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*Transnational Social Implications of the Use of the “War metaphor”
Concerning Coronavirus: A Bird’s Eye View*

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Note of Editor-in-Chief

This is the first Special issue of the journal *Culture e Studi del Sociale-CuSSoc*. The idea behind the special issue comes from this consideration: around the world, individuals are facing a critical moment, the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences require some reflections on many topics, often forgotten by scholars. This is the reason why many Italian and foreign scholars have been invited to give their contribution. Furthermore, now more than ever, it is crucial to share knowledge coming from multiple disciplines and that's why it was decided to write an entire issue in English.

For scientific and intellectual correctness, the contents of single articles refer to the situation as in mid-May 2020. It is necessary to clarify that because this Special issue was published when many countries were starting to reduce their emergency measures to cope with the pandemic.

Transnational Social Implications of the Use of the “War metaphor” Concerning Coronavirus: A Bird’s Eye View¹

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Abstract

This paper reflects on the force of the *war metaphor* primarily in Spain and the U.S. Examples from other countries are included. Methodologically, it utilizes the literature (journals and newspapers) and Twitter research. The paper addresses the impact and pervasiveness of English language translations in electronic communications. A bird’s eye view of how the *war metaphor* spread during the pandemic is presented. Additionally, the paper discusses idiosyncratic differences, cultures and histories in an Anglo-Saxon country and a Latin one. The topic of how leaders in different countries used the *war metaphor* to regulate the activities of citizens and manage their own political realities is reviewed. The situation of immigrants during the pandemic is discussed. The paper includes manifestations of those differences in celebrations, and mourning relating to the pandemic. Recommendations for future research on the *war metaphor* and its effects on solidarity and the economy of nations are put forward.

Keywords: War metaphor, Coronavirus, Pandemic, Spain, USA, Sociopolitical and linguistic comparisons.

Introduction

Winston Churchill, a masterful speaker and a well-known combative personality stated in 1920:

For good or ill, right or wrong, in war you must know what you want and what you mean and hurl your whole life and strength into it and accept all hazards inseparable from it (Churchill, 1920, in Roberts, 2018, p. 125).

As a society we may not be as clear as to what we wanted in relation to coronavirus when it first made its appearance— was it containment of a virus, destruction, or even distraction —was flattening the curve a diversion? Was it only immediate survival while we tried to understand how viruses work? Was it all of the above? Regardless of our conscious goal/s, all nations may not yet have clear or identically articulated goals. What was it that made the metaphor so popular and meaningful to political leaders and the public? For there should be no mistake, the metaphor would not have taken roots so quickly had it not been for the public’s reaction to it. The public felt the effect of the metaphor; it was a serious *war* or *call to arms*, whether or not it served as *full mobilization* of the citizenry. This was a worldwide phenomenon. Why did people who, largely, would not entertain bellicose language, agree and rally around the war metaphor in what were relatively peaceful times?

¹ Contributed equally.

This paper will reflect on the force of the metaphor primarily in Spain and the U.S.—although examples from other countries are also included. English has become a pervasive language in journalism, academia, Twitter and many social media throughout the world and, for fortune or misfortune, the language is also a superhighway for dissemination of terminology, action and ideas. Because of the pervasive use of English language translation and new, fast electronic communication, the *war metaphor*, whatever was its first language of utterance in relation to coronavirus, soon became a common rally cry in many countries.

1. A brief Note on Method

Methodologically, this paper utilized the literature, primarily the newspapers and popular and academic journals, both in print and online. It also used direct observations by the authors and a strong *word of mouth* system brought to the authors' attention information in the media, tweets, messages, etc. The pandemic events had to be understood utilizing new and even unusual but verifiable means of data collection that are often not considered by many academic journals. Nevertheless, the immediacy of the material and the constantly evolving information made alternatives unrealistic.

One important source of information has been the automatic collection of Twitter data regarding key hashtags well known internationally such as 'COVID-19', 'COVID19', 'COVID_19', 'coronavirus', 'pandemic', and their equivalents in other European languages (Spanish, Italian, French, Portuguese). To collect Twitter data from January to May 2020 *Optimized-modified-GetOldTweets3-OMGOT* tool in Irekponor, 2020, was used. The very extensive final dataset was filtered with the help of *Tableau* software and *Python* programming language. As already mentioned, the Twitter information supplemented the newspaper and journal reviews and vice-versa.

2. The War Metaphor and Lexicon. A bird's eye chronology

The World Health Organization (WHO) began its efforts in January of 2020 and developed tests that were broadly disseminated to many world laboratories. Few countries appeared to have responded immediately (Wallach and Myers, 2020). Politicians, however, picked up the war metaphor with great vehemence from the very early stages of the virus. It appears that it was started by Chinese President Xi Jinping who called their epidemic a "people's war". In France, Emmanuel Macron declared that France was "at war" with COVID-19, while Donald Trump was calling himself "a wartime President". In Italy, the government called for the country's "anti-virus czar" to "equip itself with a war economy" to confront the disease (Mulder, March 26, 2020, p.1).

Beginning with the first White House Coronavirus Task Force briefing in the U.S., on January 27, 2020, the executive began putting into motion "response procedures already on the books" (Wallach and Myers, 2020). The first briefing was carried out by Secretary Azar of Health Education and Welfare and a group of scientists from the Center for Disease Control (CDC). Dr. Redfield, from the CDC, stated that the purpose of the briefing was to update the public on the situation of the "novel coronavirus." "First though", he suggested, "I want to emphasize that this is a serious health situation in China, but I want to emphasize

that the risk to the American public currently is low. Our goal is to do all we can do to keep it that way.” (The White House, Healthcare, 2020).

Neither President Trump nor the war metaphor, which was already circulating, appeared during that briefing. Although the security forces took part in the presentation, stressing border controls and limitations on flights and migration, which project a war-like tone, the word itself was not used. The meeting still ended with Secretary Azar reassuring the public of low risk (The White House, Healthcare, 2020).

Quite immediately, while the health authorities attempted to be sober in their speech, the war metaphors continued to overtake the discussion. Government in the U.S., as in other countries, came out in an attempt to control the narrative. But President Trump proposed in his White House briefing on March 18, 2020, that “we [the citizens of the U.S.] were at war with the virus”. According to reporters from *Politico*:

When asked whether he [Trump] considered the U.S. to be on a wartime footing, he added, ‘in a sense, a wartime president. I mean, that’s what we’re fighting.’ We’re leading a campaign to fight back against this disease (Oprysko and Luthi, 2020).

In England, Prime Minister Boris Johnson did not use the war metaphor in his first official statement on March 16, 2020, either. His language was incredibly measured, with little or no overstatements. He only had one statement towards the end of the official transcript: “We’re leading a campaign to fight back against this disease” (Johnson, 2020). The term *fight* against a disease is a common way to refer, in the English language, to campaigns against deadly diseases (e.g. fight against cancer, or diabetes, etc.), so his language in the official transcript was not surprising. This was an interesting first move for such an ebullient speaker; it may have been an effort to come close to the measured language of other ministerial speakers in the past. However, by April 1st 2020, *The Guardian* newspaper reported: “Boris Johnson, another man who never wore a uniform, suggests that the country is fighting a second battle of Britain. *Cringeworthy* newspaper headlines summon up the ‘blitz spirit’, recycling 1940s propaganda” (Tisdall, 2020).

In Spain, the government declared a *Estado de Alarma* (State of Alarm) (Real Decreto n. 463, March 14, 2020) establishing the clear responsibility of the President, Pedro Sánchez, and his Ministers (*Sanidad, Interior, Defensa y Transporte, Movilidad y Agenda Urbana*) in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Spanish Committee for the Technical Management of COVID-19 included, under the axis of the ministries, representatives from the Armed Forces, National Police, and the *Guardia Civil* (a part of the security forces under the Ministry of the Interior and Defense). The decree established a daily reporting to the public by members of that committee. This level of organization made it clear to the public that the government had taken control of the war and that its orders had the force of emergency. The tone was the same. Those who analyzed the metaphor were concerned that it was addressed to an unseen and vague enemy that came, like all wars, with a suspension of liberties, massive economic consequences, and other unforeseen penalties for society.

Circumstances have begun to show that what was seen initially as *hype* by many may not have been exaggerated and that people were anxious about the lack of known courses to take against the virus; perhaps the image of total war was, in many ways, not ill chosen. In spite of journalistic warnings that the language of war divides communities, many countries took up the war language quickly because it was useful for them. At the initial stages, the people who heard their

role defined as soldiers in a fierce battle and were quick to follow government directions. The effect, judging by the literature across linguistic and national identities and idiosyncrasies in the U.S and many European countries, seems to have been similarly rousing of spirits rather than politically too contentious in the eyes of a trusting public at the beginning. But it was soon to change.

On April 5, 2020, *El País* published, under President Sanchez' signature, an opinion piece entitled *Europa se la juega* (Europe is gambling), in which he appeals repeatedly to the war metaphor, in the same way, that he had already used it with other audiences. But this time, he had a more politically charged message for the E.U.

Europe is facing a war different from the ones we have avoided in the last seventy years: a war against an invisible enemy that is testing the future of the European project ... Europe must set up a war economy and promote relief (economic resistance to the public debt caused by the virus), reconstruction, and recovery for the European Union (Sánchez, 2020, para. 2 and 6, translation by the authors).

The Spanish President was highlighting the potential political and economic implications of the fight against the virus.

On May 7th, MSNBC reported in the 11 o'clock news that President Trump was now referring to the fighters in this war as those workers who went to work aiding *his open up the country again* slogan even though the health authorities were not always in agreement. The dangers of the war metaphor were becoming apparent. What were those who followed the health authorities' mandates and did not go to work but stayed home? The public question might be whether they are cowards, a very debatable matter. Doubts began to appear about the sustaining capacity of the war metaphor.

In regards to idiosyncratic behavior, agreement about the use of specific war terms was less universal in the U.S. and Europe than in countries like China or South Korea, where the people accepted lockdown (*confinamiento*) with little rebellion, perhaps because it was less shocking to the culture, idiosyncrasies and governmental structure.

A recent article in the New York Times aptly describes differences between the lexicon and behavior of the parties reporting daily about coronavirus in the U.S. and the U.K. The paper comments: "This is Britain's answer to the White House's daily coronavirus briefing—and except for the starting time, Downing Street's genteel exercise is the antithesis of the fiery, freewheeling spectacle presided over by President Trump across the Atlantic" (Landler, Britain Dispatch, 2020, para.3).

In this crisis, the vocabulary has also been highly influenced by public health experts. We have seen already how terms of containment affected the language. Different populations needed more or less enforcement vis-à-vis those measures, but overall, terms like quarantine, social distancing, and self-isolation and even pandemic became part of everybody's language (Fiorillo and Gorwood, 2020).

While the war language brought to the fore fear, it also brought forth determination to fight, positive reactions, cheers for the heroes and *esprit de corps* among those who felt attacked by the invisible enemy. Newscasts were filled with calls for solidarity and recognition that *we were all in it together*, whether the together referred to a small town, a county, a state, a nation or the world. Yet on the other side, "for every volunteer supplying food to the elderly, there are legions of panicked shoppers stripping supermarkets in a particularly stupid bid to preempt wartime rationing." (Tisdall, 2020). In rural France and certainly in the U.S., wonderful manifestations of solidarity were often followed by signs warning

strangers to go home. Was a populist and xenophobic layer making an ugly appearance in this virus war also? We will be discussing the immigration measures taken by some countries under **Immigration and Coronavirus**.

3. Other Idiosyncratic Implications of the war. Beyond the metaphor

Beyond the terminology of *lockdown*, another unique term emerged with a less warlike tone but equally or more impactful, and that is *social distancing*. “And many see social distancing to be the greatest pandemic-era addition to the vernacular yet” (Sedensky, 2020). This term was made very popular by the health authorities. This phrase, like *flattening the curve*, was an easily understood term that communicated exactly what people needed to do. The idiosyncrasies of the citizenry and the country played a big part in the selection of words and phrases. The terms used within the war metaphor differed depending on the historical and political experiences of each country. The examples are numerous and will continue to appear added to dictionaries all over the world in years to come. For example, informants tell that the terms lockdown did not become popular in Argentina. It sounded, they suggest, too much like terms used during the government of former military groups. But, preferences for terms vary according to personal feelings and political ideologies and experiences.

Nevertheless, in general terms, the war metaphor encouraged or warned people in different countries that the situation was severe and required serious attention. The general effect of the metaphor among the population was noticeable. People stopped going to crowded spaces and streets became sometimes almost deserted. Many undemocratic “compromises” of government mandates or even suggestions were made in various countries amidst anxiety and fear. The war metaphor had created a certain ambience of acquiescence towards authority given what was happening. For example, in the U.S. churches, mosques and synagogues were closed with little protestations. Under normal circumstances, the U.S. public would have severely objected to what could be viewed as interference with freedom of religion. But this was a war, even if an undeclared one in conventional terms.

In the Vatican, news about Pope Francis’ public liturgy, under the rain, in empty churches during Holy Week offered indelible images to the world. In Spain, the *Estado de Alarma* affected people greatly because all rituals around death were interrupted and people who came from close Latino families were unable to mourn. In Spain, a future official mourning was announced on May 6 (Sánchez Castejón, 2020) in an effort to have solidarity with those who lost friends and relatives, parents and children. The same was registered in other countries where death rituals were very traditional, never to be thought as solitary events. The notions of cadavers in the streets in Ecuador (León and Kurmanaev, 2020), of burial grounds with open tombs in Brazil (Watson, 2020) and such similar images created a deep sense of public anxiety reminiscent of plagues of olden days.

Congress in the U.S and Parliaments in other places deferred much urgent work. Elections were postponed but it was apparent that the war against coronavirus was viewed as sufficient explanation. The stock market suffered incredible loses (Ozili and Arun, 2020; Krugman, 2020), but it was not until the unemployment numbers escalated and the government had to pass special legislation, that investors and the public in general began reacting with serious concern. Critics of the U.S. administration pound on the mishandling of this war.

While the United States has poured \$3 trillion into relief from the effects of Covid-19- money that will run out soon and that hasn't prevented young children in one in six households from not having enough to eat—the nation hasn't invested nearly enough in science and in scientific tools like testing, vaccines, therapies and research to combat it. (Kristof, 2020, para.12).

In fact, in the same article, Kristof praises countries like Spain and Italy that he believes have handled the outbreak better and have ripped the benefits of their more responsible handling.

The economic consequences of coronavirus have only just begun to emerge amidst lockdowns for business and the public. Economic predictions indicate that the benefits of the free market will be easily wiped out with the crisis. It would take another article to begin to address these issues, but the Press in U.S. and Spain have started to focus on the precarious balance between health and economy. Bennet (2020) quoted the prime minister of Finland saying “It gives people freedom when you have a strong welfare state” (Bennet, May 8, 2020), something that Europeans generally profess. But such statements will enter the American dialogue with greater ease now that capitalism has been seriously challenged by a virus.

4. Misinformation and Disinformation

From an international perspective, a major concern that emerged due to the speed of information flowing from country to country was the increase of both ‘misinformation’ (fake news) and ‘disinformation’ around COVID-19. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, problems at the European Union and certainly in the U.S. due to misinformation and disinformation had been already reported.² Cuan-Baltazar et al. (2020, p. 9) suggested that the “excess of poor-quality of information without scientific support” offered by the internet, had consequences that can be devastating, as “panic shopping, buying medical supplies or drugs, and, even worst, taking drugs without a medical prescription spread uncontrollably.” (Cuan-Baltazar et al, 2020, p.9). Other researchers should pursue the topic of misinformation. It became a minefield of questions, conspiracy theories, anxiety and permeated the most apparently solid sources. For example, the U.S. President’s conversation during a press conference about the possible value of research on the ingestion of disinfectants, ultra-violet lights, etc. which shocked the country (Rogers, Hauser, Yuhua and Haberman, 2020), and even the world (BBC News, 2020). As suggested by Bavel et al.,

Conspiracy theories emerged shortly after the first news of COVID-19 and have continued to persist... It is not surprising that conspiracy theories have flourished at this time. Research suggests that people feel the need to explain large events with proportionally large causes and are more likely to believe in conspiracy theories about events with serious consequences and in times of crisis (Bavel et al, 2020, p. 5).

² Disinformation is the “false, inaccurate, or misleading information designed, presented and promoted to intentionally cause public harm or profit”, and “misinformation” is the “misleading or inaccurate information shared by people who do not recognize it as such” (High-Level Expert Group on Fake news and Disinformation, 2018, p. 10). This is directly related to recent research results on the dissemination of news about COVID-19.

In the U.S. and Spain, the term first responders or *primera línea* became ubiquitous to refer to doctors, nurses, ambulance personnel and other people with direct patient contact. It was the heroic behavior of the first respondents and emergency personnel in hospitals that inspired visions of heroes in this war. As we shall see soon, the metaphor continues to offer material for action and solidarity.

5. Emerging Heroes

Like in all wars, not all that developed was addressed to generate further chaos and fear. Popular movements emerged focusing on the heroes of the war. These social manifestations have great mental health value for people whose lives had been overturned overnight. This review can only offer the start of many efforts by citizens who are longing for normalcy. Well disseminated artistic examples appeared in tweets, YouTube etc. #StayHome, #QuédateEnCasa or #Fiqueemcasa (stay at Home) claims were followed by very different kind of behaviors around the world, well associated to different cultural backgrounds. In Spain, for instance, characterized by a Latin sense of sociability, confinement at home (*confinamiento*) has been reinvented as a creative opportunity for a “together” one. So, there has been a wide list of social events or encounters developed in balconies, or through internet video calls among different groups of people, as a secure way of managing social distance.

It is possible to find on YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and other social networks light-spirited videos such as Flamenco Dancing (sevillanas) in balconies. During sacred holidays, one could see believers attempting to lift spirits by celebrating symbolically what would have been processions. In several countries Opera singers and other artists, including members of symphony orchestra, offered their neighbors video concerts over a glass of wine. There were many other expressions of support such as free calls offering storyteller for entertaining families or children (Vazquez, 2020).

An old song *Resistiré* [I will resist] from the *Dúo Dinámico*, a very famous group in Spain, was brought back into fashion during COVID-19 and became a kind of anthem which is heard several times after the giving of applause to health providers at 20:00 hours, or in hospitals. (Progressive Spain, 2020). YouTube versions of the song is found below.

The Independent, (Lovett, 2020, ‘You are our heroes’) documented the celebratory phenomenon of the heroes in an article worth examining in full because it shows a genuinely European old city phenomenon of commemoration. Thousands express support and gratitude from homes following social media appeal. Similar manifestations of gratitude were spread very fast around the globe lifting the spirits of the public. They were followed with lesser or greater intensity depending on the urban-rural context of the country and the idiosyncrasies of the population. A sociological phenomenon to be explored in depth by further research.

Here, it is befitting to end this *birds-eye review* of a phenomenon with some meaningful songs that can be found and enjoyed universally by connecting to either

YouTube³; or by reading an article in a popular magazine that compiled many cross-country examples (Hernández, 2020).

6. The War metaphor and Immigrants

In the U.S., the immigration restrictions under President Trump that were already controversial got again exacerbated by country-specific prohibitions and testing at U.S. entry ports. Arrivals from Wuhan China first tested U.S. airports on January 20, followed by Proclamation 9984 "suspending entry for foreign nationals who had traveled in mainland China. On February 10, 2020, an additional regulation in the U.S. requires airlines to collect data on their passengers and crew arriving from foreign countries. (Wallach and Myers, 2020).

There was great contrast in the handling of immigrants in the various countries involved in this war. In the U.S., not for profit charities continued their efforts to help those people without documentation but the gaps were revealed every day. The situation continues to be problematic (ASU Lodestar Center, 2020, May 12, 2020). In contrast, in Portugal the government published a *Despacho n° 3863-B-2020 (Diário da República, March 28, 2020)* for the regularization of all immigrants who had pending requests in the *Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras* (the immigration and borders service) during the *Estado de Emergência Nacional* (the state of emergency). The permit issued functions as a temporary residence permit that includes access to all public services such as the National Health and other social support. Asylum seekers were also covered. Eduardo Cabrita, *Ministro da Administração Interna*, stated in *Público*:

In a State of Emergency, the priority is the defense of health and collective safety. In these moments becomes even more important to guarantee the rights of the most fragile, as is the case of migrants. Ensuring the access of migrant citizens to health, social security and the stability in the job and housing is a duty of a solidarity society in times of crisis (Gorjão Henriques, 2020, translation by the authors).

Also, Spain introduced special COVID-19 integration measures regarding the integration of migrants and asylum seekers, suspending administrative deadlines for the duration of the pandemic guaranteeing the rights of vulnerable immigrants (Secretaria de Estado de Migraciones, 2020). This includes "The temporary suspension of refugees and asylum-seekers' obligation to have valid documents in order to continue receiving aid covering their basic needs" (European Commission, 2020).

In Greece and Croatia, other European countries which, like Portugal, have a reduced number of deaths and infected people by COVID-19 today (John Hopkins University, 2020), the success seems associated with the quick responses to coronavirus (Delauney and Kallergis, 2020, May 4). This is not to say that these European countries have solved all their challenges regarding migrants and refugees (United Nations, 2020). The Migration Policy Institute states in its letter of communication of May 12, 2020 (@migrationpolicy.org) that 'Governments will also have to rethink their border and travel processes in key ways, with a focus

³ The songs can be found from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hl3B4Ql8RtQ> (accessed, 14/5/2020); or from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gert3f3xPR4> (accessed, 14/5/2020); or from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5CrScIHAuE> (accessed, 14/5/2020).

on digitization and automation’ (p.1) as countries try open borders and attempt normalize movement across the world.

7. Country specific political meanings of the metaphor

While in the U.S. the initial war lexicon may have been intended to vilify the unseen enemy and perhaps render political advantages for the forthcoming Presidential elections (Sedensky, 2020), the reality is that most politicians and even scientific experts seem to have resorted to war language to describe the situation. Was the description of war chaos and uncontrollable forces at play what politicians wanted to convey either to keep the population busy with its peril? Nobody is likely to know for sure.

Claiming to be bolstering safety yet feeding fear, politicians cite a vast threat from an invisible enemy. As in actual war, they deem collateral damage to be unfortunate but inevitable (Tisdall, 2020).

Sources of chaos and threat diversified as soon an ‘infodemic’ became another important enemy. We have already referred to this issue as a matter worthy of future research. In a speech at the Munich Security Conference, 15 Feb 2020, Dr. Tedros Adhanom, WHO Director-General, declared: ‘But we’re not just fighting an epidemic; we’re fighting an infodemic. Fake news spreads faster and more easily than this virus, and is just as dangerous’. As a consequence, added to a scale-up response, there is a key demand to the international community of countering this infodemics as dangerous as the virus (Adhanom, 2020).

The war metaphor persists over time in speeches of public figures maintaining the idea of a dual war. A tweet by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, ‘*Our common enemy is #COVID19, but our enemy is also an ‘infodemic’ of misinformation*’ elaborated on this point (Guterres, 2020, March 28). Fake news and misinformation about COVID-19 have proliferated widely on social media, with potentially dangerous consequences (Cuan-Baltazar, 2020; Bavel et al. 2020). The politics of coronavirus have become as pervasive as social media.

Another disjuncting issue was variations in the political organization and distribution of power in different countries and the involvement of the central and more local units in the ‘war’. In the U.S., for example, the constitution states that the federal government possesses only those powers delegated to it by the United States Constitution; and that all remaining powers are reserved for the states or the people” (Art.10). Discrepancy between the two levels was important from the start in the use of “the war lexicon”. For example, Governor Cuomo from N.Y, who took on a leading role in communication, avoided using the term “lockdown” or “shelter in place” because, in his assessment, it brought forth images of the Cold War, when little children were asked to shelter themselves from atomic fallout. Yet, the Mayor of N.Y. city did not avoid the term. It was clear that there was no agreement on the lexicon, and unlike a formally declared war, where the whole country would have responded to Federal Government decrees or leadership, this war provoked struggles between levels of government (the cities, the state and the federal) tied to constitutional issues but also to political persuasions. Additionally, a different use of terms might be exemplified in Puerto Rico, where Spanish language and legal systems distinguish the Commonwealth from the mainland. Governor Wanda Vazquez moved quickly to shut down schools, beaches and businesses on the island by establishing a “nighttime curfew” (Scher, 2020) very

much a military-related, wartime term. But perhaps the use of the qualifier *nighttime* was purposeful because in English the impact might be milder than lockdown. *Curfew* is used often by parents to limit young people's time before returning home after a party. Perhaps the Governor of Puerto Rico was aware of the heightened sensitivities of a people who had gone recently through two hurricane disasters and may have been even more panicked by lockdown.

Similar tensions that those in the US exists in Spain between the central government and the *Comunidades Autónomas* (autonomous regions according to the 1978 Spanish Constitution). Before the pandemic the Catalan debates around Catalan independence or self-determination were capturing great attention, but since beginning of the State of Alarm there have been different kinds of tensions between the State and the regions. Conflicts that go from the claim for masks, respirators and other health materials to tensions about the de-escalating process to return to normalcy. At this point, regions try to regain greater autonomy in decision-making. Central government is confronted with the problems of how to arrive at the *nueva normalidad* (new normal) that will have to be managed at a regional level.

At any rate, the war metaphor seems to have served governments well to capture the attention of citizens and by-and-large to rally them to comply with different directives which were deemed important by public health authorities. The problem was that the metaphor was also open to much exaggeration and, as we have seen, misinformation. When the situation became grave and the number of victims increased exponentially, the war metaphor became less rallying and the language of solidarity, social discipline and responsibility became more intense. This language of solidarity was very observable not only in the lexicon but in the actions of citizens. In Spain the language of solidarity and unity has been promoted from the beginning by the government through each official communication. Thus, each tweet from the Government, the Ministry of Health, the National Police, or other ministries or bodies has included the hashtag #EsteVirusLoParamosUnidos (#WeWillStopThisVirusTogether), providing a strong sense of common fight, common enemy, etc. At the same time, solidarity and responsibility have been found to be important strategies to fight against coronavirus.

In Argentina, research done by Nieto and Ferreyra (2020), monitoring the conversation around the hashtags #CoronavirusArgentina and #CoronavirusenArgentina, show differences between those who prioritize community values during the pandemic (#SomosResponsables, #Noscuidamosentretodos, #EstadoPresentePreviene), and those in opposition. Those in opposition claim repressive slogans (#EstadodeSitioYa, #ToquedeQueda, #SuspendanlasClasesYa). As in Spain with the #EsteVirusLoParamosUnidos, the official discourse is around the idea of #UnidosPorArgentina, as a way to strengthen national identities (Nieto and Ferreyra, 2020)

In many states in the U.S., the role of the not-for-profit organizations increased. These community-based, not-for-profit organizations, providers of community help, had historically been an American characteristic (De Tocqueville, 2002). In Phoenix, AZ, for example, more spontaneous shows of support were found in sidewalk writings and poetry appearing in erasable chalk. But in a characteristic U.S. style, many efforts at mutual support focused, on commerce, for example, on neighborhood restaurants that were suffering financially because of the "stay at home" measures. Not only did these restaurants increased delivery, but advertisements appeared on T.V., on flyers and texts supporting those businesses to keep them afloat. Business-oriented responses in the U.S. were ubiquitous, another

idiosyncratic way in which citizens take almost personal responsibility for the survival of small businesses, perhaps a product of a strong belief in the power of individuals to improve with the basic tools of a capitalistic economy. *Eat your local pizza, buy your local hamburger, get your salad from a local vendor or truck* were common messages. Similar experiences were found in Spain where some NGOs and companies that were forced to close their normal activity, changed their products to help the most vulnerable citizens.

However, solidarity also raised political criticism. The language of war often got turned against the government, which was viewed as inefficient in solving the problem. The many errors of a very late “declaration of war against the pandemic” in the U.S. became the object of much derision. Press coverage critical of President Trump, who was already facing serious political difficulties, became commonplace. His actions against his own health advisors, his threat and dismissal of many who did not agree with him, added to the public anger but also to the public demonstrations of support by his “base”, which continued to be rallied and fed, often with less than factual information.

Final reflections and comments

Le Guern suggested that the metaphor can be considered "the queen of poetic figures" (1990: 9), and judging by its strong power of communication, this particular war metaphor conveyed a great deal in short. Our very panoramic observations of its development, dissemination and spread suggest that it played an important role encouraging and even pushing citizens to social distancing, social discipline and other measures destined to follow confinement at home.

We have tried to convey some subtle idiosyncratic differences in different countries, with different cultures, histories and peculiarities, one being an Anglo Saxon country and the other being a Latin one. Perhaps given the rapidity and universality of current means of communication including social media, those differences did not manifest themselves as too pointed or significant. Yes, celebrations had a different tonality in Spain or Italy than in the U.S. and the sense of solidarity was perhaps expressed somewhat differently. Old balconies with their romantic architecture were more impressive in old countries like Spain and Italy and the level of gaiety introduced into the daily routines was different between cultures. However, even those manifestations of gaiety with singing and dancing were treasured and caught on in Anglo Saxon environments. They were an antidote to the tragedies that surrounded newer cities and even the countryside. Children in neighborhoods followed suit and painted sidewalks with messages of encouragement to accomplish similar outcomes. Nevertheless, the war against this novel virus was a baffling phenomenon that frustrated everyone. Resiliency was brought forth in most of the countries, with people prepared to face this unseen and unknown enemy with great determination.

We also observed clear commonalities among different countries and political leaders when resorting to the war metaphor to serve their respective causes. Political leaders all became concerned about *infodemic*, as an expression of a globalized culture. While misinformation and disinformation have been around in all wars, the ease with which they can be spread now is unmatched. There is a fundamental challenge for all leaders to control this harmful new development. Most people were familiar with the disinformation of the old wartime of human

spies, but this new menace of ‘fake news’ is more ubiquitous and elusive to combat.

Finally, the *war metaphor* has given license for an unprecedented level of control of the daily lives of citizens. Has the metaphor given justification to an era of technological interference with people’s freedoms for the sake of survival? Can democracies withstand a proliferation of similar means of controlling future pandemics? Many offer dire predictions. The press is not very encouraging and the health authorities must be very parsimonious. But others realize that society has changed; that habits and even beliefs are unlikely to remain the same. Yet, more optimistic individuals prefer the songs of *Resistiré*, as we have heard them, which have become a symbol of universal resistance. In reality, the future is still ahead and people must look at it with hope.

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