

Control and Constraint: Margaret Thatcher and the Dynamics of Political Rhetoric During Prime Minister's Questions

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Abstract: *Margaret Thatcher, the first woman Prime Minister of Britain, was a controversial figure who has been largely ignored in feminist rhetorical scholarship. This article argues that the field should pay attention to political women in the 1980s to consider how they contributed to conservative and Neo-liberal ideologies that persist today. Examining Thatcher's rhetorical performance in Prime Minister's Questions during the Falklands War, this article argues that she manipulated her political context with great success and contributes to an understanding of diverse women's rhetorical practices.*

Keywords: *Margaret Thatcher, "Iron Lady," neoliberalism, presidential rhetoric, women's rhetorical practices*

Many moves political women make are examined, criticized, and judged; often, they are simultaneously condemned on the grounds that they do not possess the "masculinity" required to be an effective leader yet their affect is "not feminine" enough, a phenomenon Kathleen Hall Jamieson calls the "double bind." While scholars' attention has turned to Hillary Rodham Clinton, Sarah Palin, and other political women (Lockhart and Mollick; Shawn Parry-Giles; Sheeler and Anderson; Carlin and Winfrey), rhetorical studies has not developed sustained inquiry into one of the most notorious and well-known politicians who was a woman, Margaret Thatcher. Throughout her 11-year service as Great Britain's first woman Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990, Thatcher weathered economic conditions and political turmoil to consolidate power and establish a strong international presence for Great Britain. Her conservative policies remain controversial – illustrated in the chants of "the bitch is dead" and "so long, the witch is dead" at riots upon her death in 2013 – and her political moves resulted in racist and classist policies that hit at the heart of the British people. However, she earned the moniker "Iron Lady" first pejoratively from Russian journalists then proudly to represent her tireless commitment to the role of Prime Minister and her refusal to back down in the face of criticism.

Thatcher's political career took place mostly through the 1980s, a time period that is, with a few exceptions, understudied in rhetorical scholarship. We have examined the political climate of the 1960s (Engels; Meyer) and the rhetoric surrounding the Vietnam War in the 1970s (see Sutton for a bibliography of works; Campbell, *The Great Silent Majority*). However, the 1980s is less an object of inquiry with the exception of Ronald Reagan as a figurehead (Weiler and Pearce; Bates), despite being a political climate in which many long-lasting strides towards conservatism and neoliberalism were made. These found weight via economic policies that disenfranchised workers and empowered corporations, increased spending in the military, and resulted in economic recessions in both the United States and Britain. The political climate also led to decreased rights for women and minorities through acts that claimed to "cut down on crime" by incarcerating large numbers of minorities and that aimed to reduce women's access to equal rights in the workplace and to decision-making about their bodies. In the United States, the 1980s also witnessed the rise of evangelical Christians who sought to use political power to inject religious beliefs into the political system. Feminist rhetorical scholars have been especially reticent to examine political women of this time period, perhaps because these women often participated in a political system that frequently disenfranchised women, minorities, and the working class and poor. As Daphne Desser, Carol Mattingly, Carla Kaplan, and Christine Mason Sutherland among others have argued, however, feminist rhetorical scholars cannot ignore those women whose ideologies do not align with feminist political beliefs. A look at some of the rhetorical strategies Thatcher used to remain in office for so long and to further establish Great Britain as an international political player provides a framework through which to consider the complex rhetorical positioning politicians who are women must enact in order to be successful in a tumultuous environment.

In the Fall/Winter 2015 issue of *Peitho*, several authors offer explanations of concepts the editors believe will be central to the work of feminist rhetorical scholarship in the next twenty-five years. My examination of Thatcher's rhetorical positioning speaks to this discussion of "agency" and the "material," albeit in ways that ask us to consider the limits of our current conceptions of these terms. As a political woman who often displayed unyielding rhetorical strategies, Thatcher's rhetoric draws attention to the delineation of binaries between public/private and masculine/feminine and how her rhetorical strategies simultaneously disrupt and reinforce these binaries. I argue that Thatcher's mastery of the rhetorical situation and strategies during Prime Minister's Questions as the Falklands War occurred illustrates how one politician who was a woman manipulated a political context with great success. This examination opens up investigations into British Prime Minister rhetorics and

helps us broaden our investigations into women's ways of speaking that are central to feminist rhetorical scholarship so that we can account more fully for the diversity of women's rhetorical practices.

History and Heroism: Feminist Rhetorical Studies' Lost Women

Agency is a central concern when examining any political leader, particularly in thinking about how much control they do and do not have over their government's actions. Rhetorical agency is a contested concept, hinging on definitions of "self" and "subjectivity" as well as understandings of how much change an individual can make in a world governed by many uncontrollable factors.¹ Feminist scholars such as Megan McIntyre claim that agency must be viewed as more collaborative and networked than it has traditionally been. In cases such as Thatcher's, however, she often spoke as a singular actor even as she worked within the constraints around her. In his examination of frontier women's agency, Casey Ryan Kelly argues that agency is "an inventive capacity" (205), further describing it as "the individual or collective capacity to recognize moments in which structures are open to reinterpretation and then act to resignify the social order" (210). Examining Thatcher's performance during Prime Minister's Questions reveals how she used the technique of rhetorical masking to "resignify the social order" so that she could garner respect as the Prime Minister by veiling conflicts in her Cabinet. It is thus the performance of agency that matters as much as its actual existence, because through performance a rhetor can persuasively create support for a reality they call into existence. Such a view of Thatcher's agency might more closely align with traditional views of agency beginning with Aristotle and extending to G.E.M. Anscombe and Donald Davidson. Even though a view of agency as situational, contextual, and collaborative opens up possible avenues of study, feminist

1 Some claim that individuals have extremely limited agency (Deleuze and Guattari; Heidegger; Foucault; Herndl and Licona; Lundberg and Gunn), while others admit to the limits of an individual's agency but offer ways to enact change within these confines (Latour; Bennett; Miller; Cooper; Campbell, "Agency"; Geisler). While acknowledging the limits to agency that anyone experiences (especially in considering the many ways our bodies alone affect the agency we can enact), I take the view that there are ways individuals can deliberately make interventions into the world around them.

rhetorical scholars still need to identify those women who can be approached as individual actors due to their positions of power.²

Despite such debates about agency, some scholars have worked to describe how political women³ have stable rhetorical strategies they put into use. Richards is the most notable scholar to do so. She groups together women who have held “the highest office of their respective countries” into “women world leaders” (*Transnational*, 165). In addition to serving in these positions, she views women world leaders as “a discursive space of rhetorical action that both limits and expands the potentials for social action” (*Transnational*, 165). The moniker of Iron Lady that began with Thatcher shows the way that women world leaders are categorized and subsequently judged. Being a woman world leader creates a “symbolic figure who both interrupts (heterodoxy) and reinscribes (orthodoxy) the *doxa* of the nation-state” (*Transnational*, 2). Richards describes women world leaders as disruptive because they call into question “the seemingly stable, identical, and continuous governing of the nation-state” (*Transnational*, 18) through their gendered bodies. However, they often support the nation-state by becoming “complicit agents in the hegemonic traditions of national manhood and the *doxa* of the nation-state” (*Transnational*, 138). Thus, as Richards argues, women world leaders such as Thatcher have the

2 Thatcher herself had to contend with the power that is granted or not granted to those with women’s bodies. For example, Douglas M. Ponton analyzes an interview with Thatcher shortly after her election as Conservative Party Leader in 1975 in which 53% of the questions relate to her gender. Playing off gender stereotypes, Thatcher tried to claim agency by using “housewife rhetoric” as Ponton calls it when speaking to citizens paired with her aggressive performances when interacting with others in the government.

3 Rhetorical practices have often been categorized into masculine and feminine traits, drawing on the traditional roles of men and women (see Jamieson; Campbell, “The Discursive Performance”). Other scholars have disrupted arguments relying upon gendered notions of rhetoric (see Dow and Tonn; Condit; Blair). These scholars complicate the idea that we can easily assert the gendered nature of any rhetorical practices, even though Richards’s work points out how politicians who are women are often judged according to their ability to appropriately juggle what are commonly regarded as masculine and feminine rhetorics. It is the way in which Thatcher particularly performs this work that I draw attention to through the use of gendered labels.

opportunity to interrupt the potentially damaging power of the nation-state, but they often fail to do so as they gain and maintain political power.⁴

One reason for this failure may be tensions between political success and socially progressive ideologies. Such tensions affect which political women feminist rhetorical scholars study. When examining the rhetorical practices of political women, a central question is why we have not yet examined Thatcher's actual rhetorical practices to see how she used combative, authoritative rhetoric and to what effect. In large part, the answer seems to be that she doesn't even give lip service to a feminist agenda. Speaking of Clinton's 1995 "Women's Rights are Human Rights" speech at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, Nancy Myers argues that female political leaders must carefully speak for other women and leverage their privilege "to use their rhetoric where it may be heard" (159). In Thatcher's case, she gained access to many public and political platforms that had previously only been open to men, such as Prime Minister's Questions, but she ultimately fails to use this position to advance the human rights of those in her own nation, much less around the world.

Such failure to study Thatcher's practices leads me to view her as a "lost woman" in feminist rhetorical studies. Claiming that Thatcher is a "lost woman" may seem surprising given her notoriety in the popular imagination – as seen through the 2011 biopic *The Iron Lady* – as well as the attention she and her government have received in fields as diverse as political science (Evans; Dyson; Steinberg; Simms; Rubinstein; McLean; King; Kerr and Marsh), communication studies (Trevor Parry-Giles; Phillips; Brown and Morrow; Ponton; Auer), history (Murray; Kim; Cooper), women's and gender studies (Rose; Pilcher; Leung), psychology (Reicher and Hopkins), business (Morgan; Scammell), economics (Savoie; Steele), and linguistics (Charteris-Black). I do not claim that Thatcher

4 Other women world leaders such as Benazir Bhutto, Indira Gandhi, and Golda Meir have similarly become leaders of their countries without completely disrupting their nation-states. Tellingly, the United States has not yet embraced a woman world leader, although Hillary Clinton came close in the 2016 presidential election. This may be in large part due to the U.S. context in which citizenship is built upon a conception of national manhood as Dana D. Nelson describes it and which I discuss further in the next section. Lockhart and Mollick's 2015 collection *Hillary Rodham Clinton and the 2016 Election* and Maria Daxenbichler and Rochelle Gregory's article "Electing the Commander in Chief" help explain the extreme double bind Clinton had to navigate between using what has traditionally been viewed as masculine rhetoric but being seen as unfeminine and using feminine rhetoric but being accused of being unable to lead the nation.

is lost in the sense that she has been erased from our collective memory. Instead, what I find surprising is that rhetorical studies has yet to substantively add to this body of work focused on such an important figure.⁵ In order to more adequately account for this figure in rhetorical history, we need to examine Thatcher's actual rhetorical practices to consider what these tell us about women leaders operating in political spaces, especially given the political tensions Great Britain faced during the 1980s.

This article traces how Thatcher shaped a particular rhetorical situation, Prime Minister's Questions, and how her attempts to develop her political agency led to a minimizing of her identity as a woman during combative public situations. I do so by examining transcripts of Prime Minister's Questions during the Falklands War, transcripts that have been preserved by the Margaret Thatcher Foundation. While my approach retains a focus on the individual, it draws attention to the political context in which political women are often forced to work and how Thatcher's tactics – while not admirable from a human rights context – illustrate the difficulty women face when trying to assert authority in a traditionally masculine space.

By analyzing how Thatcher performs during Prime Minister's Questions, I claim that we must consider more broadly the rhetorical interventions feminist historical research is invested in and how to approach those lost women such as Thatcher who are politically important but who do not speak to modern feminism's goals for unity and equality. First, I explain how Prime Minister's Questions contribute to British nationalist rhetoric, rhetorics that have not been explored in the context of Thatcher's time as Prime Minister. Next, I discuss how Prime Minister's Questions during wartime are especially critical times when Prime Ministers construct a sense of agency and leadership. I then contrast Thatcher's use of rhetorical masking – a strategy used to maximize her position as the head of the government and minimize its collaborative nature – during Prime Minister's Questions with other Prime Ministers' performances to show how she embodied a masculine persona to retain political power. Finally, I ask how feminist rhetorical scholars should approach such lost women figures who fail to support feminist agendas.

5 Richards's work discusses Thatcher, but her attention mainly focuses on Thatcher as part of a line of "women world leaders" and on the portrayal of Thatcher by Meryl Streep in *The Iron Lady*.

Prime Minister's Questions as a Construction of the British Prime Ministry

Much work has been done to explain how specific rhetorical situations have contributed to the creation and sustainability of civic identities in the United States, including the presidency. Two central texts to do so are Dana D. Nelson's *National Manhood* and Campbell and Jamieson's *Presidents Creating the Presidency*. Nelson argues that an ideology of "national manhood" pervades the U.S., linking the "fraternal articulation of white manhood to civic identity" such that others are excluded from participation in this apparent democracy (ix). Despite inconsistencies in the ability of even white men to acquire this identity and tensions between the individual and the nation, the president exists as the ultimate marker of national manhood. Citizens want to believe in the power of the president as the head of state even as presidential agency is elided by "the cooperate efforts that produce every act of state" (224). Richards points out in "Averting Crisis" that many citizens accept the illusion that "the nation-state [is] an interminable project because it gives the appearance of a seemingly stable and continuous social ordering through national identities, which in turn provides citizens with a seemingly stable sense of self" (57). Part of this stability and continuity is accomplished in the United States through the figurehead of the (male) president who, according to Nelson, draws attention to the nation's desire for unity by diverting our "ability to deal with messier, open-ended, democratic heterogeneity" (204-205). Campbell and Jamieson emphasize the importance of particular rhetorical moments to cement presidential agency. Analyzing eleven specific rhetorical genres, they claim that such public genres are primary ways that citizens conceive of the presidency. However, they also acknowledge that "different systems of government generate different types of discourse" (8). Whereas these genres contribute to a particular understanding of the presidency, government, and politics in the U.S., such conclusions are not generalizable to other countries in which different ideologies and political systems exist.

Despite the attention given to U.S. political rhetoric, much less attention has been paid to British political rhetoric by feminist rhetorical scholars. An important facet of British politics that differs from American politics is that

like a president, he [the Prime Minister] has the means to influence the national political agenda in ways that far surpass those of other national political figures. But his relations with his Cabinet are not unlike those of a chairman to a corporation's board of directors: he initiates policy discussion, expects support on critical issues, and

occasionally suffers the un-presidential experience of being overruled by his ministers. (Woodward 41)

Because British politics is built upon a party system in which the party who wins the most Parliament seats in an election elects a Prime Minister, the Prime Minister serves much more as a party representative than the U.S. President. Unlike U.S. Presidential rhetoric's push for unity, Prime Ministers must defend their party's political beliefs in the face of opposition. Approaching leadership from such a combative stance lends a different type of presence to British Prime Ministers than U.S. Presidents. Because British politics is so reliant on party lines, citizens highly value politicians' ability to speak publicly with unwavering conviction even in the face of intense questioning.

One of the most frequent, recurring, and public places British Prime Ministers assert their leadership capabilities is during Prime Minister's Questions. Since 1961, Prime Minister's Questions comprise thirty minutes⁶ during the week when members of Parliament in the House of Commons question the Prime Minister about his or her decisions, policies, etc. Gary C. Woodward calls Question Time "the prime minister's most important rhetorical obligation. While lasting less than 30 minutes each day, it is the very core of political news" (43) because of the inevitable clashes that occur. These debates serve as a primary means by which British Prime Ministers assert themselves as leaders of their party and, by default, the nation. However, unlike U.S. presidents, their ability to argue and hold their ground against the opposing party is more highly valued than their ability to convey an enduring sense of national unity. Thus, Prime Minister's Questions is an often combative environment⁷ in which "[a] rhetorically adroit leader . . . will seem to be in control – even in the face of very hostile questioning . . . [b]ut the possibility of total embarrassment is always present and enhanced by the fact that members of the press have a natural interest in reporting exchanges which impugn the government's

6 In a larger move than Thatcher made to reshape this rhetorical situation, Tony Blair changed the format to one thirty-minute session per week instead of two fifteen-minute sessions per week beginning in 1997.

7 British citizens recognize the importance of Prime Minister's Questions in the construction of their national identity. Tickets are sold to Prime Minister's Questions and they are broadcast both in Britain and in the U.S. A 2014 survey of British citizens found that 54% had watched Prime Minister's Questions in some form in the last twelve months ("Tuned In or Turned Off" 7), speaking to their importance. As a comparison point, only approximately 46 million viewers, or around 14% of the U.S. population, viewed Donald Trump's first State of the Union address in 2018 (Korte).

credibility" (Woodward 43). If a Prime Minister fails to adequately perform, they could potentially lose political power since the Prime Minister position can be refilled at any time. As Stephen R. Bates et al. point out, critics have argued that the increasing rowdiness makes Prime Minister's Questions less useful than it might be and feminist critics have claimed that the atmosphere of Prime Minister's Questions "encourages an aggressive, bullish, adversarial and 'macho' style of politics" (274).⁸ Despite such critiques, Prime Minister's Questions remains a staple of British politics.

Thatcher recognized the importance of Prime Minister's Questions to the maintenance of her own authority as Prime Minister. In her memoir *The Downing Street Years*, she discusses the importance of this rhetorical situation:

But it is Questions to the Prime Minister every Tuesday and Thursday which are the real test of your authority in the House, your standing with your party, your grip of policy and of the facts to justify it. No head of government anywhere in the world has to face this sort of regular pressure and many go to great lengths to avoid it; no head of government, as I would sometimes remind those at summits, is as accountable as the British prime minister. (41)

Thatcher correctly identifies the Prime Minister's need to assert authority in this very public venue given its centrality to retaining power. Due in part to her recognition that she faced challenges enacting agency during Prime Minister's Questions as the first woman British Prime Minister, Thatcher sought ways to solidify this authority. While Nan Johnson and Megan McIntyre argue that the "exemplary" figure (Johnson 15) or "the centrality of the actor-hero-rhetor" (McIntyre 25) constrict rhetorical history and exclude primarily women rhetors, in this case the study of Thatcher and the ways she shaped Prime Minister's Questions reveals how a woman Prime Minister enacted such a version of agency. Under the watchful eye of many, including the burgeoning media, Thatcher recognized the rhetorical dexterity required of her in this position

8 As recently as April 2014, John Bercow, a House of Commons speaker, has publicly denounced the rowdy environment created during Prime Minister's Questions (Mason and Edgington), particularly stating its tendency to keep female Members of Parliament from attending. Bates et al. speak to this concern, noting that despite an increase in the number of female Members of Parliament, Prime Minister's Questions has become more rowdy and adversarial over the last 35 years. The study "Tuned In or Turned Off?" found that 67% of British citizens surveyed believe there is "too much political party point-scoring instead of answering the question" and 47% agree it is "too noisy and aggressive" (7).

and, as the first woman British Prime Minister, was acutely aware of the “test of your authority” that this situation represented. Carefully creating a dominating approach to Prime Minister’s Questions helped Thatcher build a reputation as an “Iron Lady” that kept her in office for eleven years, the longest tenure of any Prime Minister in over one hundred years.

Two changes to Prime Minister’s Questions begun during the 1970s helped Thatcher construct her persona as a political authority. The first change was to answer all important questions herself instead of handing relevant questions over to cabinet members as had historically been done, a change initiated by the previous Prime Minister, James Callaghan. By answering more questions him or herself, the British Prime Minister claims that they can speak for their party and government without needing to defer authority to others. The second change is that the practice developed of asking the Prime Minister open questions, not about particular policies but about official visits (Richard Kelly). Since these could not be transferred to another Cabinet minister, the opportunity to ask subsequent supplementary questions after this opening question allowed the Prime Minister to be questioned on theoretically any aspect of the government, policies, etc. Since then, the standard opening question is to ask the Prime Minister to list their engagements for the day before moving into supplementary questions about other issues (Richard Kelly 8). This shift means that the Prime Minister has to be ready to answer questions about almost any subject. Their ability to stay on their feet and produce acceptable answers when confronted with questions from the opposition became a mainstay for strong Prime Ministers and could weaken the standing of those Prime Ministers who did not perform well during Prime Minister’s Questions.

These shifts played well into the construction of Thatcher’s identity as a woman Prime Minister. As Jamieson argues, politicians who are women, even more so than politicians who are men, have to make crucial decisions about their rhetorical performances that will affect how others view them and their authority. Often, political women face situations in which making any choice will lead to public judgment. These double binds are built upon the presumption that women have certain traits that do not align with those traits held by leaders. Thus, while politicians who are women may try to accept the subject-positions of both woman and leader, a way of negotiating subjectivity and agency according to Campbell (“Agency,” 4), doing so is often impossible given a sociocultural environment in which these subject-positions are incompatible. The public’s inability to reconcile the subject-positions of woman and leader often leaves women with difficult decisions about how to best position themselves as politicians and opens them up to criticisms that politicians who are men would never face (such as comments on clothing, age, issues of interest, etc.). Thatcher tried to overcome the double binds politicians who are

women often face by enacting the expected assertive and oppositional rhetorics of a Prime Minister, recognizing the interruptive effects of inhabiting a woman's body and creating a strong rhetorical position as a counterbalance to this bodily reading of her authority. This was the tactic she felt would grant her the most agency, and her long term as Prime Minister speaks to the success of her positioning.

Thatcher herself had to contend with the subject-positions of woman and Prime Minister, a leadership position that had been traditionally masculine before she stepped into it. In addition, Thatcher also had to cope with one of the most popular female images in Britain, that of the Queen. Throughout Britain's history, the Queen has been seen as a figurehead of the nation who serves as a stabilizing feminine presence, even if mostly gaining power through the nurturance of the nation rather than as its political leader. Part of Thatcher's work was to show that she was unlike the Queen, despite being feminine, and to establish that she was an authoritative figure capable of handling oppositional British politics. The Falklands War provided Thatcher with the kairoitic moment to stake this claim, and her performance during Prime Minister's Questions reinforced her reputation as an "Iron Lady," an identity set partially in opposition to the Queen that, as Jamieson points out, also allowed her to escape some of the double binds other political women face (129).

Thatcher did not contest the masculine terms through which the role of Prime Minister is constructed; instead, she played into those terms and constructed a more domineering personality than men before and after her who held this position in order to retain power. Her inability to recreate the gendered terms by which the Prime Minister gains power illustrates the challenges politicians who are women face in escaping double binds without reinscribing patriarchal, oppressive political structures. By successfully employing political rhetorical practices, Thatcher created the subject-position of the Iron Lady, a role for political women that Richards argues subsequent women world leaders are often measured against.⁹

9 The "Iron Lady" moniker works both for and against political women. For those who embrace Thatcher's embodiment of masculine rhetorics, the Iron Lady label is a signal that they are strong and effective leaders. For those who use different tactics, the Iron Lady label can serve as a judgment or even indictment of their political style, which is viewed as ineffective in contrast to Thatcher's.

Utilizing Combative Tactics During the Falklands War

While Prime Minister's Questions is already a combative situation, Prime Ministers use perhaps some of the most contentious, polemical public rhetoric during times of conflict. The Falklands War was one of the major international crises Thatcher faced during her time as Prime Minister. In 1981 in the face of abject unemployment, her approval rating plummeted to a record 25%, the lowest recorded for any Prime Minister since polling began (Campbell, *The Iron Lady* 182). The conflict in the Falklands, rather than being a British embarrassment as was assumed would be the case, revived confidence in Thatcher's leadership and "set her on a pedestal of electoral invincibility from which she was not toppled for another eight years" (Campbell, *The Iron Lady* 184). The ways Thatcher asserted her authority by drawing on agentive rhetoric helped push Britain to a victory and won her support from those inside and outside the Conservative party. Thus, the conflict served a crucial part of Thatcher's political career, illustrating that she was capable of assuming the aggressive stance of war general when needed and distracting attention away from her position as a politician who was also a woman.¹⁰

Although the Falklands War was important for Thatcher, the Falkland Islands themselves were not highly valued by the British. The Falklands is a set of islands very close to Argentina's coast that is populated not only by islanders but also by colonizing British emigrants. Control over the islands was contested between Britain and Argentina in 1982; although Britain entered into a period of negotiation with Argentina, ultimately Thatcher's government determined that the citizens of the islands themselves should be allowed to determine whose rule they wanted through "the principle of 'self-determination'" (Thatcher 174). As can be imagined, these terms were disagreeable to the Argentinian junta then in power who put into action a plan to seize the islands. Although before the Falklands War the islands had been largely neglected by Britain, Thatcher seized Argentina's invasion of the islands as a prime opportunity to assert her global authority and combat her low approval rating. The resulting conflict ended in Britain retaining the Falklands and a huge increase in Thatcher's popularity. This swing in approval ratings led to Thatcher and the Conservative Party's victories in the next election; in Argentina, the

10 Assuming this masculine position is one way women leaders solidify their positions, especially against those who might call for their removal. Elizabeth I similarly appropriated the masculine role of war general as seen in her speech to her troops at Tilbury before the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, illustrating her ability to lead her country during wartime.

effects were more drastic, with these events spurring the overthrow of the military government. Thatcher herself claims, "Nothing remains more vividly in my mind, looking back on my years in No. 10, than the eleven weeks in the spring of 1982 when Britain fought and won the Falklands War" (173). In effect, the Falklands War, fought over land the British government had been ambiguous about throughout the twentieth century, created a wave of support that Thatcher rode for the next eight years.

I turn briefly to an analysis of Prime Minister's Questions from April 1982 when the Falklands War began to June 1982 directly after the conflict ended in order to illustrate what further attention to Thatcher (and other women like her) could offer feminist rhetorical scholarship. One of the tactics through which Thatcher positioned herself as Prime Minister is rhetorical masking. Rhetorical masking occurs when a person deliberately frames their actions or agency in individual rather than collective terms, despite the distributed nature of those actions or that agency. Thatcher, like other politicians, used this tactic to construct an authoritarian persona for herself, masking the contributions of her Cabinet and building her own authority by projecting the government as her own. Such moves were fairly new to the British Prime Minister position since only Callaghan before Thatcher had begun the practice of answering questions that could have been diverted to Cabinet members, and he did not use this tactic as often as she did (see below). Further, Callaghan, unlike Thatcher, did not have the opportunity to utilize this type of rhetorical practice during conflict, a situation in which the nation feels threatened and the desire for a commanding leader is strong. Although scholars such as Richards have drawn attention to representations of Thatcher, my focus remains on Thatcher's building of her own ethos through a comparison of her actual rhetorical strategies with those of the Prime Ministers before and after her. I direct my analysis in this manner not to establish that she is a heroic figure but to emphasize how she, as a political woman, utilized particular rhetorical strategies to enact a successful and effective ethos. Thatcher's performance during Prime Minister's Questions shows how rhetorical masking is one way for politicians – especially those who must struggle to bolster their ethos – to garner agency for themselves, even if such agency is ultimately an illusion.

One of the tactics Prime Ministers sometimes employ to avoid directly answering questions is referring the House to a forthcoming statement from another member of the government, which often evades such questions altogether and shifts agency to others in their government. Bates et al. examine how Prime Ministers from Thatcher to Cameron handled their first ten weeks of Prime Minister's Questions; they found that Thatcher deferred to her Cabinet Ministers to answer questions less often than Major, Blair, Brown, and

Cameron, the four Prime Ministers immediately succeeding her, despite her having set the precedent for this practice. Answering questions herself rather than deferring them reflects Thatcher's approach to working with her Cabinet, which was typically to assert her own positions within her Cabinet and to force support for them, sometimes by replacing those ministers who disagreed with her. Rhetorically masking the role of the Cabinet minimizes their role and allows Thatcher to maintain the public image that she is in control.

Such rhetorical masking can be seen throughout Prime Minister's Questions during the Falklands War. On April 20, 1982, Thatcher faces a question from Tam Dalyell, a Labour party Member of Parliament, when he asks if "she will . . . establish new criteria upon which appointments of financial advisers are made by Departments, so as to ensure more effective public accountability and parliamentary control" ("House of Commons PQs" n.p.). Thatcher replies, "Departments are already accountable to Parliament for public funds spent on the appointment of professional financial advisers. It is always in the Government's interest to obtain the best advice available. We have no plans to change the present arrangements" ("House of Commons PQs" n.p.).

At this point, Thatcher could have easily deflected attention to one of her Cabinet ministers and the influence that the Cabinet has over such decisions. Instead, she includes herself in her government, using the customary "we" Prime Ministers use when speaking about their government, which reinforces her authority as the head of her political party and its collective agreement. When pressed further, Thatcher does mention one particular Cabinet minister: "I shall pass on that suggestion to my right hon. Friend [Norman Fowler] the Secretary of State for Social Services. As my hon. Friend knows, my right hon. Friend has made proposals to ensure that those authorities are properly accountable to Parliament, which they have not been in the past" ("House of Commons PQs" n.p.). Referencing Fowler is not, however, an evasive move but instead a way for Thatcher to emphasize what the government is doing to address problems others ask about. Further, it remains clear that Thatcher is in control through her statement that she will "pass on that suggestion." At least according to this rhetorically masking statement, it is she who determines what actions are taken and by whom, reflecting the diminished authority of her Cabinet. Thatcher's performance in front of the House of Commons solidifies her role as the head of the government and minimizes the actions others can take without her approval. Such moves make her appear authoritative at the expense of downplaying the collaborative and distributed nature of the British government that she often obstructed.

Unlike Thatcher, Callaghan directs attention to others in his Cabinet by deflecting answers onto their past or future statements. During Prime Minister's Questions on December 14, 1976, Callaghan is asked a question by Member

of Parliament Peter Viggers that is intended to accuse Callaghan's government of too many public expenditures:

Is the Prime Minister aware that if he were to visit Switzerland he would find financial prudence and frugality which are much more in key with the majority of British people than the attitude of the present Government? Does he accept that if he followed these virtues it would not be necessary for the Chancellor to make a statement tomorrow rectifying the damage done by the Government over the last two and a half years? (Hansard n.p.)

Here, Viggers directly refers to the Chancellor (Denis Healey) of the Exchequer in his question, acknowledging his role in the government, which does not typically occur in exchanges with Thatcher during Prime Minister's Questions. After a brief defense of the expenditures, Callaghan replies:

As the hon. Member knows, there will be a further statement tomorrow . . . I recommend that my hon. Friend wait until tomorrow. I cannot promise that the statement will please him or many other people. It is not a statement which, in present circumstances, can be made to please people. But we must live through this period and see the country to the other side, and this is what we intend to do. (Hansard n.p.)

Callaghan's tactic is to refer Viggers to the statement that Healey himself will be delivering the following day, diverting attention away from himself and deflecting responsibility onto others to answer questions from political opponents.

In contrast to Callaghan, Thatcher utilizes tactics that acknowledge statements Cabinet members make while still asserting her own views, consistently taking advantage of the newly-minted convention for Prime Ministers to take as many questions as possible during Prime Minister's Questions to craft her persona. Foot asks her on May 13, 1982, amidst other Members of Parliaments' questions, about possible terms that can be made to settle the Falklands conflict without war. After pointing out the disorder of multiple questions being asked at the same time, a move to reassert her control over the situation, Thatcher refers to a statement already made by the Foreign Secretary of the House, Francis Pym, in the last week. Rather than stopping here, however, Thatcher goes on to reiterate the government's position and, consequently, her own as its head:

With regard to a settlement, yes, we do work for a peaceful settlement, but the right hon. Gentleman must accept that it may not be possible, for reasons already stated by my hon. Friends, for us to come to a

settlement that is acceptable to us and to the Argentines. We shall try to do so, but, as hon. Members say, there are certain things that we cannot and must not forgo. That must be well understood.

If there is a settlement, the Government would come afterwards to report to the House and would be answerable for the settlement that they had agreed. Equally, if there is not a settlement, the power of action resides in the Government. I make it clear that no military option or action has been stopped by virtue of the negotiations up to date. ("House of Commons PQs" n.p.)

Such additional explanation works to reinforce her own judgment about the situation in Argentina and the power of her position in determining what the British government will do as they negotiate with Argentina. Her statements "as hon. Members say, there are certain things that we cannot and must not forgo. That must be well understood" and "I make it clear that no military option or action has been stopped by virtue of the negotiations up to date" reinforce the power of Thatcher's views in determining the government's actions.

At another point on May 27, 1982, Michael Brown asks Thatcher to make a statement about the conflict. She replies that a statement was made about it the previous day by the Secretary of State for Defence. Instead of simply ending her response here, however, she goes on to provide detailed information that reinforces her knowledge about the conflict:

The House would not expect me to go into details about the operations in progress, but our forces on the ground are now moving from the bridgehead. Yesterday my right hon. Friend gave initial figures for casualties on HMS "Coventry" and the "Atlantic Conveyor". The House will wish to know that the latest information is that one of the crew of HMS "Coventry" is known to have died, 20 are missing and at least 23 of the survivors are injured. Four of those on board the "Atlantic Conveyor" are known to have died, eight are missing, including the master, and five of the survivors are injured. The next of kin have been informed. We all mourn those tragic losses.

Yesterday the United Nations Security Council adopted unanimously a resolution on the Falkland Islands. It reaffirms resolution 502 and requests the Secretary-General to undertake a renewed mission of good offices, to enter into contact with Britain and Argentina with a view to negotiating mutually acceptable conditions for a ceasefire and to report again to the Security Council within seven days. We shall, of course, co-operate fully with the Secretary-General in that.

In voting for the resolution our representative at the United Nations made it clear that, in view of Argentina's continued refusal to implement resolution 502, the only acceptable condition for a ceasefire is that it should be unequivocally linked with a firm and unconditional Argentine commitment immediately to commence withdrawal of its forces from the islands. ("House of Commons PQs" n.p.)

Despite the many factors that play into her decision-making during this time, including the input of others in her government, Thatcher speaks intelligently, performing the role of an authoritative and in-control leader to such an extent that she masks the integral role of her ministers.¹¹ Such moves reinforce Thatcher's familiarity about what is happening, even though many others are actually involved in the decisions being made. Providing such detailed answers is one reason Thatcher has been hailed as one of the strongest public speakers during Prime Minister's Questions.¹²

Unlike the work Thatcher does to hide the agency of her Cabinet members, her successor Tony Blair often points out their individual agency in performing actions for the government. Near the beginning of the "war on terror" on March 12, 2003, for example, he is asked whether he will travel to Indonesia to speak with their president about international terrorism. He replies, "I have no plans at present to visit Indonesia but I have been in contact with President Megawati. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed counter-terrorism with President Megawati when he visited Indonesia in January" (*Hansard* n.p.). Here, Blair points to the collaborative work his government does in speaking with other countries, passing off some of the leadership of the nation in the process. In contrast, Thatcher typically masks the agentive role of her Cabinet members. For example, despite her own insistence that she sought "a peaceful settlement," Thatcher's opponents viewed military operations against Argentina as her primary concern, regardless of any possible negotiations through the United Nations ("House of Commons PQs" n.p.). Their frustration is voiced by Labour leader Michael Foot on April 27, 1982, when he presses her:

11 Disputes between Thatcher and her Cabinet members are well-documented. For example, Francis Pym publicly opposed Thatcherism, famously stating, "Landslides don't on the whole produce successful governments" ("Thatcher's Class of '79").

12 In Bates et al.'s study of Thatcher, Blair, Brown, and Cameron, they found that Thatcher and Brown were the most accomplished at Prime Minister's Questions when measuring quality of answers "in terms of its fullness" in relation to "any given question" (269).

The right hon. Lady's reply on the subject of the appeal from the Secretary-General of the United Nations was insufficient and unsatisfactory. Does the right hon. Lady not appreciate that this is a new element in the situation? Is it not extraordinary that she did not include any comment on it in her reply to my hon. Friend the Member for West Lothian (Mr. Dalyell)? Will the Prime Minister look at this matter in a much fuller context? Will she undertake to ensure that the Foreign Secretary goes to New York to discuss this matter with the Secretary-General? ("House of Commons PQs" n.p.)

Despite his and others' concerns that Thatcher is acting outside the recommendations of the United Nations, she insists on her own management of this situation, explaining how she is trying to work within United Nations sanctions while not dragging her feet. After minimally conceding that the United Nations plays a role in her decision, Thatcher reinforces her control over the situation by returning to the idea that "time is fast running out" on a peaceful resolution ("House of Commons PQs" n.p.) and reinforcing how she makes decisions about where Pym goes, who he talks to, and when: "My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has recently returned from Washington. I do not think that he could achieve anything by going to New York now" ("House of Commons PQs" n.p.). Pym cannot act as a singular agent determining to go to New York to consult with the Secretary-General of the United Nations but, instead, must perform his duties while adhering to her own set of priorities. This performance of Thatcher's agency allows her to inhabit her role as an authoritative world leader and to become a vital part of the feminine – if not feminist – tradition of world leadership. The overall effect is to retain her authority as the Prime Minister by masking the power of her Cabinet rather than pointing out the distributed responsibility for the many actions of a government during war.¹³ Doing so allows Thatcher to anticipate the expectations and fears of the British people, performing an authoritative role that she assumes they will expect from any Prime Minister during a conflict.

Thatcher's approach to Prime Minister's Questions illustrates her careful attention to constructions of agency. By limiting deferral to others in her government and by restating information in her own terms, Thatcher rhetorically masks the role of her Cabinet ministers and others in her government,

13 For example, Blema S. Steinberg describes a cabinet meeting Thatcher held before British forces were sent to the Falkland Islands in which she asked each person whether he supported the decision. As Steinberg states, "this bound the government as a whole, making it less easy for her to be a solitary scapegoat" (224). Thatcher's rhetoric during Prime Minister's Questions, however, hides the involvement of her cabinet in these decisions.

constructing a picture of the government in which she alone enables the actions of others and makes decisions. Finlayson and Martin argue that political speeches “must, in some measure, adapt to audiences, confirming their expectations and respecting their boundaries, even as it tries to transform them” (450). By respecting the format of Prime Minister’s Questions but using rhetorical masking, Thatcher performs as her audience expects a Prime Minister to even as she claims more authority for herself. This rhetorical positioning worked to such an extent that John Campbell argues that Thatcher’s leadership during the Falklands War directly contributed to Thatcher’s remaining in office for so long, and her performances during Prime Minister’s Questions were an integral part of media representations of her leadership. The Iron Lady persona, as Richards points out, represents the complex positioning Thatcher had to take as a woman world leader to show her ability to enact authority in the face of adversity. This rhetorical performance illustrates the ways that women in different venues can and cannot shape the rhetorical strategies they use in particular situations. Hence, Thatcher’s rhetorical practices ask us how to approach women who are effective rhetors but who do not make claims to a feminist agenda.

“She is the Gentleman”

At times, Thatcher’s gender rose to the forefront of her interactions with other politicians. During the Prime Minister’s Questions I examined, the issue of gender briefly arises on June 15, 1982. Andrew Faulds, a Labour Member of Parliament, slips and begins, “... will the right honorable Gentleman” and, at laughter noted in the transcript, says, “She likes that, she is the gentleman” before correcting himself (“House of Commons PQs”). Although the only such instance Thatcher’s gender is explicitly mentioned in this set of texts, it highlights the awareness of her gender that she and others had and their view of her leadership. She had assumed a traditionally masculine position of power so fully that they saw her losing her identity as a woman to become a man, a slippage that Richards notes is not unusual in service of protecting the lineage of the nation-state. Thatcher herself encouraged this reading by utilizing authoritative rhetorics in combative public situations that supported often unpopular and devastating policies. These may not be admirable rhetorics for feminist scholars to analyze given the damaging ends to which they were used, but they illustrate the difficulty Thatcher – and those around her – had in imagining any other way to embody the Prime Minister’s position successfully.

Others have directly addressed the problems with including Thatcher in any feminist tradition. Natasha Walter, writing of British feminism in her book *The New Feminism* in 1998, explores the ways that Thatcher has been ostracized by feminists despite making inroads for women. She claims, “No British woman this century can come close to her [Thatcher’s] achievements in grasping

power. Someone of the wrong sex and the wrong class broke through what looked like invincible barriers to reach into the heart of the establishment" (173). Walter goes on to explain the ways that Thatcher celebrated femininity through her clothing and household metaphors even as "she broke the most apparently resistant bastion of male power in the Western world" (174). Despite such progress, however, feminists struggle to figure out what to do with Thatcher. Walter believes that this is due to conflicts about how feminist Thatcher was, arguing:

Women who complain that Margaret Thatcher was not a feminist because she didn't help other women or openly acknowledge her debt to feminism have a point, but they are also missing something vital. She normalised female success. She showed that although female power and masculine power may have different languages, different metaphors, different gestures, different traditions, different ways of being glamorous or nasty, they are equally strong, equally valid. . . . No one can ever question whether women are capable of single-minded vigour, of efficient leadership, after Margaret Thatcher. She is the great unsung heroine of British feminism. (175)

As Walter herself points out, these claims were and are profoundly divisive in that they ask feminists to consider how to define feminism and how to regard those women who do not fit into a feminist tradition of any kind but who paved the way for other women to assume powerful positions. She explains that "feminists are unable to celebrate [Thatcher's] achievements, not just because of their political colour, but because she has been demonised as a freak" who is not a woman but is, instead, "deviant" (175). It is the latter claim that I find most pertinent to the way feminist rhetoricians have ignored Thatcher's rhetorical contributions. I certainly agree that Thatcher is not a feminist according to definitions of feminism focused on activism for women's or human rights. However, I concur that her inhabiting of the previously male-dominated position as Prime Minister of Britain makes her worthy of our attention.

Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch's insistence that feminist rhetorical practices have and must continue to shape rhetorical studies as a field can only be carried forward if we are willing to examine the rhetorical practices all woman, including lost women rhetors, utilize. The field of feminist rhetorical studies has not welcomed women whose political views do not align with its own, struggling to identify how they fit into its constructions of feminist rhetorical history. While availability (or lack of availability) of material written by women rhetors is often cited as one struggle in feminist rhetorical historiography, the Margaret Thatcher Foundation has ample materials about Thatcher that have yet to be tapped by this field. Thus, feminist rhetorical

scholars have to examine what other reasons they have for excluding her and similar women from their analyses of feminist rhetorical history. As Jamieson argues, whether or not we agree with Thatcher's politics:

In her exchanges with Parliament, she decisively dispatched the notion that a woman is incapable of thinking on her feet. In moments of crisis, she rose to eloquence. And by leading her country into war, she made it less likely that future female candidates for President of the United States will be asked whether they are tough enough to function as commander-in-chief. (191)

Although women who are politicians still face these questions, Iron Ladies such as Thatcher have paved the way, even if imperfectly, for them. Our most important question, then, is how do we approach women rhetors such as Thatcher who are powerful and popular or even infamous but whose political projects do not support women's rights or human rights? To those who would answer by ignoring them, I would challenge feminist rhetorical studies to think more broadly about the work we do and why. Thatcher illustrates this blind spot, opening feminist rhetorics up to a wider, more varied base by asking scholars to consider those lost women rhetors who do not conform to the prototypes of feminist rhetors that have been constructed in the field.

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