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## **METAPHORICAL ENHANCEMENTS OF THE US/THEM ASYMMETRY IN WAR SPEECHES OF AMERICAN PRESIDENTS IN THE YEARS 1917–1972**

**Keywords:** Us/Them asymmetry, metaphorical conceptualizations, war, presidential speeches

### **Introduction**

This paper analyses the metaphorical conceptualizations that highlight the antagonism between countries and people in the service of political agendas. The objective of this study is to investigate how and why American Presidents exploited the *Us/Them* asymmetry in their speeches on wars. The paper indicates that the metaphor system and frameworks identified by George Lakoff (1991) and Esra Sandikcioglu (2000) in the narrative of the Gulf War had been previously employed in World War I, World War II, and the Vietnam War. In addition, this study proposes an extension to the metaphor systems described by both researchers by incorporating the WAR IS A JOURNEY metaphor, which serves the same objectives, namely, justifying involvement in war and evading responsibility for war actions.<sup>1</sup>

The paper employs the methodological framework of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), which originates from Lakoff and Johnson's book *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). Their fundamental assumption, crucial for my analysis, is that people think and communicate using conceptual metaphors, which involve correspondences or mappings between a source and a target

domain. What is more, how a concept is understood can be influenced and manipulated by a particular source domain used to conceptualize it (Lakoff 1986, 1987, 1993). Various scholars have modified and challenged Lakoff and Johnson's original ideas (for more recent studies and critique see: Deignan 2010; Gibbs 2009, 2011; Keysar et al. 2000; Steen 2011; Kövecses 2002, 2015, 2020). However, for the purpose of comparing the coverage of the Gulf War with that of the WWI, WWII, and the Vietnam War, I chose to use the same methodology as Lakoff and Sandikcioglu.

The article examines speeches delivered by American Presidents<sup>2</sup>. The analysis is structured as follows: First, George Lakoff's and Esra Sandikcioglu's remarks on the application of figurative language in war discourse are presented. Next, the metaphorical conceptualizations that highlight the *Us/Them* asymmetry in the speeches related to World War I, World War II and the Vietnam War are identified and analysed. The study concludes with a presentation of the observations and conclusions.

### **Lakoff's and Sandikcioglu's on the Application of Metaphorical Language in News Coverage of the Gulf War**

This section presents a detailed account of Lakoff's (1991) paper "Metaphor and War: The Metaphor System Used to Justify War in the Gulf" and Sandikcioglu's (2000) extension of his findings in "More Metaphorical Warfare in the Gulf; Orientalist Frames in News Coverage." Both researchers demonstrate the role of the *Us/Them* polarity in the conceptualization of war and the significance of metaphorization in highlighting it. In his paper, Lakoff (1991) analyses various conceptual metaphors employed during the Gulf War. Here, I present only his metaphorical conceptualizations that emphasize the *Us/Them* asymmetry, whose exploitation influenced people's understanding and evaluation of the Gulf War.

The first metaphorical conceptualization to be discussed is the fairy tale scenario. Lakoff (1991) offers two types of the scenario: the Rescue Scenario

and the Self-Defense Scenario. The former involves a crime committed by an unreasonable, evil, and irrational villain, and an innocent victim who is saved by a hero. In the Self-Defense Scenario, there is no hero as such, and instead a victim is forced into military action by a villain. It should be noted that the fairy tale scenario may be very manipulative as it can be applied to almost any situation. In Lakoff's (1991) view, we just have to answer the following questions: Who is the victim? Who is the villain? Who is the hero? And what is the crime? Furthermore, Lakoff (1991: 8) points out that the fairy tale scenario does not contain an objective evaluation of an event but rather provides a pattern in which a hero "rescues an innocent victim" and "defeats and punishes a guilty and inherently evil villain (...) for moral rather than venal reasons."

Lakoff (1991) concludes that the image of war created by the fairy tale scenario is extremely biased, distorted, and one-sided. Moreover, the scenario can easily obscure inconvenient facts, as people typically do not scrutinize the facts closely and tend to believe in the narration offered by politicians and media. In Lakoff's (1991) view, casting countries or people in different roles affects the way they are perceived because the roles evoke particular connotations. The archetypal hero is morally upright and courageous, whereas the villain is typically associated with amorality and viciousness. Despite its superficial nature and possible biases in role selection, the fairy tale scenario effectively emphasizes the *Us/Them* dichotomy, influencing the perception of both a hero and a villain (Lakoff 1991: 4).

Lakoff (1991) argues that the exploitation of the *Us/Them* asymmetry is an effective way of demonizing the enemy and providing moral justification for entering war. He points out that the metaphor WAR IS VIOLENT CRIME: MURDER, ASSAULT, KIDNAPPING, ARSON, RAPE, AND THEFT is another way of highlighting the polarity. According to Lakoff (1991: 12), "here, war is understood only in terms of its moral dimension, and not, say, its political or economic dimension. The metaphor highlights those aspects of war that would otherwise be seen as major crimes." It should be observed that the *Us/Them*

asymmetry is highlighted by naming only the actions of the enemy without acknowledging our own. Turning to Lakoff's (1991: 12) account one can read that "the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was reported on in terms of murder, theft and rape. The American invasion was never discussed in terms of murder, assault, and arson (...) We portrayed Us as rational, moral, and courageous and Them as criminal and insane."

Lakoff's analysis indicates that the fairy tale scenario and the metaphor WAR IS VIOLENT CRIME: MURDER, ASSAULT, KIDNAPPING, ARSON, RAPE, AND THEFT were employed to highlight the *Us/Them* asymmetry. Both metaphorical conceptualizations aimed at justifying the US involvement in the war, demonizing the enemy and establishing a convenient narrative for the American cabinet. However, Sandikcioglu (299) claims that the metaphor systems identified by Lakoff "merely prove to be part of a much broader conceptual framework," and that the news coverage of the Gulf War was closely linked to Orientalism.

According to Sandikcioglu (301), the narration employed during the Gulf War conceptualized Iraqis as "prototypical instantiations of the Western concept of Orientals (...) and American as Westerners." The author (302) notes that these conceptualizations were created by the "Western mind" and stem from the "prejudiced East-West relationship." Furthermore, Sandikcioglu emphasizes the dependence between power and metaphor, concluding that more powerful countries have more dominant and persuasive metaphors. This dependence was evident during the Gulf War when the metaphors "of the West proved to be far superior" than those of the Iraqis (301).

Analysing the news coverage of the Gulf War, Sandikcioglu (304) noticed that the division into "two worlds, Us and Them" is structured by conceptual frames: civilization vs. barbarism and maturity vs. immaturity<sup>3</sup>. According to Sandikcioglu (308) the frame, civilization vs. barbarism, consists of the conceptual metaphors ORIENTALS ARE BARBARIANS and WESTERNERS ARE CIVILIZED, as well as the subframe "the Oriental is immoral" and "the

Westerner is moral.” The author (308) notes that “the most forceful” narrative employed during the Gulf War was shaped by this framework. The narrative portrayed Saddam Hussein as a “reincarnation of Hitler,” drawing comparisons between his invasion of Kuwait and Hitler’s invasion of Poland. It also linked the US invasion of Iraq to the response of the Allies, attributing the support of the civilization to the West and accusing the Orient of regressing to barbarism.

The next frame, maturity vs. immaturity, consists of the conceptual metaphors THE ORIENTAL IS A STUDENT and THE WESTERNER IS A TEACHER. It should be noted that the frame also relies on the uneven distribution of power, as “the ‘teacher’ is allowed to determine everything, i.e. the ‘teaching methods,’ the ‘evaluation’ of the performance and most importantly the ‘subjects’... to be taught” (Sandikcioglu 312). Conceptualizing the West as a teacher and the East as a student has far-reaching consequences. The metaphors imply that there is a difference in knowledge and education levels between the Orientals and the Westerners, with the latter being more culturally, politically, and economically advanced and experienced, as well as expected, just like teachers, to achieve specific educational objectives, even if it requires being strict.

Sandikcioglu (317) concludes that the news coverage of the Gulf War was influenced by the Orientalism framework and “polarized the world into the Orient and the West, into Us and Them.” As could be observed, Iraq was typically associated with “images of barbarism, weakness, immaturity, emotionality and instability,” while the West was characterized by a number of positive attributes, including “civilization, power, maturity, rationality and stability” (317). Although the narration presented a simplified and stereotypical image of the enemy, it was effective in turning the American people against the Iraqis and justifying the US involvement in the Gulf War.

The review of Lakoff’s and Sandikcioglu’s views on metaphorical conceptualizations that emphasize the *Us/Them* polarity will serve as the theoretical groundwork for further analysis. In what follows, I want to argue

that American presidents exploited the *Us/Them* asymmetry not only to influence the public opinion during the Gulf War, but that it was used earlier to shape the perception of the sides during World War I, World War II, and the Vietnam War. What is more, this asymmetry was achieved not only by the use of the fairy tale scenario and the frameworks discussed by Sandikcioglu, but also by the metaphor WAR IS A JOURNEY.

### **Presidential Speeches on World War I**

Let me begin with the “Address to Congress Requesting a Declaration of War Against Germany” delivered by Woodrow Wilson on 2 April 1917. The following excerpts reveal the self-defence scenario, in which the president casts the government and people of the United States in the role of both a Victim (1–3) and a Hero (9–14), while the Imperial German Government fills the role of a Villain (4–8):

- 1) I advise that the Congress declare the recent course of the Imperial German Government to be in fact nothing less than war against the government and people of the United States.
- 2) American ships have been sunk, American lives taken, in ways which it has stirred us very deeply to learn of;
- 3) I thought that it would suffice to assert our neutral rights with arms, our right to use the seas against unlawful interference, our right to keep our people safe against unlawful violence.
- 4) The present German submarine warfare against commerce is a warfare against mankind. It is a war against all nations.
- 5) I officially laid before you the extraordinary announcement of the Imperial German government that on and after the 1st day of February it was its purpose to put aside all restraints of law or of humanity and use its submarines to sink every vessel (...)
- 6) The new policy has swept every restriction aside. Vessels of every kind, whatever their flag, their character, their cargo, their destination, their errand, have been ruthlessly sent to the bottom league without warning and without thought of help or mercy for those on board (...)
- 7) (...) the German government itself and were distinguished by unmistakable marks of identity, have been sunk with the same reckless lack of compassion or of principle.
- 8) I am not now thinking of the loss of property involved, immense and serious as that is, but only of the wanton and wholesale destruction of the lives of noncombatants, men, women, and children (...) Property can be paid for; the lives of peaceful and innocent people cannot be.

- 9) Our motive will not be revenge or the victorious assertion of the physical might of the nation, but only the vindication of right, of human right, of which we are only a single champion.
- 10) We desire no conquest, no dominion. We seek no indemnities for ourselves, no material compensation for the sacrifices we shall freely make. We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind.
- 11) It is common prudence in such circumstances, grim necessity indeed, to endeavor to destroy them before they have shown their own intention. They must be dealt with upon sight, if dealt with at all.
- 12) It is our duty, I most respectfully urge, to protect our people so far as we may against the very serious hardships and evils (...)
- 13) Our object now, as then, is to vindicate the principles of peace and justice in the life of the world as against selfish and autocratic power (...)
- 14) It will be all the easier for us to conduct ourselves as belligerents in a high spirit of right and fairness because we act without animus, not in enmity towards a people or with the desire to bring any injury or disadvantage upon them, but only in armed opposition to an irresponsible government which has thrown aside all considerations of humanity and of right and is running amuck.

The speech begins by depicting the US as a victim of an unfounded attack. In (1–3) Wilson states that the US remained neutral in the belief that “it would suffice” to keep the American people “safe against unlawful violence.” However, a ruthless and merciless villain attacked the country, showing no respect for the law, human rights and international agreements. In Wilson’s scenario Germany commits a crime “against mankind” and wages a “war against all nations,” forcing the innocent victim to respond to the attack. The president justifies the US war actions stating that the US did not want to join the war and emphasizing that it is “common prudence” and “grim necessity” to fight against Germany in order to protect the American people and other nations.

The analysis suggests that the fairy tale scenario identified by Lakoff (1991) in the narrative of the Gulf War had been used during World War I in an unchanged form. What is more, it served the same functions: firstly, it emphasized the asymmetry between the two countries, influencing the way they were perceived. The United States was portrayed as a benevolent nation, committed to defending not only its own citizens but also the interests of other countries facing threats from Germany. In contrast, Germany was depicted as

an archetypal villain, exhibiting indiscriminate aggression and a lack of empathy and moral rectitude. Secondly, it provided a moral justification for the US involvement in the conflict. This was achieved when the President repeatedly asserted that the United States was forced by Germany to respond, leading many in the public to perceive the US as an involuntary participant in the war.

Sandikcioglu (300) argued that the narrative employed during the Gulf War was closely linked to Orientalism. However, upon closer inspection of the same data (excerpts 1–14), it becomes apparent that the narrative employed by Wilson was shaped by the frame civilization vs. barbarism, although the country labelled as immoral was not representative of the Orient. The framework offered by Sandikcioglu (308) consists of the conceptual metaphors ORIENTALS ARE BARBARIANS and WESTERNERS ARE CIVILIZED, with the subframe “the Oriental is immoral, the Westerner is moral.” In Wilson's speech, the Americans (Westerners) are portrayed as those who “desire no conquest, no dominion (...) no material compensation for the sacrifices.” Furthermore, they are portrayed as “champions of human rights” who seek to “vindicate the principles of peace and justice.” It is noteworthy, however, that the subframe is not identical, as Wilson's narrative depicts Germans as barbarians, responsible for “wholesale destruction of the lives of noncombatants, men, women, and children,” despite the fact that Germany is not a Middle Eastern country. It is therefore important to highlight that in this context, the conceptual framework civilization vs. barbarism gave rise to the conceptual metaphors AMERICANS ARE CIVILIZED and GERMANS ARE BARBARIANS along with the subframe “the Americans are moral” and “the Germans are immoral.”

Let me turn to “A World League for Peace” speech, delivered by Woodrow Wilson on 22 January 1917. The following passages have been selected in order to demonstrate how the president employed the WAR IS A JOURNEY metaphor in order to discuss the conflict:



- 15) We are that much nearer a definite discussion of the peace which shall end the present war. We are that much nearer the discussion of the international concert which must thereafter hold the world at peace.
- 16) In every discussion of the peace that must end this war it is taken for granted that that peace must be followed by some definite concert of power which will make it virtually impossible that any such catastrophe ever overwhelm us again.
- 17) (...) so far as our participation in guarantees of future peace is concerned, it makes a great deal of difference in what way and upon what terms it is ended.
- 18) I do not mean to say that any American government would throw any obstacle in the way of any terms of peace (...)
- 19) With a right comity of arrangement no nation need be shut away from free access to the open paths of the world's commerce.

As with any war, peace marks the end of the conflict. Thus, in the journey metaphor employed by Wilson, peace is the destination towards which the US is heading. However, it is important to remember that peace is relative. Hence, it was impossible for both the Allied Powers and the Central Powers to achieve their desired outcome and end the war as they intended. Emphasizing that “peace must be followed by some definite concert of power” and that “it makes a great deal of difference in what way and upon what terms it is ended,” the president suggested that only one side could win, and the first to do so would defeat the other. Additionally, Wilson used the adjective “nearer” to indicate the US’ position relative to the opponents on the way to the goal.

Pointing out the position and emphasizing the possibility of only one side winning suggests that the metaphor WAR IS A JOURNEY implies another metaphor—WAR IS A RACE. As the Allied Powers and the Central Powers were competitors in this race, they had to unite and work effectively and quickly to defeat the opponent. The WAR IS A RACE metaphor emphasizes the *Us/Them* asymmetry, without explicitly identifying any negative traits of the opposing group. The mere fact that they are against Us is sufficient to portray Them in a negative light.

The analysis indicates that the fairy tale scenario and the conceptual framework civilization vs. barbarism by Sandikcioglu can be identified in the narrative of World War I. These metaphorical conceptualizations not only align

with those discussed by both researchers, but also serve the same purposes. In addition, it was demonstrated that the WAR IS A JOURNEY metaphor serves the same goals, highlighting the *Us/Them* asymmetry. In what follows, I will argue that this conceptual system is highly applicable and was also exploited during World War II.

### **Presidential Speeches on World War II**

On 8 December 1941, Franklin Delano Roosevelt addressed Congress requesting a declaration of war. The passages (20–26) demonstrate the use of the fairy tale scenario in which the president casts the US in the role of both a Hero (25–26) and a Victim (20–22), and ascribes the role of Villain to Japan (23–24):

- 20) The United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan (...) The United States was at peace with that Nation and, at the solicitation of Japan, was still in conversation with its Government and its Emperor looking toward the maintenance of peace in the Pacific.
- 21) I regret to tell you that very many American lives have been lost. In addition American ships have been reported torpedoed on the high seas (...)
- 22) There is no blinking at the fact that our people, our territory, and our interests are in grave danger.
- 23) The Japanese Government has deliberately sought to deceive the United States by false statements and expressions of hope for continued peace (...) It will be recorded that the distance of Hawaii from Japan makes it obvious that the attack was deliberately planned (...)
- 24) (...) since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December 7, 1941, a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire.
- 25) No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory.
- 26) As Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy I have directed that all measures be taken for our defense.

Passages (20–26) reveal the self-defence scenario. The portrayal of the US as an innocent victim, who “was at peace” with Japan and was “looking toward the maintenance of peace,” contrasts with the depiction of Japan as a villain who “deliberately sought to deceive” the US and put the American people and

territory in danger. It should be noted, however, that Roosevelt emphasized the *Us/Them* asymmetry not only by casting the countries in different roles but also by referring to them in vastly different ways. He treated the US both as a country and a nation. Although the name “United States” appears several times, the president also uses expressions such as “American lives” and “American people.” However, he referred to Japan as “the Empire of Japan” and “the Japanese Government,” focusing solely on the government’s control of the territory. This created a powerful asymmetry, influencing how the listeners perceived both countries. The president emphasizes that the US is a nation and that each of his listeners is an important part of the country. On the contrary, he talks about Japan in terms of the territory ruled by the government, not mentioning the many civilians that would be attacked by the US. The dehumanization made it easier to convince the American people to attack the Japanese and to overcome possible moral hesitation.

One day later, on 9 December 1941, Roosevelt addressed the nation with the following words:

- 27) The sudden criminal attacks perpetrated by the Japanese in the Pacific provide the climax of a decade of international immorality.
- 28) Powerful and resourceful gangsters have banded together to make war upon the whole human race. Their challenge has now been flung at the United States of America. The Japanese have treacherously violated the longstanding peace between us.
- 29) Japanese forces had loosed their bombs and machine guns against our flag, our forces and our citizens.
- 30) And no honest person, today or a thousand years hence, will be able to suppress a sense of indignation and horror at the treachery committed by the military dictators of Japan (...)
- 31) Many American soldiers and sailors have been killed by enemy action. American ships have been sunk; American airplanes have been destroyed.
- 32) The Congress and the people of the United States have accepted that challenge. Together with other free peoples, we are now fighting to maintain our right to live among our world neighbors in freedom, in common decency, without fear of assault.
- 33) We Americans are not destroyers—we are builders.

The aforementioned passages (27–33) are rich in figurative language. First, they reveal the self-defence scenario, in which Japan is again portrayed as a

Villain, and the US as an innocent Victim forced into military action. The *Us/Them* asymmetry is well-visible when we juxtapose the way Roosevelt talks about Japan (“gangsters”) and the US (“we are not destroyers—we are builders”). Moreover, the wartime actions of Japan are described as “criminal attacks” and “a war upon the whole human race,” while the military response of the United States is referred to as a “fighting to maintain our right to live (...) in freedom.”

Second, in (29–31), the president points out that the war waged by Japan is marked by “bombing”, “killing” and “destroying.” One may say that this is a literal definition of war, however, turning to Fabiszak’s (2007: 104) account we can read that

[d]efinitions focusing on only one aspect of this complex and multi-faceted concept are incomplete and may be intentionally used to obscure those aspects which are not acceptable to the public opinion, but not all rhetoric is based on conceptual metaphors, though they may probably be activated by both metaphorical and non-metaphorical linguistic expressions.

Finally, it should be noted that the narrative is shaped by the framework civilization vs. barbarism. The subframe “Japanese are immoral” and “Americans are moral” underly the conceptualization of Japanese as “powerful and resourceful gangsters” whose attacks “provide the climax of a decade of internationality immorality” and the Americans as those who fight for “freedom” and “decency.”

The analysis shows that the fairy tale scenario and the metaphor WAR IS VIOLENT CRIME: MURDER, ASSAULT, KIDNAPPING, ARSON, RAPE, AND THEFT offered by Lakoff (1991), as well as the conceptual framework civilization vs. barbarism discussed by Sandikcioglu, can be identified in the coverage of World War II. Additionally, these metaphorical conceptualizations perform the same functions as those identified in the Gulf War coverage, with highlighting the *Us/Them* asymmetry being the most relevant.

## Presidential Speeches on the Vietnam War

Let me turn now to the speeches concerning the Vietnam War. The excerpts (34–41) come from the speech delivered by John F. Kennedy on 25 May 1961:

- 34) (...) while we talk of sharing and building and the competition of ideas, others talk of arms and threaten war.
- 35) Our strength as well as our convictions have imposed upon this nation the role of leader in freedom's cause (...) We stand for freedom.
- 36) We stand, as we have always stood from our earliest beginnings, for the independence and equality of all nations (...) And we do not intend to leave an open road for despotism.
- 37) The great battleground for the defense and expansion of freedom today is the whole southern half of the globe—Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Middle East—the lands of the rising peoples. Their revolution is the greatest in human history. They seek an end to injustice, tyranny, and exploitation.
- 38) For the adversaries of freedom did not create the revolution; nor did they create the conditions which compel it. But they are seeking to ride the crest of its wave—to capture it for themselves. Yet their aggression is more often concealed than open. They have fired no missiles; and their troops are seldom seen. They send arms, agitators, aid, technicians and propaganda to every troubled area. But where fighting is required, it is usually done by others—by guerrillas striking at night, by assassins striking alone—assassins who have taken the lives of four thousand civil officers in the last twelve months in Vietnam alone—by subversives and saboteurs and insurrectionists, who in some cases control whole areas inside of independent nations.
- 39) (...) we will make dear America's enduring concern is for both peace and freedom—that we are anxious to live in harmony with the Russian people—that we seek no conquests, no satellites, no riches (...)
- 40) Powerful propaganda broadcasts from Havana now are heard throughout Latin America, encouraging new revolutions in several countries. Similarly, in Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand, we must communicate our determination and support to those upon whom our hopes for resisting the communist tide in that continent ultimately depend. Our interest is in the truth.
- 41) We are not against any man—or any nation—or any system—except as it is hostile to freedom. Nor am I here to present a new military doctrine, bearing any one name or aimed at any one area. I am here to promote the freedom doctrine.

As can be observed Kennedy chose to employ the fairy tale scenario to describe the conflict in Vietnam. It is important to note that Kennedy makes very few references to the victims and refers to them collectively as “the whole southern half of the globe—Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Middle East.”

The president focuses almost solely on the noble features of the US, assuring that the country “stands for freedom” and “independence and equality of all nations.” Interestingly, Kennedy did not identify a villain. The enemies are referred to as “others” and “the adversaries of freedom.” The dismissive language downplays the strength and ability of the villain to challenge the US. Moreover, it emphasizes the asymmetry between a brave hero and a cowardly villain, influencing the public’s perception of the sides.

On 7 April 1965, Lyndon B. Johnson also employed the fairy tale scenario. As visible in (42–49), the US was cast in the role of a Hero, North Vietnam and Communist China were cast as the Villains, and South Vietnam as a Victim:

- 42) The first reality is that North Viet-Nam has attacked the independent nation of South Viet-Nam. Its object is total conquest.
- 43) Simple farmers are the targets of assassination and kidnapping. Women and children are strangled in the night because their men are loyal to their government (...) Large-scale raids are conducted on towns, and terror strikes in the heart of cities.
- 44) The confused nature of this conflict cannot mask the fact that it is the new face of an old enemy. Over this war--and all Asia--is another reality: the deepening shadow of Communist China (...) This is a regime which has destroyed freedom in Tibet, which has attacked India (...) It is a nation which is helping the forces of violence in almost every continent. The contest in Viet-Nam is part of a wider pattern of aggressive purposes.
- 45) Our objective is the independence of South Viet-Nam, and its freedom from attack. We want nothing for ourselves--only that the people of South Viet-Nam be allowed to guide their own country in their own way.
- 46) We are also there to strengthen world order.
- 47) We will not be defeated. We will not grow tired. We will not withdraw, either openly or under the cloak of a meaningless agreement.
- 48) Because we fight for values and we fight for principles, rather than territory or colonies, our patience and our determination are unending.
- 49) This generation of the world must choose: destroy or build, kill or aid, hate or understand (...) Well, we will choose life. In so doing we will prevail over the enemies within man, and over the natural enemies of all mankind.

The *Us/Them* asymmetry is clearly evident when we compare the descriptions of North Vietnam and China to that of the US. The Communist China is referred to as “a regime which has destroyed freedom” and “a nation which is helping the forces of violence.” Furthermore, the descriptions of the communist countries include nouns such as “brutality”, “conquest”, “attacks”,

and verbs such as “ravage” and “destroy.” In contrast, the US involvement in the war was favourably described as fighting “for values” and “principles.” Referring to the US, the president used nouns such as “freedom”, “bravery”, “values” and verbs such as “to guide” or “to strengthen.” As can be seen, the scenario presented the conflict in stark contrast, with no acknowledgement of the war’s complexity. Additionally, passages (42–29) reveal the metaphor WAR IS A VIOLENT CRIME, which was exploited by Johnson to obscure the inconvenient facts about US war actions in Vietnam.

The next speech to be analysed was delivered by Johnson on 31 March 1968. As visible in the excerpts (50–53), the narrative employed by the president was shaped by the framework maturity vs. immaturity:

- 50) That the United States would stop its bombardment of North Vietnam when that would lead promptly to productive discussions—and that we would assume that North Vietnam would not take military advantage of our restraint.
- 51) Our purpose in this action is to bring about a reduction in the level of violence that now exists. It is to save the lives of brave men—and to save the lives of innocent women and children.
- 52) Thus, there will be no attacks around the principal populated areas, or in the food-producing areas of North Vietnam (...) But I cannot in good conscience stop all bombing so long as to do so would immediately and directly endanger the lives of our men and our allies. Whether a complete bombing halt becomes possible in the future will be determined by events.
- 53) North Vietnam rushed their preparations for a savage assault on the people, the government, and the allies of South Vietnam. They caused widespread disruption and suffering. Their attacks, and the battles that followed, made refugees of half a million human beings. The Communists may renew their attack any day.

The metaphors THE US IS A TEACHER and NORTH VIETNAM IS A STUDENT underlie the aforementioned metaphorical expressions. Johnson asserts that America has a higher level of humanitarianism and morality, as it is concerned with “the lives of innocent women and children.” Moreover, the US is portrayed as a teacher responsible for maintaining order, which the president emphasizes by expressing his desire to reduce the “level of violence.” In contrast, North Vietnam is depicted as a rebellious student responsible for “widespread

disruption and suffering.” The term “savage” suggests that North Vietnam is not only disobedient but also lacks cultural and educational refinement. Additionally, the president implies that the US is in control and that the bombing will only cease on its terms. By stating that “whether a complete bombing halt becomes possible in the future will be determined by events,” Johnson suggests that North Vietnam will either be punished by further bombing or rewarded by reducing it. The framework maturity vs. immaturity highlights the uneven distribution of power and cultural and educational disparities between the US and North Vietnam.

The last speech to be analysed was delivered by Richard M. Nixon on 25 January 1972. In this speech, the president employed the WAR IS A JOURNEY metaphor:

- 54) There were two honourable paths open to us. The path of negotiation was, and is, the path we prefer. But it takes two to negotiate; there had to be another way in case the other side refused to negotiate. That path we called Vietnamization. What it meant was training and equipping the South Vietnamese to defend themselves, and steadily withdrawing Americans, as they developed the capability to do so. The path of Vietnamization has been successful (...) But the path of Vietnamization has been the long voyage home. It has strained the patience and tested the perseverance of the American people.
- 55) As I have stated on a number of occasions, I was prepared and I remain prepared to explore any avenue, public or private, to speed negotiations to end the war.
- 56) For 30 months, whenever Secretary Rogers, Dr. Kissinger, or I were asked about secret negotiations we would only say we were pursuing every possible channel in our search for peace.
- 57) Some Americans, who believed what the North Vietnamese led them to believe, have charged that the United States has not pursued negotiations intensively. As the record that I now will disclose will show, just the opposite is true.
- 58) We will pursue any approach that will speed negotiations.
- 59) It is a plan to end the war now; it includes an offer to withdraw all American forces within 6 months of an agreement; its acceptance would mean the speedy return of all the prisoners of war to their homes.

Motion verbs such as “pursue” focus attention on the progress that is being made. Next, the president’s strategies for ending the conflict are mapped onto “paths.” Unlike the words “option” or “possibility”, “path” indicates direction.



Each “path” has an endpoint, which implies that the “journey” is not pointless. Furthermore, the president put an emphasis on a tempo, using words such as “speed”, “speedy” and “intensively.” By highlighting the direction and pace Nixon aims to convince the audience that the war is progressing as desired. Additionally, the use of pronouns “we”, “us” and “our” indicates that the participants of a race are projected onto the president and the nation collectively. This, in conjunction with an emphasis on speed, gives rise to the 'WAR IS A RACE' metaphor. As previously indicated, the WAR IS A RACE metaphor highlights the *Us/Them* asymmetry, convincing the participants of the race that they must work quickly to defeat the opponents. Secondly, it directs people’s attention towards the final goal, keeping them engaged, without focusing on what must be sacrificed to achieve it.

The analysis indicates that the fairy tale scenario, the metaphor WAR IS A VIOLENT CRIME, and the framework maturity vs. immaturity were used to emphasize the *Us/Them* dichotomy during the Vietnam War. Furthermore, the asymmetry between the sides involved in the conflict was also highlighted by the WAR IS A JOURNEY metaphor.

### **Observations and Conclusions**

The aim of this paper has been to identify and analyze the metaphorical conceptualizations used to highlight the *Us/Them* asymmetry in speeches concerning wars. I demonstrated that the metaphor systems and frameworks identified by Lakoff (1991) and Sandikcioglu in the coverage of the Gulf War had been also employed earlier by American presidents to influence people’s understanding and evaluation of World War I, World War II, and the Vietnam War.

The analysis indicates that, as to be expected, the primary reason for exploiting the *Us/Them* asymmetry was to create adversarial images of the countries. These images were then used to serve different political agendas, most often to justify involvement in war and establish a convenient narrative

for the American Cabinet. It was demonstrated that the fairy tale scenario was particularly effective in evading responsibility for war actions, as it placed the blame for joining and waging a war on an enemy rather than on a president. Moreover, the fact that the framework “civilization vs barbarism” may be identified in an unchanged form in WWI, WWII and the Vietnam War may suggest that it is not part of a “culture-specific model” that “helped frame the debate about the Gulf crisis” as Sandikcioglu (299) argued, but rather part of a more universal model that can be applied in various contexts, not limited to those involving the Orient. I believe that the conceptual frameworks described by Sandikcioglu may have a wider application and a different origin than anticipated, not necessarily so closely linked to Orientalism. As previously noted, the framework has the potential to influence the narrative of any conflict and shape the perceptions of countries that are not representatives of the Orient. Nevertheless, the extent to which it can be applied is beyond the scope of this study.

Finally, it was observed that the American presidents used the metaphor WAR IS A JOURNEY to emphasize the *Us/Them* asymmetry. Although this metaphor may not be the most obvious choice, it assumes a different meaning in the context of war. The concept of war is mapped onto a journey, however, the desired trajectory and conclusion of this journey vary depending on the country in question. Therefore, the conflict can be conceptualized as a struggle between two opposing forces, each with their own distinct goals and perspectives. It is evident that only one plan for the journey can be accomplished, and that only one goal can be achieved. Furthermore, when the emphasis is placed on the pace at which the desired outcome is reached, the metaphor WAR IS A JOURNEY transforms into the WAR IS A RACE metaphor. The latter unites people and encourages them to take fast and effective actions aimed at defeating the opponents. Furthermore, the WAR IS A RACE metaphor can readily highlight the *Us/Them* asymmetry in a variety of contexts, without a

need to name the opponents' negative features. The mere fact of their opposition is sufficient to portray them in a negative light.

### Endnotes

1. The article provides a summary of the findings presented in my unpublished MA dissertation.
2. All of the speeches were taken from the site <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches>.
3. The author provides a total of five conceptual frameworks.

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### **Abstract**

This paper aims to analyse the metaphorical conceptualizations that highlight the dichotomy between the countries and people in the service of political agendas. The study introduces the brief account of Lakoff's and Sandikcioglu's remarks on the use of figurative language in a political discourse. This is followed by a systematic analysis of the metaphorical conceptualizations that emphasize the *Us/Them* asymmetry in the speeches of American presidents regarding World War I, World War II, and the Vietnam War.