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Basel

Research Project

Gendered leadership discourses of political leadership during the Covid-19 pandemic

Project funded by own resources

Project title Gendered leadership discourses of political leadership during the Covid-19 pandemic

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Organisation / Research unit

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In this project, we explore the gendered discourses of the – seemingly favourable – media coverage that women Heads of State received for their handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. We do this by analysing media reports published in different outlets using (multimodal) critical discourse analysis and we identify and describe the discursive strategies that on the surface appear to challenge hegemonic – and largely masculine – discourses of leadership, that, we argue, nonetheless reinforce discriminatory gender ideologies. We discuss how this is discursively achieved and how complimenting these leaders on their performance continues to compare them against a masculine norm and constructs their leadership as “alternative” and exceptional. This gendered portrayal of political leadership in times of crisis illustrates how the discursive construction of identities, responsibilities and relationships during Covid-19 is largely hinging on power relations and political ideologies that systematically disadvantage and undermine women. The purportedly positive form in which this occurs makes it particularly difficult to challenge and subvert these discourses and their underlying gendered ideologies.

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