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The 4th International Rhetoric Workshop (Borders and Crossroads)

The International Rhetoric Workshop (IRW) is a workshop for scholars of rhetoric to engage in collaborative dialogue about their research with internationally renowned senior scholars. The 4th biennial workshop took place from June 18th to June 20th at the Department of Mass Communication at the University of Dubrovnik in Dubrovnik, Croatia. It was organized around the theme “Borders and Crossroads” and hosted 47 participants whose scholarly work was reviewed by nine mentors. While the majority of participants came from North America and Europe, participants also represented other continents, such as Asia (i.e., China, Kazakhstan, and Lebanon). The participants were an even mix of emerging and established scholars, comprising graduate students up to full professors. Similarly, the planning committee that organized everything was

also composed of PhD students, young scholars, and already-recognized researchers, from the United States, Canada, Poland, Greece, and Croatia, who don't necessarily live, work, or study in those countries only.

The idea for the IRW originated in 2015 and was developed by four academics: Erik Bengtson and Frida Buhre from Uppsala University, David Miguel Molina from Northwestern University, and Robert Topinka from the University of Sussex. The first meeting of the IRW was held in 2016 at Uppsala University in Uppsala, Sweden. Two years later, the IRW was organized by and held at Ghent University in Ghent, Belgium. Due to the COVID pandemic, the 2021 IRW was held online in collaboration with the College of San Luis in San Luis Potosí, Mexico (Andrychowski et al., 2021). Since then, the IRW has received endorsement from rhetorical organizations worldwide, including the Rhetoric Society of Europe and the Rhetoric Society of America.

Over the years, the IRW has followed the format of offering workshops that provide participants a space to discuss their research with peers and faculty mentors, keynote addresses on the IRW theme featuring leading rhetoric scholars from around the world, and roundtables that allow participants to engage in discussions regarding both their research and the IRW theme. This year's theme, "Borders and Crossroads" was chosen for several reasons. On the one hand, "borders" are powerful and versatile concepts that evoke consideration of the material, ideological, and rhetorical practices that delineate and separate zones of physical and symbolic exchange, movement, and mobility. Borders are deeply rhetorical in how they define geographical territories, serve as judicial markers of citizenship, and function as ideological tropes for constructing group and individual identities and for demarcating who does and does not belong to a given community or nation. "Crossroads," on the other hand, has numerous symbolic meanings and can represent places of indecision, places of incipient change and transformation, places of encounter and exchange, places between worlds, and places of liminality.

Due to its geographic location, Dubrovnik, with its proximity to the Adriatic Sea, comprises a cultural and historical crossroad of various empires and civilizations reflected in the city's architecture, arts, and traditions. Throughout that history, Dubrovnik has undergone geopolitical shifts of its borders, highlighting the importance of communities' resilience to extreme political turmoil as well as to the construction of its modern identity among the challenges of globalization, migration, and climate change. Taken together, the "Borders and Crossroads" theme and the IRW host location invited participants to consider the rhetorical contours of how

different political, economic, environmental, ethnic, racial, and social groups and interests intersect and interact and what possibilities we might identify within those spaces of exchange for cultivating hope, world-making, justice, and sustainability in the future.

The International Rhetoric Workshop's structure is unique and differs from traditional conferences. The workshop's structure emphasizes inclusivity and draws on Freire's ideas and theory involving a dialogic learning approach, which fosters respect and cooperative activities (Freire, 1981). Commencing on Monday, 17 June, the Welcome Reception was held that evening, offering a platform for informal conversations before the main workshop days and a chance to relax after what, for some, was a lengthy period of travel to Dubrovnik. This reception was sponsored by the Croatian Philological Association to showcase one of the main IRW's assignments: strengthening the bond between the international organization and the local community.

Each day was organized following a simple structure: the program started with a keynote lecture, after which participants split into groups with their mentors for the "workshop pods". After the lunch break, everyone gathered again for the roundtable sessions. The workshop pods were grouped by interest – for example, critical race studies, gender, and queer studies – and consisted of a unique blend of graduate students, early-career scholars, and others seeking feedback on works-in-progress. Each pod was led by a faculty mentor, who was invited to attend the workshop to offer guidance in their field or a related field. This year's mentors were: Michael Burke (University College Roosevelt, Utrecht University), Karma Chávez (University of Texas at Austin), Lisa Flores (Penn State University), Annie Hill (University of Texas at Austin), Matthew Houdek (Rochester Institute of Technology), Gabrijela Kišiček (University of Zagreb), Brent Lucia (University of Connecticut), Dimitris Serafis (University of Groningen), and Kris Rutten (Ghent University).

IRW 2024 opened with a keynote from Dimitris Serafis. In "Hatred Rhetoric and Authoritarianism: Critical Perspectives on Multimodal Argumentation in the 'Refugee Crisis,'" Serafis used newspaper headlines and other multimodal artifacts to interrogate authoritarian regimes' use of hate speech to legitimize their practices. On the second day of the workshop, Karma Chávez delivered her keynote, "Throwing Stones: Weapons of the Weak and Lethal Violence on Borders of Mexico/US and Palestine/Israel," in which she explored how rock throwing by colonized peoples is refigured to provide rationale and justification for the use of lethal force in militarized states. Finally, on the third day, Lisa Flores spoke about the rhetorical effects of

“urgency” as a way to frame border crises in her keynote address, “Urgency, Care, and the Spatio-Temporalities of Spectacular Border Crisis.”

Following the Workshop Pod on Tuesday, June 18th, Ana Vlah (Utrecht University) led an interactive presentation on the history and culture of Dubrovnik. Her presentation, titled *Narratives of Dubrovnik: Understanding its History through Literature*, is yet another example of how the IRW seeks to promote dialogue by aiming to augment the local culture and history of where it is being held.

Interactive roundtables, which explored the role of rhetoric as a tool for mapping, articulating, interrogating, and/or maintaining boundaries, were held on Tuesday and Wednesday. The first roundtable investigated “Rhetorics of Borders/Crossroads,” while the second one explored “Rhetorical Pedagogy across Borders.” Members of the 2024 IRW planning committee moderated these panels, and different mentors were invited to be on one panel or the other, depending on their areas of specialization.

The first roundtable discussion on “Rhetorics of Borders/Crossroads” included panelists Annie Hill, Gabrijela Kišiček, Matthew Houdek, Carlos Abaunza (Nazarbayev University), Terrie Wong (Pennsylvania State University, Brandywine), and Shuzhen Huang (Commonwealth University of Pennsylvania). Participants were asked to reflect on how rhetoric plays a key role in how they conceive of physical, conceptual, and/or linguistic borders in their scholarly pursuits. Several other questions arose, such as how borders – whether of land, thought, or identity – manifest within both personal and scholarly experiences, and how rhetoric serves as a tool to construct, reimagine, and critically challenge these borders. Their responses led the audience to think about how the establishment and negotiation of physical and conceptual borders (i.e., border rhetorics) influence democratic processes, democratic values, participation, and inclusive representation within and between individuals, communities, and nations and prompted further questions, such as, “What kinds of identity construction and negotiation do these formations allow or limit?” Finally, the panelists discussed the kinds of responsibilities and commitments that their philosophical, pedagogical, and linguistic understandings of borders and crossroads suggest in connection with questions of ethics, justice, and human rights and how our roles as scholars implicate us in these conversations.

The second roundtable entitled “Rhetorical Pedagogy across Borders” included panelists Michael Burke, Kris Rutten, Brent Lucia, Lisa Melonçon (University of South Florida), Andreas Karatsolis (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), and Kelly Scarff (Virginia Tech). Intending to explore the evolving landscape of rhetorical education and how it transcends traditional boundaries, it highlighted the expansion of rhetorical

pedagogy to a wide variety of texts and contexts, responding to the diverse and rapidly changing modes of communication of diverse audiences. During the discussion, the rhetoricians emphasized the need to continually adapt to new communication technologies, shifting cultural landscapes, and emerging social issues by adopting flexible and responsive approaches, ensuring that rhetorical education remains relevant and effective in preparing students for the exigencies of the modern era. To achieve this goal, it was concluded that qualities such as inclusivity, interdisciplinarity, and responsiveness to technological and societal changes are necessary to equip students with the skills and critical awareness needed to navigate and influence the diverse rhetorical landscapes of the modern world.

On the second day of the program, Wednesday, June 19th in the evening, participants, organizers, faculty members, and guests enjoyed a social event that included a guided city tour, kindly provided by the Dubrovnik tourist board, and dinner at a local restaurant featuring traditional Croatian cuisine. The group was divided into three smaller groups for the tour, where they learned about the city's long and rich history, including a visit to the historic Franciscan Monastery. One group had the rare opportunity to explore Dubrovnik's library, one of Croatia's richest libraries, renowned for its collection of over 70,000 books, including 1,200 rare manuscripts, 216 incunabula, and 22 tomes of 15th- to 17th-century church corals. Afterward, everyone gathered near the famous Jesuit Stairs for a traditional 45-minute performance by the local group, Klapa Kaše. *Klapa*, a traditional Croatian form of a capella singing, was inscribed in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list in 2012. Sparkling wine was served during the event and Dubrovnik's historic architecture provided a stunning backdrop, enhancing the cultural atmosphere of the performance and making the evening truly memorable. Social events like these are essential for fostering connections and creating a relaxed atmosphere for academic collaboration.

This year, the organizing committee also planned for what we termed "Super Pods" to occur on the last day, Thursday, June 20th. This "Super Pod" idea was intended to continue building on and promoting dialogue among all participants by combining workshop pods into collaborative discussions. This structure highlights the overall main goal of the workshop, which is to give graduate students and early-career scholars a space to share ideas and works in progress. Others who are more set in their careers can also gain much from this collaborative structure, especially if they are starting to explore a new project.

Overwhelmingly positive reflections and feedback were shared by the participants during a semi-structured interview and the completion of a survey that accompanied the closure of the workshop in Dubrovnik. The event was praised as both a transformative learning experience (Getz, 2007) and an exemplary model of academic collaboration, highlighting its impact on their personal and professional development. First, the responses given noted the remarkable blend of academic rigor and collegial culture. The attendees were especially impressed by the keynote lectures, described as “thought-provoking and inspiring, challenging us to expand our perspectives on global rhetorical issues.” Another participant remarked, “The diversity of international scholars brought fresh insights and approaches to the rhetoric of borders that deepened my understanding.” The interactive pods between early-career scholars and established professors were widely praised for fostering meaningful engagement. One emerging scholar expressed, “It was empowering to engage with well-known professors in such an open and supportive environment. The constructive feedback I received will be invaluable to my research moving forward.” Several participants also emphasized the importance of the roundtable discussions on the rhetoric and pedagogy of borders. “Discussing the rhetoric of borders felt timely, given the global challenges we face”, one participant shared. Thoughts about the workshop as a platform for dialogue on contentious topics and critical reflection on the great diversity of perspectives within the field of rhetoric were also shared. Opposite theoretical frameworks can lead not only to spirited and valuable intellectual exchanges that challenge existent ways of thinking, but also to a robust and open dialogue where differences are viewed as a crossroads of growth rather than barriers to conscientization and understanding. Beyond its academic character, the IRW’s 2024 social aspects were also lauded. One participant commented, “The city tour of Dubrovnik was not only well-organized but deeply enriching. The chance to explore the city’s rich history, followed by a summer evening of traditional *klapa* music and a delicious dinner, was a perfect way to blend scholarship with cultural experience.” One scholar noted, “I left the workshop with new friends and collaborators from around the world.” Finally, a recurring comment was the warm hospitality during the event and its thoughtful organization, with one attendee stating, “I felt fully supported throughout the workshop. The leadership team prioritized creating an empowering environment for all participants.” All in all, the feedback gathered from the participants painted a picture of a successful organization that left a lasting impression. The IRW 2024 workshop is both an opportunity to engage with cutting-edge rhetoric scholarship and a transformative experience based upon collaboration, expanded perspectives, and energized scholars at all stages of their

careers. For all the above reasons, the organizing committee is both grateful and proud to have facilitated such an enriching and transformative event dedicated to the global rhetorical community.

The workshop in Dubrovnik sparked several thought-provoking discussions that we believe will shape the future of rhetorical studies. The theme of “Borders and Crossroads” fueled our conversations and manifested in two directions. First, our discussions were based on sharing insights on how different cultures interpret and utilize rhetorical strategies. We have observed different approaches to teaching and studying rhetoric in various parts of the world. These discussions were enriching; they helped us better understand other points of view. Second, we have explored how rhetoric intersects with linguistics, sociology, political science, and more to address complex global issues. These conversations highlighted the need for ongoing dialogue and research, and we encourage all participants to continue exploring these critical topics in rhetorical studies and beyond.

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