CoR Workshop 3: Ethos and Identification (14th March 2018)
University of Glasgow/Novotel Glasgow

Introduction to the Network (Henriette van der Blom and Alan Finlayson)

1. Henriette van der Blom is a Lecturer in Ancient History at the University of Birmingham and is the Principal Investigator for the Crisis of Rhetoric network. Van der Blom's research on Cicero led her to think more broadly about political speech, which resulted in the establishment of the Crisis of Rhetoric network. Alan Finlayson is a Professor in Political and Social Theory at the University of East Anglia and is the Co-Principal Investigator for the Crisis of Rhetoric network. His research analyses how people think and communicate about politics, and uses rhetoric to understand what political actors are doing.

2. The Crisis of Rhetoric workshops encourage the audience to participate in the discussions and to help generate lessons. The theme of the third workshop (in a series of six) was "ethos and identification", which assessed the meaning of ethos and the ways in which political orators can use ethos and character to created identity with their audience and to persuade their audience. This workshop built on the findings of the first and second workshop. Summaries of these workshops can be found on the network website: www.birmingham.ac.uk/cor

Session 1: Ethos in political rhetoric in ancient Rome (Karl Hölkeskamp and Henriette van der Blom)

3. Karl Hölkeskamp is Professor of Ancient History at the University of Cologne (Germany). His research focuses on political cultures of ancient Greece and Rome with a particular attention to oratory, political structures and institutions, performance of political rituals and the space in which political activity takes place. Henriette van der Blom has been presented under 1.

4. Karl Hölkeskamp presented the ways in which a Roman orator in the republican-period (mainly 2nd-1st century BC) could use, create and manipulate collective identities through speeches to soldiers and to the Roman people in the popular assembly. Using the example of Julius Caesar addressing his soldiers as *Quirites* ('citizens') rather than *milites* ('soldiers') or *commilitones* ('fellow soldiers'), Hölkeskamp explained how Caesar through this one word discharged his soldiers from military service and thereby symbolically severed the special bond of mutual reliance, loyalty, and trust between himself as general and his soldiers. Through re-identifying the soldiers as citizens, Caesar used a 'rhetoric of address' to create a new relationship between himself, the soldiers and the state.

5. The word *Quirites* was the formal address of the Roman citizens in the formal and informal assemblies in Rome (*comitia* and *contio*). By addressing the citizens as citizens, the orator was also making his audience part and partner in a community of shared identity and values which we can summarise as 'Romanness'. In the *contio* (which can mean the meeting, the audience and even the speech delivered), the orator could create communities through his 'rhetoric of emphatic address': in

a language where the subject is built into the verb, the use of personal pronouns such as 'I', 'you', 'we' in Latin meant that a strong emphasis was placed on the person or group, which in turn created shared communities or distance: 'I' will do this for 'you' ('rhetoric of asymmetrical relation') because 'I' am concerned about and do can something to better 'your' welfare; or, 'we' are all Roman citizens, caring about the same things. Through these explicit pronouns, the Roman orator addressing the people could claim the role of leadership and guidance based on his rank, status and knowledge but also claim a shared concern and future.

6.   Some Roman orators also dared to rebuke the audience, putting them in their place: Publius Cornelius Scipio Nasica (consul in 138 BC, and *pontifex maximus*, a priestly position) delivered a speech against a popular bill on distribution of grain designed to alleviate a grain shortage and rising prices, and he allegedly argued in front of the people: 'Be silent, *Quirites*, I ask you. I understand better than you what is expedient for the Republic', and he apparently got his way. What made this obviously patronising, even offensive, address possible was that Nasica appealed to the shared conviction that all Romans should work towards the best interests of the *res publica* – the shared community of Roman citizens. Roman orators could operate with a range of rhetorical addresses: the rhetoric of inclusion ('we'), exclusion ('him there', 'they'), 'asymmetrical address' ('I' and 'you'), which all in some ways reflected and reproduced the social hierarchy of Roman society.

7.   The medium was always part of the message and the *contio* so much more than speech: the location in the Roman Forum, the surrounding temples, senate house and statues of famous Romans of the past, the sheer act of standing in front of the Roman people, and the adherence or not to the audience expectations of the orator played a major part in the delivery of the message. A *contio* speech, like any speech, was a performance and a ritual which reproduced and recalibrated notions about what it meant to be Roman and about the orator himself.

8.   Henriette van der Blom spoke about Aristotle's discussion of 'ethos', by which he mostly meant the speaker's presentation of his own character. In the Athenian law courts and political assemblies, speeches were often written by speechwriters for a client or litigant, and therefore the speech writer (logographer) had to make sure that the speech suited the character of the person delivering it. Although it was uncommon at Rome to have your speech written by another person, there are examples of this and Quintilian's rhetorical handbook from ca. AD 100 includes guidance on how to tailor a speech to the character of the speaker.

9.   In the Roman republican world, ethos was more complex. In the court room, the Roman advocate had to think about his own character (the orator was almost always a 'he' in the Roman context), the character of the client, the opportunity for damaging the credibility of the prosecutor or of a hostile witness, and the character of other persons (within or outside of the courts) whose characters were relevant to the case in some way. In the senate and popular assembly, there were also multiple aspects of 'ethos' to consider: the speaker's, the other speakers', the audience's collective identity, and the wider audience later hearing about the

event.

10.   The element of ethos/character/identification was highly important in Roman oratory because in political speeches, each politician represented himself and not a party (although sometimes he did seem to adhere to some form of ideology). Building up and nurturing a public character or public image was crucial for all politicians but especially for those coming from a family not previously engaged in politics. One example was Cicero who was a so-called 'new man', really a nobody, but who created a public career for himself by making himself known as a great advocate in the courts through brilliant oratory and constant attention to public image. Even for politicians of the establishment, public character was significant because it could help make the politician known to the electorate and it could promote him as a credible and trustworthy political magistrate. Research by Henriette van der Blom has shown that oratory was one of several factors for career success in republican Rome, but that the crucial factor was a credible public persona.

11.   A credible public persona is crucial today as well. In the summer of 2014, Ed Miliband (then Labour Party leader) attempted to present himself as authentic by positioning himself against a 'showbiz' culture causing political disillusionment. He said that he was not from 'central casting', suggesting that he was the real thing. Miliband got it wrong because you do not get more popular by speaking about who you are but rather by showing it, by displaying a credible 'ethos'. Even teams around top politicians can fail in their advice.

12.   What makes ethos so important is that it is the only one of the three so-called rhetorical 'proofs' – *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos* – to be pervasive in all parts of any speech and included in all the steps to prepare and deliver a speech.

13.   Roman republican orators tried to create a shared sense of identity with their audience, sometimes by referring to an already shared cultural identity or memory into which the orator could position himself. For example, through reference to a historical figure or event, a politician could attempt to associate himself or the present discussion with any positive or negative connotation of the historical figure or event. We can also see this in modern political rhetoric when, for example, David Cameron shortly before the EU referendum in June 2016 was unhappy with being called a '21st century Neville Chamberlain' by the audience in the TV debate programme 'BBC Question Time'. Cameron responded by comparing himself with Winston Churchill fighting for democracy and freedom. The difficulty of using grand historical examples to support your point is that the audience might not agree with your comparison or might emphasise the distance between you and the exemplar.

14.   Ethos and identification is not easy to create, build up and maintain. It necessitates deep and detailed knowledge of the audience addressed, but also of how the audience already perceives the speaker and how any self-presentation might fit with that perception. It is possible to shift an existing public image, but usually only slowly and gradually, unless the speaker is suddenly known for a

universally positive or negative action – such as heroic or criminal acts. But a public image must always be nurtured and this is where the Roman experience is so useful: in a society in which speech and oral communication was central to public communication, Roman oratory provides a marvellous test case and point of comparison with modern political speech, also when it comes to ethos.

15.   The discussion following the presentations included consideration of the Roman *contio* as an oratorical space without voice amplification but room for up to about 6000 people. There was also some discussion of the democratic (thus seemingly non-hierarchical) context of British politics in which the political orator has to display individuality as well as a sense of equality with the audience, and the ways in which the skilled orator can balance out the tension between these two through the successful display of ethos. Another point was that the populist politician often presents themselves as similar to the audience but also as more than the audience, providing the audience with the possibility to become someone on par with the politician in the future. The discussion then focused on oratory as performance as the only way to explain its effectiveness because the audience becomes 'co-actors' (drama studies), with the example of the American constitution including set occasions for speech ('State of the Union address') and American culture including speech occasions in school and local communities. An element of this performance is when people without votes get a voice through public spectacle, as sometimes happened at political speeches before full franchise when the disenfranchised (men) might heckle the party leader at his speech, or at the Roman circus and theatre in the imperial period where common people could shout out towards the emperor. A final discussion point was the way in which modern media and recording of speech has limited the freedom of political orators to move away from previous performances, because the internet remembers. Nevertheless, the human capacity for remembering and passing down memories has always imposed some limitations on public figures.

Session 2: Constructions of ethos in contemporary British politics (John Gaffney)

16.   John Gaffney is Professor of Politics and Co-director of the Aston Centre for Europe Research, Politics and International Relations, Aston University. He works on political rhetoric in the interplay between political science, literary criticism and drama criticism, and he has studied both British and French political cultures.

17.   John Gaffney focused his talk on the definition of ethos as 'character' and the various aspects of 'character' when understood as the French *personage*: character as deployed or revealed, ethos as the character of the speaker and – at the same time – as a character within the narrative in the speech, the development/change in a character over time, and character as rhetorical performance as well as through absence/presence and received/perceived character. He also discussed the use of literary criticism and drama criticism to understand the function of character in storytelling, with the character both telling the story and becoming a protagonist within the story.

18. Gaffney argued that we should not look for a distinction between 'real' and imagined character traits, because what is seen is real to the beholder. Max Weber's dictum on charisma has been unhelpful, he argued, because taken too literally: rather, charisma is not to be found in the (inborn) character but rather in the performance itself; it is produced by speaker, speech and audience.

19. Introducing 'stereotype' as a neutral term to better unpack what character is and means, Gaffney argued that clever orators can use stereotypes productively to convey messages about themselves and others, such as John F. Kennedy's self-presentation as a relaxed, yet presidential, man who was also a modern husband and father. Another example is British Prime Minister Theresa May whose public character upon becoming PM was rooted in a narrative about herself (the vicar's daughter, Home Office Secretary), and was developed when she declared her candidacy for Party leader and, having become PM, in her speech outside no. 10 Downing Street. Yet, when she announced the general election in 2017, she had no narrative about the country, and the one she was provided with (the party manifesto, written by the same Nick Timothy who had written her accession speech) did not work with her public character. This allowed Jeremy Corbyn to offer an alternative narrative and steal the focus.

20. The discussion following the presentation included consideration of stereotypes (archetypes) as a potentially set number which could be catalogued, but also that these limit politicians (especially female politicians who seem to have a smaller and more pejorative range to choose from). There was also discussion of the concept of 'character' in ancient history writing and biography (on which there is much scholarship) and whether or not a person's character was considered fixed, and of stereotypes compared with clichés, 'dormant metaphors' (Perlman), and myth (and mythopoeia) . The good orator can change register within a speech, can construct a narrative to fit their public character, and can adjust the character to the genre of speech (deliberative, forensic, epideictic – including praise and blame). May constructed a pre-Thatcher nostalgic Britain in her no. 10 speech, but could not carry it through in the following speeches. The reason why stereotypes/myth works is that human beings like being told stories because they function as cognitive shortcuts and as moral dramas offering the choice between two (e.g. May's versus Corbyn's stereotypes). Academics need to examine the plots of these stories to better understand the underlying messages of politicians. The problem is that the world is more complex now and there are no longer easily understood hierarchies to fit into or narratives to identify with. It was argued at Workshop 1, that great oratory is created only at moments of crisis, but why has the crisis of Brexit not created great oratory?

Session 3: Philosophies of ethos (Sophia Hatzisavvidou)

21. Sophia Hatzisavvidou is Lecturer in Politics at the University of Bath. Her research focuses on political rhetoric and communication, she has worked on rhetorical 'ethos' in historical perspective and is currently carrying out a Leverhulme project on environmental rhetoric and political communication.

22.   Sophia Hatzisavvidou discussed the history of the concept of *ethos*, starting with the ancient poets Homer and Hesiod (both ca. 8th-7th century BC) and ending with the modern philosopher Heidegger. Both Homer and Hesiod, she argued, use the word *ethos* in plural (*ethea*) as 'where and how one dwells', and both individuals and groups can be agents of *ethos*. Homer also uses the plural *ethea* to describe the places in which animals live and are safe, while Hesiod talked about *ethea* for humans as towns or homelands. In Archaic Greek, *ethea* can refer to character but can also be taught. The 4th century BC historian Herodotus talks about *ethē* as custom or shared social practices, while 5th century sources use *ethē* as the characteristics of a person and as where and how you demonstrate your relationship with the values of the community.

23.   For the 4th century BC philosopher Plato, the city state (the *polis*) has its own *ethos* and the *polis* grows out of its people's character; it is bound to its laws. That way, the art of politics becomes the crafting of souls. Plato's pupil, Aristotle, is the first (known) to explicitly connect *ethos* with language because, he argues, *ethos* is produced through speech and is connected with the virtues of the community.

24.   Modern-day thinkers have left out the location element from the meaning of ethos (Bourdieu, Foucault). But Heidegger returns to pre-Socratic thinking (Heraclitus) and its focus on dwelling for the meaning of ethos (his 'Letter on Humanism', 1946). Heidegger argued that ethics concerns being with one another ('mit einander'), understanding the way we behave in relation to others as our ethos; he used a fragment of Heraclitus to argue that ethos is a way to describe how we relate to the open world. We can use this to better understand ethos, also in the political world.

25.   The discussion following the presentation focused on the element of space and location relating to ethos, and the 'rootedness' of an orator in his communication with his community/audience. In the ancient Greek sources, the polis community separated safe and unsafe space with the city wall, and the community was characterised by its shared values. In modern society, it is less easy to define shared values because our communities have become less local, less hierarchical and less easily defined. Some participants also argued against Heidegger's point about an open society and instead suggested Hans Blumenberg's idea of a democratic society welcoming debate.

26.   The discussion moved towards the actions modern politicians need to take in order to communicate effectively through ethos: they need to try to understand their society's values and then demonstrate (rather than speaking about) these values through their actions, including speech. In order to do so, the politician needs to be both part of the community and outside it so that they can see how the community could be improved. The problem is that we no longer have easily definable societal values because individuals have very different conceptions of their futures.

Closing Discussion and 'Next Steps'

27. The closing discussion focused on identifying key findings of the workshop: 'ethos' related to character, rituals, performative stages/spaces, and whether it is possible to take out the ethical (morals) of ethos. 'Ethos' can mean character, character of the orator, other individuals, his audience and even of the community addressed. 'Ethos' can be seen as a performance or a ritual, for example the ritual of voting following certain rules, traditions and behavioural expectations. It is possible to identify the 'ethos' of the orator/performer and of the protagonist in the narrative told/performed at the same time, but the construction of effective ethos is difficult because of shifting platforms (including modern (social) media). There is a sense that oratorical stages/spaces have decreased over time and that political communication now takes place outside the face-to-face oratorical situation, but it is important to create stages/spaces in which two opposing viewpoints can be debated and the audience can make decisions based on open debate. The 'ethos' of an orator should be made to fit the genre in which they are speaking. It is possible to include the ethical aspect in 'ethos' ('is the speaker a good person?') but this risks creating problems of defining what is ethical and of screening out demagoguery, which is important to study and understand (even if not to condone).

28. The Scottish Independence Referendum 2014 was used as a case study to discuss the elements of what appeared to be a well-argued and open debate on both sides: the informative literature from both sides sent to all Scottish households, the performance of technically high-quality oratory, positive stories told on both sides of the debate, the long-standing rhetorical tradition in Scotland, the element of location/place in the debate which focused on a narrative about the kind of country Scotland should be, a sense of a shared future. By contrast, the debate leading up to the EU Referendum 2016 presented less-engaging literature to households, oratory of a more technically varying quality, positive stories only on the Leave side, did not build on a rhetorical tradition in England, Wales or Northern Ireland, the recent Scottish Independence Referendum and the SNP success at the 2015 General Election as well as a much divided England, Wales and Northern Ireland meant that it was difficult to formulate an engaging narrative about the kind of country the UK should be and indeed a sense of shared future.

29. The discussion could be summarised as: effective ethos connects real people (with a sense of ethos) with a real proposition in a situation where there is a genuine decision to make, one which can be realistically enacted.