Chapter 18

Political rhetoric in Scandinavia

Jens E. Kjeldsen, Christian Kock, & Orla Vigsø

Abstract
Rhetorical research in the three Scandinavian countries has made contributions to the study of political communication, representing approaches that are not often found in research coming from the social sciences or from more systemic, theory-based orientations. Rhetoric, both as an ancient tradition and as a modern discipline, tends to emphasise close study of actual pieces of communication – verbal, visual, or otherwise. This rarely leads to quantitative, generalisable findings, but instead to observations and conceptualisations of phenomena – which may then be studied from quantitative and empirical angles. Often, rhetorical studies will have a normative tilt, based on notions of democracy, deliberation, and the public sphere – often with an eye for malfunctions and possible remedies. A growing literature of studies in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway tend to share some of these characteristics. At the same time, rhetorical scholars in Scandinavia recognise the value of empirical observation and have made contributions of their own in that regard, for example, in the field of reception studies.

Keywords: political debate, speechmaking, political rhetoric, Scandinavia, visual rhetoric

Introduction

Political rhetoric in Scandinavia is characterised by an informal style undergirded by egalitarianism and authenticity. Compared to the ideological style and frequent hostility found in, for instance, the US, Scandinavian politicians' rhetoric is mostly pragmatic, plain, and less polarising – for reasons of national cultures and democratic systems. This goes for traditional genres such as debates and speeches as well as for visual and online communication.

Before we describe this in more detail, we preface our account with remarks on what we might call the epistemology of rhetorical research, in other words, the kinds of insights rhetorical scholars typically seek. Rhetoric is historically

Kjeldsen, J. E., Kock, C., & Vigsø, O. (2021). Political rhetoric in Scandinavia. In E. Skogerbø, Ø. Ihlen, N. N. Kristensen, & L. Nord (Eds.), *Power, communication, and politics in the Nordic countries* (pp. 365–383). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. https://doi.org/10.48335/9789188855299-18

a humanistic discipline emphasising close, qualitative study of texts and other artifacts, considered singly or in small corpora. Such studies typically emphasise observations of significant phenomena that are then described and theorised. Quantitative claims of prevalence, causation, or effect are not typical, but the observations and concepts presented may invite and enable quantitative study. Also, rhetorical work often includes normative perspectives, for example on whether the phenomena observed are conducive to or inimical to a healthy democracy. Thus, rhetorical scholars' research results, while different from typical empirical findings in the social sciences, may inspire and complement them, and conversely.

Most rhetoric researchers in Scandinavia practice rhetorical criticism, analyses of rhetorical practice in political communication, and historical studies (e.g., Berge, 2014a). Their work is generally pragmatic about methodological purity, integrating several theories and methods and combining them with methods adapted from neighbouring fields, such as discourse analysis or linguistic pragmatics. Methods, in any given case, are chosen in order to best answer the research question. Textual analyses focusing on argumentation, ethos, gender, attitudes, or political debate all call for different tools.

Recently, scholars have turned towards work rooted in political science and deliberative theory. They increasingly realise that they not only have distinctive insights to offer on political rhetoric themselves, but also something to learn from disciplines using empirical, systemic, and quantitative approaches.

Scandinavian research differs from contemporary American rhetorical research published in journals such as *Quarterly Journal of Speech* and *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, which generally appears more theoretical and often reflects political engagement on behalf of groups considered disenfranchised or marginalised. Scandinavian rhetoricians usually seek to communicate to a broader audience, even in research journals. This is considered part of a scholarly ethos, but also a public duty. Thus, alongside academic publications, rhetorical scholars regularly discuss political rhetoric in print, broadcast, and online media aimed at general audiences.

This chapter discusses the practice of political rhetoric in use as well as the study of it. We point briefly to some contextual determinants of Scandinavian political rhetoric before highlighting key traits in contemporary practice: egalitarianism, attempted authenticity, and a turn towards populism and increased polarisation. Then follows a short discussion of political rhetoric in different genres. Finally, we highlight a few emerging research trends in the study of political rhetoric in Scandinavia.

The framework for Scandinavian political rhetoric: Media system and political system

The three Scandinavian countries – Sweden, Denmark, and Norway – have closely related languages and cultures and similar political systems (see Chapters 2–6), hence the political rhetoric is rather similar, and that is also true of research fields, objects, and methods (Kjeldsen, 2012; Kjeldsen & Grue, 2011).

The Scandinavian countries are established parliamentary democracies with high levels of social welfare. As elsewhere, political rhetoric is mainly performed in the media, and the media system creates important rhetorical constraints. The Scandinavian media system – with dominant public broadcasters and relatively small populations – has fostered shared national public spheres with a high degree of newspaper reading and dominant public broadcasters. In practice, there is a marked proximity between politicians and the public: politicians, including party leaders, cabinet members, and prime ministers, regularly participate in the public sphere with comments, interviews, and debate pieces, and especially in broadcast political debates.

Because Scandinavian countries have multi-party systems and proportional party representation (see Hopmann & Karlsen, Chapter 11), both "catch-all" rhetoric and bi-partisan hostility is less prevalent than in the "winner-takes-all" systems of the UK and the US. Because Scandinavian voters have several alternative parties to pick from, voters may turn their backs on both the attacker and the attacked. Thus, traditionally, party political polarisation in these countries is low; politics in Scandinavia is generally oriented towards compromise or, if possible, consensus.

The party-centred focus of election campaigns and the collegiality between politicians emphasise the prime minister's character (ethos) and abilities less and the party's policies more. The prime minister routinely meets opponents in public debates or interviews, so he or she tends to – and is expected to – excel at live debate, confidently displaying command of government policy and skilfully countering opponents' arguments. Compared to the US, Scandinavian politicians are in much more direct rhetorical contact with the public, continuously engaged in rhetorical exchanges – with the electorate watching.

The Scandinavian rhetoric of egalitarianism and authenticity

The political rhetoric of Scandinavia – especially in Norway and Denmark – reflects an ideology emphasising egalitarianism and authenticity. We see this in visual rhetoric in print ads (in Denmark; Kjeldsen, 2008), in video adverts (in Norway; Iversen, 2018a), in speechmaking (Johansen, 1999, 2002; Kjeldsen & Johansen, 2011), and online (Krogstad, 2013, 2014). Politicians do not want

to appear as rising above ordinary people. The lowering of the political hero's status reflected in television (e.g., Meyrowitz, 1985), weeklies, and popular culture has made the ethos of "the ordinary" central in political communication. This phenomenon, of course, goes beyond Scandinavia: In the US, for instance, we have witnessed the casual fireside chats of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the colloquial styles of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush. In Denmark and Norway, appearing ordinary and unassuming matters even more. A Danish study of public spokespersons found that in addition to credibility (ethos) and charisma, public communicators were evaluated according to "one-of-us" appeal, subsuming qualities like sensitivity, warmth, folksiness, and capability of admitting mistakes (Hansen & Kock, 2003).

In Norway, Johansen has defined authenticity in political communication as expressing yourself with a "lack of style and form in the traditional sense" (Johansen, 1999: 162; see also Johansen, 2002). Already in 1966, the American social scientist Harry Eckstein described the particular authority and legitimacy of a Norwegian politician, displaying a style still prevalent in Scandinavian politics – especially in Norway and Denmark: Prime ministers "cultivate equality more than primacy" (Eckstein, 1966: 156f). Such observations suggest, we claim, a general Scandinavian appreciation of equality, uniformity, and artlessness in advertising and speeches, television debates, and online presence. We find such rhetoric exemplified in Danish prime minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen's New Year's speech on 1 January 2002, which called out "chartered arbiters of taste who determine what is good and right":

> There are tendencies towards a tyranny of experts, which risks suppressing free popular debate. The population should not put up with the wagging fingers of so-called experts who think they know best. (Rasmussen, 2002)

Print and television ads (Kjeldsen, 2008) depict "ordinary Danes" or something typically "Danish", such as the Danish countryside. Advertisements showing politicians mostly address viewers as equals through eye contact, normal perspective, and small conventional portrait photos, refraining from conspicuous statements or symbols, presenting politicians as friendly, ordinary persons. Compared to France, the UK, or the US, Scandinavian ads lack appeals to leadership capabilities or international experience. Another study suggests that while female French politicians seek to project effortless superiority, their Norwegian counterparts demonstrate conspicuous modesty (Krogstad & Storvik, 2012).

The rhetoric of populism, hostility, and polarisation

While political rhetoric in Scandinavia is generally less hostile and polarised than in many other European countries – and especially the US – the last 20 years

have shown right-wing movements using increasingly hostile and aggressive rhetoric. In Denmark and Norway, populist parties have used anti-elitist and anti-immigration rhetoric since the 1970s. The important year in Sweden was as late as 2010, when the nationalist Sweden Democrats (SD) began morphing from a neo-Nazi organisation and entered parliament with 5.7 per cent of the vote. In 2011, they redefined themselves as a social-conservative nationalist party, reaching 17.5 per cent in 2018. They display strong anti-immigration – often anti-Muslim – rhetoric, especially in less formal communication (e.g., Mral & Oja, 2013).

The growth of SD gave more space in the media for political discourse that had been absent from mainstream media, leading to a general change of tone in debates. SD's representatives engaged freely in offensive generalisations, personal attacks, and confrontations, especially in social media and blogs. SD leaders have denounced and excluded members who use explicitly racist language. At the same time, prominent politicians from the centre and right-wing parties have also adopted a more hostile tone. The distinction between alternative and mainstream media has been blurred, and fake claims, personal attacks, insinuations, and name-calling have become integral parts of much political communication (e.g., Ihlebæk & Nygaard, Chapter 13).

In Denmark, there has also been a slide toward hostile, uninhibited rhetoric about certain population segments and those holding divergent views (Krogh & Zuleta, 2017; Institut for Menneskerettigheder, 2017). Politicians increasingly turn to social media, avoiding independent journalism in favour of direct communication to the public or to carefully targeted segments, using sharp, slogan-like rhetoric, visuals, and mediated oratory.

In tone and rhetorical style – especially in the immigration debate – Norway stands between Denmark and Sweden (Hovden & Mjelde, 2019): Denmark exhibits the harshest rhetoric, Sweden the most restraint (Gripsrud, 2018). In Denmark, new right-wing anti-immigration and anti-Muslim parties have emerged, and in Norway, new right-wing populist news sites take more confrontational political stands, attacking the "elite", the left, and especially Islam (e.g., *Document* and *Resett*). Still, the populist appeals of most Scandinavian parties are subdued compared to European counterparts. Studies have found, for instance, that the traditional high/low distinction and the "bad manner" trait of populism either does not apply, or applies in different ways (Villadsen, 2019).

Studies of online debates (Andersen, 2019, 2020) demonstrate how an issue like immigration facilitates personal engagement and expression, strong emotions, and conflict, but sidelines argumentation and issue-oriented deliberation.

All-out hostility in populist rhetoric is dampened by dominant, shared public spheres. Shaming is notable in debate on moral issues like immigration (Villadsen, 2018). While shaming can function as a society's moral correction of immoral behaviour, it may also suppress deviant views, leading to increased

polarisation. A common response by those shamed for being xenophobic is the populist accusation that the elite supresses ordinary people (Kjeldsen, 2019b). Analyses of rhetorical dissent, shaming, and hostility have shown that the victims of such attacks often have the rhetorical agency to fight back (Villadsen, 2017). Mral (2019), for instance, demonstrates how rhetorical attempts are used to silence women through verbal threats in social media, but also demonstrates how women's resistance strategies – showing outspoken but calm and demonstrative personal deportment – can discredit attackers.

The main genres

In general, the most explored political genres in rhetorical studies in Scandinavia have traditionally been speechmaking, broadcast debates, and visual party rhetoric. As in other parts of the world, online rhetoric and social media communication are now becoming dominant.

Political speechmaking

The study of political speechmaking in Scandinavia has two dominant trends: historical accounts (e.g., Johannesson, 1996; Johansen, 2019) and criticism or case studies of individual speakers or speeches (e.g., Kjeldsen, 2013; Kock & Villadsen, 2017). Since such humanistic studies are interpretive and hermeneutic in nature, reductive accounts of "results" are inappropriate. Analysis provides insight into genres, their rhetorical appeals, and the historical development of speechmaking. Historically, it is clear that political speechmaking has changed in content and even more so in form. With the expansion of broadcast and online media, speeches moved from an oratorical style to a more informal and personal, conversational style (Johansen, 2002; Kjeldsen et al., 2019; Lund, 2020). Political speeches no longer address a live audience exclusively – or even primarily – but rather composite media audiences. Political convention speeches and election night speeches, for instance, have become staged media events celebrating the party and the party leader, somewhat shifting attention from party and policy to leader and ethos (Lund, 2020). Traditional political speechmaking has converged with contemporary media forms, image staging, and visual rhetoric.

While political speeches are traditionally expected to be deliberative (weighing arguments for and against issues), research shows that they often do not primarily deliberate, but deal with praise and blame, promoting and negotiating shared values: they are epideictic (Kjeldsen, 2019a; Kjeldsen, 2020; Lund & Tønnesson, 2017; Tønnesson & Sivesind, 2015; Vatnøy, 2015).

Most studies of speechmaking have been historical. While such studies have often focused on "great speeches by great men" (e.g., Jørgensen, 2009),

scholarship has also highlighted female leaders in political movements (Mral, 1999, 2013; Mral et al., 2009; von der Lippe & Tønnesson, 2013). In Sweden, The Labour Movement and Language project mapped out the development of a specific rhetoric, with influences from both foreign agitators and domestic religious movements (e.g., Johannesson, 1996; Åsard, 1996).

Argumentation studies have played an important role in the study of political rhetoric and speechmaking. Studies have examined the "between-the-lines" argument (Sigrell, 2001), demonstrated the importance of narratives (Dahlin, 2008), scrutinised uses of implicature and innuendo (Kock, 2016), and investigated situations where politicians face an internal but divided audience (Bruhn, 2018). Such studies point to the different strategies used by politicians in order to persuade and meet the demands of the situation, especially the contexts – ranging from the party-internal opposition via the parliamentary situation to large scale international politics.

In general, studies of political speech genres show that the political has always been an integrated part of epideictic genres, and conversely. Political speechmaking can be seen as rhetorical seismographs for disputes and disagreements that simultaneously divide the nation and hold it together. Even in an age of the Internet and social media, speechmaking offers a unique rhetorical possibility for the public to look to leaders for direction, especially in times of distress and confusion (e.g., Johansen, 2019; Kjeldsen, 2020; Lund & Tønnesson, 2017; Vatnøy, 2015; Villadsen, 2020).

Visual political rhetoric: Posters, advertisements, and online communication

Another prominent object of Scandinavian rhetorical studies is visual political rhetoric. Mostly, this research deals with advertisements, posters, and online communication.

A genre more prominent in Scandinavia – especially Sweden and Denmark – than in, for instance, the US, is the election poster. Parties use posters in public spaces and print advertisements in newspapers. Studies have noted a general absence of negative campaigning in Scandinavia, placing the countries in a special position. A general tendency is increased personalisation (Håkansson et al., 2014), but means of depicting the ethos of candidates stay within a narrow range (Vigsø, 2017), creating a conformity which may add to a public weariness of political campaigns. A comparative study of political ads in Germany and Sweden (Holtz-Bacha & Johansson, 2017) shows that positive appeals dominate the poster campaigns in both countries, using "soft sell" rhetoric for indirect critique and implied comparisons rather than direct attacks.

Political print ads are also extensively studied in Scandinavia (e.g., Carlson et al., 2017; Dahl, 2015; Johansson & Odén, 2013; Kjeldsen, 2008). A study

of Danish ads emphasises Scandinavian egalitarianism and authenticity (Kjeldsen, 2008): the design is typically plain, often featuring shortlists, contrasts, and antitheses, seeing politics as a matter of simple choices. This aligns with a "documentary" style, apparently presenting reality unadorned. Conspicuous artfulness appealing to voters' decoding abilities, as in commercial advertising, would contradict "plain talk" egalitarianism and risk being regarded as manipulative – a visual equivalent of a speaker flaunting their eloquence. Scandinavian politicians seldom gain by portraying themselves as brilliant, proudly competent, or even visionary.

Similar trends are apparent in political television advertising and political online communication. Political television advertising is prohibited in Denmark and Norway. It was prohibited in Sweden as well, until it finally appeared on Swedish terrestrial television for the first time during the 2006 elections, and had its breakthrough with the European Parliament election in 2009 and the general election in 2010 (Johansson, 2017; e.g., Iversen, 2018b). In style, the rhetoric of Swedish political television commercials is similar to that in commercial ads, and it favours the use of humour and irony. As in much of Scandinavian political rhetoric, direct attacks are rare. Instead, "the parties criticize policy consequences of the opposing parties by direct or indirect comparison to highlight their own policy or ideology" (Johansson, 2017: 274).

Other studies look at political video ads shown in movie theatres and videos on party homepages and sites like YouTube and Facebook (e.g., Iversen, 2018a, 2018b). Much of this research suggests that this visual rhetoric in advertising is often epideictic: instead of offering arguments for policies, it displays image and values (Kjeldsen, 2000; Krogstad & Storvik, 2012; cf. Nilsen, 2013). However, research also shows how visual political rhetoric communicates arguments indirectly and perhaps more efficiently, because its implicit ("enthymematic") character involves audiences in the cognitive construction of arguments meant to persuade them (Kjeldsen, 2007, 2015).

Political broadcast debates and interviews

Despite changes in political broadcast debates since the beginning of the 1960s, for years this genre left politicians in charge of the set-up and the principles of participation. Without moderator interference, every speaker could go on undisturbed during their carefully allotted minutes, looking into the camera and appealing directly to viewers at home (Allern, 2011).

This began to change in the 1970s, as control moved from politicians to journalists. The public broadcasting corporations – SVT (Sweden), NRK (Norway), and DR (Denmark) – increasingly curated debate programmes, but not until the mid-1980s did they achieve full control over the most important genre: the party leaders' final election debate.

In Norway, for instance, the use of a stopwatch to ensure that everybody got precisely the same amount of talking time was abandoned in the 1980s. The debates were now divided into distinct themes, with more active questioning by the journalists (Allern, 2011). Such changes were partly caused by the introduction of new commercially funded public channels that broke the broadcasting monopolies in Sweden and Denmark in 1988 and in Norway in 1992. Debates became even more firmly controlled by journalists, and the demand for more entertainment value rose.

One important result of the research in televised political debates – and in political argumentation in general – is the distinction between vote-gathering and vote-shifting (Jørgensen et al., 1994, 1998). Vote-gatherers are ideological, categorical, and polarised, use attention-getting devices reminiscent of popular journalism, and tend to be "telegenic". They tend to be favoured by television and other popular media. Vote-shifting rhetoric, by contrast, is focused, offers specific instantiation, and tends to clearly demarcate claims. Generally, vote-shifters are moderate and polite verbally and nonverbally, less sprightly than vote-gatherers, but more earnest and insistent. Vote-gathering rhetoric seems to be best at winning undecided voters and energising believers; vote-shifting seems better at winning votes from the opposition. The Rhetoric that Shifts Votes project studied 37 televised town hall debates over a period of ten years, finding that debate winners were more likely to be typical vote-shifters. Effective debaters generally use both strategies, but vote-shifting rhetoric tends to be more effective in a bipartisan debate, since votes won from the opposition count twice – down for "them", up for "us".

Unlike the massive Rhetoric that Shifts Votes project, some studies indicate that vote-gathering, image-oriented rhetoric may be more persuasive than issue-oriented rhetoric (Krogstad, 2001). However, more recently, the appeal of vote-shifting rhetoric has been supported by studies demonstrating that a rhetorical style of moderate self-assertion (acclaim) and few, but precise attacks generate the most positive evaluations in the media (Krogstad, 2006). In egalitarian Scandinavia, excessive self-assertion and personal bragging will mostly be viewed negatively. Rhetorical reception studies (see more below) have also supported the power of vote-shifting rhetoric, showing that television audiences become involved when debate participants are allowed to give well-formulated, structured comments (Vatnøy et al., 2020); when debaters heckle and interrupt each other, viewers' attention falters and is drawn away from the argument, towards the politicians' appearance and the programme format (Vatnøy et al., 2020). While moderators and journalists seem to fear prepared and uninterrupted remarks from politicians, the study shows audiences reacting positively to coherent and well-reasoned mini speeches.

In contrast to other kinds of political communication research, studies of rhetoric do not shy away from being normative (e.g., Berge, 2014b). In many

studies, it is an explicit aim that research should not only study how debates, political interviews, and other types of political rhetoric are carried out and what consequences they may have, but rhetorical research should also help improve political and public discourse. Lantz (2013), for instance, proposes an empirically based model for the most useful way to moderate political debate. This normative aspect is also present in a line of research examining how political debates and election interview programmes meet the electorate's need for political information. Studies point to several ways political debates and interviews might improve. One challenge is media bias and differential treatment of participants. There is some evidence indicating that conservative parties are confronted with more critical questions and horse-race speculations (Haug et al., 2010; Vatnøy, 2010). Generally, though, unequal treatment appears to occur most in critical questioning of political incumbents (Svennevig et al., 2014). However, textual analyses indicate that equally important factors are journalistic practices framing the debate climate and the moderators' personal styles (Kamsvåg, 2013; Sandvik, 2016). While international, especially American, research provides some evidence that female politicians both communicate differently and are treated differently than male politicians, studies of the rhetoric of gender in Scandinavia tend to indicate that differences are small or inconsequential (Gomard & Krogstad, 2001; Krogstad, 1999; Mral, 2013; Mral et al., 2009; Sandvik, 2004).

A line of research examines rhetorical practices that mislead, obfuscate debates, and dodge counterarguments (e.g., Andersen, 2016; Kock, 2011a). Among others, Gabrielsen and colleagues (2020) have observed and conceptualised how politicians evade critical questions by means of "shifting" strategies. They identify three subcategories: time-shifts, agent-shifts, and level-shifts. Like much rhetorical research, such studies seek to improve public discourse on behalf of citizens. For example, knowledge of shifting strategies could enable journalists to quickly detect shifts and react appropriately.

Even though research points to a range of challenges, the general picture is that Scandinavian political debates and interviews serve the electorate well in providing both information and clarity about policies. Several studies, for example, suggest that reporters' questioning style has shown slightly less counterproductive aggressiveness in the period from the 1990s to the middle of the 2010s (e.g., Sandvik, 2014; Vatnøy et al., 2016).

In general, rhetorical research demonstrates how hostile rhetoric and personal attacks may undermine public discourse, but the research also contributes to a qualified understanding of why and how reasonable disagreement and agonistic (rather than antagonistic) rhetoric is an essential component of a well-functioning democracy. For example, research by Jørgensen (e.g., 1998, 2011) has conceptualised the genre of public political debate on a speech-act-theoretical and normative basis, emphasising that disagreement is part of the essential nature of debates, while hostility is not.

New directions for rhetorical political research

Recent research in Scandinavian political rhetoric has three notable trends: 1) rhetorical citizenship and deliberation; 2) philosophical understanding of the political; and 3) rhetorical reception.

A dominant trend is a move towards work rooted in political science and deliberative theory. Public debate has always been a central object of study for Scandinavian rhetoricians. The public debates and arguments regarding nuclear power plants and waste disposal in Sweden, for instance, have been analysed by Mral and Vigsø (2013; see also Hansson-Nylund, 2016), as has the communication and press coverage during the Fukushima nuclear accident in Japan, involving a comparison between German and Swedish media. One important aspect of this is the analysis of how public debate develops in relation to the constraints of the situation and the format of the discussion (Vigsø, 2009). Danish scholars have looked at public debate on prostitution as a case study in productive versus unproductive political argumentation (Jørgensen, 2011; Kock, 2011b; Onsberg, 2011). The affinities with work on deliberative democracy is evident in Kock's work (e.g., 2009, 2017), proposing a view of rhetorical argumentation as essentially deliberative: It is centrally concerned with collective action and does not allow for deductive or compelling demonstration of *the* right action to choose. It nevertheless posits rules and requirements for proper arguments in regard to the parameters of "relevance" and "weight", but recognises that these have subjective components. Relevant and weighty reasons regarding some issue may moreover belong to multiple different "dimensions", and hence be "incommensurable", leading to "reasonable disagreement".

In Norway, the rapprochement between political science, media studies, and rhetoric is apparent in the Centre for Political Communication (POLKOM) at the University of Oslo. Many issues addressed there are rhetorical, including questions of power, media, and politics (Ihlen et al., 2015). Ihlen has published extensively on strategic communication, public relations, and framing, among other things, in relation to lobbying, immigration, and environmental issues (e.g., Dan et al., 2019; Ihlen et al., 2015, 2018).

A crosscutting concept developed in recent years thematises "rhetorical citizenship", in other words, the ways citizenship is constituted and enacted not just by legal rights and duties but also discursively. This notion, proposed by Kock and Villadsen (2012, 2014, 2015), is a conceptual frame and invitation to cross-disciplinary work, rather than a theory; however, it has begun to gain currency in academic work in all Nordic countries, as well as among scholars abroad. Among these studies in rhetorical citizenship, Villadsen's (2007, 2013, 2014) close readings of official apologies has revealed how these are potentially powerful forces in shaping social norms and the conditions of citizenship.

A different approach to political rhetoric, representing a more philosophical understanding of the political, uses philosophical theories – including those of Ernst Cassirer, Cornelius Castoriadis, and Slavoj Žižek – and examines several questions such as, What is the political in rhetorical terms? What is the relation between the political and the creation of social meaning? How can we use rhetoric to study the formation of contemporary ideas about social relations? (e.g., Bengtsson, 2019; Buhre, 2019; Rosengren, 2016, 2018; Stagnell, 2020).

Another new direction is rhetorical audience and reception research. This approach aims at studying not only rhetorical text and context, but also how empirical audiences accept, negotiate, or reject political rhetoric (Kjeldsen, 2016, 2018). The approach acknowledges the impact of rhetoric but rejects a simple transmission model of communication. The aim is to understand the interaction between the rhetorical situation, the characteristics of the utterances, and the audience's uptake and negotiation of them. Instead of moving conjecturally from textual traits to assumed effect, reception studies allow researchers to move from response to text and point to rhetorical traits that may have shaped the response. Studies deal with press photographs (Kjeldsen & Andersen, 2018), Facebook (Vatnøy, 2018), political advertising (Iversen, 2018a, 2018b), and television debates (Vatnøy et al., 2020). In Denmark, similar approaches have been used to examine political commentary (Bengtsson, 2018) and how political debate in online media is curated by journalists (Rønlev, 2018).

Conclusion

Describing the varieties of political rhetoric in Scandinavia is not easily done. Sweden, Denmark, and Norway are different countries, with varying rhetorical traditions and styles. However, compared to other countries – and especially the US – these three countries share an informal type of rhetoric undergirded by egalitarianism and authenticity. While the political rhetoric in Scandinavia is certainly confrontational, it is rarely explicitly ideological, hostile, or vile. Instead, it is marked more by a compromising, plain, and pragmatic style that is less polarising, compared with two-party, winner-takes-all political systems. It is probably safe to say that the notion of a public sphere comes to mind more easily when looking at Scandinavian political rhetoric than is the case in large countries like Germany, France, Italy, Britain, or the US.

This goes for the political rhetoric coming from political actors as well as for the academic study of it. Politicians and other political debaters are rhetorically very present in the public eye because they constantly contribute opinion pieces, appear in news programmes and media interviews, and make live public appearances as speakers or debaters. They cannot retain the position they seem to hold in many other countries: as distant figures moving in a

sphere of their own. The media and the public are constantly calling them to account, and they have to respond – which, in turn, has fostered a proliferation of defensive and diversionary techniques such as dodgy answers, parroting of talking points, and so on.

Practically all leading politicians nowadays have blogs, and larger parties have their own media outlets, aiming to have an apparent, ongoing dialogue with the population while evading the scrutiny of the mainstream media. While these are obviously more important than ever in the contemporary situation, it is arguable that over-zealous media monitoring of politicians tends to overemphasise a quasi-forensic approach to political coverage: politicians' alleged wrongdoings, misstatements, or past broken promises may then come to overshadow a more truly deliberative debate about what is to be done in the future.

In rhetoricians' study of political rhetoric – as well as in their public analyses in non-academic outlets – the idea of a public sphere is strongly, while implicitly, present. Rhetorical scholars looking at political rhetoric in their respective countries often more or less explicitly emphasise the potential democratic function and usefulness of their objects of study in an approach more inherently normative than studies more tilted towards political science and most journalistic commentary. There, the emphasis is more often on a purely "rhetor" angle – second-guessing politicians' possible strategic motives for whatever they do or say – and studies within the political science tradition tend to be more quantitative and purely descriptive on a "systemic" level – with hardly any textual analysis and little or no normativity relying on notions of democracy or deliberation. But, if the latter are desiderata in the study of political communication, then it is appropriate and fortunate they are among the contributions rhetorical research aims to provide.

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