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The Rhetoric of Lithuanian MeToo Discourse

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Abstract

. The great spread of the phenomenon of *MeToo*, a global movement promoting the publicity of the facts of sexual harassment, has also received a response in Lithuania: anonymous stories in blogs have grown into a provocative discourse that has attracted a great deal of attention. The aim of the research presented in this article is to characterise the discourse of *MeToo* in terms of rhetorical expression that has not been discussed yet: to identify and elicit the dominant elements of rhetorical argumentation. The empirical research was conducted using the method of rhetorical analysis that allows distinguishing and defining in rhetorical categories the models characteristic to rhetoric appeals. The method of rhetorical analysis combined with directed content analysis, as well as with critical discourse analysis. Following the methodology of provocative narrative research, it was analysed the material published at the time of maximum intensity and involvement in the discourse, such as testimonies, publications, interviews, and comments of women who have been subjected to sexual harassment. The results of rhetorical discourse analysis allow us to discuss the culture of accusation in which the normalization of victim condemnation is prevalent, and logical reasoning gives way to prejudice-based emotional appeals.

Keywords: metoo, provocative discourse, rhetoric.

Introduction

Modern means of media have led to changes in the scope, intensity, and effectiveness of communication. New technologies that are being developed every day help create even more effective communication at all levels, changing the perception of its participants about the phenomena of human reality and existence (Benjamin, 2005: 2014). The multi-layered and interactive nature of the media legitimized free dissemination of information and active dialogue (Balčytienė, 2000: 117). The democratization of content production and dissemination has resulted in content users becoming both creators and sources, especially on social networking platforms (Pérez-Soler, 2017: 74–81). The online medium, which offers unlimited opportunities for dialogue and polylogue, is an advantageous place for the dissemination of subjective truths and the intersection of different views and attitudes.

Online media that intertwines different genres and even more diverse relationships of discourse participants have also become an attractive arena for the birth and performance of provocation. In online media, different genres and sub-genres “overlap” and texts here become heterogeneous (Marcinkevičienė, 2008: 80). Not only does the provocative narrative inspire these processes, but it emerges as a result of such a genre modification, at the same time as a condition for discourse actuality, in other words, readability, and notoriety.

An example of a typical modern, provocative discourse is the worldwide movement, which has attracted much attention and provoked controversial reactions that promote the publicity of the issues of sexual harassment, abuse, and violence against women. The intensive dissemination of the phenomenon has also received a response in Lithuania: anonymous stories on the blogs emerged as a sign of solidarity that has grown into a provocative discourse that has received a great deal of agiotage. Provocation is defined as the activity of questioning and contradicting norms, values, laws, rules, and symbolic power (Driessens, 2013: 556). It is associated with the provocation of backward reaction (Paris, 1989, quoted from Boudana, Segev, 2017: 8). This understanding of provocation opens up the possibility of creating a discourse that consists of the source and its sequences, i.e., reaction to it, reaction to reaction, and others. The chain discourse perception determines the bias of causality and exceptionally subjective judgment of events (Boudana, Segev, 2017: 10–13). The rhetorical analysis of *MeToo* discourse as a provocative narrative allows decoding the rhetorical strategies of influence that discourse creators adopt. The article aims to characterize the discourse in terms of rhetorical expression, i.e., to identify and elicit the dominant elements of rhetorical argumentation. The objectives of the article are: (1) to reveal specific logical and rhetorical tops in the testimonies of victims of harassment; (2) to identify dominant eristic arguments in the discourse of sexual harassment; (3) to discuss the specifics of linguistic expression in comments about sexual harassment; (4) to comment on probable transformations of provocative rhetoric in the observed discourse.

In recent years, the discourse of sexual harassment has received a great deal of attention from various institutions and organizations. There are plenty of events related to the topic of sexual harassment, as well as preventative-methodological material on how to identify sexual harassment and take prevention (Vengalė-Dits, 2012). In the academic field, this issue has been studied mainly in legal terms (Veršekys, 2008; Vaičiūnienė, 2003), social terms (Šidlauskienė, Pocevičiūtė, 2015), and psychological terms (above-mentioned research carried out by M. Čeponytė and K. Žardeckaitė-Matulaitienė): the meaning of sexist attitudes for the identification of sexual harassment was investigated (2017), the analysis of young adults’ subjective perceptions of sexual harassment experiences, response to sexual harassment and consequences of sexual harassment were performed (2018), and options of solving the issue of sexual harassment in Lithuania and worldwide were discussed (2019).

The research conducted by the authors of this article is an attempt to analyse the discourse of sexual harassment in a new, yet not specified, rhetorical aspect. In this case, rhetoric is understood as “the science of the conditions and forms of effective communication, ways of persuasion applied not only to the texts of eloquence but of all genres” (Koženiauskienė, 2001: 15). One of the founders of the modern rhetoric

theory, Dubois, attributes rhetorical communication to any form and content of the communication, the primary purpose of which is effective communication (Dubois, 1986: 18–20).

Through the analysis of the research material, it was aimed to distance from subjective judgment, to “disembowel” the discourse through the method of rhetorical analysis that allows distinguishing and defining characteristic models of rhetoric appeals in rhetorical categories. The chosen method of rhetorical analysis was combined with a directed content analysis (Hsieh, Shannon, 2005), which consisted of several stages: (1) the rhetorical categories of the phenomenon under investigation were identified according to the frequency and repeatability criteria during the exploratory analysis; (2) the analysed cases fall into the respective category, the type of rhetorical argumentation; (3) extended content of categories, i.e. performed rhetoric content analysis. It is worth to note that the investigated discourse is exclusively contextual and intertextual, and its perception is inseparable from critical discourse analysis that incorporates elements of the influence of social context and social groups on the dissemination and evaluation of discourse.

Following the methodology of provocative narrative analysis, it was examined the material published at the time of maximum intensity and involvement into the discourse (Paris, 1989, quoted from Driessens, 2013: 562), i.e. testimonies, publications, interviews, and comments of women who have been subjected to sexual harassment published during November 2017–February 2018, as well during November of 2019. It was focused on the articles published in the most read news portals *Delfi*, *15min.lt* and in the articles for the typical users irrespective of his/her social and intellectual characteristics. There were analysed testimonies of women who have been sexually harassed, that were published on purposefully created website *Akadės paslaptis*, as well as on social networking *Facebook* accounts. In the research were used comments published under the most commented articles in the portal *Delfi*, as well as under the posts of the individuals that spoke about sexual harassment on the social network. A total of over 400 samples from 26 sources were collected.

The approach chosen for the research is the analysis of the relationship between the victim and society. Such a research to a large extent reveals the relationship between the accused harasser and the public, i.e. attitudes of the public towards the accused of sexual harassment, though probably, does not cover all the possible narratives that could be elucidated by separate research of such a relationship. The terms *victim*, *the accused harasser* used in the article refer to the roles of discourse participants, not to the legal status of the mentioned individuals.

***MeToo* discourse: elements of the logic topic**

The discourse of *MeToo* is created by three sources, i.e. authors of testimonies (victims of sexual harassment), individuals accused of sexual harassment, and the society that takes the main role, i.e. the discourse evaluator. It is noteworthy that the role of society is twofold: it not only consumes but also produces the discourse itself, and creates its sequels. In addition, the public reaction and response is also the main indicator of (in)tolerance to the phenomenon.

MeToo discourse takes the characteristics of duality, i.e. the testimony serves the function of the accusation; an individual accused of sexual harassment takes a position of defense; the society that receives the testimony also splits into accusers and defenders. This narrative of accusation and justification affects all discourse levels: as well pre-verbal, i.e. the selection of logical topos, arguments, discourse composition, and verbal, i.e. wording of arguments, strategies of verbal expression.

Testimonies of the victims of harassment posted on the website dedicated to the publication of the harassment facts *Akadės paslaptis*, as well as women’s confessions on *Facebook* accounts hashtagged *MeToo*, are rather fragmented in terms of thought consistency, text composition, and slightly incoherent, incomplete. Nevertheless, testimonies are connected by an almost identical topic, close to the topic of the speeches of legal accused persons. Logical topos should be interpreted “as a kind of abstraction, a *medium*, where one can find pre-made generalised schemes of argumentation, models of interpretation, and sets of assumptions. The logical topos is like a skeleton, a carcass that the addressee during the creation of discourse applies in a specific situation and fills with content” (Gabrėnaitė, 2010: 28). The application of

schemes and models of the logic topic in the discourse, i.e. their concrete realization called the rhetoric topic. The rhetorical topos functions as a worded argument, a complete phrase that answers the question posed by the logic topic (Koženiauskienė, 2005: 134).

All a little more explicated stories of experienced harassment are constructed according to the logical scheme in which the accused harasser speaks in court (Koženiauskienė, 2005: 118): an activity (criminal) is described, the guilt of the accused harasser is indicated, motives and circumstances of the crime are disclosed, the characteristics of the accused person are provided, and the nature of the damage is mentioned (see Table 1).

Such a topic scheme, a model of theme development in testimonies, is an intuitive choice of their authors, determined by the essence of the discussed subject, as “the rhetoric of speech and text governs the rhetoric of speech or text” (Nackūnaitė, 2002: 60). It confirms the versatility and applicability of certain toposes to a variety of discourses, both professional and the ones created intuitively. Even though the topic characteristic to the speeches of accusation dominates in testimonies, there are significant elements of defense speeches: here its prominence gains a topos of (self)explanation, implied by the need to explain the causes of certain act, to justify one or another decision, therefore, every part of discourse logic composition is twofold as well: it is stated *what* happened and explained *why* it happened. This presupposes the peculiarity of the discourse: as an independent part of the composition, usually, the topos of introduction or the final part, the explanation, why the author kept silent after the event of harassment and/or decided (now) to talk, is discussed: *To tell to someone about it seemed unimaginable, I was afraid of being condemned for the sexual intercourse with the teacher, that it could affect the studies I had started.* (AKADĖS PASLAPTIS 1, 30/01/2018); *By this post I want to tell those who suffer or suffered from this person: I support you, I will fight till running out of power as he said.* (AKADĖS PASLAPTIS 1, 30/01/2018).

Table 1
Scheme of logical topic

Scheme of logical topic	Realization of logical topic
Guilt of the accused ↓ Harassment	<i>It is a cruel truth. I studied in the department of Painting: J.G. uses psychological violence against the students of the Department; the content of sexual humiliation dominates. The ones who make a stand are humiliated and prosecuted.</i> (15MIN 02/02/2018).
Motives of the crime ↓ Fulfilment of sexual needs	<i>...he took my hands, started to repeat a mantra that both of us are grown up people, and that what is going is nothing wrong, as he feels that I like him, that the feeling is mutual.</i> (DELFI 10/11/2017)
Circumstances ↓ Limiting the opportunities for the victim to resist	<i>After the classes, he used to ask me for a drink at the Department, studios, joinery, he used to say that he knew what was better for me. After a few bottles of beer, he used to start sexual intercourse.</i> (AKADĖS PASLAPTIS, 1, 30/01/2018).
Characteristics of the accused harasser ↓ Limiting the opportunities for the victim to resist	<i>At that time J.G. was considered as the most progressive among painting teachers, his students – the strongest and the most talented, the most promising. J.G. was fierce for those who opposed him, and fiercely defended “his own”.</i> (AKADĖS PASLAPTIS 1, 30/01/2018).
Damage done by the crime	<i>I felt self-destructively, at that time it seemed that self-destruction is the only way to resist him. I lived as if two lives: one as a talented, good grade receiving student, and the other: as his sex toy.</i> (AKADĖS PASLAPTIS 1, 30/01/2018).

The rhetoric topic of *MeToo* discourse

Philosopher Martin Heidegger argued that language is “home of being”: it is the word that reveals the essence of the phenomenon, and it opens up as much as the word as an instrument opens it (Heidegger, 1989: 224–225). By retelling past experiences, a person experiences them again and conveys these experiences through specific linguistic expression (Labov, 1972, quoted from Boudana, Segev, 2017: 17–18). A victim’s testimony of experienced sexual harassment and violence should be perceived as a controlled process: the narrator makes decisions about to whom and what experiences to disclose, how to construct a narrative (Fileborn, 2019, quoted from Mendes, Keller, Ringrose, 2019: 1292). With the opportunity to recreate the course of events from the perspective, to consider their causes and consequences, and having formulated the purpose of the narrative, having anticipated the reactions of the audience, an element of persuasion appears, i.e. a pursuit to create an influential discourse, to form the attitude of addressees, to influence their opinion, consciously or intuitively through the use of certain rhetorical instruments. After all, “writing down discourse, the world is being rewritten, and the rewriting is not a repetition, it is a metamorphosis” (Ricoeur, 2000: 53).

As already mentioned, the logical topic is the ground for the creation of the rhetorical topic, it is not only a specific model, scheme, framework of discourse which is filled with the rhetoric topic, in other words, they are worded. The essential difference between logical and rhetorical topos is that the logical topic obeys the laws of logic, which oblige to follow certain rules of logical reasoning, consistency, identity, and validity; the function of rhetoric topic is by using a variety of linguistic and stylistic means of expression to create persuasiveness of discourse, to persuade the addressee, therefore, often in general, logical argumentation is supplemented or replaced by emotional appeals.

In terms of rhetoric persuasion, written testimonies of individuals that have experienced sexual harassment are a mixed discourse: the strength of rhetoric appeals here ranges from deliberate attempts to disclose the accused harasser, to prove his guilt and persuade by the truthfulness of events, to emotional despair, and finally, to concise reporting of the experience. Depending on the intent of the discourse, its scope, the abundance and nature of the used rhetoric instruments, however, considering the total of testimonies, certain characteristic models of rhetorical reasoning emerge.

First of all, the rhetorical analysis of the content of testimony reveals the duality of the already mentioned discourse, i.e. the interpretation of the essence of a thing through contradictions. Contradictions are created by contrastive qualitative and quantitative toposes emphasizing the difference between age, gender, social status, and power relationships, as for example, *young girl – experienced man*, *a female student – a male teacher*, *insignificant – influential*, and others. Fundamentally, these are variations of the classical topos *an old man and a boy* that illustrates and interprets contrasts (Abramowska, 1982: 10). Such contrasting and at the same time complementary, i.e. opportunities of each other complementing pairs of toposes are very high. Quite often, the same topos might be taken as a basis to prove contrasting theses, as for example: if a young person violates the norms of society, he can be blamed for irresponsibility, to rebuke for frivolity; however, it can also be justified: a young person lacks experience, life wisdom. In both cases, the same topos of quantity applies: by observing many individual cases, the norm is set, or a concrete case is presented as (not) conforming to the norm. The duality of the topos, when the same topos might be used in different and even contradictory contexts, is determined by its open semantics (Gabrénaitė, 2010: 30–31).

Most the rhetorical toposes in the discourse of *MeToo* function as eristic arguments justifying the victim and condemning the accused harasser or turned to opposite directions: condemn the victim and justify the accused of harassment. Eristics (in Greek *ἑριστική τέχνη* – the art of dispute), i.e. the art to defend one’s arguments, to gain the acceptance of others, using all the ways and means available to accomplish this aim. The purpose of eristic argumentation is not the objective dissemination of facts, truth is not sought through it, rather the appearance of truth that is created, opinion, evaluation are being expressed. The relationship between rhetoric and eristic is complicated: eristic is a part of the theory of rhetoric, it exists in *refutatio* or in the refutation of opposite opinion, one of the constituent parts of

classical rhetoric composition, however, otherwise than classical rhetoric, eristic does not seek for credible evidence, it uses all means both reliable and unreliable. In the words of German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, the author of the study *The Art of Being Right* (“Die eristische Dialektik”, 1830), which explains the ways and means of eristic argumentation, in the case of eristic argumentation the objective truth is pushed aside or considered accidental, the attention is focused on the defense of own position and the denial of the opponent’s position. Schopenhauer provides a comparison with a fighter, who should not be interested in who is right in the dispute that provoked the fight, as “here it is only important to beat and beat back” (Schopenhauer, 1997: 48).

Thus, eristic argumentation is not a type of emotional argumentation that is directed towards persuasion and interpretation but not towards evidence, therefore, it is understandable that in the discourse of sensitive sexual harassment there are plenty of these arguments, they appear in both classical and modified forms that match the specifics of the narrative. In the examined texts, rhetorical argumentation very often intertwines with the eristic one, and sometimes it is generally suppressed by the latter.

The stories of the victims that have experienced sexual harassment explain individual decisions of the authors of testimonies by rhetorical arguments, often the excuses are made for failing to resist to a harasser. One of such arguments, inevitably appearing in all testimonies, is **argumentum ad verecundiam** or the appeal to an authority. Circumstances of harassment that the victim encountered are explained in terms of power of the authority (teacher, creator): *At that time I admired the environment of the Academy, and J. G. became the authority I believed in recklessly* (AKADĖS PASLAPTIS 1, 30/01/2018); I felt as if had won the total of jackpot. I, so “raw”, and without experience, just after the Academy was invited by such a great and honoured director to his team... And not for whatever but to create the decorations for the play directed by him (DELFI 04/02/2018); ... at that time he was an authority for me. At that time it was a great achievement for me to stay with Š. B. and talk. (15MIN 13/11/2017); To enter that world seemed as a great achievement. ... for this I wanted to be at the same place as he was. (15MIN 13/11/2017).

The testimonies of victims of sexual harassment abound in fear, fright, and motives of anxiety, by fear are explained actions, decisions, and their consequences. It is a variation of the eristic argument **argumentum in terrorem**, appealing to the sense of fear, in its reverse expression. The traditional form of this argument is to appeal to the addressee’s sense of insecurity by intimidating and even threatening. In the examined discourse, a strong confrontation between fear and courage is created. It is most prominent when the authors of testimonies are explaining why they kept their experiences in silence *then* and why they decided to *open up* now.

In all cases without exceptions, silence is interpreted as a fear of being condemned and loose real or supposed professional prospects: *To tell someone about it seemed unimaginable, I was afraid of being condemned for the sexual intercourse with the teacher, that it could affect the studies I had started.* (AKADĖS PASLAPTIS 1, 30/01/2018); *Why anonymously? As our society, unfortunately, does not accept such stories, judges the victims, it is enough to read comments under articles on similar topics.* (AKADĖS PASLAPTIS 2, 30/01/2018); *In the field of art, in the field of painting, he was an influential person, at least at that time. Therefore, later, for the published situations, brutal persecution for the works starts, oppression on how you paint, it is told that you have no talent. There is open psychological violence. As a result, people, students, did not speak out loud for a long time* (15MIN 02/02/2018); *I even recognize the individuals who share those stories, however, I also understand their will to keep anonymous, as the reaction of the public is terrible.* (15MIN 02/02/2018); *I kept this story for me for a long time, I told no one, as I blamed myself. I didn’t understand completely what had happened. And only now, when I started to speak about it, I understood that what had happened was not normal* (15MIN 13/11/2017).

Speaking, sharing of own knowledge and experiences are perceived as liberation, solidarity with other victims, as well as warning: *Please, do not remain silent, as it hurts more when you keep silent* (AKADĖS PASLAPTIS 1, 30/01/2018); *I write only because someone has to start talking about it. ... I know, when you are “there”, it seems that there is no option, though it is.* (AKADĖS PASLAPTIS 2, 30/01/2018); *I waited quite a long time for a good opportunity to share this personal experience that I want to describe*

here; finally the expanding, growing #metoo gives me the opportunity to do it locally and very on time. (DELFI 04/02/2018); There are two circumstances. Firstly, the movement #metoo that has encouraged and made to think over many things. Secondly, rumours about other girls who have suffered from it have reached me. I understood that I am not afraid, and I am ready to talk about it. It seems to me that it is necessary. Not for me but in order to protect ourselves from future stories. (15MIN 13/11/2017).

The essential moment in the narratives of harassment: the indifference of the environment, the surrounding people's acceptance of the existing situation and the ignorance of the fact of harassment cases. It is a variation of an eristic argument to masses, *argumentum ad populum*, when the moment of the adaptation to the opinion and position of the majority, being part of the crowd is stated. In the discourses of persuasion, *argumentum ad populum* is usually used to construct positive images of universal joy, the right choice, communality, and common and therefore appropriate opinion. In testimonies on sexual harassment, the appeal to masses takes the form of an inclusive stereotype that eliminates the possibility of resistance: everyone knows it/everyone does like that. The impotence caused by the apathy and lack of external help of those around them, course colleagues, colleagues, teachers, and administration. The recurrence of harassment as a common, non-reprehensible phenomenon reappears in the testimonies: *On the other hand, to resist against his will seemed pointless simply because so many people in secret already knew his romances with female students. ... Many people and many institutions ... tolerated and unconditionally supported the behaviour and works of this person. (AKADÈS PASLAPTIS 1, 30/01/2018); It is the hardest when the Department sees and understands it and chooses to be blind and silent. (15MIN 30/01/2018); It is absolutely an inadequate behaviour, ... sometimes you hear what he say and cannot believe that it has been said as the surrounding people do not react. ... you are standing and cannot understand whether you have heard that right or wrong, and then you are looking to the surrounding people, and they keep silent. (15MIN 02/02/2018); Why have I been waiting and (publicly) kept silent for almost ten years, since 2009? Because what I wanted to tell everyone was and probably still is taken for granted and tolerated both in the general public and in my narrow professional contexts. Especially in the case of the latter, it is so "normal and natural" that the topic is "just as it is no longer necessary as everyone already knows and understands what is happening, nothing new can be said here". Give a laugh, if you can and want, or keep silent and respect the high authority. (DELFI 04/02/2018).*

The pivot of the discourse of sexual harassment is the personal experiences of harassment. In terms of eristic argumentation, they are considered as **argumentum misericordiam** – appealing to sympathy. This argument again adapts to the specifics of the narrative and performs the function of (self)explanation. Emotional appeals are not fully developed, more fragmented than detailing, however, through them, marginal feelings are expressed, therefore, the testimonies are shocking and persuasive: *I felt self-destructively, at that time, it seemed that self-destruction is the only way to resist him. I lived as if two lives: one as a talented, good grade receiving student, and the other: as his sex toy. ... After the completion of the Bachelor's degree, I underwent severe traumas – inferiority complex, frustration, insomnia, panic attacks... (AKADÈS PASLAPTIS 1, 30/01/2018); I went into panic, alcohol, stopped sleeping; I felt not important, I could not handle painting assignments alone In such a state, I ruined a lot of my works, everything seemed hopeless. Finally, I had to take doctors' consultations, take medicine, take academic leave, which was unexpected to many as I was a good student. However, at that time, the day used to start with the thoughts of jumping off the roof and the particular one. (AKADÈS PASLAPTIS 2, 30/01/2018).*

The quoted statements support the data of various studies, that "individuals experiencing sexual harassment, quite often experience anxiety, depression, headaches, as well are characterized with lower self-esteem, or sexual harassment experienced by students is related not only with long-term anxiety, anger, depression but also with alcohol consumption (Čeponytė, Žardeckaitė-Matulaitienė, 2018: 30).

The rhetoric of defense: the response of the accused of sexual harassment

The public reaction of the accused of sexual harassment and their response is an essential factor in the development of provocative discourse. In the analysed discourse such a response – public statements, answers to questions of the interviews – does not create a coherent narrative. However, in this rather poor material, the prevailing rhetorical toposes that essentially define the content of the “response” that reached the public sphere might be distinguished.

The first reaction in all cases of Lithuanian *MeToo* was **denial**, expressed during the interviews given to journalists or making public announcements. The rhetoric of denial highlighted the absurdity of the situation, the reaction of strict rejection and indignation at given accusations: *Considering the social harassment campaigns on social networks that are directed against me personally, only characterize the organizers of the campaign themselves and no one else. Neither our theatre nor I have anything to do with this content.* (DELFI 06/02/2018); *First of all, all the ramblings on these imaginary situations should end It is a total bluff that there were things of some kind that prevented them from creative expression. I deny entirely sexual relations, it is total nonsense.* (15MIN 31/01/2018); *I radically deny reproaches* (DELFI 31/01/2018); *To respond to the accusations made against me on social network Facebook, I would like to inform you that I do not agree with the accusations made against me.* (DELFI 24/11/2017). As the assertion of personal position and proof of innocence, the opportunity to appeal to the institutions of law enforcement was declared: *Vaitkus also stated that he reserves the right to sue for the offense against his honour.* (DELFI 06/02/2018).

Subsequently, the rhetoric of denial was complemented by **the understatement of the significance** of the event and the accusations: *It seems to me these things need to be told a little differently, I do not understand why people are frightened, afraid, silent, thinking that there is such a high crime that it is necessary to escape the situation, to hide.* (DELFI 04/02/2018); *After all, even if it was like I was indiscreetly talking to someone somewhere, how can I remember this now in my head? Nine years have passed.* (DELFI 31/01/2018). The understatement of the significance balances at the line of **argumentum ad personam**, arguments against a person, in separate cases, answering the questions of an interview, the cynicism addressed to the authors of the testimonies erupts: *... those girls were quite sophisticated as personalities. Many people can testify.* (15MIN 31/01/2018); *A harsh feminist position, lets call it like that. And what she writes goes far beyond reality.* (15MIN 31/01/2018). The significance of the accusations is understated more by choosing the strategy of dissociation, without making public comments, without answering to questions of journalists, totally ignoring any attention from the public space: The director insisted on respecting his and others’ privacy and therefore did not intend “to defend himself or argue on social networks or media”. (DELFI 24/11/2017). There is the rhetoric of conspiracy in the statements of the accused of sexual harassment – emphasizing third-party attempts to dispose of and making suspicions of conspiracy theories. The accused harassers in the public sphere have widely commented on attempts to dispose with them for their professional activities, one has envisaged a campaign of defamation of a hostile party, another accused of revenge his immediate supervisor: *– I believe that the public must be informed about the recent targeted and currently intensified defamation campaign against the activities of the Russian Drama Theatre, and against me as the director of the theatre. This campaign is systematically carried out by the propaganda portals controlled by unfriendly forces in Lithuania through their means of public information. ... It is characteristic that this defamation campaign is mainly directed against my person.* (DELFI 06/02/2018); *...I suppose, the head staged this avalanche of complaints by taking my drafts of the complaint from the table some time ago and in a strange, humiliating way, tries to dispose of me.* (15MIN 31/01/2018).

***Argumentum ad personam*: the rhetoric of victim accusation**

The provocative *MeToo* narrative is characterised by the strong dimension of subjectivity, covering many biased and even manipulative aspects. Subjectivity here is to be interpreted as the substitution of a coherent succession of events by the causal link that implies an emotional evaluation of discourse. The two-sided perception of provocation as an invitation to react or as a reaction results in the bias and

subjective judgment of the chain of causality of events. (Boudana, Segev 2017b: 10–13). Subjectivity is characteristic to the argumentation of all actors of the discourse, i.e. depending on the context and position (victim or accuser, different social status, age, etc.), self-supporting arguments and techniques of persuasion creation are sought.

The testimonies of possible sexual harassment cases that have appeared on the social network *Facebook* and purposefully created website *Akadés paslaptis* have divided public reactions into defending and accusing. From the perspective of the authors of testimonies and evaluations of their narratives, negative rhetoric broadcasted in the public sphere is easily schematized, and its expression is also typical: appeals of *argumentum ad personam* dominates, the rhetorical topic of the third power is a bit rarer (*It seems to me that she has probably been offered some money* (DELFI 08/02/2018); *That contrapositioning of men and women is conscious and has a purpose, i.e. the control of people's personal lives. You can see it with a naked eye.* (15MIN, 02/02/2018); *I believe that the same control is being pursued by these actions. Hitler also sought perfection. Besides, what she does, now equates to violence. And just a question – how many enemies we have, you will be next #Youtoo.* (15MIN 02/02/2018).

It is interesting to note that the negative supporting rhetoric of colleagues, friends of the individuals accused of sexual harassment in the articles published on news portals, in general, does not differ from the rhetoric expressed in anonymous comments. Similarly, there is no greater difference between known public figures, influencers, politicians, representatives of the entertainment world, professionals, representatives of the media, and ordinary social networks' users, comparing their comments both in terms of their chosen rhetoric arguments and the wording of those arguments: full of demeaning, subject to vulgar lexis, irony against the authors of testimonies, and straightforward humiliation.

Known public figures who made public announcements take the position of accusers and start the personal attacking of the authors of testimonies. Their comments are dominated by the straightforward *argumentum ad personam*, reinforced by diminutives that imply the ironic judgment, and lexis of vulgar shades or even nonstandard: ... *I know little Simona – she is the kind of person that is a crazy artist, always late, forgets everything, loses things, does not remember, creates stories, and then says – “you told me so”. ... she is a kind of artist that is lost between reality and fantasy.* (DELFI 08/02/2018); *She is the person who seeing the man approaches, you know, when the woman makes a signal – she is the one who flirts, who sits down demonstrating her pretty thigh, she starts with a simple joke, something fun, not by introducing the peculiarities of her work. Imagine the presentation of my scenographic ideas or my play in the same Klaipėda Musical Theatre – she comes, starts to talk not about the play but starts to smile, something like purr, bow-wow. She is like this.* (15MIN 08/02/2018); *He forced her? By power or violence? No. Intimidated or bulldozed? No. Has the girl clearly resisted? No. Was she a minor? No. Was she afraid? Now she says that yes, she was. Was she afraid of disposal? No.* (15MIN 02/02/2018). The appeals against the individual become generalizations that are developed to the stereotypical narrative of “all females are like that”: ... *most of the actors, both during the repetitions and any other time – all the time there is kind of little flirt, joke... ... The mental status of these girls should be thoroughly analysed. ... Why not men accuse women of harassments, how many there are female actors that get on the same Koršunovas, and on Vaitkus. Men with their teeth clenched sit and keep silent, not saying anything, and women are screaming.* (DELFI 08/02/2018).

The *argumentum ad personam* targeted to the condemnation of the victim functions as a three-way appeal: (1) a victim seeks self-promotion and popularity (*Always somehow getting harassed and harassed, could not think of another type of promotion* (FB 10/11/2017); *Didn't get the role, chose this way to earn fame... Might remember when in kindergarten a kind of little John wanted to kiss her* (FB 10/11/2017); *Have you imagined yourself already as a Hollywood actress? It's way too far for you, unfortunately...* (FB 13/11/2017); (2) the victim is cheating as makes the accusations too late (*Woke up after 5 years? I do not believe in any word. Every woman can accuse of this any man, there is no evidence, especially after so many years. It is the same as to address the police and tell them that five years ago my neighbour Peter has stolen my barrow :):)*; *Find other ways to win fame, e.g. go to the X-Factor* (FB 10/11/2017); *It is deplorable and sad when girls drink so much to remember that after 5 years.* (FB 10/11/2017); *You didn't want fame*

5 years ago, kept silent, now you woke up, something is wrong here, you should be sued for defamation (FB 10/11/2017); (3) the victim herself provoked the accused harasser (*Also think about whether you want to defend or judge as nothing has been proven yet, and often, the fact that girls themselves make their careers through beds is not a news.* (FB 10/11/2017); *It's a pity that all kinds of tramps attempt to harden the life of a man, little girl of easy virtue, you better keep silent* (FB 13/11/2017); *But first, you shouldn't drink with an old man.* (FB 13/11/2017). Often, in the same comment, such appeals support one another, "ground" the speaker's position. A typical example of this rhetorical expression: *I am a woman and I should support women; however, I am not the one of those who support the person only because she is a woman too. I don't know who should be blamed in this situation, but to speak after 5 years without any evidence is illogical, secondly, what kind of girl who is not 16-year-old and being sane would stay with an older man and is so naïve and does not know what will happen? It's hard to believe, I don't want to condemn the woman who got into this situation, but it is very to easy to accuse a person, it might be that she didn't get the role and this is her revenge. Actually, nowadays girls themselves would do anything to be promoted.* (FB 13/22/2017).

The quoted examples reveal the way the contraposition of courage and fear actualized in the whole discourse of sexual harassment acquires a paradoxical expression – *circulus vitiosus*, in other words, starts running in the vicious circle of irrational argumentation. The authors of the testimonies explain/argue that the reasons of hidings the stories of harassment for a long time have been fear to be condemned by the society, loss a fragile social status, and the supporters of the harassed women – form the highest ranks officials of country, well known individuals in the public to anonymous commenters – unanimously praised them for their courage (*But the fact that people dare to speak is something I welcome, as you really do not need to conciliate. I wish for everyone to dare to speak and do not let things like these happen in our society.* (Dalia Grybauskaitė, DELFI 05/02/2018); *We must congratulate the brave people who finally decide to speak about such cases* (Saulius Skvernelis, DELFI 05/02/2018); *I am happy that women are no longer afraid to speak. I strongly invite others to open up, not to be afraid, you have great support.* (Neringa Rekašiūtė, DELFI 2, 10/11/2017); *It is very sad to hear, a terrible shame that such things happen, you are extremely brave.* (FB 10/11/2017); *Thank you for daring to share! I imagine how much courage it took to speak out loud.* (FB 10/11/2017); *Strength, girls! Thank you for daring to speak out* (FB 13/11/2017). However, one of the main argument of negative evaluation of the authors of testimonies is the accusation of delay, delayed reaction, and reproaches under cover of irrational fears: *I would suggest you think over and you might remember who else was harassing you. ...Don't get angry, woman, now is not the time of Stalin when you had to be afraid... and to be silent for so many years... it's not adequate...* (FB 10/11/2017); *And what is the reason here for the cult of fear? If you have really been raped, go and do obduction, make a statement and put in prison the citizen unworthy man's name. Simple* (FB 17/11/2019).

It is clear that the narrative of accusation of the victims of sexual harassment in the public sphere dominate. The rhetoric of the comments is complemented by data from the surveys of the public opinion on sexual harassment in the country: "Eight out of ten respondents (81 %) said that it should be done by the person who is being harassed, to the question who has to make the limits in case of sexual harassment,. Three-fifths (63 %) of respondents said victims themselves contribute to sexual harassment by inappropriate outfit or provocative behaviour, half of the respondents stated that victims actually enjoy the attention they get (47 %), or tend exaggerate (49 %). A significant part of the respondents (40 %) also said that people who had spoken of sexual harassment had misunderstood flirting. (Mano teisės, 05/12/2018).

The rhetorical biases of the *MeToo* narrative

After two years of the first testimonies of sexual harassment experiences and the stormy public reaction to it it is possible to estimate the (in)effectiveness of the discussed rhetorical appeals from the perspective. However, it is even more interesting to observe new sequels of provocative narrative and biases of rhetorical expression.

As mentioned above, one of the response strategies of the accused of sexual harassment were to distance from any communication. Julija Steponaitytė, the first actress in Lithuania who marked her testimony with the tag #MeToo, after being asked why in her opinion she had not received any reaction from the director accused of sexual harassment, replied: *Well, it's an interesting silence which anywhere in the world would be accepted as an obvious escape from the problem and basically acknowledging that you have nothing to say. And in Lithuania, it was accepted as a silence of the honourable man. By keeping in silence, he completely eluded the answer and many people accepted it as an honourable silence. It is absurd, but it works in our society. .Mano teisės, 05/10/2018*). This opinion is supported by plenty of comments in the public sphere, a characteristic example: *Lack of attention and intellect initiates such behaviour of girls. Respect ... for behaving firmly and not distracting.* (DELFI 13/11/2019).

Žmonės, the most popular magazine in the country, which promotes the image of a socially responsible publication, in November 2019 announced an interview with the director who was silent for two years and printed his picture on the cover, takes over and develops this narrative. The previously vital *argumentum ad verecundiam* – the appeal to the authority of a famous man, a talented artist, a professional in his field – is supplemented by new colours: the journalist, who took the interview, created a portrait of a nearly mystified, misunderstood hero and a lonely person: *Finally I saw the way the little fir trees, that Šarūnas Bartas told me about nearly two decades ago, have grown up. They surrounded, hid and fenced off from strangers his homestead near the lake. In the house surrounded by evening dusk, it seemed that he himself, his thoughts and his movies were hiding. ... I felt like I had been in one more Bartas movie made of real-life fragments. ŽMONĖS 46 (837)*. The journalist was developing the rhetoric of “honourable man” when she presented an interview on her social network account: *I know very well that there will be some who will say: what have you done?! He is almost a criminal. I'm not used to judge people in their absence. It is not me who proves the truth but men in black robes and the one who is above us. I determined to listen. Šarūnas immediately said: I won't talk about girls, it is dishonourable for a man to talk about women with whom he had a close relationship.* (FB 13/11/2019).

Analogical narrative is used by the director who spoke after two years about accusations thrown against him. History is commented laconically, the rhetoric of dissociation and superiority is dominant: *I did not realize what was happening at once. Later I got a lot of calls. I watched my name being discussed online, in the press, on television. It was really sad and absolutely clear: talking at that time meant being unheard. Nobody cared what was really going on, everyone needed noise and scandal. No one would have heard what I was trying to say. In those days truth and lie fell in one pile and when that happens, the boundaries are erased, and the truth cannot be proved. ... My life is not a reality show. I have no power to influence other people's determination and decision to speak lies. And there is no other starting point, only my conscience.* (DELFI 13/11/2019).

It is important to notice that the content of the interview and especially the decision of the magazine's publishers to choose the man who was accused of sexual harassment as the face of magazine's cover received a lot of negative attention in the public sphere. Stimulated by these or other reasons management of magazine publicly expressed regret over their decision: *As a publisher of magazine Žmonės, I want to react to a discussion about the decision of our team to put Šarūnas Bartas picture on the cover and make the interview with him. In my opinion, we made a mistake and we have to learn from it. I apologize to everyone who was offended by this decision. I see that people in our society find it difficult to understand this problem and that this topic requires even more discussion.* (Tomas Balžekas, FB 17/11/2019). Regardless of its ethical and/or marketing motives, such a move by magazine publishers is likely to inspire a certain public rhetorical biases, especially having in mind the statement, by communication science theorist Denis McQuail's, that mass media is, for many people, a major channel for cultural expression and representation and main material of social reality that forms and creates social identity (McQuail, 2010: 12).

The dissemination of the vulgar expression

When speaking of the discourse of sexual harassment, specifics of linguistic expression cannot be left unmentioned. The linguistic expression of the discourse (which can hardly be judged by such categories as the correctness of the language or its compliance with the norms) in a way also illustrates the level of emotional culture of its participants.

Language of both, articles and (non) anonymous commentary on the topic of sexual harassment very strongly represents the process of legitimizing vulgar culture in the public sphere. Kristina Stankevičiūtė, who analysed the manifestations of vulgar journalism, observes that “recent political and social events ... encourage us to start considering vulgarity as a formation of the category of particular thinking” and certain examples of disregard for generally accepted standards of conduct “allow to presume that vulgarity has become a new standard” (Stankevičiūtė, 2018: 177). The discourse of *MeToo* is the perfect illustration of the researcher’s statements.

Rude sarcasm and even plainspoken insults are found not only in anonymous commentary but also in the speeches of the ones who have their names and surnames visible to the public. In fact, the amount of sarcasm and insults in those commentaries leaves us no other option but to agree to the fact that vulgarity is accepted as a standard of verbal expression in this discourse. Vulgarity in the discourse of *MeToo* “is equal to straightforwardness, simplified presentation of reality and perception as well as banal documentation of it” (Stankevičiūtė, 2018: 169). Such strongly emotionally connotated expression undoubtedly even further intensifies the negative stance and supports *ad personam* argumentation: *Where are these prudes coming from???* *What’s the phrase “accused of sexual harassment” itself worth? Is it proven? Some chick spreads her legs for a successful and well-known man and then after a few years decides to become famous out of it? And here comes the choir of the prudes “the famous women of Lithuania”. It would be sad if it wasn’t so ridiculously funny* (FB 17/11/2019); *What kind of moron does one have to be (regardless of the gender) to pretend to be a victim of sexual harassment even though they’ve made that decision themselves to boost their career? As for the magazine – it’s for fools. It’s about nothing. My wedding was photographed too, for some unknown reason. They could put two goats banging on the cover, I wouldn’t care* (FB 17/11/2019); *The last report from the prude front. ... Bitches may bark but the caravan moves on (proverb). Everybody have a nice weekend* (FB 17/11/2019).

Conclusions

The discourse of *MeToo* in the public sphere resembles a battlefield court in which the public enthusiastically takes on the roles of accusers and defenders. The provided analysis reveals the following generalizations:

1. The effectiveness of logical and rhetorical toposes in the discourse of sexual harassment is associated with their versatility and universality: topos functions as a particular component of the discourse, as a structural-notional model. Toposes serve as stimulus capable of effecting perception of information and its emotional value. Topic reflects general principles of our society thinking, it is also a particular indicator of intellectual and spiritual maturity of the society, a determinant of cultural community.
2. Eristic argumentation is dominant in observed discourse (*argumentum ad verecundiam*, *argumentum in terrorem*, *argumentum ad populum*, *argumentum ad personam*, etc.). Eristic arguments, coarse means of expression balancing on the verge of vulgarity, and often beyond it, eliminate the possibility of rational discussion. It is not the lack of tangible facts and evidence that makes the logical argumentation to be left behind but more the axiomatic position based on prejudices that rejects or ignores objective reality. The results of rhetorical discourse analysis allow us to speak about a culture of accusation with entrenched normalization of victim condemnation, from expressions of sophisticated sympathy to straightforward accusations.
3. The nature of discourse also determines the specifics of linguistic expression – selection of tools which impact and reinforce drama, personalized approach, psychological tension. The analysis of

comments language allows to speak about validation of vulgarity as a norm of verbal expression and reveals the level of emotional culture of discourse participants

4. The analysis of rhetorical appeals not only confirms the research on societal attitudes related with sexual harassment but also reveals the principles of the creation of provocative discourse content, as well as lets us notice justifications for violent behaviour, resilient stereotypical attitudes when judging sexual harassment cases, and from a perspective we can also notice the bias of those attitudes. Provocative transformations of rhetoric illustrate the flexibility and manipulative nature of rhetorical means of expression. On the other hand, the increasing reactions to the phenomenon of intolerance allow us to talk about the processes of self-education of society and to draw the directions of the trajectories of consciousness.

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