

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Title: Gender in the Deliberative Public Sphere.

Short name: Gender Rhetoric.

Thematic area: Communication and social change

Mode of co-operation: joint field work

1 Principal objective and sub-goals

1. 1 Primary objective

1.1.1 Summary

The question of the gender in relation to rhetoric studies understood as the discipline tasked with studying public argumentation and popular deliberative practices that are at the heart of a social and liberal democracy, has undergone radical developments in the past twenty years. It has led to a diversification of rhetoric theory and practice concerning democracy and deliberation, and, in keeping with Third Wave Feminism, has made rhetoric studies a field of excellence to re-examine gender-in-politics.

South Africa's consolidated democracy stands firmly by its constitutional principle of non-discrimination on the basis of gender as well as a sustained policy of gender redress and progress (if 52% percent of South Africans are women, 29% are elected town councillors and 18% are mayors, while their ratio in Parliament is one of the highest in democratic states). South Africa offers a field of enquiry on the rhetoric of gender on a new and challenging scale, unknown before in the South.

The project will investigate how gender enters and is played out in the sphere of democratic public deliberation so as to arrive at a typology of public rhetorical practices with regard to how gender issues are represented in the media when policy decisions are at stake; how public argumentation undergoes a significant change when gender is used to load arguments otherwise independent from gender perceptions; how cultural norms are used as rhetorical commonplaces to alter debates and produce retrogressive arguments.

The project draws its data from three sites of public rhetoric, areas in which the project leaders have demonstrated expertise: media rhetoric (Lippe 1995 and 2000) ; official rhetoric (parliamentary and corporate) (Lippe 1999, Salazar 2002 and 2005) ; non-governmental rhetoric (advocacy groups, communities) (Lippe 1999 and Salazar 2001).

1.1.2 Intellectual background

Gender theory is not just about additively introducing female perspectives and examples in the rhetoric tradition, but it is also about analysing rhetoric as the bi-gendered

phenomenon it really is. Traditionally and historically, rhetoric has until just recently been an art reserved for men and thereby clearly gender-determined. It has been a power tool used to pursue the interests of power and power has been a male sphere; in politics, in law as well as in religion. Rhetoric has often been pursued and taught as agonistic art, focused on the fighting elements, where the objective is to win over the opposition with any verbal and non-verbal means available, not just with rational arguments. This can be said to have been effective and well adapted to its purpose in centralistic and hierarchically governed societies, be it with democratic or other forms of government. Today, the situation is different as power has been decentralised and it is no longer solely a concern of the white Western man (even if it still is to a great degree). But above all, public language has to a greater extent been democratised and new voices have tried to break through the dominating communication pattern. Rhetoric in its traditional form, both as an analytical and practical instrument, is therefore by many viewed as being too limited for the present reality, which is less patriarchal than any known reality in history.

In the course of history, women, and other groups finding themselves in underprivileged positions, have developed sophisticated strategies to assert themselves in the patriarchal rhetorical field. There is now a great variation of empirical studies of individual women rhetoricians, especially within American rhetoric research (Campbell 1989, 1993, 1994; Levin & Sullivan 1995; Wertheimer 1997, Sutherland & Sutcliffe; Ritchie & Ronald 2001). The interest in this research area is however growing also in other countries. At present, intense discussions are taking place with respect to a reevaluation of the Aristotelian foundations for rhetoric research from a gender perspective. As an example, it has been said that not least the rhetorical production model means different things to women and men: *invention*, i.e. the way of discovering the content of a discourse means different things to men and women; so does differentiated approaches to “rhetorical situations”: “The act of invention for women, then, begins in a different place from Aristotle’s conception of invention: women must first invent a way to speak in the context of being silenced and rendered invisible as persons” (Ritchie & Ronald 2001, xvii).

A further assumption in rhetoric research is that rhetoric is dependent on situation. In the times when the rhetorical situation was exclusively male, principles for public speaking were developed, which worked for a male communication culture: competitive, agonistic and formalised. One strategy used by women was then to adjust to this communication pattern. But most often it was essential to support one’s argumentation with considerably more than more or less formal arguments. The task was first and foremost to create, in an offensive manner, a well-functioning *ethos* (Mral 2003).

To a great extent, women’s choice for deliberative actions ever since the scientific revolution, has governed by the female starting point (Salazar 1997; Nativel, 1999; Logan 1999; Carr 2003; Lippe 2006). Women’s establishment of *ethos* and handling of *logos* and *pathos* are done on considerably different conditions and in different ways than men’s choice of rhetorical means (Salazar 1999). Women’s differing choices of rhetorical strategies have mostly been noted in general terms and from individual empirical examples, while synthesising studies are rarer (Salazar 2005).

Nonetheless, women's argumentation has often been a rhetoric of powerlessness. They have developed strategies to break through the mechanisms of exclusion, and they still do, not least within modern rhetoric research (Shugart and others 2001). In 1996, Michael Billig pointed out that the revival of rhetoric in the academic field so far had had a clear masculine mark. Despite the post-modern talk about "the celebration of otherness" he says, "the 'Other' in fact still is excluded" (Billig 1996, Lippe 2006).

However, analysing alternative speakers, as we intend to do in both areas described above, it soon becomes very clear that these, in many respects, have developed more sophisticated and varied rhetorical strategies than speakers accepted in the dominating public sphere. Since women's voices have been suppressed for such a long time and have had so many barriers to break through, women have often developed very advanced techniques to enable efficiency. The study of women speakers therefore widens the theoretical horizon of rhetoric. Or, as Campbell claimed already in 1989: "the rhetoric of outgroups is, comparatively speaking, more important for rhetorical criticism and theory" (Campbell 1989, p 23). What is especially notable in women rhetoricians is a great sensitivity to the demands and expectations of the audience, which often results in a virtuoso as well as what, from a historical perspective, is a very entertaining game with the prejudices of the audience (Weber 1990; Mral 1999; Cloud 2004; Lippe 2000).

Turning the perspective of rhetoric vis à vis democracy studies from the rhetoric of the dominating part to the rhetorical strategies of the once dominated element also opens our eyes to the democratic potential of rhetoric.

1.2 Specific outcome

The specific outcome is categorized as follows:

- 1) A typological understanding of what rhetoric studies call "ideographs" or how the media construct visual arguments regarding, in this case, gender.
- 2) A typology of verbal arguments concerning gender as they are played out in the public arena (political and corporate) with regard to policy making, whether the issues are or are not gendered (example: rape).
- 3) A typology of what rhetoric calls "taken-for-granted", that is sets of arguments and styles or arguing which operate without public debaters or agents being aware of their usage and effect on audiences.

This project wishes to make a significant contribution to rhetoric studies by providing historical, theoretical and practical comparative analyses about women as deliberators, both in politics and corporate environment, thus enabling a transition from a seemingly neutral approach to a more open and more flexible theory, which abandons what, in the words of Bourdieu, could be called "the necessary denial" of rhetoric, i.e. the exclusion of everything that does not fit into the white, male, agonistic pattern for public argumentation and popular deliberation.

1.3 Secondary objective

A secondary objective is of a practical nature. The project aims at producing a film documentary that could be used in schools to heighten awareness of gender as a public argument and in a Mphil in Media and Communication launched in 2006 at the University of Cape Town. The aim is to produce an interface between research and civil society, education in particular. The documentary will be modelled on *Women's Rhetoric. An Ethnography of Public Speaking in South Africa* (Salazar 2005).

2 Scientific references

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3 Project time table

2007: Media Typology of Rhetorical Gendering of Public Deliberation

May (5 days) : 1st workshop in Norway: teams will meet and explain their work, formal papers and informal workshop.

December (5 days): 2nd workshop, in South Africa: teams will present finished papers, tabled for discussion. Wrap-up of first area. Online uploading.

2008: Verbal Typology of Rhetorical Gendering of Political and Corporate Deliberation

June (5 days): 3rd workshop, in Norway: teams will present case studies in formal papers and round-table. Brief for documentary.

December (5 days): 4th workshop, in South Africa: teams will present results in formal papers. Wrap-up of the second area of research. Online uploading. Rough edit of documentary.

2009: General Typology of Rhetorical Commonplaces regarding Gender in Democratic Deliberation in Norway and South Africa

June (5 days) : 5th workshop, in South Africa : teams will present data collected and analyses. Online uploading. Final edit of documentary.

December (5 days): International Symposium in Norway on Gender Rhetoric – North-South. The teams will organize a larger conference, to present the Project to international scholarship. Preparation of journal issue of selected papers. Planning of Proceedings. Final uploading of online materials. Release of documentary.

4 Publication plan with target audiences

-Online: Papers delivered at workshops will be placed online on a dedicated site (graduates and researchers, open).

-Print publication: the journal *The Public-Javnost* [ISI accredited] has already been approached for a special issue on gender rhetoric, once the project is close to completion (wider readership in communication studies).

-Media: documentary film on gender deliberation (educational).

-Proceedings of the International Symposium (professionals in the field).