts⁷⁷, which coincides well with a masculinist repertoire. His language takes an extremely harsh and crude tone in both written and spoken text when he attacks Islam. His directness in communication, and his unabashed Islamophobic language forms his ‘bad boy’ attitude. He is otherwise a very reserved figure in terms of displaying emotions, and usually performs a cool, calm and collected image of a career politician in televised performances, even in the face of harsh criticism, exemplified in his performance on BBC’s “Hard Talk”.⁷⁸ His tone, while re-constituting himself as a “dominating”⁷⁹ leader, also reproduces a “civilized masculinity protecting the submissive dependents from masculine other[s].”⁸⁰

74 RenewEurope: Guy Verhofstadt 26 Apr 2017 Plenary speech about the situation on Hungary (video on YouTube), 26 April 2017, URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MsjM-Js39bFY> (accessed on 20 May 2020).

75 Euronews (in English): ‘Here comes the dictator’ Juncker’s cheeky welcome for Hungarian PM (video on YouTube), 22 May 2015, URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1hl-83Jpd_OI (accessed on 20 May 2020).

76 Geert Wilders debate with Christian Union leader Gert-Jan Segers in 2017, before the parliamentary election. See: Paul Nielsen: Dutch Freedom Party Geert Wilders Final Debate ENGLISH SUBTITLES (video on YouTube), 14 March 2017, URL: <https://youtu.be/ma2Tbkk8lZc> (accessed on 20 May 2020).

77 Maarten Van Leeuwen: ‘Clear’ vs. ‘Woolly’ Language Use in Political Speeches: The Case of the Controversial Dutch Politician Geert Wilders, in: Online Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the Poetics and Linguistics Association (PALA) 28 (2009), Middelburg, URL: <https://www.pala.ac.uk/uploads/2/5/1/0/25105678/vanleeuwen2009.pdf>.

78 Geert Wilders on BBC Hardtalk, part 1 (video on YouTube), 26 January 2009, URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6cFKQNBH3s> (sccessed on 20 May 2020).

79 For a discussion on dominating masculinity in global world order, see: James W. Messerschmidt: Hidden in Plain Sight: On the Omnipresence of Hegemonic Masculinities, in: *Masculinities: A Journal of Identity and Culture* 12 (2019). Keynote Address at: 2nd Symposium on Men and Masculinities, Istanbul (September 2019).

80 Ov Christian Norocel: Constructing Radical Right Populist Resistance: Metaphors of Heterosexist Masculinities and the Family Question in Sweden, in: *Nordic Journal for Masculinity Studies – NORMA* 5:02 (2010), pp. 170–183, here pp. 179f.

Drawing Boundaries: ‘Outsiders and Insiders’

Among the core defining aspects of populism, perhaps the most significant one is the conceptualisation of society in dichotomous terms, and taking the liberty to define “insiders” to be “included” in the fold of the pure, ordinary people versus “outsiders” who are to be excluded.⁸¹ Both Wilders and Orbán present ample examples of exclusionary populism⁸² in drawing boundaries between outsiders and insiders. Yet, their designated insiders are configured differently.

In the case of Wilders, the metaphoric boundaries between insiders and outsiders are drawn along axis of ‘Islamic’ versus ‘Judeo-Christian’ civilisations. As Rogers Brubaker argues, Wilders’ populism is an example of populisms that are “distinctive in construing the opposition between the self and the other not in narrowly national but in broader civilizational terms. This partial shift from nationalism and “civilizationism” has been driven by the notion of civilizational threat from Islam”.⁸³ Moreover, Wilders associates himself with Western mainstream conservative historical figures, such as Winston Churchill and Ronald Reagan. In doing so, he does not limit his political stance to Dutch nativism, but rather portrays himself as part of a broader civilisational ‘defence bloc’ of Western civilisation: Churchill as the leader of defence against Nazis, Reagan against communism, and now, himself, against Islam.⁸⁴

Unlike Wilders, who portrays himself and the ‘Dutch people’ as part of broader Western civilisation, Orbán uses a nativist discourse with his “designated insiders” consisting of ethnic Hungarians, whom he defines as “a nation without any relatives in Europe” and as “culturally alien” to neighbouring countries⁸⁵, thus portrays the population of Hungary as exceptional and alone in Europe. While framing the de-democratization process that he has been cultivating since 2010 as a transformation from “liberal freedom” to “Christian freedom”, he clearly asserts who is “inside” and who remains “outside” of his imagination of the nation:

Christian freedom is not something abstract. It is very specific, understandable and tangible: patriots instead of citizens of the world; love of country instead of internationalism; marriage and family instead of popularising same-sex relationships; protecting our children instead of drug liberalisation; Hungarian children instead

81 Cas Mudde: *The Populist Zeitgeist*, p. 543; Rogers Brubaker: *Why Populism?*, *passim*.

82 Cas Mudde/Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser: *Exclusionary versus Inclusionary Populism*, *passim*.

83 Rogers Brubaker: *Between Nationalism and Civilizationism*, p. 1191.

84 Geert Wilders: *Marked for Death: Islam’s War Against the West and Me*, p. 77.

85 Viktor Orbán: Interview at International National Conservatism Conference, Rome (Interviewer: Christopher DeMuth).

of immigrants; Christian culture instead of a multicultural confusion [...] In Hungary today all this is seen as self-evident—and is almost taken for granted.⁸⁶

Obviously, Orbán's nativist construction of 'the people' is a highly gendered one, as he gives a central role to the notion of traditional family, and actively excludes various gender identities, sexual preferences and different lifestyles from the fold of the nation. This exclusion does not remain at the level of discourse, but has been reflected in his policies, such as defining the contours of marriage in the Constitution⁸⁷, ending the legal recognition of trans people⁸⁸, and rejecting the ratification of the Istanbul Convention⁸⁹. In contrast, Wilders, who speaks to a social and cultural context defined by the inclusion of LGBTI individuals, not only avoids promoting notions of the traditional family, but actively defines respect for sexual freedoms as an inherent part of Dutch culture.⁹⁰ Furthermore, by attributing gender inequality, oppression of women and violence against LGBTI individuals to Islam, he legitimises his Islamophobic discourse in ostensibly secular and liberal terms.

Embodying and Protecting 'the people'

Despite profound differences in their constructions,—particularly gendered constructions—of the 'insiders', the 'pure people' as outlined above, what unites the two PRR politicians is the way they narrate their relation to these 'insiders'. In narrating their relation to the people, both leaders display performances of masculinity as 'heroic protectors', as well as claiming to embody the people, to be 'men of the people'. Whereas the 'heroic protector' performance constitutes the aspect of extraordinariness, the claim to be close to the people hints at the performance of ordinariness.

86 Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's speech at the 28th congress of Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Union, at: About Hungary, 2 October 2019, URL: <http://abouthungary.hu/speeches-and-remarks/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-speech-at-the-28th-congress-of-fidesz-hungarian-civic-union/> (accessed on 3 March 2021).

87 Borbála Juhász: Friedrich Ebert Foundation Working Paper: Orbán's Politics – a Gender Perspective, p. 3.

88 Shaun Walker: Hungary votes to end legal recognition of trans people, at: The Guardian, 19 May 2020, URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/19/hungary-votes-to-end-legal-recognition-of-trans-people> (accessed on 1 June 2020).

89 Kafkadesk: Hungary rejects Istanbul Convention on gender equality and women's rights, at: Kafkadesk, 7 May 2020, URL: <https://kafkadesk.org/2020/05/07/hungary-rejects-istanbul-convention-on-gender-equality-and-womens-rights/> (accessed on 1 June 2020).

90 Paul Mepschen et al.: Sexual Politics, Orientalism and Multicultural Citizenship in the Netherlands, *passim*.

With regard to the performance of heroic protectors, both Orbán and Wilders present themselves as leaders determined to protect the boundaries of their nation and civilisation against immigration. In doing so, both leaders resort to a configuration of political masculinity which marks a ‘protective’ father figure, who urges direct action in the face of crisis to protect ‘their own’. Both underline ‘urgency’ and the significance of stopping immigration and keeping borders closed to immigrants. While Wilders fervently argues that “the floodgates are open”⁹¹ and Muslim immigration puts “the survival of Netherlands and Western civilization at stake”⁹², Orbán, who uses the metaphor of immigrants “breaking down the door”, claims that building a fence was of absolute urgency to “hold back the tide”⁹³.

When it comes to performances of ordinariness, the claim to be the embodiment of the ‘ordinary, pure people’, is common to both cases. Orbán, who presents himself “as the righteous voice of the people and the sole protector of the nation”⁹⁴, identifies with ‘the people’ in his frequent use of “we”, instead of “I”, implying that he is speaking in the name of the national collective. In defining himself as a “country boy”⁹⁵, as a “street fighter”, he conveys an image of the “common Hungarian”. Just as he imagines Hungarian society as “alone in Europe”, he underlines his “single” and particular stance *vis a vis* other leaders in the EU, and performs the role of the leader who represents the exceptional, particular Hungarian nation *vis a vis* Europeans:

When the prime ministers of the European Union meet with each other regularly, I am the only prime minister who doesn't understand the languages of anybody else. The majority of the prime ministers understands the language of at least one

- 91 Cassius: Geert Wilders 2017 Campaign Ad “Make The Netherlands Ours Again” English Subtitles (video on YouTube), 7 March 2017, URL: https://youtu.be/V_fYn0dN9u4 (accessed on 1 June 2020).
- 92 Paul Nielsen: Dutch Freedom Party Geert Wilders Final Debate ENGLISH SUBTITLES (video on YouTube), 15 March 2017, URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ma2Tbk-k8IzC> (accessed on 3 March 2021)
- 93 Viktor Orbán: Those who are overwhelmed cannot offer shelter to anyone, at: Website of Hungarian Government, 3 September 2015, URL: https://ceskapozice.lidovky.cz/forum/viktor-orban-those-who-are-overwhelmed-cannot-offer-shelter-to-anyone.A150903_161154_pozice-forum_tube (accessed on 3 March 2021).
- 94 Cas Mudde: Populist Radical Right parties in Europe, Cambridge 2009, cited in: Cathrine Thorleifsson: Disposable strangers, p. 323.
- 95 Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's acceptance speech after receiving the “Person of the Year” award (Krynica-Zdrój), at: About Hungary, 7 September 2016, URL: <http://abouthungary.hu/speeches-and-remarks/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-acceptance-speech-after-receiving-the-person-of-the-year-award-full-text-in-english/> (accessed on 3 March 2021).

or two other countries, but I am the one who is alone always, because we Hungarians got here in a miracle way.⁹⁶

Orbán's ardent supporters affirm his image as a leader who looks out for the nation. "Orbán showed his mettle again. The government has not only improved the situation for people today. The government provided the future of our nation."⁹⁷, says a voter immediately after the election victory in April 2018, showing his approval of Orbán's claim of political masculinity that is "constructed around, ascribed to and/or claimed by"⁹⁸ himself.

Wilders, on the other hand, builds his narration of closeness to the Dutch people by emphasising that he, like the ordinary Dutch, has first-hand experience of the 'troubles' that he claims to be caused by Muslim immigrants. He presents himself as a common man who knows 'the streets', and thus understands the struggles of ordinary Dutch citizens. In narrating his experiences, he recurrently underlines that he used to live in the Kanaleneiland district of Utrecht, a district that was increasingly inhabited by Muslim immigrants. He describes the district as formerly having been a neighbourhood of "native-born, blue collar and middle-class Dutch residents"⁹⁹, which was 'taken over' by Muslim immigrants later on. He stresses his experience of having been physically assaulted and robbed by Arab youths in the past, thus underlining that he physically shares the plight of the ordinary Dutch. He takes pride in having lived in this neighbourhood, and presents it as an experience that shows his closeness to ordinary people and his distinction from other politicians, whom he claims "looked [at him] as if [he] was talking about another planet"¹⁰⁰ whenever he talked to them about the problems in Kanaleneiland, and asked "why the hell do you stay in that neighborhood?"¹⁰¹ By underlining his experience of Kanaleneiland, he stresses his loner position in Dutch politics, being 'one of the people', and not one of the elite politicians who are removed from ordinary people's problems.

His performance of the 'lone fighter for the common people' is even more apparent in the story he recounts about an elderly Dutch woman who sent him 10 euros with a letter of support. She claimed to support Wilders because she is the last Dutch

96 Viktor Orbán: Interview at International National Conservatism Conference, Rome (Interviewer: Christopher DeMuth).

97 Vice News: Hungary's Anti-Migrant Prime Minister Is Crushing the Opposition (HBO) (video on YouTube), 18 April 2018, URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rD_Q3n-Q0V_o (accessed on 1 June 2020).

98 Kathleen Starck/Birgit Sauer (eds.): *A Man's World? Political Studies in Literature and Culture*, p. 6.

99 Geert Wilders: *Marked for Death*, p. 82.

100 *Ibid.*, p. 83.

101 *Ibid.*

person on her street, and he is “the only one speaking on [her] behalf”. “I hung her letter on the wall to remind me who I am fighting for”, he declares.¹⁰²

In other words, as a politician of the opposition, Wilders presents himself as both the protector and a member of the ordinary Dutch people, whom he claims are lonely, as they cannot find representatives among other Dutch politicians. The performance of his own ‘loneliness’ in politics parallels his narration of the loneliness of the Dutch people: He, just like them, claims to be sidelined by the elite politicians, against whom he is fighting in the name of the common people. Orbán also performs the ‘protector’ and embodiment of the people, but as he has been in power for a decade, his performance underlines the loneliness of the Hungarian people *vis a vis* the rest of the world.

Concluding Remarks

Messerschmidt argues that “hegemonic masculinities often are simultaneously hidden in plain sight, operating in a disguised way while concurrently securing an overwhelmingly legitimating influence; that is, hegemonic masculinities are so obvious that people do not actually “see” them”.¹⁰³ The fact that masculinism is taken for granted in politics hinders the visibility of hegemonic masculine practices. It can be argued that an over-emphasis of masculinity around right-wing populism, ironically, contributed to the opaqueness of masculinity. A nuanced gender lens that reads configurations of power in a context-dependent structure, is needed to wipe away the opaqueness, the taken-for-grantedness of masculinity in PRR politics.

Through the analysis of the PRR leaders’ discourse, style and performance, forms of political masculinities shaped by domination, aggression and attestation of manliness become more apparent. This study, by comparing two PRR leaders, analysed the gendered processes of interactions fostered through the reproduction of masculinist values in juxtaposition to the discursive and stylistic repertoires of PRR. A comparative reading of the performances of political masculinity by Orbán and Wilders reveals the common ground in terms of the stylistic and performative aspects of their populism, without missing their ideological and discursive differences. Even though both politicians display the main tenets of populist radical right such as nativism, anti-immigrant discourses, and populist conceptualisations of society in two antagonistic groups, these cases also bear profound differences. For example, while the hegemonic practices of Orbán re-draw the boundaries of the nation, Wilders uses Western civilisational rhetoric and justifies his Islamophobic, anti-immigrant position based on a claim to protect not just the Dutch nation but Judeo-Christian civilisation. The

102 Ibid., p. 92.

103 James W. Messerschmidt: *Hidden in Plain Sight*, p. 17.

concepts of 'pure people' in Wilders' and Orbán's constructions differ especially in terms of the exclusion or inclusion of people identified by non-hegemonic gender identities and sexual preferences. Contrary to Orbán, who naturalises gendered power relations under the banner of defending traditional family values, Wilders presents himself as a defender of gender equality, women's rights and LGBTI rights, which he claims to be inherent parts of Dutch culture. Yet, ironically, despite their differences related to gender politics, their gendered political performances show remarkable commonalities. They both claim to be the embodiments of the nation's ordinary people. They both assume the authority to define and draw lines between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' of the nation. They display common performances of 'brave bad boys' who dare to challenge the politically speakable and thinkable. They both perform 'heroic protectors' of their constructed 'insiders' through a crisis narrative, claiming that the nation is under acute threat.

According to Moffitt, the notion of populism as a political style has analytical strength for the understanding of the ways in which populism travels across different contexts. It also shows us the role of affective and passionate performances in populism as opposed to technocratic, emotionally neutral political performances.¹⁰⁴ This study shows that looking at radical right-wing populism through the lens of gendered symbolisms, and reading populist style with a special focus on performances of masculinities, further contributes to the understanding the affective capacities of populism. We suggest that analysing populist political styles through the performances of masculinities is invaluable to the understanding of the common ground on which different populisms are constructed. We also suggest that a research agenda which analyses the gendered performances of woman populist politicians, and performances of left-wing populist politicians, would further expand our understanding of the place of gender in populist style and performance.

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