Pandemic and war: crisis narrative and leadership.
Analysis of the presidential speeches at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic

Pandemia y guerra: narrativas de crisis y liderazgo.
Análisis de las estrategias discursivas presidenciales en el inicio de la pandemia del COVID-19

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ABSTRACT
Introduction. Crises caused by unforeseen events such as COVID-19 challenge political actors' communication and leadership abilities. In response, these politicians establish communication strategies that seek to redefine and reinforce their leadership (and their image) before public opinion. **Methodology**. This text analyzes the development of some of the strategies carried out by the political leaders of the three European countries most affected by the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic: Emmanuel Macron (France), Giuseppe Conte (Italy), and Pedro Sánchez (Spain). The analysis is based on generative semiotics and focuses on the study of the semi-operative, semantic and discursive dimensions. **Results**. In the specific case of the coronavirus pandemic, such narratives introduce issues

related to war and combat. In this way, they facilitate the appearance of sub-frames such as heroism and patriotism. **Discussion**. There is great similarity between all the discourses analyzed when making use of the narrative sequence of the hero's realization. Neither the different political context nor the diverse evolution of the pandemic in each of the countries analyzed, as well as the different political status of the leaders, entails a differentiation in their narrative bases and their war frameworks. **Conclusions**. It is confirmed that the new narratives originate in traditional discursive orders such as the warlike and the epic-heroic and a novelty stands out: the role that science plays in accompanying this discourse.

KEYWORDS: Political communication; crisis communication; leadership; narrative; metaphorization.

RESUMEN
Introducción. Las crisis provocadas por acontecimientos imprevistos como el COVID-19 ponen a prueba las capacidades de comunicación y liderazgo de los actores políticos. Como respuesta, estos políticos establecen estrategias comunicativas que buscan redefinir y reforzar su liderazgo (y su imagen) ante la opinión pública. **Metodología**. Este texto analiza el desarrollo de algunas de las estrategias llevadas a cabo por los líderes políticos de los tres países europeos más afectados en la primera ola de la pandemia del COVID-19: Emmanuel Macron (Francia), Giuseppe Conte (Italia) y Pedro Sánchez (España). El análisis se basa en la semiótica generativa y se centra en el estudio de las dimensiones semionarrativa, semántica y discursiva. **Resultados**. En el caso concreto de la pandemia del coronavirus, tales narrativas introducen cuestiones relacionadas con la guerra y el combate. De este modo, facilitan la aparición de subencuadres como la heroicidad y el patriotismo. **Discusión**. Existe una gran similitud entre todos los discursos analizados a la hora de valerse de la secuencia narrativa propia de la realización del héroe. Pero ni la diferencia de contexto político, ni la diversa evolución de la pandemia en cada uno de los países analizados, así como tampoco el diferente estatuto político de los líderes, conlleva una diferenciación en sus bases narrativas y en sus encuadres bélicos. **Conclusiones.** Se confirma que las nuevas narrativas se originan en los órdenes discursivos tradicionales como el bélico y el épico-heroico y se destaca una novedad: el papel que juega la ciencia en el acompañamiento de este discurso.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Comunicación política; comunicación de crisis; liderazgo; narrativa; metaforización.

CONTENT

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1. Introduction

Moments of crisis, such as the one caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic, erode the political discursive routines of a society (Krzyżanowski, 2019) and are faced with urgent problems that require extraordinary actions, both on the part of citizens and their political institutions (Christensen et alt., 2016). These are moments that question the stability of the current discursive order in at least three

aspects: a) the habitual forms of political communication (Bennett and Pfetsch, 2018); b) the social perception of reality (Boin, Kuipers, and de Jongh, 2019); and c) the modalities of political leadership (Anderson, 2018).

At these critical moments, political leaders and institutions set in motion processes aimed at recovering lost stability through strategies that range from the attempt to recover and repair the altered discursive order to the proposal of new forms of discursive organization (Losada Díaz, Rodríguez Fernández, and Paniagua Rojano, 2020). It is in this context when new narratives emerge (Valdivia, 2020) that often have their origin in traditional discursive orders (Holmgreen and Huang, 2020; Sabucedo, Alzate, and Hur, 2020).

In this article, we will specifically analyze the narrative form of the political discourse of the presidents of the three European countries in which the COVID-19 crisis, in its first wave, was most intense: Emmanuel Macron (France), Giuseppe Conte (Italy), and Pedro Sánchez (Spain).

We will study the narrative syntax of their discursive interventions and how they try to reconfigure the approach and framework with which they face the pandemic and, at the same time, redefine the role attributed to the different actors that appear in the discourse.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Leadership

Defining the concept of political leadership, despite being fundamental to understanding political processes, is complicated. Many disciplines have contributed to the study of leadership, such as political theory, history, psychology, and management studies (Anderson, 2018; Boriello, 2017). But the most widely accepted definition is specified in the singular set of power relations and influences that is exerted on a wide range of thematic areas, highlighted at national and global level, and from which it is erected in a position of authorized preponderance that involves ideologies and ethics (Blondel and Thiebault, 2010).

The concept of leadership is, therefore, relational (Fabbrini, 1999): political leaders initially obtain authority through the ballot box, but that authority is potentially subject to constant and latent challenges since they will have to legitimize themselves through discourse. Based on it, and its variety of styles, leaders offer social constructions of reality (Berger and Luckman, 1966).
In this sense, in societies dominated by the media (Pérez Tornero, 2020), and with an increasingly mediated political space (Mazzoleni, 2017), leaders are forced to progressively act as authentic media actors (Hepp, Hajarvard, and Lundby, 2015). In particular, television, which has been playing a fundamental role in the process of personalization of politics (especially since the 1990s) and which has caused the political weight of the individual actor to increase over time, while the centrality of the political group, that is, the political party itself, ends up going to the background (Rahat and Sheafer, 2007).

Some authors (Sampugnaro and Montemagno, 2021; Cervi and Roca, 2017) consider that this phenomenon is causing a kind of Americanization of politics; Others, on the other hand, emphasize that the roles and powers belonging to political leaders vary depending on the political system of one country or another (Blondel and Thiebault, 2010). However, there is broad agreement on the centrality of discourse as a constructor of realities and as a central aspect of contemporary leadership.

2.2. Crisis

The concept of crisis is perhaps one of the most debated in the social sciences in recent times (Krzyżanowski, 2019; Moffitt, 2015). As de Clercy and Ferguson (2016) emphasize, "modern" crises are gradually transformed into "cross-border crises" (Boin, 2019), since they can cross geographical and political borders and, at the same time, they become disasters of international proportions that affect and threaten multiple and different fields, both in the personal and professional spheres of citizens, whatever their social, economic, and cultural level. They are crises that "jump from one field to another", unearthing long-forgotten problems and turning them into great threats of an unforeseen scope (Arjen Boins, 2019).

Other authors prefer to speak of mega-crisis that, besides having global scope, originate different crises intertwined with each other and entail negative and permanent changes (Parrott, 2020); In the words of Bruce Parrott (2020), they generate a "*snowballing political agenda that makes individual danger harder to address*". And to illustrate this, the attacks of September 11 in New York, the Asian tsunami, Hurricane Katrina, SARS and bird flu, the global financial crisis, or the Fukushima nuclear disaster serve as examples (Parrott, 2020).

It is for all this that the COVID-19 pandemic, developed in practically the whole world throughout 2020, must be analyzed under the conceptual umbrella of a mega-crisis (Boin, Lodge, and Luesink, 2020; Parrott 2020), since, besides its global and transversal dimension, it arises suddenly, produces a considerable impact, and introduces irreversible changes. For this reason, the coronavirus pandemic "requires additional leadership capacities" (Tourish, 2020; Tömmel, 2020), in the sense that it is the leaders themselves who can contribute to solving, or also worsening, crisis processes such as that of the case at hand. (Ortega and Orsini, 2020).

2.3. Leadership in times of crisis

Crisis and leadership are closely linked phenomena (Boin et alt., 2016). In fact, crisis management is more than an operational response to minimize the consequences of a terrible event, because it has an eminently political component (Liu and Boin, 2020). The crises themselves are social constructions (Valdivia, 2020, Moffitt, 2015), labels that societies collectively reach in their efforts to understand an emerging and latent threat. And this collective process has a political nature since it is up to governments and administrations to direct and provide solutions in crisis management (Liu and Boin, 2020). In this sense, they can be considered as "dynamic forces in the continuous processes of legitimation, delegitimization, and re-legitimation" ('T Hart and Boin, 2001) that break the familiar symbolic frameworks that endorse the pre-existing socio-political order, damaging the legitimacy of leaders and government institutions, but also providing opportunities to repair that damage (Sorace, 2016). In other words, political and social actors participate in a kind of competition over the construction of crisis frameworks (de Clercy and Ferguson, 2016; Lakoff, 1991).

3. Rationale and objectives

In this article, we will study the most relevant fragments of the official speeches broadcast on television by the political leaders of the three European countries with special impact during the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic: France, Italy, and Spain, to unveil their narrative strategies and analyze their similarities and differences.

In this sense, we will follow the comparative method to identify and explain similarities and divergences between the studied cases (Mair, 1997) -based on the recommendations of Sartori (1991)-

, and we will compare, *per genus et differentiam*, three countries that share many historical and cultural characteristics, which have similar and/or comparable political systems, and which belong to the same model of the media system. This is what Hallin and Mancini (2004) define as the Mediterranean Model or Polarized Pluralism, represented for the present case as different government systems: France is a semi-presidential republic, Italy is a parliamentary republic, and Spain is a parliamentary monarchy. Therefore, its leaders can be expected to show similar discursive strategies, but also some contextual differences regarding the political and discursive opportunities of each specific case (Koopmans and Statham, 2010).

Regarding the selection of the speeches to be analyzed, we must point out the following: In the case of France, President Emmanuel Macron delivered three speeches in the initial and expanding moments of the pandemic, specifically, on the 12th and 16th of March and April 13th, 2020, which caused, in the first instance, closures of non-essential places until, finally, the country was confined. In the case of the Italian Republic, its president, Giuseppe Conte, addressed his fellow citizens on more occasions than Macron and Sánchez. To be able to fairly compare the speeches of the French and Spanish president, we have chosen the three most important speeches delivered by Conte: on March 4th, 11th, and 21st, which correspond to the announcements of the closure of universities and schools in the so-called red zones, the subsequent closure of the country, and the announcement of the most restrictive confinement measures to date, such as the cessation of any non-essential activity. Finally, in the case of Spain, President Pedro Sánchez addressed his compatriots through an appearance and two official announcements on March 10th, 13th, and 28th that led to the declaration of the State of alarm and the confinement of the country a bit later.

Table 1. *Selection of the main speeches made by the presidents of the French, Italian, and Spanish governments*

Leader	Position	Country	Political system	Date of speeches and appearances
Emmanuel Macron	President of the Republic	France	Semi-presidential republic	Speeches: March 12th and 16th April 13th
Giuseppe Conte	President of the Council of Ministers	Italy	Parliamentary republic	Speeches: March 4th, 11th, and 21st
Pedro Sánchez	President of the Government	Spain	Parliamentary monarchy	Appearance: March 10th Official Announcements: March 13th and 28th

Source: Self-made

4. Methods

To analyze these phenomena, we place ourselves in the field of the categories and methodologies provided by generative semiotics, especially by the semiotics of the so-called School of Paris, which had J. A. Greimas as its central figure (Bertrand, 2019).

We will introduce in our analysis, following the generative semiotics of the School of Paris, the distinction between a story (narration) and narrativity, considering, in turn, political discourse as a story (Patterson and Monroe, 1998; Ravecca and Dauphinee, 2018; Cervi, 2020).

The story of the concrete discursive manifestation of narration and the narrative itself is a semiotic system capable of generating different narratives that respond to the same basic structure or abstract

macrostructure (Charteris-Black, J., 2004 and 2011), as well as themes that contribute to configuring unpublished perceptions of reality, at the same time that they redefine the roles played by the different actors of the discourse (Ravecca and Dauphinee, 2018), especially those who exercise political and social leadership (Bertrand, 2019).

We will pay special attention to the development of actantial and acting structures that are intrinsically linked to new narrative strategies and to the theming and framing processes with which it is accompanied. Likewise, we will especially pause in the consideration of: a) the figure of an actant-addresser that tends to configure itself –at the acting level- as a people, nation, or country and constitutes the fundamental pillar of the continuous process of community constitution; b) the relationship that this addresser establishes with the main hero -the politician-enunciator- and that, therefore, confers legitimacy on his leadership; and c) the new relationships established between political leaders and citizens (Greimas, 1983). In the latter context, aspects related to metaphorization (metaphors and allegories) will be especially relevant.

We consider metaphorization as a discursive process of comparison between two semantic entities that ends up establishing a semantic intersection -crossing of semic values or semantic fields-. Throughout a specific narrative sequence, the metaphorization processes -which are concatenated as the action of the sequence unfolds- usually start from comparisons between two close semantic terms and end up causing a deep fusion (intersection) between said terms until the point of making any hint of the initial comparison disappear (Bertrand, 2019). In this way, metaphorization ends up establishing the hegemony of one of the two terms of the comparison and takes the other to the background. And sometimes, that hegemonic term is repeated throughout the narrative sequence, becoming a type of redundancy that we will call isotopy.

We could say, then, that metaphorization, ultimately, consists of a framing process that presents three consecutive stages: 1) the *starting point*, in which two different elements appear simultaneously within a certain frame to which various themes are associated; 2) the *comparison*, in which the two elements come closer to each other, which begins to destabilize the current frame and new thematization processes (themes) appear; and, finally, 3) the *intersection*, as a result of the fusion of the values of the two compared terms that end up producing the emergence of a new frame with several themes (Greimas, 1983).

The result of a continuous process of metaphorization gives rise to the constitution of large isotopies (and frames) that contain specific and compatible themes and approaches. The notion of framework that we use in this study comes from the proposals of ethnomethodology and, especially, from the contributions of the sociology of everyday life (Goffman, 1993), which in a simplified way Lakoff (1991) and others apply to the understanding of both everyday and political language (Holmgreen, L-L, & Huang, 2020).

We will be especially concerned with analyzing the metaphorization phenomena (comparison/fusion of values) between two scenarios or frames. Namely, on the one hand, that of the pandemic and, on the other, that of war (combat) (Lakoff, 1991; Sabucedo, Alzate, and Hur, 2020).

We will see how the speech of the leaders moves between different frames (frames or approaches), especially the health and the economic -both related to the pandemic-, but also the warlike approach. And we will verify that all of them end up being framed, in turn, in a meta-discourse of patriotic heroism and the constitution of the community.

In the three cases studied we have followed the same protocol. In the first place, we have tried to make explicit the macrostructure that contained the narrative syntax -the one that organized the oral discourse of the presidents-, attending to the following aspects: a) the description of the scene of the action; b) the presentation of the actants (semiotic-narrative level) and the actors (discursive level); c) the definition of the semiotic-narrative scheme and its phases; d) process of metaphorization, thematization, and/or marking (frame) of the various semiotic-narrative phases and the configured actors; e) the insertion in that actantial structure of the enunciating subject and his relations with the addresser (source of legitimacy). Once this analysis has been carried out, we proceed to compare it and draw conclusions about the narrative strategies and their impact on the configuration of the leadership and legitimacy modalities.

For operational purposes, we will consider the sum of the three speeches as one divided into three chapters, but with a solid structural coherence. Each chapter provides a gradual progression of narrative development (narrative sequence) with substantial differences. Through them, the enunciator unfolds a syntactic course of the action and proceeds, in that course, to the configuration -both pragmatic and passionate- of the different actants and actors that intervene (Ravecca and Dauphinee, 2018). And this journey is combined with complex metaphorization processes that give rise to new themes and frames. The continuity of the structural development does not prevent each chapter from enjoying concrete autonomy and coherence that, in any case, would have allowed its autonomous study. However, for a better analysis of the narrative dimension, it is more practical, methodologically speaking, to consider the three discourses as a unit, because it is from an extended narrative sequence that we can see in their entirety the various processes of metaphorization and framing.

The description of all these dimensions has been carried out through qualitative analyzes based on deductive logic (Weaver-Hightower, 2018) and developed by individual researchers that, subsequently, have been the subject of discussion and consensus with others, thus filtering subjective interpretations (not justified) and adhering to the significant and explicit discursive indicators. Based on this first analysis, nothing prevents that, in successive studies, the analyzes carried out are susceptible to being re-examined using various reception and interpretation analysis devices required by other study methodologies.

5. Results

5.1. Macron's speeches

In just a month, Macron offers a first vision of the emerging problem of COVID-19 and designs a narrative and discursive strategy in which both the relationships between the actants and actors, as well as the processes that include metaphorization and theming dynamics -in which various values and semantic fields play a relevant role-, which end up providing new frames, can be easily recognized.

In his first intervention and very early in his speech, Macron presents a synthesis of the basic narrative path, which includes the configuration of the corresponding scenario: "*Depuis quelques semaines, notre pays fait face à la propagation d'un virus, le COVID-19, qui a touché plusieurs milliers de nos compatriotes*". In this statement are clearly distinguished: a time -dated concretely in relation to the enunciative act; the actors that allow guessing a well-defined actantial structure: a subject-hero ("*notre pays*") facing other subjects (COVID-19); and, at the same time, a concrete action, a transformation: propagation. We are, therefore, before a hero and an antihero, the latter being the one who inflicts considerable damage on another subject who presents himself as a patient: "*plusieurs milliers de nos compatriotes*".

This first statement directly constitutes the structural base of the entire narrative sequence that acts as a macrostructure and houses the entire subsequent unfolding of the speech.

At the beginning of his speech, Macron perfectly illuminates the damage (subject) -we could say, in narrative terms: the violation of order- that must be repaired (the damage to compatriots)-, he identifies the opposing subject (the antihero: COVID) and focuses substantially on the hero who must repair the affront: "our country." It is a resounding and precise acting presentation (country, compatriots, etc.), but abstract enough to show a precise correspondence with the deep semiotic-narrative level: the actantial structure.

This presentation manages to highlight a concrete semantic field: that of the homeland and, at the same time, opens up to an abstract generality that gives it a container character. In other words, it will allow the subject-actants to be invested, throughout the discourse, with different types of values, and none of them will come into conflict with the patriotic theme outlined from the beginning. In fact, almost all the subsequent discourse will almost always move within a dynamic of insertion of different values in the described actants and, in this way, broadly develop the process of actorization and figuration.

5.1.1. French collective subject: a great nation

In this sense, Macron's speech adopts a parallel figurative strategy. On the one hand, he describes the anti-hero virus and its spread, based on the approach (or thematization process) that we can call "sanitary", using terms from medicine and medical sciences. On the other, it presents the subject "our country" as a collective subject that can also be recognized as "*la nation*" and that is subdivided (broken down and articulated) into different actors who possess, by themselves, different values (always compatible with the theme of patriotism): "*les personnels des hôpitaux, médecins, infirmiers, ambulanciers, les agents des Samu et de nos hôpitaux, les médecins de ville, l'ensemble des personnels du service public de la santé en France*". The configuration of COVID as diverse actors, but semantically and syntactically coordinated, occurs, therefore, through the accumulation of patriotic and health values, that is, through values that refer to the field of patriotism and the health field. To this must be added a new configuration dimension that confers specific passionate states to the actors: sensitivities and attitudes of a cognitive and emotional nature (both in terms of their initial disposition and their sensitivity and achievements (Bertrand, 2019): "*l'ensemble des personnels du service public de la santé en France sont engagés avec dévouement et efficacité*").

However, before the presentation of these pragmatically and passionately configured actors, Macron's speech brings out the figure of the enunciator himself, as the actor of the speech: "*nous avons préparé, agi*", that is, an actor who is far-sighted, apt (with competence), and who has acted (*performance*). Naturally, it is not difficult to establish an identity between this "*nous*" and Macron himself. With this, the double figure of subject-enunciator emerges who, like the other actors, will be endowed, through discourse, with concrete semantic values. Next, an alliance (cooperation) is established between this enunciating "*nous*" and the actors (doctors, health workers, etc.): "*Si nous avons pu retarder la propagation du virus et limiter les cas sévères, c'est grâce à eux parce que tous ont répondu présents*". Note that health workers are presented as subjects, whose action is subordinated to that of the subject-enunciator (Macron). It is this who becomes the main actor, while the others tend to go from hero subjects to subject-helper. And immediately afterwards, the actant-subject-hero-enunciator also unfolds as subject-addresser capable of granting recognition to the subject-helper: "*Si nous avons pu retarder la propagation du virus et limiter les cas sévères, c'est grâce à eux parce que tous ont répondu présents*". And: "*C'est pourquoi, en votre nom, je tiens avant toute chose à exprimer ce soir la reconnaissance de la Nation à ces héros en blouse blanche, ces milliers de femmes et d'hommes admirables qui n'ont d'autre boussole que le soin, d'autre préoccupation que l'humain, notre bien-être,*

notre vie, tout simplement". Note that Macron also adopts the role of representative of all those who listen to him: "*vous*".

It is difficult not to recognize here the reconfiguration of leadership that Macron presents in just a few lines of his speech: he adopts in his narrative strategy the role of the addresser, main hero, and representative of all, with whom the other subjects, the health workers, cooperate. We could qualify this strategy as absorbing leadership, in which the leader retains almost all existing actantial roles, reserving the role of helpers or anti-heroes for the other actors.

Immediately, and without breaking continuity, the characterization and construction of another important protagonist are reached: the citizens (represented) to whom the president addresses. There is a psychological characterization (cold blood in the face of anxiety, anguish, anger, and panic). This "cold blood" is accompanied by belonging to a collective subject, "a great nation", defined as the set of women and men who are capable of placing the collective interest above all else, a human community that is sustained by two values: solidarity and fraternity: "*Je veux aussi, ce soir, saluer le sang-froid dont vous avez fait preuve (...) Tous, vous avez su faire face en ne cédant ni à la colère, ni à la panique. Mieux, en adoptant les bons gestes, vous avez ralenti la diffusion du virus et ainsi permis à nos hôpitaux et nos soignants de mieux se préparer. C'est cela, une grande Nation. Des femmes et des hommes capables de placer l'intérêt collectif au-dessus de tout, une communauté humaine qui tient par des valeurs : la solidarité, la fraternité*".

It is very evident here that there is a development that goes from the passionate characterization of the configured actor to its insertion in the semantic field of the nation or country. In this way, Macron with his last term used (*la fraternité*) directs his characterization of "*vous*" not only to the theme of the homeland but to the issue of the homeland as it is established in the principles of the French republic in which fraternity is one of the essential pillars (along with freedom and equality).

Subsequently, Macron's speech brings out another helper subject: that of those who know (epidemiological scientists, researchers, etc.) who adopt the attitude of advising and guiding- through their knowledge- Macron's action: "*Nous avons en France les meilleurs virologues, les meilleurs épidémiologistes, des spécialistes de grand renom, des cliniciens aussi, des gens qui sont sur le terrain et que nous avons écoutés, comme nous le faisons depuis le premier jour*". But this help from those who know is not limited to fighting the pandemic, but even to defending democracy, with which we return, by an indirect path, to the theme of patriotism and civility: "*en suivant l'avis des scientifiques comme nous venons de le faire, d'assurer la continuité de notre vie démocratique et de nos institutions*".

The basic actantial structure is the one that proposes the essential theme that lies at the base of Macron's narrative: patriotism founded on the values of cohesion, protection, fraternity, and union. All the other themes that are shown in the discourse: health, disease, knowledge, science -each with its own actantial and acting configuration- are subsumed in the thematic-setting and the values of patriotism.

Only in Macron's second speech does the theme of war appear: "*Nous sommes en guerre, en guerre sanitaire, certes: nous ne luttons ni contre une armée, ni contre une autre Nation. Mais l'ennemi est là, invisible, insaisissable, qui progresse. Et cela requiert notre mobilisation générale. Nous sommes en guerre*". And it is this issue of war that is combined with that of patriotism, but adds a kind of State of exception that, in this case, leads to the suspension of some of the previous actions: (pension reform, for example). It is in this scenario configured by war in which they openly declare who are enemies

and who are not, and what are the priorities that must be established, as well as the aspects that can go to the background.

In the third speech, coherence is ensured by maintaining the actantial structures already deployed and the themes of patriotism and war. The discursive expansion is carried out by presenting a version of the war: the economic struggle, which has its own profiles, but it does not stop being presented as patriotic combat. In this same third speech, the metaphorical and war terms are constant and constitute an authentic *leitmotiv* of the text. The only novelty is that, in its conclusion, the war and patriotic themes seem to give way, without completely disappearing, to the theme of the almost mystical union of French compatriots and fellow citizens: "*Le moment que nous vivons est un ébranlement intime et collectif. Sachons le vivre comme tel. Il nous rappelle que nous sommes vulnérables, nous l'avions sans doute oublié*".

5.1.2. Macron's leadership

From the point of view of leadership, the narrative journey shows us various operations: the presentation of an enunciating subject who performs various actantial functions (addresser-subject-hero) and who, at the same time, subsumes and subordinates other subjects in his action (except the anti-hero-enemy). And all this is done through representation and union. While representation leads us to the field of organizing political activity, union leads us, through solidarity and fraternity, to the almost mystical link between the nation and humanity.

The use of the metaphorization process (regarding combat and war) has a double function: it reduces the complexity of the cognitive and pragmatic field and increases the intensity and narrative tension, which gives the enunciator more strength and greater capacity to involve the receiver.

Macron's leadership can be presented as that of the patriotic hero, that is, the leader of wars and combats that can suppose the overcoming of a test in which both the target people and the subject itself are presented as the object of heroic recognition.

5.2. Conte's speeches

As explained above, the Italian president, Giuseppe Conte, addresses his fellow citizens on more occasions than Emmanuel Macron and Pedro Sánchez. To be able to fairly compare the speeches of the French and Spanish president, we have chosen the three most important speeches delivered by Conte on March 4th, 11th, and 21st, which correspond to the announcements of the closure of universities and schools in the first instance, then the closure of the country, and very restrictive confinement measures that only allowed activities classified as essential, such as food and everything related to medicine and drugs.

The first sequence of Giuseppe Conte's first speech introduces the general macrostructure: *"Non è la prima volta che il nostro Paese si trova ad affrontare emergenze nazionali. Ma siamo un Paese forte, un Paese che non si arrende: è nel nostro DNA. Stiamo affrontando la sfida del Coronavirus. Una sfida che non ha colore politico, che deve chiamare a raccolta l'intera Nazione. È una sfida che va vinta con l'impegno di tutti: cittadini e Istituzioni, scienziati, medici, operatori sanitari, protezione civile, forze dell'ordine. L'Italia, tutta, è chiamata a fare la propria parte".* The nation -defined as a strong country that does not surrender- thus is shown as the hero opposed to the antihero, COVID, which causes damage (the emergency) and substantially focuses on the hero who must repair the affront: "all".

The name of the virus appears very little in the three speeches. Conte mainly chooses words such as "emergency": the subject is "we" and the "emergency" is the anti-subject. The situation is described as an exceptional event, a trial, and a particularly serious and tragic challenge: "*non solo l'Italia ma nessun Paese al mondo potrebbe affrontare una simile situazione d'emergenza in termini di strutture, posti letto e risorse umane richieste*" (...) "*la crisi più difficile che il Paese sta vivendo dal secondo Dopoguerra*". It is an emergency that occurs with a harmful element that causes death and deep personal pain: "*La morte di tanti concittadini è un dolore che ogni giorno si rinnova, questi decessi per noi, per i valori con cui siamo cresciuti, per i valori che ancora oggi noi condividiamo, non sono semplici numeri, quelle che piangiamo sono persone, sono storie di famiglie che perdono gli affetti più cari*".

To the extent that the situation is exceptional, the solution, that is, the cure, passes through exceptional measures established by the Government (transparently), but above all, it requires the dedication, effort, and sacrifice of all (of the citizens first, and doctors and State security forces later). As in the case of the French president, Conte takes the opportunity to awaken patriotism, but unlike Macron, in Conte, there is, from the beginning, a thematization close to war or, at least, to the confrontation that represents a new challenge: "*É una sfida che va vinta con l'impegno di tutti*". The issue is losing or winning, and that means life or death.

The second framework, in some way dependent on the first, is the economic emergency. "*Questa sfida, ormai lo sappiamo bene, riguarda la salute dei cittadini, è una sfida che mette a dura prova il nostro sistema sanitario nazionale, ma riguarda anche la tenuta della nostra economia, del nostro tessuto produttivo fatto di piccole e medie imprese*". And this economic emergency, which derives from the health one, is also represented as a disease: the Italian economy needs a "*terapia d'urto*" (shock therapy), in which the European Union (named for the first and only time in the first speech): "*dovrà venirci dietro e sostenere questo nostro sforzo*". Europe, therefore, plays a helper role, but not a unique and determining factor.

There are, then, three semantic frames at stake: health, economy, and, secondly, combat (life or death), although the latter ends up encompassing the former as a meta-story. In all of them, the collective hero ("*l'Italia tutta: cittadini e istituzioni, scienziati, medici, operatori sanitari, protezione civile, forze dell'ordine*") and its opponent are pointed out: COVID-19 and the emergency situation that it causes.

The test that the subject must pass is his own constitution, that is, his ability to form a community all together: "*Questa è la forza del nostro Paese, una "comunità di individui" come direbbe Norbert Elias*". In fact, two of the three speeches close with "*Tutti insieme ce la faremo*" and "*Uniti ce la faremo*". Conte identifies the various parts that make up the collective subject: "*Penso in particolare innanzitutto ai medici, agli infermieri ma penso anche alle Forze dell'ordine, alle Forze armate, agli uomini e alle donne della Protezione Civile, ai commessi dei supermercati, ai farmacisti, agli autotrasportatori, ai lavoratori dei servizi pubblici, anche ai servizi dell'informazione (...)*".

5.2.1. Italian collective subject: Italy as actant and determiner

At the intersection between health and economic emergencies, we can see the definition of the object of desire/value at stake. On the one hand, there is life itself, and on the other, there is national pride. The pandemic is perceived as a challenge that causes the country to "hang its head" and it will only be through a cure of the virus when the nation can lift it: "*Quando il nostro Paese viene colpito, sa rialzarsi, sa fare squadra, sa tornare più forte di prima*" (...) "*un intero Paese ha affrontato con coraggio, con determinazione questa emergenza, deciso a rialzare la testa*".

The expression "raise our head", which Conte uses repeatedly, is especially interesting because it seems to quote almost verbatim from the Italian anthem, which begins precisely with the phrase: "*Fratelli d'Italia, Italia s'è desta*". In this way, the isotopy of the constitution of the Italian national community is resurrected.

On the other hand, from an actantial point of view, Italy is clearly seen by the whole world as an example of strength and improvement, after being the first European country affected by the pandemic. And this makes it, after the distant impact of China, in the center of attention of the Western world: "*In questo momento tutto il mondo ci guarda: certamente ci guardano per i numeri del contagio, vedono un Paese in difficoltà. Ma ci apprezzano anche perché stiamo dando prova di grande vigore, di grande resistenza*". But Italy will also be, in the words of its president, a model, a reference for the whole world, when the health crisis passes: "*Siamo, lo ricordo, il Paese che per primo, in Europa, è stato colpito più duramente dal coronavirus, ma siamo anche quelli che stanno reagendo con la maggior forza e con la massima precauzione, diventando giorno dopo giorno un modello anche per tutti gli altri*".

Besides the above, the nation of Italy assumes, to a certain extent, a role of addresser (insofar as it attributes duties), since it "calls" Italians to pass this "test" as an act of love and self-giving: "*In questi giorni durissimi, siamo chiamati a misurarci*". Once again, the parallels with the country's anthem are evident: the Italian anthem concludes with "*Siam pronti alla morte l'Italia chiamó*", which we understand as a dramatic thematization of the patriotic heroism on which the Italian nation's constitution seems to be founded.

Still, Conte's narrative is specific. The politician openly cites the Eliasian concept of "*gesellschaft der individúen*" (Elias, 1990); however, this representation of "Italianity" as "a great family", resolutely evokes the *Gemeinschaft* (Clausen and Haselbach, 2019), the community understood as a traditional society, the world in which social relations are personal and are based on emotional attachments, on the recognition of shared characteristics, especially personal loyalty to the family, ethnic relationships, etc. In some way, Italy is presented as an imagined political community (Anderson, 1983) that becomes a subject within Conte's narrative.

5.2.2. Conte as a leader

The leader presents himself as a delegated subject of the Nation but outlines his characteristics in a particular way: there is an interesting mix between a bureaucratic leader (Weber, 1994) and a kind of "nurturing father" (Lakoff, 1991). On the one hand, he is situated in the role of "helmsman", who exercises with awareness and transparency: "*Siamo sulla stessa barca. Chi è al timone ha il dovere di mantenere la rotta, di indicarla all'equipaggio*". On the other hand, when Conte acts as a subject - mainly "I"- he expresses it like this: "*ho scelto*" and shows the assumption of a duty ("*ho ritenuto doveroso*") with full consciousness ("*ho fatto un patto con la mia coscienza*"), although he asks Italians for efforts to get out of the crisis. Still, he also plays the role of moderator: "*Rallentiamo il motore produttivo del paese, ma non lo fermiamo*". In this sense, he seems to take over the paternalistic role and the role of a wise man, who knows what he is doing -and assumes it with conviction- but, above all, who is sure of what is best for his country. Ultimately, Conte's leadership style is twofold. On the one hand, he plays the paternal role ("nurturing father" of Lakoff) and helmsman who brings his people to fruition. On the other hand, he adopts the role of bureaucratic leader -endowed with specific knowledge- who, from a rational point of view, guides the citizens. In any case, he always embraces a position of "servant leader" (Greenleaf, 2008) who humbly serves his country.

5.3. Sánchez' speeches

In just two and a half weeks: from March 12th to April 13th, Sánchez offers a narrative and discursive strategy of the pandemic based mainly on more technical than political elements to carry out his mission: to manage the COVID-19 crisis, possibly to get the greatest possible support from Congress, and, also, to avoid critical logic for the transmission of political ideology in decision-making. But, furthermore, he does it to obtain the support of the autonomous governments that, before the state of alarm, held the competencies of Health and that, with the sole command, became of the State. Hence, the Spanish president had to strive to achieve speeches that would avoid friction between the existing political complexity and the morass of territorial governments that Spanish geopolitics encompasses.

The frames present in the three speeches are: a) health (the disease -Pandemic-), b) war, and c) the political (institutionalization and political organization). The health frame (a) is, from the beginning, the protagonist of the three appearances, although the other two go in and out as the State of alarm and the consolidation of confinement arrive. This health emergency is always based on what the experts say. Sánchez does not set himself up as the savior of the crisis, as the leader who guides the people, but as the driver, allowing himself to be advised by experts, scientists, and doctors: "We are facing a global health emergency" (...) "The scientific experts are who have to lead the way "; "All the decisions that have been made and that are going to be made in this crisis will strictly obey scientific criteria."

Through the health framework, it introduces some warlike connotation, through the metaphor of the shield that the health workers represent, thus praising the "robust and prestigious health that exists in Spain: They are numerous professionals (we have a ratio of doctors per inhabitant higher than the European average), and, above all, they are very well trained and very competent and capable. They support one of the most prestigious and efficient health systems in the world, according to all specialized indicators. They are the safest shield".

Another frame that underlies secondary is that of the economic crisis. This frame appears from the beginning with what Sánchez defines as a Shock Plan (as is the case in Italy), which guarantees both the protection and well-being of Spanish families as well as the supply and production of medicines, as well as access to sanitary material. The idea announced by the Spanish president is, from the beginning, that citizens feel protected in health and the economy, basic pillars of the Welfare State today.

The Semantic Field of War (b) is reflected very aggressively in the speeches, surely driven by the inexorable advance of the virus in Spain (especially and at that time), in Europe (with the example of Italy), and the rest of the world. The war words used make the idea that Spain is at war against the virus very clear: "The first line is made up of health professionals, our shield against the virus"; "The march of the battle that all of Spain, like the whole world, is waging against the COVID-19 pandemic"; "…A different challenge that is to wage a war together against a common enemy that is decimating the health of its citizens"; "...deadly voyage of the virus"; "…The virus is hitting us with ruthless violence"; "... when the battle becomes more intense, as is the current moment that we are suffering in our country." But Sánchez does not introduce patriotism in such a marked way as it happens with Macron and Conte when talking about war. The Spanish president thematizes the concept of the war (against the virus) to point out, with conviction, the idea and the meaning that this term carries: life or death, as Conte also points out in his speeches.

Finally, the semantic field of the political institution (c) becomes the instrument that Sánchez uses, starting with the proclamation of the state of alarm, to defend himself against possible criticism from the opposition. For this reason, from the beginning, his speeches are based on the patriotic discourse

of Europe as the great institution that protects its members and which, in turn, serves as a defense to face the criticism of the Spanish for the harsh actions that were being adopted: "Europe must set up, if I may express myself, a kind of war economy and promote resistance, and then European reconstruction and recovery"; "... and now it is up to Europe, the European Union, to protect all European citizens, the weakest, and particularly also those countries that are unfortunately now suffering the greatest consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, as is the case of Spain"; "Europe is at stake, so let's make the 12-star blue flag take root forever in the hearts of Europeans. Europe must rise forever and not strengthen the speeches of those who want the opposite, who want to weaken it, who want to weaken our common project".

5.3.1. Spanish collective subject: Spain as actant

Concerning the actants, the speeches of President Sánchez appeal to the unity of all Spaniards to overcome the pandemic: "All Spaniards are called to overcome this crisis. Together we will overcome it". The subject-hero actant is, therefore, the collective of all Spaniards, understanding that the actors that are integrated with this actantial function are doctors, health workers, compatriots... On the other hand, experts and scientists present themselves as the subject helper who supports the actions of the hero and of Sánchez himself, the latter as an integral part of that collective hero-subject.

The characterization that the enunciator makes of the collective subject has a first outstanding element: equality over diversity: "The waiting room of a hospital does not understand ways of thinking, colors, ideology, or gender. The virus affects people without asking where they are born, where they live, or what they think". And it is precisely from the recognition of this basic equality that the collective subject manages to fully establish itself: "This problem affects us all as a country and as a country in unity." But, also with the articulation of actions and solidarity: "and in full coordination and cooperation we are facing it," says Sánchez.

The war frame constitutes, de facto, a semiotic landscape conducive to what is the real test: the constitution of the "collective we", as a nation, as a State, without saying it implicitly, as occurs with the speeches of Italy or France. President Sánchez conveys the idea of unity as a country: "I want (…) to send a message of confidence to all Spaniards, to all citizens, a message of unity, serenity, and stability.

In the second speech, the shortest of all, the state of alarm is announced and the allegory of war and protection of the citizen is made clear throughout the speech of President Sánchez, using a martial language that supports the entire text: "These decisions will be aimed at mobilizing all the resources of the State as a whole to better protect the health of citizens"; "We all have a task and a mission in the next few days, in the next few weeks, and it is not minor. The first line is formed by health professionals: our shield against the virus. They, with their dedication, with their sacrifice, protect us all and deserve the recognition and gratitude of all"; "Victory depends on each one of us, in our home, in our family, at work, in our neighborhood. Heroism also consists of washing hands, staying at home, and protecting oneself to protect all citizens".

In the third speech, with the virus about to show itself already in its maximum splendor of deaths and with panic on the part of the Spanish population, President Sánchez appeals to the disease, which is killing its citizens, as a metaphor of war: "Now Europe faces a different challenge, which is to wage a war together against a common enemy that is decimating the health of its citizens (...) and threatening not only social well-being but also our economic progress". He, therefore, appeals to the responsibility of all to face the virus, under the pretext that its citizens lose their health and even their lives.

5.3.2. Sánchez' leadership

The war against COVID-19 allows Sánchez to show solidarity with the country, integrating himself into that collective subject, but, at the same time, showing himself to the public with determination to face it: "To combat this public health emergency, we will do what it takes, where it is needed, and when it is needed. And together, make no mistake, we will overcome this crisis".

Along with the determination, Sánchez presents himself as a targeting actant, capable of designing a narrative program for other actants, especially the EU countries: "Europe must set up, if you allow me to express myself, a kind of war economy and promote resistance, and then European reconstruction and recovery"; "And it has to do it as soon as possible with measures that support the public indebtedness that many member states are assuming to resolve and deal with this pandemic."

Unlike Macron, the Spanish president does not present himself as the patriotic hero who saves citizens from the enemy and the war that COVID-19 supposes. Sánchez does not pretend to be the subject-hero of this tough fight but rather presents and offers himself as a vehicle and supporter who, like Conte, wants to integrate all the members of his community: that of a complex country that is too critical at the time to pool political sensitivities.

6. Conclusions

Crisis and leadership are closely linked phenomena (Boin et alt., 2016): political and social actors actively participate in a kind of competition over the construction of crisis frameworks (de Clercy and Ferguson, 2016; Lakoff, 1991). In this sense, our objective was to discover how three different political leaders narratively framed a national crisis with global impact. From all this, the conclusions that we point out below can be deduced.

First, it is important to underline the great similarity to each other of the analyzed speeches of the three presidents when it comes to using their own narrative sequence in the creation of the hero. Neither the difference in the political context, nor the diverse evolution of the pandemic in each of the countries, not even the different political status of the three European leaders: French, Italian, and Spanish entails a differentiation in their narrative. On the contrary, each of these leaders adopts an institutional role marked by the traditional symbols of each nation; They are in a position of decisive leaders, capable of guiding the action of their compatriots through a path of collective fulfillment that goes through asserting those attributes that characterize their personality and idiosyncrasy as a country and propose a destination in which they are recognized: the overcoming of a tough and critical test.

Their strategy of framing the action within the framework of combat or a war situation is also very similar. With this, they favor dramatic attention, appeal to the heroic capacity of the population, and, ultimately, approach the patriotism typical of moments in which it is the nation or the community that is threatened by a cause external to itself.

In this way, the isotopy of war is what becomes the basic pillar of all narrative architecture. From here, the three leaders coincide in placing themselves in the role of the addresser, who draw the horizon of the action, and know how to value the achievement of the hero-people. And, at the same time, they present themselves as heroes perfectly identified with the nation or with the group of their compatriots. In any case, the most evident attributes are: their determination, their conviction in success, and their total dedication to the task.

Up to here, what we can consider fully coincides with the classical tradition of epic literature and the canonical role of the hero. In this sense, our results coincide with those of previous research on other types of crisis, such as the economic one that began in 2008 and ended almost a decade later (Borriello, 2017), or on more recent studies that have politicians as protagonists in other contexts related with Covid-19 (Iqbal, et. alt, 2020; Prasad, 2020).

In these common approaches and attitudes, the differences between the discourses analyzed are reflected in the specific characteristics of each political culture (more dramatic and patriotic tones in the French president; more political and bureaucratic, in the case of the Spanish president; and more lyrical and poetic, if we refer to the Italian president) and, in some way, confirm the results of previous research (Cervi, 2019) on how political culture sets the frames of reference.

In this sense, future research should focus on comparing more leaders to confirm the existence of these common patterns in speech.

It is also worth noting some novelties such as the role that science plays in accompanying this speech. It is precisely science and scientists who occupy -along with the politician- the role of the addressers. They are the ones who know how action goals should be and who are leading the way, always through the hero's speech. In this sense, science presents itself as a collective hero, capable of ensuring and reinforcing the action proposed by politicians.

This cooperation between politics and science is not presented in any case as the result of dialogue or as the result of a dialectical action. On the contrary, it seems to be presented in all the cases studied as a justification or a reinforcement of the path proposed by politics. In this regard, none of the speeches of the presidents is open to the participation of the audience, to present spaces for negotiation or intersection. On the contrary, it is given as something closed and predetermined that can hardly be discussed.

In this framework, what at first could lead to a more flexible imperative political discourse, through the rational mediation of scientific discourse, ends up being simply a reinforcement of the imperative aspects of the expression of political leaders and, in this sense, future research should delve more deeply into the relationship between political discourse and scientific discourse.

7. References

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