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Rhetoric of social movements

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**Sprawozdanie/Report: 2nd Biennial International Rhetoric Workshop:
*Rhetorical Cultures: Mapping Global Publics and the Crossroads of
Democracy*, 3rd – 6th July 2018, Ghent University**

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Sprawozdanie/Report: 2nd Biennial International Rhetoric Workshop: *Rhetorical Cultures: Mapping Global Publics and the Crossroads of Democracy*, 3rd – 6th July 2018, Ghent University

Between the 3 and 6 July this year the 2nd Biennial International Rhetoric Workshop: *Rhetorical Cultures: Mapping Global Publics and the Crossroads of Democracy* was held at Ghent University, Belgium. It was the second edition of the event which was brought to life in 2016 when the first edition of *International Rhetoric Workshop* was organized in association with Uppsala University, Sweden.

The whole idea of the *International Rhetoric Workshop* was born in 2015 and later developed by four scholars from Sweden and the USA: Erik Bengtson, Frida Buhre (both from Uppsala University), David Miguel Molina (Northwestern University) and Robert Topinka (University of Sussex). This year's edition has been organized by the IRW organizing committee which consisted of the following people: James Proszek (USA), Ida Andersen (Norway), Moran Pollack (Israel), Brent Lucia (USA), Justine Amakali (Namibia), Matthew Houdek (USA) and members of the Department of Educational Studies from Ghent University Helena Calleeuw and Laura van Beveren under command of Kris Rutten, the president of the Rhetoric Society of Europe.

The aim of IRW was to create a space where young and emerging scholars (PhDs and recently dissertated) get the chance to have their work closely read by 4-5 other young scholars and one established faculty member with similar interests. The workshops give the participants an opportunity to read other young scholars' work, participate in panel discussions and development sessions, and to hear some lectures by distinguished keynote speakers. Since 2015 IRW has cooperated with and received the endorsement from rhetorical organizations worldwide e.g. RSE (Rhetoric Society of Europe) and RSA (Rhetoric Society of America).

The theme of this year's edition was *Rhetorical Cultures: Mapping Global Publics and the Crossroads of Democracy*. The organizers wanted to encourage broad-based reflection, inquiry, and collaboration, taking stock of the emergent

rhetorical practices that shape and undergird the political world today in all of its contingency and heterogeneity. Among discussed problems were e.g. how ideas of race, ethnicity, and otherness are rhetorically constructed and deployed as a political means of securing hegemonic conditions or undermining democratic processes, how rhetorical studies can contribute to the theoretical, critical, and conceptual understandings of public cultures and their formation or how rhetoric can be introduced into educational settings and how rhetorical analysis can help inform educational research. Among many distinguished scholars who were invited, three delivered keynote speeches: Jessica Enoch (USA), Lisa Storm Villadsen (Denmark) and Raka Shome (Singapore/USA).

After the welcome reception the first keynote speaker was Raka Shome, who is a Visiting Senior Fellow at National University of Singapore. She writes on postcolonial cultures, transnational feminism, and media/communication cultures. Her research interests are in Asian Modernities, Transnational relations of India, Racism and Media in a global context, Transnational Media Cultures and Gender, and the Transnational politics of knowledge production as a communication issue. Moreover, Raka Shome is the author of *Diana and Beyond: White Femininity, National Identity, and Contemporary Media Culture* (University of Illinois Press, 2014) – a book that examines how new sets of postcolonial relations in contemporary western cultures are mediated through images of white femininity, especially privileged and celebrity white women.

In her lecture *Gender, Nationalism, and the Swachh Bharat (Clean India) Movement*, Raka Shome focused on the rhetorical logics of contemporary India nationalism that is being forged under the current right wing Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and his BJP party. Speaker showed one of the highlights of this nationalism, namely rewriting India as a modern Hindu nation and simultaneous exclusion of Muslims and other lower caste populations such as Dalits, the untouchable caste. One of the political instruments is the “Clean India” movement which is involved in the production of a national pedagogy around cleanliness. People are encouraged to cultivate clean habits, not drop garbage on the roadside and to build latrines at home, as opposed to going to open fields for relieving oneself. Raka Shome examined how the female body often comes to stand in for the clean national body that must be honored and protected. In her talk Shome carefully discussed how such articulation of the female body into the SBA (Swachh Bharat) movement implicitly and often explicitly draws on Hindu notions of domesticity and womanhood. She also demonstrated the link between nationalism, gender, and a Hindu modernity that is being forged in contemporary India.

The second keynote speaker was Lisa Storm Villadsen who is Associate Professor of Rhetoric at Department of Media, Cognition and Communication

at the University of Copenhagen. Her main research interests concern rhetoric's role in contemporary public life. Villadsen is especially interested in how rhetoric reflects the norms undergirding messages and discussions in the public realm, primarily in a political context. Together with Christian Kock she developed the term rhetorical citizenship as a theoretical and critical framework and edited the books *Rhetorical Citizenship and Public Deliberation* (2012) and *Contemporary Rhetorical Citizenship* (2015).

In her lecture *Rhetorical Citizenship and Public Moral Argument: Too Quaint an Idea for Neoliberal Times?*, Villadsen revisited Celeste Michelle Condit's 1987 article *Crafting Virtue: The Rhetorical Construction of Public Morality* and asked whether the rhetorical craft Condit describes has been rendered impotent in our age of populism, political polarization, and fake news. By introducing her own and Christian Kock's concept of rhetorical citizenship Villadsen made an argument that at this moment when despair and 'tuning out' can be tempting reactions to a hyper-polarized political climate and alarming developments in areas such as international relations, minority protection, etc., we still can and must look to rhetorical practice for hope of improvement. She called the much-publicized social media driven #metoo movement a recent and significant example that collective moral reorientation does in fact occur as a result of multiple sustained rhetorical efforts across genres and media. Furthermore, Villadsen suggested that official apologies, like the ones that were evoked by the #metoo movement, are not just potentially meaningful to the wronged group. The debate that usually accompanies official apologies also carries importance for the surrounding society because it confronts issues of social injustice on a collective level by discussing formerly politically sanctioned discrimination or maltreatment of different kinds of minorities as public issues.

The last of the keynote lecturers invited was Jessica Enoch from University of Maryland, USA. Her research focuses on feminist rhetoric and pedagogies, rhetorical education, histories of rhetoric and composition and literacy studies. She is author of two books: *Refiguring Rhetorical Education: Women Teaching African American, Native American, and Chicano/a Students* (Southern Illinois UP, 2008) where she revisits the seemingly innocuous figure of the nineteenth-century female teacher to investigate the radical iterations of rhetorical education that women teachers have produced and *Domestic Occupations: Spatial Rhetorics and Women's Work* (Southern Illinois UP, 2019) which works at the intersection of space, rhetoric, and gender to investigate how the material and discursive constructions of the home have both enabled and constrained women's entrance into professional occupations and spaces.

Enoch's talk, *Gendered Barriers: Examining Historical and Present-day Issues Concerning Professional and Academic Access*, was an analysis of the dominant discourses that have shaped women's academic and professional experiences and the ways women have composed their own rhetoric to intervene in these discourses to access to the university and various career opportunities. In her lecture Enoch focused on the spatial rhetoric that conditioned women's university and career experiences as well as the spatial rhetoric those women used to alter these experiences. In Enoch's view, spatial rhetoric designates who is allowed in a space and what can happen within that space. In her presentation, she used this definition to develop a spatio-rhetorical analysis through which she showed how the composition of space has affected women's intellectual and professional lives. Enoch considered the spatial rhetoric that circulated in and through the nineteenth-century university campuses in the U.S., determining women's entrance to the laboratory and thereby affecting their training and career in the sciences.

Besides the keynote lectures during the three days workshop there were organized five panel sessions where scholars and academics like Rebecca Dingo (USA), Elizabeth Weiser (USA), Hilde Van Belle (Belgium), Christian Kock (Denmark), Kris Rutten (Belgium), Jens Kjeldsen (Norway/Denmark) and Ryan Salomon (USA) discussed subjects like *Rhetorical criticism as an interdisciplinary perspective*, *Rhetorical Criticism, Public Memory and Identification*, *Visual Rhetoric and Argumentation in the Construction of Rhetorical Cultures*, *Globalizing Rhetoric, Gender & LGBT Studies* and *What is the point of rhetorical study and research*. Through the interesting discussions the panelists tried to answer such different and intriguing questions like e.g. can rhetoric, as an interdisciplinary practice, function as a way to transform society or what is the impact globalization has within rhetorical studies and what is its ability to shape areas of our discipline.

Conference participants were also invited to take part not only in passive activities during workshops, but most of all in active discussions and in reviewing each other's articles. They were divided in nine groups, each consisting of four to six members. The aim of each member was to read the articles from their group in advance and later to give a substantive and helpful feedback to the paper authors. The group discussions were also a huge opportunity to get to know foreign models and university programs of doctoral studies. Moreover, the participants were given a lot of good and useful advice on how to write articles for international scholarly journals and how to effectively plan the writing of doctoral thesis.

During the three day workshop we also had a chance to see a little of the city of Ghent. The best opportunity to do this were an organized boat trip combined with Belgium beer tasting and a visit to a newly opened Ghent public library which is also a multifunctional academic and scientific center – De Krook.

Summing all up, the *2nd Biennial International Rhetoric Workshop* held at Ghent University was a perfectly organized and a very interesting event for anybody whose interests concern rhetoric and rhetorical studies. For me it was one of the very first occasions to discuss my research issues with the worldwide experts face to face. I am looking forward to taking part in the upcoming events organized by the Rhetoric Society of Europe and Rhetoric Society of America like the RSE Conference in Pavia, Italy (September 11-13,2019) or 8th Biennial Rhetoric Society of America Summer Institute (University of Maryland, College Park, MD, June 3-8 2019).