

Rhetoric as salvatory

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The present volume is a “new beginning” of a story that goes back to the founding of democracy in South Africa in 1994.

For some fifteen years the Centre for Rhetoric Studies, at the University of Cape Town, has been promoting the cause of rhetoric on the African continent. Seconded by friends and colleagues, from Morocco to Romania, from Sweden to Argentina, from France to the United States, whose home disciplines or intellectual interests lie with philosophy and critical theory, politics and religion, the law and science, and simply rhetoric, we have forged ahead, moved by the belief, supported by observation, that a democracy without the means to argue is bound to fail, and impelled by the conviction, borne by intelligence, that a duty of deliberation, placed on both governed and government, is fundamental to the exercise of citizenship.

For some fifteen years our graduates have proudly gone to job interviews carrying a label novel enough to attract attention: “Rhetoric Studies”. Ours were the first African PhDs in rhetoric. As the *International Encyclopedia of Communication* (Blackwell, 2008) points out, a continental pioneering work has been achieved. By all standards it has been a collective work, truly intellectual in its purpose and genuinely international in its compass, deeply collegial in the sense of recognition that animates us, while affirmative of what can be, and is achieved on this continent.

The “new beginning” mentioned earlier is the launch of a new book series: the *African Yearbook of Rhetoric*.

After fifteen years of colloquia, events and symposia (among our guests were Paul Ricoeur, Jacques Derrida, Jean Rouch — I shall not humble the living by mentioning them by name), after fifteen years of successful and enriching bilateral projects, mostly funded by the National Research Foundation of South Africa, which must be credited for having welcomed “Rhetoric Studies” in its nomenclature of research fields, we have decided to launch a book series. This runs against the grain of common wisdom, common enough but commonly unwise, which considers electronic dissemination as *nec plus ultra*.

In spite of our instrumental resort to online tools, and a website that has become a major resource (www.rhetoricafrika.org), we have opted for the printed word. It may have to do with a fascination for the printed word which Doris Lessing, in her Nobel lecture,¹ places at the heart of Africa’s salvatory. It has to do with the desire to affirm that for ideas not to be transient and vanish in the maelstrom of Internet flotsam they have to be set and to last and to effect change. There must be a tangible support. The irony

¹ Philippe-Joseph Salazar, “Nobel Rhetoric; or, Petrarch’s Pendulum”, *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 42, 4 (2009): 373-400.

is lost on none of us: we, rhetoricians, deal in speeches, the most transient form of human, civic art; we, rhetoricians, are acutely aware of the nature of public persuasion whose artifacts — speeches, its touchstones and references — disappear as soon as they appear; we, rhetoricians, observe and analyse the perversity of transient communication (think of a politician saying “I never said ‘that’”, such is the nature of a speech, it comes and goes). Because of all this, we, rhetoricians, mistrust the prestidigitation of the verbal and its ersatz, e-communication, and are wedded to seeing ideas in print. Printed books are like monuments: even defaced, monuments preserve a trace of that which was. Books are such a salvatory.

The first volume in this book series, *African Yearbook of Rhetoric*, draws on a bilateral project on gender and rhetoric, funded, over three years, by the national research agencies of South Africa and Norway.² Dr Jairo Kangira of the University of Namibia, and himself a PhD in Rhetoric Studies, has kindly accepted to be its co-editor, thus lending this inaugural volume a stronger African imprint. Writers from the project include Berit von der Lippe (Oslo) and a roster of young researchers at the Centre for Rhetoric Studies (Ruvimbo Goredema, Bridget Kwindu, Themba Ratsibe) as well as postdoctoral fellow Dr Sergio Alloggio and Zimbabwean academics Zifikile Gambahaya and Pedzisayi Mashiri. We have also secured decisive contributions by leading feminist rhetoricians, Barbara Cassin (CNRS, Paris), Nicole Dewandre (European Commission) and Cheryl Glenn (Penn State); and welcomed a collaborative essay by Gerard A. Hauser (Colorado) and Jens Elmelund Kjeldsen (Bergen) in the field of deliberative democracy. Their chapters need no presentation; they are their own very best orators.

In keeping with the African, continental purview of this book series, we aim at being multi-lingual. This volume is an incipient testimony to this strategic decision: rhetoric as a salvatory of *logos* on, and in Africa.

The second volume (2011) will deal with the *Rhetorics of Justice in post-societies*, the third (2012) will be devoted to *Presidential Rhetorics in Africa*.

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