Research Article

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The language of rhetorical feminism, anchored in hope

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Abstract: “The Language of Rhetorical Feminism, Anchored in Hope” honors contemporary expansions of rhetoric in terms of theory, practitioners, and practices. I’ve forged a new pathway that begins at the nexus of rhetoric, feminism, and hope, a juncture where the traditionally disregarded rhetorical practices and powers of so-called Others can be appreciated for their potency. Their purposeful resistant rhetorical praxes provide the constituent features of a theory I call “rhetorical feminism.” My hope is that the best parts of these rhetorical feminist praxes will meld with the best parts of rhetoric writ large.

Keywords: hope, rhetorical feminism, rhetoric, Others

“The Language of Rhetorical Feminism, Anchored in Hope” works to temper the heated language of prejudice and may even soften the attitudes of language users themselves. After all, when speakers actually listen to and see their targets (their so-called enemies) as fellow human beings, those more powerful speakers often change their attitudes, their language, and their rhetoric. On a global scale, we can witness such prejudice-to-tolerance linguistic transformations when warring nations reach an accord, when elected factions come together for the common weal, when asylum seekers are accommodated, and when protesters rightfully win their cause. Unfortunately, the United States does not now offer many comparative linguistic transformations, as our president models alarming public acts of speaking that too many citizens emulate enthusiastically and with impunity. As the “person most representative of the nation and its shared democratic values” (Stuckey 2020), Trump has normalized a rhetoric of hate and prejudice that is recirculated by his supporters – a political language of injustice applied against women, blacks, Mexicans, Muslims, China, the Kurds, Syria – in short, against anyone whose interests won’t “Make America Great Again.” Long-respected American journalist Dan Rather writes, “I cannot remember a time when the world saw the United States this unsteady, adrift, corrupt, or incompetent” (2019).

It is in response to this context that I situate my project at the nexus of feminism, rhetoric, and hope. It’s at this juncture that I study the rhetorical tactics of powerful, mainstream rhetors vis-à-vis those of Others. What I have learned time and again is that these Others are also powerful rhetors themselves but that many of their language practices (particularly those considered to be feminine) are disrespected, dismissed, if not ignored altogether by those more powerful. Yet without these voices – powerful and subaltern alike – there is no democracy. Without these voices, there is no hope.

I’ve divided my article into three sections, each of which demonstrates the necessity of hope to this project we call democracy. First, I will demonstrate the necessity of hope to the democratic ideal, where everyone has a voice – and uses it rhetorically. Second, I will explain the tactic I call “rhetorical feminism,” which is anchored in hope; and, finally, I will meditate on hope and the possibilities of rhetorical feminism for us all.

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As many readers know well, rhetoric – whether spoken or written, embodied or digital – holds possibility and power; rhetoric can *do* something that works toward the democratic process. It's a plastic art that enables us to (1) investigate issues; (2) challenge unjust systems; (3) re/invent ourselves as engaged "citizens" (a complicated term, to be sure); (4) expand our rhetorical repertoire; and, thereby, (5) cultivate and participate in a way of life we believe in. Aristotle's rhetor and audience were powerful, citizen-class, land-owning men who discussed and voted on issues in the agora, where they participated in the life *they* believed in. According to tradition, Athenian democratic life wasn't complicated by Others, by men of other nations and castes or by women – all of whom comprise the complex democracies of the United States and of, for example, Sweden, where this keynote was delivered.

The US Constitution is based on "we the people" forming "a more perfect union" and "establishing justice." But because we haven't yet established who exactly constitutes "we," that perfect union has never solidified. Our union is not one that illustrates the democratic *ideals* handed down to us by the ancient Athenians, who promoted "the importance of every citizen having a voice, being listened to carefully, and [being] heard with respect," as Gilligan reminds us (2011, 24). Self-proclaimed the most powerful (though hardly the most operational) democracy in the world, the United States continues to suppress the public, political rhetorical contributions of Others (women, people of color, immigrants, the disabled, the sexual, and gender diverse), despite the promise that we are all equal under the law.

Within a democratic framework, having an equal voice is paramount. Yet many people still are not taken seriously or listened to. Legal equality does not automatically translate into social equality, let alone having a voice that is heard. Equality under the law does not trip the mechanism that releases voice and power, so it's truly striking when the words of women and Others receive well-deserved attention, as is the case with former presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren's relentless "I have a plan for that" and the progressive policies of recently elected Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Kamala Harris. True equality manifests itself only when a person can assume the role of a rhetor, knowing that their civic rhetorical words or actions will be listened to and acted on (positively or negatively) by an engaged audience. Such has never been the guarantee within traditional rhetorical exchanges that use a Greco-Roman benchmark.

After all, those traditional rhetorical practices, delivered, for the most part, by powerful, political men, have failed to produce an inclusive community that invites cross-boundary communication. We see the results of antagonistic rhetorical practices on both the national and international political stage: in Donald Trump's unyielding tweets and casual threats to Syria, Iran, China, and Korea; the factionalism leading up to and as a consequence of Brexit; the steady upsurge of right-wing populism in Sweden, Denmark, Great Britain, France, Germany, Poland, Italy, Slovenia, Slovakia, Estonia, Hungary, Turkey, Brazil, and the Philippines; the failed negotiations within the United Nations Security Council with regard to forced displacement of over 70 million people worldwide; and the ever-shifting blame game and strategies in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Conventional rhetorical operations don't readily accommodate coalition, reconciliation, or calm reflection – capacities that are crucial to any democracy, of course, but also to our survival as a species. Nor do these conventional operations take into consideration the needs and interests of Others, including those of the world's most vulnerable citizens (children, the poor, the elderly, the disabled, the displaced, the so-called foreign, and raced). Instead, antagonistic rhetorical practices have injured our human capacities that otherwise would lead us to resist injustices of all kinds.

In response to such long-entrenched rhetorical exchanges, Other rhetors are delivering rhetorical messages that promote inclusivity, human rights and social justice, and mutual understanding. They are embodying *rhetorical feminism*, a set of tactics that multiplies rhetorical opportunities in terms of who counts as a rhetor, who can inhabit an audience, and what those audiences can do. When implemented, rhetorical feminism is inclusive, representative, and democratic.

We human beings are perpetually divided from one another, providing rhetoric's basic motives of bridging divisions, inducing identifications. Perhaps the most influential rhetorician of the twentieth century, Kenneth Burke (1950, 1969) would be the first to admit that traditional rhetorical transactions cannot always fulfill rhetoric's basic motives, that rhetoric does not always bring agreement. In *The*

Rhetoric of Motives, Burke explains that it is “so clearly a matter of rhetoric to persuade a man by identifying your cause with his interests” (24). But that to do so is first to confront the “implications of *division*” (22, original emphasis). In other words, “Identification is compensatory to division. If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity” (22). Thus, rhetoric divides as it identifies. This seeming impossibility – discord and concord meeting on the human tongue – presents a paradox we cannot overcome; yet it is one we can work to address.

Toward these ends, rhetorical feminism pushes beyond the strategies comprising traditional rhetoric and those of feminist rhetoric, both of which rely on the Greco-Roman benchmark what with its (1) arguments based on reason, (2) goal of persuasion, (3) rhetorical appeals, and (4) traditional deliveries. Both rhetorics have accomplished a great deal, but yet “feminist rhetoric” continues to be referred to pejoratively, its practitioners described as angry, strident, and fixated on men behaving badly – all distractions from the unfinished business of establishing authentic equality in a democracy.

Rhetorical feminism extends and energizes these rhetorics. It is a self-consciously rhetorical tactic responsive to the ideology that is feminism and to the key strategies that are feminist rhetoric and traditional rhetoric. Rhetorical feminism’s key distinguishing feature is that it is anchored in hope, the Cornel West kind of hope. “Hope and optimism are different,” West tells us, “Optimism tends to be based on the notion that there’s enough evidence out there to believe things are gonna be much better.” Optimism is much more rational and secular, whereas hope “looks at the evidence and says, ‘It doesn’t look good at all.’” With hope, we go “beyond the evidence to create new possibilities [...] that [...] allow people to engage in heroic actions always against the odds, no guarantee whatsoever” (qtd. in Smith, 2006: 105–6, original emphasis). By banking on hope, we rhetorical feminists look at the evidence (which doesn’t look good at all) and make a leap of faith beyond that evidence to conceptualize and mobilize a union of rhetoric and feminism.

Predicated on uncertainty and on hard work, hope is often a response to despair, catastrophe. Given the rollback of women’s rights in the United States, the numbing regularity of both mass shootings (370 by the end of October 2019) and police killings of black citizens (150 by the end of October 2019), the rise of anti-Semitism (up 150% in 2018 compared to 2013), and the resurgence of populist politics worldwide, given the overt prejudices against all Others, many of us are struggling with uncertainty, wrestling with despair – for it doesn’t look good at all. But we are taking that leap of faith that is hope and working hard toward the future (“List” 2019, statistics.com 2019, Keyak 2019).

Anchored in (1) hope, rhetorical feminism offers ways to (2) disidentify with hegemonic rhetoric; (3) be responsible to marginalized people even if we ourselves are marginalized; (4) establish dialogue and collaboration; (5) emphasize understanding; (6) accept vernaculars, emotions, and personal experiences; and (7) use and respect alternative rhetorical practices. Tapping these seven features, rhetorical feminism promotes cross-boundary dialogues and coalitions. In these ways, rhetorical feminism helps translate the self-interested practices of traditional rhetorics into those that protect the entire group (rather than just one or two individuals), practices such as empathy, reconciliation, and calm reflection that (and I repeat) are crucial to our survival as a species. This is not to say that rhetorical feminism will always reach its mark (after all, things don’t look good at all) or that we will want to implement it in every situation. But it’s surely a practice worthy of consideration, one worthy of including in our language use, our rhetorical repertoire.

In this section, I unpack the theory of rhetorical feminism, by using the representative writings of contemporary theorists who write from and to those in the margins, modeling a way to speak – and listen – to those who want to participate. Because I circle back to hope at the end, I will start with disidentification, a term coined by Muñoz (1999) to describe an intentional subversion of dominant expectations for being in the world,¹ for disidentifying with the traditional expectations for a rhetor, for instance. Rhetorical feminists understand how they might be expected to identify their cause with the interests of the dominant but choose, instead, to disidentify with those interests in order to identify with the interests of the subordinated.

¹ Eve Sedgwick was one of the earliest scholars to use the term (1993), but Muñoz, her former student, specifically and effectively employed it in 1999.

Gearhart's (1979) "The Womanization of Rhetoric" was perhaps the first feminist essay to vehemently disidentify with rhetoric's key principle of persuasion, launching a powerful salvo that declared, "Any intent to persuade is an act of violence" (195):

Of all the human disciplines, [rhetoric] has gone about its task of educating others to violence with the most audacity. The fact that it has done so with language and metalanguage, with refined functions of the mind, instead of with whips or rifles does not excuse it from the mindset of the violent. (195)

Gearhart's disidentification with rhetoric's long-held transactional goal decouples successful rhetoric with winning, dominating, conquering only, for

Communication can be a deliberate creation or co-creation of an atmosphere in which people [...] if and only if they have the internal basis for change, may change themselves. [...] With this understanding we can begin to operate differently in all communicative circumstances, particularly those wherein *learning* and *conflict encounter* take place. (198)

For Gearhart, authentic change happens only from within – not from an outside force, not from a rhetor. Hers is a hopeful transaction, one that recognizes the persuasive power of a self-to-self exchange that disidentifies with tradition.

Echoing Gearhart, Foss and Griffin (1995) offer another disidentifying response to rhetoric's "persuasive, often violent, influential power":

Although we believe that persuasion is often necessary, we believe an alternative exists that may be used in instances when changing and controlling others is not the rhetor's goal; we call this rhetoric *invitational rhetoric*. (5)

For Foss and Griffin, invitational rhetoric is a natural outgrowth of feminist rhetorical theory, relying as it does on such feminist principles as equality, immanent value, and self-determination as a means to create a mutually informing relationship.

Anzaldúa's (1981) "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to 3rd World Women Writers" provides another example of disidentification:

Dear mujeres de color, companions in writing—

I sit here naked in the sun, typewriter against my knee trying to visualize you. Black woman huddles over a desk in the fifth floor of some New York tenement. Sitting on a porch in south Texas, a Chicana fanning away mosquitos and the hot air, trying to arouse the smoldering embers of writing. Indian woman walking to school or work lamenting the lack of time to weave writing into your life. Asian American, lesbian, single mother, tugged in all directions by children, lover or ex-husband, and the writing. (165)

In her letter (excerpted here), Anzaldúa disidentifies with traditional rhetorical tutelage and deliveries, embracing her purposeful, radical position in the margins as well as the marginalized lives of her audience.

Finally, bell hooks² politicizes her disidentification with traditional theories of masculinist rhetoric and civility, linking herself, instead, with feminist theories of speaking back, speaking out, and speaking up. Like Anzaldúa's, hooks's (1994) rhetorical feminism encourages everyone to embrace their agency, regardless of their positionalities, regardless of civility, which for too long has served to mask "white fragility." For hooks, the goal is *not* civility, it is change, so she speaks *out* against the racism that separates white women from women of color and speaks *back* to white women whose "inability to listen to black women [...] impedes feminist progress" (1994: 102):

Many of the black women who were actively engaged with feminist movement were talking about racism in a sincere attempt to create an inclusive movement, one that would bring white and black women together. We believe that true sisterhood would not emerge without radical confrontation, without [...] discussion of white female racism and black

² Bell hooks does not capitalize her name.

female response. [...] Most white women dismissed us as “too angry,” refusing to reflect critically on the issues raised. By the time white women active in the feminist movement were willing to acknowledge racism, accountability, and its impact on the relationships between white women and women of color, many black women were devastated and worn out. We felt betrayed; white women had not fulfilled the promise of sisterhood. (1994: 102–3)

With her marginalized audience, hooks disidentifies with notions of civility, of getting along. She shares with them a sense of betrayal and exhaustion. Rhetorical feminism means speaking out about these kinds of issues, and together rhetorical feminists do just that.

The value of disidentification is one of stepping back and evaluating what “is” – the ideology that prevents what “should be,” which is the authentic province of rhetoric, and of hope. When Aristotle (1984) tells us that “men have a sufficient natural instinct for what is true,” he is encouraging rhetoricians to strive to bring everyone to the truth, to what “should be” in a democracy (I.1.15). Disidentification allows a reconceptualization of acceptable rhetorical practices within a true democracy that respects Others.

All the disidentifying women I’ve mentioned so far maintain a focus on the rights, needs, and values of marginalized Others. Rhetorics aimed at, or arising from, marginalized Others are most often dismissed by mainstream rhetoricians, perhaps because these rhetorics don’t meet the criteria of what Sarah Hallenbeck calls the “sanctioned narrative” of a public-sphere rhetorical transaction (2012: 9). Whatever the reason for their relegation to the margins of history, politics, and leadership, the rhetorics of marginalized should not be ignored, for they hold transformative potential for their practitioners as well as for the rest of us, whether we are part of the white, straight, Christian majority or not. We need to listen to, read, and cite the rhetorics of Others, these purposeful uses of inclusive rather than exclusive language.

For example, Audre Lorde admonishes us to remember our responsibility to marginalized people, regardless of our position (1993):

Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society’s definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference – those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older – know that *survival is not an academic skill*. It is learning how [...] to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. *For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house*. (1984: 112, original emphasis)

Hooks, too, always reaches for those on the margins by using down-to-earth language and homely anecdotes to grapple with thorny sociocultural issues, such as the aforementioned racism that separates white women and women of color. She also contributes to rhetorical feminism by closing the traditional distance between rhetor and audience, purposefully using “we” and “our” to place herself within her marginalized black audience where she shares their sense of betrayal, exhaustion, yet hope for the future. Writing as she does in the spirit of what I am calling rhetorical feminism, hooks is continually amazed

that there is so much feminist writing produced and yet so little feminist theory that strives to speak to women, men and children about the ways we might transform our lives. [...] Where can we find a body of feminist theory that is directed toward helping individuals integrate feminist thinking and practice into daily life? (1994: 70)

For hooks, the purpose of our theories should be the transformation of people’s lives, to help those in the center, but especially those in the margins, to hope for and realize a different way of living.

Foss and Griffin’s accessible explanation of invitational rhetoric also reaches those on the margins, where it could fulfill hooks’s hope for a feminist theory that could be practiced in daily life:

Invitational rhetoric constitutes an invitation to the audience to enter the rhetor’s world and to see it as the rhetor does. [...] Ideally, audience members accept the invitation offered by the rhetor by listening to and trying to understand the rhetor’s perspective and then presenting their own. When this happens, rhetor and audience alike contribute to the thinking of an issue so that everyone involved gains a greater understanding of the issue in its subtlety, richness, and complexity. (1995: 5)

Foss and Griffin’s belief in the generative qualities of an invitational rhetoric that is dialogic and mutually transformative illustrates their hope for the power of rhetorical transactions – academic and everyday

alike. There is a rhetorical feminist practice that can lead us deeper into the margins and allow us to carry new knowledge back into the mainstream. After all, a fundamental incentive for learning from Others is so we can hear, acknowledge, and benefit from their experience of reality.

Authentic dialogue, coalition, and collaboration constitute the fourth feature of rhetorical feminism. An early version of this concept is Gearhart's reimagining of the conventional contract between the rhetor and audience. Rhetorical transactions should be collaborative, negotiable, and based on a willingness "on the deepest level to yield his/her position entirely to the other(s)" (1987: 199). Anzaldúa's choice of a letter to Third World women writers ("Dear mujeres de color, companions in writing") provides an expansive preview of how dialogue and collaboration could energize rhetorical practice, for unlike the monologic finished speech, her letter initiates dialogic connection and invites response among her readers and herself:

How hard is it for us to *think* we can become writers, much less *feel* and *believe* that we can. What have we to contribute, to give? Our own expectations condition us. Does not our class, our culture as well as the white man tell us writing is not for women such as us? (1981: 166, original emphasis)

Most apparent of all in this exchange is Anzaldúa's commitment to hope that these women of color will write, get things written, despite evidence to the contrary.

Toward these ends of establishing dialogue, maybe even collaboration, Foss and Griffin ask us to speak in ways that convey our point of view to our audience, until they understand (not necessarily agree with) us and then listen to our audience until we understand them. From these dialogue-driven understandings, we might coalesce to get things done. A coalition allows groups to speak out and act together rhetorically – despite their different agendas, experiences, and politics. We rhetorical feminists must continue to try to forge some means of working together, some shared albeit essentialized identity – across generations, differences, identities, and rhetorics.

Feminist cyborg scholar Donna Haraway insists that the best thinking is done collectively, slowly, through dialogic engagement:

There is a strategic use to speaking the same idiom as the people you are sharing the room with. You craft a good-enough idiom so you can work on something together. I go with what we can make happen in the room together. And then we go further tomorrow. (2019)

Haraway's suggestion of "speaking the same idiom as the people in the room" carries weight – and consequence, for a rhetoric valuing vernaculars, emotions, and personal experience is too often considered to be weak, sloppy, even feminine (or bad). Emotion has long been dismissed in argument and testimony as a sign of unpredictable passion, untrustworthiness, weakness, and femininity (in other words, inferiority). In their collaboration, Gilligan and Richards write, "When reason is gendered masculine and emotion feminine," it becomes challenging for men to respect their feelings and [for] women to believe they are rational beings (2018: 6). Gilligan builds on her groundbreaking 1982 thesis that the "different voice" – the voice that joins rather than separates thought from emotion – is actually the authentic human voice, the voice of rhetorical feminism.

Theorist Ellen Gorsevski also moves away from a steady focus on the logos-driven rhetor, whose single purpose has been to wield logic (or reason) to change someone else. She extends the concept of rhetorical feminism by showcasing the advantages of what she calls "peaceful persuasion," which values understanding, emotions, experiences, and insights, components that Gorsevski aligns with the democratic ideal of "influence exerted in the public sphere for the good of all" (2004: 50). However inarticulate they may be, she writes, "involuntary bodily and emotional expressions of frustration, anger, and fear or joy, hope, and kinship cannot be dismissed as outcasts of the rhetorical canon" (2004: 157).

The authentic voice of rhetorical feminism, which combines reason, emotion, vernaculars, and experience, speaks to a hopeful future of inclusive rhetorical practices that establish authentic connections with people like us, but especially with those who are not.

An emphasis on understanding rather than persuasion underpins much of rhetorical feminism, surfacing as it does in each of its features, explaining, as it does, the value of hope, of listening to and speaking from the margins, of engaging as equals in dialogue and collaborations, and of developing authentic, even if provisional relationships – all the features I’ve mentioned so far. To strategize among and across differences, people need rhetorical relationships that emphasize some measure of Burkean identification and assume (as Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca would have them) the existence of “intellectual contact” (1982: 14). The goal of rhetorical feminist transactions must be that of understanding if ever people – across all subject positions – can hope to coalesce.

Rather than delivering a tattoo of claims powerful enough to influence (if not overpower) an audience, a rhetorical feminist initiates a multiphased process of understanding, allowing time for all sides to listen, keep silent, consider, and weigh. It’s the kind of often slow process of mutual consideration and equal participation that we Americans rarely witness in the public arena, for coming to an understanding rarely makes our evening news or Sunday morning talk shows. Instead, we see the opposite: combative, cross-talking, name-calling, exaggerated, argue fests. Nope, things don’t look good at all. Still, understanding is my hope for rhetorical exchanges.

As the basis for authentic understanding, many rhetorical feminists are also demonstrating the transactional success of alternative rhetorical deliveries, especially those long considered feminine, such as rhetorical listening and productive silence. Rhetorical feminists watch for these deliveries, for they realize that there is meaning in silence just as there is meaning in listening. As rhetorical arts, silence and listening can deploy power; they can defer to power. It all depends (Glenn 2004, Ratcliffe 2005).

Separately and together, Krista Ratcliffe and I have given over big chunks of our careers to the study of rhetorical listening and productive silence as sites of invention, delivery, and, ironically, voice. Resounding with much more meaning than the most-often-presumed passivity, obedience, agreement, or boredom, both silence and listening serve as essential components of persuasion, understanding, invitation, and deliberation – all features of rhetorical feminism. What better way to demonstrate interest in another’s ideas, arguments, and life than to listen carefully? What better way to reflect calmly on an issue, think through a solution, or compose a response than to remain silent?

Rhetoric has long been the art of finding things out and getting them across, and silence and listening serve both those functions. They also represent a major feminist challenge to the presumption that verbal persuasion is rhetoric’s sole means of delivery, sole goal. Silence and listening open up other sites of rhetorical delivery – and rhetorical invention – as well, sites such as contemplation, reflection, meditation, negotiation, empathy, emotion, and inquiry. Often gendered feminine (i.e., weak or bad), silence and listening provide the spaciousness necessary for the rhetor to acknowledge her own embodied experiences and perspectives as well as those of her counterparts. In these ways, silence and listening entail, as Lipari tells us, “the recognition of another self, the startling presence of another being, a not-self,” and, as such, can ethically enact a “recognition of an unknown other to whom we are bound and about whom we feel care and concern” (2014: 176). As tactics of rhetorical feminism, silence and listening enable us to see differently, to connect through dialogue and mutual dialectic, to enrich and enlarge the rhetorical transaction.

While drafting the manuscript that evolved into *Rhetorical Feminism and This Thing Called Hope* (2018), I initially despaired that feminism has made so little impact on the practices and practitioners of traditional rhetoric – let alone in my country, where “democracy rests on a premise of equal voice as the condition for free and open conversation and debate” (Gilligan and Richards 2018: 2). My country has elected a government (as have many others) that increases military spending while working steadily to “further restrict women’s access to birth control and abortion and protections against sexual assault” (Gilligan and Richards 2018: 92) and to build more concentration camps on our southern borders, where children are routinely separated from their parents. As I write this, the United States president is facing impeachment and calls his critics “conspiracy mongers, racists, and human scum.” In the meantime, my country continues to become openly *undemocratic* in its legislated misogyny, racism, xenophobia, and homophobia (Gilligan and Richards 2018: 2), while our nation’s chief is tweeting and riffing a new “21st-century bottom line for presidential performances” (Collins and Stephens 2019). The *New York Times*

columnist Charles Blow reminds us that our president's agenda has always been about "bending the rest of America, the rest of reality, really, into subordination to the white supremacist patriarchy" and warns us that "history is sitting in judgment" (2019). Before his recent death, respected civil-rights activist Elijah Cummings begged the "American people to pay attention to what is going on. If you want to have a democracy intact for your children, and your children's children, and generations yet unborn, we've got to guard this moment. [...] This is our watch" (2019).

No, things don't look good at all – but still I hope. Hope is more important than ever at this historical moment.

It's a good thing that rhetorical feminists have anchored their work in hope, for at a time of deep divisions, practitioners of rhetorical feminism have been able to coalesce across sometimes very great differences. In a deliberate turn from proof-driven logic, persuasion, and domination, these rhetors show us how to remain open to diversity; to challenge to our beliefs; to change either alone or with our audience; and to realize opportunities for coalescing and understanding.

Just think of Code Pink, against US-funded wars; Women in Black, against wars of any kind; One Billion Rising, which strives to eradicate violence against girls and women; Baring Witness, a global network of anti-war protesters; the Liberian Women in White, the first Christian-Muslim women's alliance that helped end Liberia's long civil war; Black Lives Matter, founded in response to the repeated killings of black men by police officers; the 2017 Women's March on Washington, a nonviolent protest march declaring that women's rights are human rights; the Me Too movement, which supports survivors of sexual abuse, assault, and harassment; Say Her Name, which calls attention to police violence against black women, girls, and femmes; and the black-inspired #YouOkSis, which calls on people to intervene in street harassment situations by engaging with the victim (Glenn 2018).

These are occasions of solidarity, despite differences, despite anger and frustration – these are occasions rooted in hope. All these rhetorical feminist embodiments acknowledge that feminist visions of our rhetorical future have not yet been realized. Therefore, I continue to focus on the hopefulness of the rhetorical feminist project at the same time I address the very real difficulties that continue to keep us at odds. Yes, I hope.

I could go on to write of the rhetorical feminism of Others, rhetors who can be found if we do the kinds of pioneering work that feminists, rhetoricians, and linguists are doing so well. Reading and citing the scholarship of the unfamiliar not only demonstrate the politics of citation but help us develop new ways of being rhetorical, ways that become part of our ever-expanding rhetorical and linguistic repertoires. I could write more about moving into our rhetorical future, but I want to move into my conclusion.

Rebecca Solnit assures us, "Ideas at first considered outrageous or ridiculous or extreme" (ideas rooted in the rhetorical power of feminism, for instance) "gradually become what people think they've always believed. How the transformation happened is rarely remembered, [...] but it recalls that power comes from [...] the margins, that our hope is in the dark around the edges, not the limelight of center stage" (2016: xvi). Indeed, rhetorical feminism does reside in the margins, but that's also where hope and power reside.

As I've mentioned already, ours is a time of political unrest, a time when, as Gilligan and Richards remind us, "the Trump agenda seems to determined not to care about the future, to dispense with health care, to end efforts to protect the environment, to cut the budget for education, to risk nuclear warfare," and to disparage countries, leaders, peoples, and colleagues who (according to him) don't deserve to be taken seriously (2018: 35–6). Blow describes the Trump message as a "white supremacist mantra" (2019). Thus, our political present seems to be exclusively white, nationalist, masculinist, and toxic. Yet I hope for a tomorrow in which the voices of *all* our citizens are encouraged and heard; when the goal of democratic debate, deliberation, and dissent is shared commitment; and when the political, scholarly, and social participation and influence of Others is a mere extension of their equality.

I may be hopeful, but I am not naive. There are days that I look at the evidence and say, "It doesn't look good at all." But following West, I "make a leap of faith *beyond* the evidence." No matter what, I remain anchored in the knowledge that rhetoric – the spoken, written, unspoken, and embodied – is an endlessly pliable human art, one that always carries within it the potential to be realized in *eudaimonia*, the greatest good for all human beings. And feminist interventions into that art provide opportunities for

new ways of being rhetorical, fresh ways for demonstrating understanding, sharing power, and realizing hope. Achieving these goals is the urgent and ongoing work of activists, scholars, rhetors, and citizens everywhere, all over the world.

Those of us working toward linguistic and rhetorical equity want to create possibilities for a world that is rounder, more humane, and more future-oriented. After all, when all is said and done, our rhetorical prowess isn't about our wins or our lack thereof; rather, it is about our movement between divisions, with our arms out, changing others' lives at the same time they change ours, making the connections the count, making the small changes that can transform hope into a future, a place of *eudaimonia* for us all. Influential political voice Marianne Williamson continues to remind us of our moral compass, about our need to care for vulnerable children, to seek economic and criminal justice, to repair the earth, pay reparations for historical wrongs, provide people with health care and education, release people from undeserved economic burdens, and balance military preparedness with the waging of peace (2019). Though unsuccessful politically, Williamson has proved to be an influence morally, reminding us that it's our conscience that leads us to do these things.

We need to work together, to imagine and shape the world we all want to share; to work for the good of a world that none of us may ever know but that our children and grandchildren might gladly enter. Working toward *eudaimonia* is just the kind of work we linguists, rhetoricians, scholars, and teachers can do so well.

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