

# **‘Mister Speaker! I therefore have no claim’ – Agda Östlund’s Entrance in the Parliamentary Debate in March 1922 in a Historical and Rhetorical Perspective**

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## **Abstract**

In March 1922 the Social Democrat Agda Östlund (1870–1942) speaks as the first female member of Swedish Parliament in the Second Chamber due to her own proposal for the state to take responsibility for arranging suitable work for tuberculosis patients when they leave the sanatorium, so that they can complete their convalescence. It may seem that democracy was once and for all established when women were finally included in the Parliament. But that was not the case. The question is how Agda Östlund acts in a formative historical stage after the first democratic election, how she finds a speaking position and how her speech can be understood in relation to the negotiation of the meaning of women’s civil and democratic rights.

This article includes a contextualisation and a text analysis where I go into how the text relates to a rhetorical situation. I see Agda Östlund’s utterances as rhetorical in accordance with the theoretical perspectives established by Lloyd F. Bitzer where the key concepts are rhetorical situation, problem, restrictions and audience. Agda Östlund uses the mother role as a rhetorical strategy, connects the issue of tuberculosis to the home and everyday environment and nursing, which are traditionally female spheres, and highlights class injustice in the possibility of completing convalescence after sanitation. The mother role and the factual and low-key argumentation have two purposes in this speech – partly to adapt to the Parliament order, and partly to present the actual issue. The rhetorical strategy is about using the mother role as a persona to make the class perspective a matter of care, nursing and compassion.

Östlund’s entry into the Parliament debate can be described as a rhetorically fragile situation because she speaks for the very substance of her own motion while at the same time following the committee’s line, in which she herself is a part, and demands a rejection of it.

## **Keywords**

Agda Östlund, Swedish parliament 1920s, women’s civil and democratic rights in Sweden, working-class health, tuberculosis, the mother role as a rhetorical strategy

**‘Mister Speaker! I therefore have no claim’ – Agda Östlund’s entrance in the parliamentary debate in March 1922 in a historical and rhetorical perspective**

Det blev tyst och stilla i andra kammaren på lördagseftermiddagen då talmannen ropade ut i salen fru Östlunds namn. Riksdagsmännen samlade sig i en stor klunga framemot talarstolen, och när fru Östlund tog ordet

rådde en andlös tystnad. Hon var också den första kvinna, som tagit ordet i riksdagen, och det märktes att riksdagsfarbröderna liksom kände att det var vad man kallar ett historiskt ögonblick.<sup>1</sup>

A hush fell over the Second Chamber on Saturday afternoon when the Speaker called out the name of Mrs Östlund. The Parliament members gathered in a large group in front of the podium, and when Mrs Östlund spoke, the silence was total. This was actually the first time a woman spoke in the Parliament, and it was noticeable that the male members somehow felt that it was what one might call a historic moment.

On Saturday, March 11, 1922, the Social Democrat Agda Östlund (1870–1942) speaks as the first female member of Swedish Parliament in the Second Chamber due to her own proposal for the state to take responsibility for arranging suitable work for tuberculosis patients when they leave the sanatorium, so that they can complete their convalescence.<sup>2</sup>

It may seem that democracy was once and for all established when women were finally included in the Parliament. But that was not the case. The question is how Agda Östlund acts in a formative historical stage after the first democratic election, how she finds a speaking position and how her speech can be understood in relation to the negotiation of the meaning of women's civil and democratic rights. At the time for her speech Sweden is being ruled for the second time by a Social Democratic government.

This article includes a contextualisation and a text analysis where I go into how the text relates to a rhetorical situation. I see Agda Östlund's utterances as rhetorical in accordance with the theoretical perspectives established by Lloyd F. Bitzer where the key concepts are rhetorical situation, problem, restrictions and audience. A rhetorical situation is a situation that can be changed through utterances. Problem refer to the current situation that motivates an utterance. Restrictions refer to what can be said in a given context. I will return to this later.

### **Agda Östlund's road to the podium**

The first female member of the Parliament to reach the podium had grown up in the small town of Köping in Västmanland, a province in central Sweden. Her father, Per Lundgren, was employed in mechanical workshops and worked extra to reach the threshold for the right to vote, at this time 800 kronor per year (Flood, 1954, p.12). Her mother, Ulrika, was interested in politics and enjoyed reading Fredrika Bremer, a pioneer of the Swedish women's movement. Here, the young Agda Lundgren thus acquired a political awareness from home at an early age (Flood 1954, p. 119).

Her radical mother thought that it was important that she learned a trade, so that she would not be forced to marry in order to secure her livelihood. Agda Östlund trained as a seamstress (Flood, 1954, p. 14). At the age of 16 she rented a sewing machine at a cost of five kronor as a deposit and then five kronor per month (Benavente, 2020, p. 11).

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<sup>1</sup> *Social-Demokraten*, 13.3.1922.

<sup>2</sup> From 1866 to 1971 the Swedish Parliament consisted of the First Chamber and the Second Chamber. The Second Chamber was directly elected by those entitled to vote, while the First Chamber was elected indirectly via the country's county council. A law fell unless both Chambers voted yes.

The family were active in the temperance movement, more precisely in the Gustaf Adolf lodge of the Good Templars in Köping, and Agda Östlund herself joined when she was 19 years old (Flood, 1954, p. 15)<sup>3</sup>. This is where she learned how to play an active part in organizations and how to speak in public. She has herself recounted how she forgot the first verse and ran off in shame, when she was to perform the poem 'Hjärtats hem' (Home of the heart) by King Charles XV of Sweden (Flood, 1954, 119)<sup>4</sup>.

Soon, however, she would become a well regarded speaker and was entrusted with a number of different assignments. It was in the Good Templar lodge that Agda Östlund met her future husband, the metal worker Anders Östlund. In the mid-1890s, they moved to Stockholm, where they became members of the Fram lodge. In 1898 the daughter Hildegard was born.

Something that distinguishes the labour movement in the Nordic countries is the mobilization through popular movements. Class politics in the Nordic countries acquired, as the sociologist Göran Therborn puts it, a popular movement character. The temperance movement existed, Therborn continues, in the middle of this popular movement field and was until the First World War the largest popular movement (Therborn, 1994, p. 71).

Membership in both the labour movement and the temperance movement increased rapidly, and the two movements became closer as the temperance organizations shifted their focus from individual self-help to general temperance policy, and social democracy developed in a reformist direction with less emphasis on the revolutionary perspective. Many were active in both the labour movement and the temperance movement (Ambjörnsson, 1998, p. 258).

According to Ronny Ambjörnsson (1998), a specialist in the history of science and ideas, a specific culture of conscientiousness gradually developed through the temperance movement, the independent church movement, and the labour movement. Conscientiousness meant, according to Ambjörnsson, a consciously controlled life and awareness of the conditions of life needed to take a position vis-à-vis society – in short, the control over one's own actions that was needed to change society in an organized way and to develop as a person.

Dignity and solidarity were two important elements of this conscientiousness. The unionized worker has dignity, both in relation to the employer and in relation to the other workers. This dignity includes the same kind of conscientiousness that is characteristic of the temperance movement: sobriety, disciplined behaviour, and an emphasis on the value of knowledge and education (Ambjörnsson, 1998, p. 112).

It was in connection with the general strike for voting rights in May 1902 that Agda Östlund became seriously involved in politics, and a year later she joined the Social Democratic women's club in Stockholm (Flood, 1954, p. 22)<sup>5</sup>.

Initially the support offered by the party to the Social Democratic women was limited. If any campaigning was to be carried out, they had to beg for money, mainly from the Social

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<sup>3</sup> The Good templar movement had its roots in the United States. At first it was religiously influenced, but in the early 20th century it became religiously neutral

<sup>4</sup> In Hulda Flood's biography the title of the poem is 'O, var är ditt hem, jag frågade mitt hjärta'. This line forms part of the poem 'Hjärtats hem' (Home of the heart) by King Charles XV of Sweden. I therefore believe this is the poem that is referred to.

<sup>5</sup> The general strike took place 15–17 May 1902 in Sweden and was used to get universal and equal suffrage.

Democratic Party, but also from LO, the confederation of trade union organizations linked to the Swedish labour movement (Flood, 1954, p. 23).<sup>6</sup>

The Social Democratic Party was early characterized by a patriarchal structure, according to historian Christina Carlsson (1986, p. 139). One of the consequences of the division of the labour movement into a trade union and a political part was that it separated issues that dealt with paid work from other social activities, such as family, housework and children. The ideology and organization of the Social Democrats were based on men and wage labour. The women, who were both mothers and workers, became a weaker part in the organization, says Carlsson.

As a pioneer in the Social Democratic women's movement, Agda Östlund built up an extensive network of contacts. One of her early correspondents was Hulda Flood from the Karlstad women's club. Flood would later become the party's first female party secretary. 'You immediately felt that here you had a reliable friend and comrade, to whom you could turn with confidence. This meant an enormous amount to us, who at that time, with small means and against a lot of resistance, worked hard in the rural areas to get the women interested in political work', Hulda Flood said about her party comrade Agda Östlund (Flood, 1954, pp. 8-10).

When Agda Östlund appeared in public one of the first times in Stockholm, at a suffrage meeting in the autumn of 1907 with an audience of 2,000, she came straight from a day in the washhouse (Flood, 1954, p. 24). When a childhood friend, Svea Säfverström from Köping, later asked her how she found the courage to speak, she replied: 'if you really want something, you find the courage' (Flood, 1954, p. 15)<sup>7</sup>.

For many years, Agda Östlund travelled around Sweden, campaigning for women's right to vote and organizing women from the working-class. At the same time, she wrote articles in *Morgonbris*, the magazine of the Social Democratic women's movement. Her articles covered both the activities of the Social Democratic women's clubs and the conditions experienced by the workers.

The Social Democratic men prioritized an extension of men's suffrage before the introduction of the women's and bourgeois LKPR (Landsföreningen för Kvinnans Politiska Rösträtt – National Association for Women's Political Suffrage) demanded suffrage for women on the same terms as men, which meant that the association did not take a clear position on universal suffrage. For a long time, there were financial barriers to suffrage.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The Swedish trade union confederation, LO, is an umbrella organization for trade unions that organize mainly blue-collar workers. It was founded in 1898 and started its work the year after. The original task was to coordinate the resources of the affiliated unions when conducting defense battles. LO is an abbreviation for Landsorganisationen i Sverige, National organization in Sweden.

<sup>7</sup> The childhood friend, Svea Säfverström, is mentioned in *Köpings Tidning* (20.12.1893) when she was elected bookkeeper for Köpings Sparbank. It also appears that her father, 'R. Säfverström', was employed as materials manager at Köpings Mekaniska Verkstad, the mechanical workshop where Agda Östlund's father also worked.

<sup>8</sup> In 1866, the Parliament with two Chambers was established. Anyone who earned 800 kronor per year, had wealth or owned agricultural property of a certain value was allowed to vote in the Second Chamber elections. The right to vote in the First Chamber was graded according to income. In 1909, universal suffrage was introduced for men. If you had not paid your taxes or were dependent on social services were not allowed to vote. In 1919, the Parliament decided on universal and equal suffrage for women and men. In 1921, women were able to use their right to vote in parliamentary elections for the first time.

For Agda Östlund and her female party comrades, it was a question of managing ideological, organizational, and strategic considerations in the struggle for the right to vote. The Social Democratic women agreed on a compromise: they would primarily push for the right to vote through their own organizations, but with the freedom for those who so wished to participate in bourgeois suffrage associations (Flood, 1960, p 63).

While, for example, her party colleague Ruth Gustafson abandoned the bourgeois LKPR after her proposal that LKPR would work for the abolition of the exclusion from suffrage of those receiving poor relief – Agda Östlund chose to continue cooperating with them (Rönnbäck, 2004, p. 88).

As a Social Democratic woman active in the struggle for the right to vote, she fully experienced the tensions of both the male labour movement and the bourgeois movement for women's right to vote. There was class conflict between suffragist women and gender conflict between Social Democrats. As a campaigner Östlund had to deal with these ideological cracks and contradictions in various contexts in order for her message to get through. Both the message and the description of the problem must be angled in different ways – Östlund's awareness of this is evident from the range of her styles. As a writer for the magazine of the Social Democratic women's movement, she used drastic images, irony, and sarcasm to stir up political consciousness among working-class women. As a subordinated female speaker in the public arena, she instead used a low-key, factual rhetorical strategy (Gustafson, 2018, p. 52).

### **Tuberculosis – an acute health problem**

In addition to her positions of trust within the Social Democratic women's movement and the temperance movement, Agda Östlund was also a member of the board of the Stockholm city tuberculosis bureau (Stockholms stads tuberkulosbyrå). During the 19th and early 20th centuries, tuberculosis claimed more lives than any other disease. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century approximately one million people in Europe died each year from tuberculosis (Puranen & Zetterholm, 1987, p. 124).

Tuberculosis not only caused human suffering but also became a socio-economic problem, when people at their most productive age were snatched away, leaving families behind (Uddenberg, 2015, p. 47).

Tuberculosis is a social disease, largely linked to the environment in which people live. It is an infection that is spread from person to person, or indirectly via bacteria in milk, dust etc. Housing density and the quality of housing play a major role in the spread of the disease, which is not highly contagious, but dependent on more lasting contacts for it to be transmitted. Tuberculosis is also related to nutrition – people with good nutritional status are significantly more resistant than those who are malnourished (Puranen, 1984, p. 5).

The Stockholm that received Agda and Anders Östlund was experiencing rapid growth associated with industrialization and characterized by overcrowding and housing shortages. Most workers, with their family, lived in single room accommodation (Puranen, 1984, p. 343)<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Three types of apartment dominated in the working-class neighbourhoods of 1890s Stockholm: one room and kitchen, two rooms and kitchen and a room with a porcelain stove but without a kitchen (Torsten Gårdlund, *Industrialismens samhälle*, Stockholm 1942, p. 380).

Many workers were forced to sleep at their workplaces (Tallerud, 1999, p. 185). There are reported cases of ten people sharing a room of twenty square metres. It is estimated that 25 percent of workers in Stockholm towards the end of the 19th century lived as lodgers (Puranen, 1984, p. 256). Housing was often substandard, damp, cold and lacking in ventilation (Puranen, 1984, p. 343).

The city was completely inside the old customs, what is now called the inner city. Södermalm and Kungsholmen were the most distinct working-class districts because most of the factories were built there. The workers tried to live as close to the workplace as possible in order to get there on foot. Tram travel became far too expensive (Lindgren, 2014, pp. 73-77). That Kungsholmen – the King's Isle – was known as Svältholmen – Starvation Isle – says something about its social status (Puranen & Zetterholm, 1987, p. 115).

Of the 10,067 who died of pneumonia in Sweden in 1905, a majority, 54 % belonged to the 'poor', according to the Royal Majesty's report on the tuberculosis issue (Puranen & Zetterholm, 1987, p.114). In Stockholm, mortality was higher than in the country as a whole. The National Board of Medicine's statistics for the year 1890 state the mortality rate in infectious diseases to 54 per 10,000 inhabitants, against 24 in Stockholm County (Lindgren, 2014, p. 77).

The work environment might also contribute to the spread of tuberculosis. At this time Stockholm was the country's largest industrial city and factories and residential buildings coexisted in the same neighbourhood. Cleanliness and air quality in the workplace were poor, which is clear not least from numerous local agreements from this time, specifying how often cleaning should take place (Lindgren, 2018, p. 11). Inhalation of different types of dust – for example lead dust in the printing works, tobacco dust in the tobacco factories and textile fibres in the textile factories – increased the workers' susceptibility to the tubercle bacterium (Berggren & Greiff, 1990, p. 170).

Tuberculosis was spread from person to person through coughing, but could also be spread via, for example, milk from cows suffering from udder tuberculosis. The most important preventive measures were therefore to do with hygiene. Patients who were cared for at home had to cough and spit into special containers containing disinfectant, and if they died their clothes would not be used by others until after thorough cleaning. In schools, factories, meeting rooms and railway carriages sick people's expectorations would also have to be made safe (Uddenberg, 2015, p. 48).

By the end of the 19th century, Sweden's first sanatorium had opened in the mountains in the north of Sweden. Subsequently, state owned sanatoriums were built in each county, in rural and often upland areas. In many ways the care was reminiscent of that of spas and health resorts, but in the sanatoriums it was the air, not the water, that was to promote health (Uddenberg, 2015, p. 49)<sup>10</sup>. At the same time, preventive efforts were carried out through so called dispensaries, or tuberculosis bureaux, which functioned as a kind of advice agencies that

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<sup>10</sup> From the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were four sanatoriums in Sweden for the care of mainly poor tuberculosis patients. They had been funded by public fundraising. The treatment, diet and leisure activities offered were the same regardless of the patients' ability to pay. However, the differences in room distribution remained. Patients were offered a private, semi-private or public room. The poor paid for their rooms through subsidies. According to the statutes, it was clear that financial reasons should not be an obstacle to being considered for a care place. (Puranen 1984, p. 329).

provided education and information. One goal was to detect early tuberculosis, so that it could be treated before it got hold of the patient. One method used was radiological examination: a weak X-ray through the chest was aimed at a fluorescent screen where the doctor could detect 'shadows on the lungs' which could be tuberculosis (Uddenberg, 2015, p. 48).

The tuberculosis bureaux cooperated with the sanatoriums and were not infrequently established in connection with them. Stockholm city tuberculosis bureau, where, as we have seen, Agda Östlund was a board member, were open four days a week. Those who were diagnosed with tuberculosis were offered a free spit bottle, a spittoon, a toothbrush, and a laundry bag, as well as an information brochure about the disease (Lindhagen, 1910, p. 13).

The lack of knowledge was a problem, not least among those who were particularly vulnerable and lived in appalling hygiene conditions and great poverty. The many magazines, brochures, and lectures that were intended to disseminate information to the public often contained language that was difficult to access. Victor Berglund, a doctor and the director of Sundsholm's sanatorium, near Halmstad on the West Coast, commented: 'The language and method of presentation used by scientists will not be understood by the common people, and it is precisely these who harbour most of the sources of infection and need help first' (Berglund, 1910, p. 13).

Criticism soon emerged that the extensive investment in sanatorium care did not yield the expected results. According to several doctors, the problem was principally that working-class tuberculosis patients were unable to complete their convalescence appropriately after they had been discharged from the sanatoriums. Many were forced to return to hard work, overcrowding and substandard hygiene conditions.

### **The rhetorical situation**

In order for a situation to be considered rhetorical, it must, according to rhetoric researcher Lloyd F. Bitzer, contain a problem or other factor that warrants expression, have an audience with the ability to affect the problem, and finally incorporate all the constraints that the speaker has to take into account if he or she wants to be able to convince the audience to approach the problem in the way the speaker wishes. Rhetorical acts, according to Bitzer, are thus first and foremost anchored in a historical context and constitute an answer to a specific situation in this context (Bitzer, 1968, p. 3).

A rhetorical situation is a language situation where a speaker can influence the participants' beliefs and actions. The first element of the rhetorical situation is the rhetorical problem. It is an imperfection that has an urgent character: it is a defect, an obstacle, something that is in a way that it should not be. In almost all contexts, there will be many different problems, but not all are part of a rhetorical situation, not all are rhetorical problems. A problem that cannot be influenced by rhetoric is not a rhetorically problem, says Bitzer (1968, p. 6)<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> According to Bitzer, things that happen with necessity and that cannot be changed – such as death, winter and certain natural disasters – are examples of intrusive problems but not rhetorical intrusive problems. But there he is wrong: a natural disaster that has occurred cannot be abolished, but the situation can be improved through a wise rhetorical effort of, for example, a deliberative (advisory) nature. This can be compared with Agda Östlund's speech against a decision already made by the committee – which thus should not be able to change but which she still creates a rhetorical situation around.

Critics have pointed out that the very identification and description of the problem is part of the rhetorical act. For good reasons they believe that Bitzer, through his definition of the rhetoric problem and the rhetorical situation, does not pay enough attention to the actor setting the agenda by selecting facts and events, interpreting them and giving them a specific meaning by depicting them linguistically and symbolically. Rhetoric is about linguistically and symbolically creating attention for a specific situation and giving it a specific meaning, according to rhetoric researcher Richard E. Vatz (1973, p. 161).

The second element of the rhetorical situation is the audience. If a speech is not aimed at an audience that actually has the ability in some way to influence the rhetorical problem, then it is not a matter of rhetoric, Bitzer says (1968, p. 8). For an audience to be considered rhetorical, however, it does not necessarily have to manifest itself as a homogenous collection of people. The rhetorical audience may well consist of only a part of the total audience who listens to the message.

According to Bitzer, the third element of the rhetorical situation is the set of constraints (1968, p. 8). The constraints constitute a context that the speaker must relate to in his or her speech, and represent a large and varied group of circumstances. It can be a question of doxa, hegemony, attitudes and traditions that the speaker must consider in order to get the message across.

All rhetorical situations emerge and develop to reach the point when a speech is most appropriate or effective. According to Bitzer, recurring and comparable situations create traditions and expectations of the content and form of a speech. Bitzer states that a good speaker must carefully examine the type of situation he finds himself in and, after consideration of possible answers to the given situation, choose what best suits the speaker's agenda. Bitzer sees a predictability in the rhetoric: if you read the situation well, you should – in this reasoning – be able to predict what will happen next (1968, p. 9).

### **The debate on tuberculosis and parliamentary rhetoric**

As regards the rhetorical situation described by Bitzer that the Social Democrat Östlund faced in her first appearance in the parliament the identification of the tuberculosis' relationship to class was by all accounts an important factor. Firstly, class was a factor in terms of the prevalence of tuberculosis, which could be linked to general sanitary and economic living standards, in that poverty and deficient sanitation provided a breeding ground for tuberculosis. Secondly, class was significant within tuberculosis care, in that working-class patients found it harder to complete their period of convalescence after the sanatorium stay.

Debate about the problem of many tuberculosis patients being unable to complete their period of convalescence, following a period in the sanatorium, had been going on for a long time.<sup>12</sup> Gustaf Wahl, then a Social Democratic member of the Stockholm City Council, had proposed that the City of Stockholm and the state would help arrange suitable work for people recovering

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<sup>12</sup> In 'Arbetslöshet och tuberkulos', in *Svenska Nationalföreningen mot Tuberkulos Kvartalstidskrift*, 1:1912, Emanuel Lindhagen argued for the introduction of labour colonies as a solution to the problem. Victor Berglund addressed the problem in several publications and launched his vision of smallholdings as a solution (*Några reflektioner öfver arbetarhygien och tuberkulos*, Halmstad 1907, *Några reflektioner öfver tuberkulos och tuberculosvård*, Halmstad 1910 and *Den vita pesten. Hur lungkot uppkommer, sprides, utvecklas och motarbetas*, Stockholm 1916). Victor Berglund was interviewed in the newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* 10.7.1908 about his thoughts on tuberculosis care, under the heading 'The fight against the enemy of the people. Conversation with the tuberculosis-insurance doctor'.



from tuberculosis. In his motion to the City Council, Wahl had referred to the previously mentioned Victor Berglund's program of rural smallholdings for tuberculosis patients. Wahl also reported on his own observations of tuberculosis care in connection with a visit to Söderby hospital in Stockholm.

Jag har sett patienter lämna sjukhuset relativt återställda och som, om de haft möjligheter att erhålla något lättare arbete samt i övrigt möjlighet att leva under något så när goda hygieniska och ekonomiska förhållanden, säkerligen skulle ha kunnat vidmakthålla den återställda hälsa, som de vunnit på sjukhuset. Istället ha de merendels, omedelbart efter utskrivningen från sjukhuset, kastats in i sina gamla yrken eller mången gång ännu tyngre arbete, än de förut innehåft, med resultat att de om någon tid nödgats återvända till sjukhuset, fullständigt nedbrutna och till utseendet liknande skuggor av vad de förut varit. Sådana patienter repa sig sällan mera från sin sjukdom.<sup>13</sup>

I have seen patients leave the hospital fairly well recovered, who, if they had been able to find somewhat lighter work and an opportunity to live in reasonably good hygienic and economic conditions could certainly have maintained their restored health, which they had gained at the hospital. Instead, they have mostly, immediately after leaving hospital, been thrown into their old trades or often even heavier work than previously, with the result that at some point they have had to return to the hospital, completely broken down and looking like shadows of what they were before. Such patients rarely recover from their illness.

The proposals tabled in 1922 by Gustaf Wahl in the First Chamber and by Agda Östlund in the Second Chamber of the Parliament were based on Wahl's previous proposal to the Stockholm City Council, with the difference that now only the state and not the municipality is asked to take responsibility for providing work for people suffering from tuberculosis. Several passages in Wahl's motion to the Parliament are identical to those he previously used in the motion to the Stockholm City Council. In his motion to the First Chamber, Wahl demands that the parliament request that the state investigate what measures could be taken to prepare suitable work for a convalescent center for tuberculosis. Östlund's motion, which is dated five days later, refers only to Wahl's motion and uses the same claim.<sup>14</sup>

Both Gustaf Wahl and Agda Östlund were newcomers to the Parliament and both had a strong commitment to improving tuberculosis care. The problem of working-class tuberculosis patients not being able to complete their convalescence after their sanatorium stay was still unresolved. Society had not yet organized lighter work for the group of tuberculosis patients who lived in poverty.

### **The mother role as a rhetorical strategy**

In the following, I want to test the idea that Agda Östlund makes use of the role of mother as a persona and situates the issue of tuberculosis care in the home and the everyday environment

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<sup>13</sup> 'Om åtgärder i syfte att Stockholms kommun och staten må anskaffa åt tuberkulossjuka konvalescenter', proposal put forward in the Stockholm City Council in 1915, by Gustaf Wahl.

<sup>14</sup> 'Angående beredande av lämpligt arbete åt tuberkulossjuka konvalescenter', proposal put forward in Second Chamber, 1922, nr 162 by Agda Östlund.

and nursing – which are traditionally female spheres – as a rhetorical strategy to enable her to assert herself and make her voice heard in a patriarchal rhetorical forum.

According to the rhetoric researcher Brigitte Mral, the concept of persona can be defined as an external character which, in a complicated process, on the one hand is to some extent imposed on the individual by the environment, but which on the other hand is just as much the result of the individual's own choice. This character forms a mask to hold in front of and speak through. According to Mral, the choice of persona can be seen as a strategic adaptation to the expectations and rules of the environment (1997, p. 29). In order to be able to give the words an impact in a situation of subordination, women choose roles, identities that are acceptable to women, or at least comprehensible to the respective audience. This role-play does not mean denying, but rather varying and developing different aspects of one's own identity, which sometimes becomes a game with the audience's prejudices (Mral, 1995, p. 110).

According to Mral, a characteristic of the Swedish suffrage women was that they had chosen socially acceptable roles. This rhetorical strategy was a consequence of the suffrage women arguing out of a disadvantage and the opponents portraying them as threatening subversives. Much of these women's argumentation can be seen as a forced defensive stance. One of these socially acceptable roles that women of suffrage had chosen was the role of mother, or the maternal attitude, in which the refining influence of motherhood on social life was emphasized.

The idea of women's world-improving mission, motherhood and the safe home, against the adversary's accusations of subversive tendencies, had recurred not least with Ellen Key, who had summarized her utopia of women's importance to good society in the metaphor of 'mother of society'. Ellen Key was a Swedish feminist who had great influence as a writer and lecturer. Just as women build the good home for their own family, they should also be able to build the good society for all, she had written in a manifest from 1896. The suffrage women had used notions of home as the lost paradise that could be recaptured. In this discourse, the woman had represented the good home that had been lost in the new era (Florin, 2006, p. 230).

Mral, who has studied the rhetorical strategies of female speakers during times when demanding a place in public was seen as unnatural behavior for a woman, connects the mother role, or motherly attitude, with the use of a humility topos – to indicate that one really wants to be silent, that one does not really have the ability to speak, but that one is forced by the circumstances, or that you speak for others, that you take on the cause of others or serve a higher purpose (Mral, 2003, p. 42).

Agda Östlund's speech in the parliament could be linked to humility topoi of this kind, but it has a completely different tone and meaning here. This is a new historical situation, when women gain access to the public through the democratic breakthrough with the newfound right to vote and stand for election. The question of the use of humility topoi also gets a specific tone from the fact that Agda Östlund is a socialist and part of a movement. That Östlund makes herself a mouthpiece for the working-class and the fact that she does not speak for herself does not necessarily mean in that perspective that her use of humility means that she takes on a submissive female role. Rather, it means that she speaks for others out of ideological conviction, that the rhetoric is driven and characterized by a commitment to the cause, in this case helping the tuberculosis sufferers.

När jag nu begärde ordet i denna fråga, så var det icke för att tala för  
utskottets yrkande. Men jag har velat begagna detta tillfälle att å deras

vägnar, som motionen avser att skydda, rikta en den varmaste vädjan till regeringen att, då nationalföreningens utredning föreligger färdig, taga sig an denna sak och att, för att än en gång citera utskottet, 'så fort förhållandena medgiva' ett förslag i motionens syfte må vara att förutse.<sup>15</sup>

When I asked for the floor on this issue, it was not to speak in the favor of the committee's request. But I have wanted to take this opportunity to address, on their behalf, who the motion seeks to protect, the warmest appeal to the government, once the national association's investigation is complete, address this matter and, to quote the committee once again, 'as soon as circumstances permit' a proposal for the purpose of the motion may be to anticipate.

The use of humility topoi, which Mral has observed as a rhetorical strategy among female speakers throughout history, thus acquires a specific tone with regard to the Social Democrat Agda Östlund at a new historical stage when women conquered the right to vote and stand for election to the parliament.<sup>16</sup> As previously pointed out, the very identification and description of the rhetorical problem can be seen as part of the rhetorical act. The speaker can set the agenda by selecting facts and events, interpreting them and giving them a specific meaning by depicting them linguistically and symbolically. Östlund selects the tuberculosis issue, focuses on the home, the everyday environment and nursing and highlights a class injustice in terms of the possibility of completing the convalescence after the sanatorium stay.

As new members of the parliament, Wahl and Östlund take the opportunity to raise the yet unsolved issue of tuberculosis care. Wahl is more or less reusing the six-and-a-half-year-old motion from Stockholm City Council. The introduction that more and more doctors have pointed out that tuberculosis care is expensive and ineffective is the same. Wahl also refers to the same lecture and uses the same quote from the doctor Victor Berglund. In the paragraph that deals with own experiences and experiences of tuberculosis care at Söderby Hospital, the only difference is that in the parliament motion it is clearly stated that Wahl himself lived there as a patient and apparently was himself affected by tuberculosis.<sup>17</sup>

Östlund's motion in the Second Chamber does not contain any of his own formulations but only refers to Wahl's motion and has the same claim as him.<sup>18</sup> The first thing Östlund does is to ally herself with a man, also in the First Chamber, and follow in his footsteps. To refer only to Wahl's motion could be seen as a defensive strategy, a strategy of humility. It may therefore seem that Östlund is just jumping on a train that is already rolling, but in fact it is she, and not

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<sup>15</sup> 'Angående lämpligt arbete åt tuberkulossjuka konvalescenter, lördagen den 11 mars' in *Riksdagens protokoll vid lagtima riksmötet år 1922. Andra kammaren. Andra bandet*, Stockholm 1922, nr 16, p. 64.

<sup>16</sup> This strategy has not only been used by female speakers but is part of an old rhetorical tradition to 'captatio benevolentiae', ie. win the goodwill of the audience. See E.R. Curtius, 1945, chapter 'Topoi'.

<sup>17</sup> 'Om åtgärder i syfte att Stockholms kommun och staten må anskaffa åt tuberkulossjuka konvalescenter', proposal put forward in Stockholm City Council 1915, nr 25 by Gustaf Wahl; 'Om vidtagande av åtgärder för beredande av lämpligt arbete åt tuberkulossjuka konvalescenter', motion in First Chamber, 1922, nr 36 by Gustaf Wahl; For information about Söderby hospital in Stockholm, see särtryck ur Svenska Nationalföreningens mot tuberkulos kvartalsskrift, issue 4, 1935. Alf Gullbring writes about the history of the hospital in conjunction with the 25 year anniversary. The inauguration took place October, 1910. It was then the country's largest tuberculosis hospital with 452 care places. 'Sun and light, outdoor walks, walks and dietary treatment were the predominant things', according to Gullbring. He writes about the treatment methods that applied at the opening and then explain how the treatment methods have changed over the years.

<sup>18</sup> 'Angående beredande av lämpligt arbete åt tuberkulossjuka konvalescenter', proposal in Second Chamber, 1922, nr 162 by Agda Östlund.

Wahl, who speaks out in the Chamber – even if she demands a rejection – and raises the issue and brings it up in the public, which was clearly central to their common strategy. The purpose of the motion was to shed light on an old issue that was still unsolved. The one who fulfills that purpose is Östlund, not Wahl. The motion itself does not attract any attention to the issue.

Östlund is aware that she, as the first female member of the Parliament to enter the podium, will arouse interest in the mass media and she uses it to shed light on the issue. In an article entitled ‘How it feels – to be one of the four’, published in *Morgonbris* in February 1922, shortly after the opening of the Parliament, she describes with an ironic tone how the journalists ask questions to the female members as if they had never worked with politics in the past and that the newly elected thirty male members in this respect have been ‘sadly neglected’.<sup>19</sup>

With the role of mother as a rhetorical strategy, Östlund thus connects the tuberculosis issue to the home and everyday environment and nursing when she highlights the difficulties of completing the convalescence after the sanatorium stay for tuberculosis patients from the working-class.

Men om den sålunda vårdade icke kan behålla den hälsa han återvunnit eller åtminstone den förbättring han undergått på sanatoriet, så är det ofta beroende på de omständigheter, som möta honom eller henne, då de återvända till vardagsförhållandena. Det är oftast brist på arbete och därmed brist på allt. Det är, som någon sade till mig här om dagen: de får sörja för mycket. Detta är nog sanningen i all sin bitterhet.<sup>20</sup>

But if the person thus cared for cannot maintain the health he has regained or at least the improvement he has undergone in the sanatorium, it is often due to the circumstances which meet him or her when they return to everyday conditions. It is usually a lack of work and thus a lack of everything. It is, as someone told me the other day: they have to take care of a lot. This is probably the truth in all its bitterness.

This can be compared with the following speaker, the left-wing socialist Ivar Vennerström, who places the issue in the medical department world when he talks about his experiences of tuberculosis care in the County Council in the province Västernorrland in the north of Sweden.

Östlund substantiates her argument by referring to medical experts, investigations, motions and committee reports. For example, when she refers to a statement by the doctor Georg Kjellin, who is the director of the Stockholm city tuberculosis bureau, to emphasize that the issue is still relevant.

Huru aktuell denna fråga är t.ex. inom läkarkretsar, fick jag nytt bevis på genom ett häromdagen gjort uttalande, av föreståndaren för Stockholms stads tuberkulosbyrå doktor Kjellin. Han sade: ‘Om jag haft pengar, skulle jag för länge sedan på egen risk ställt i gång med en dylik arbetskoloni.’ Man ställer sig sannerligen icke beredd att för saken till och med offra av vad man själv har om man icke känner, att det är en nödvändig sak, som

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<sup>19</sup> *Morgonbris* 2:1922, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> ‘Angående lämpligt arbete åt tuberkulossjuka konvalescenter, lördagen den 11 mars’ in *Riksdagens protokoll vid lagtima riksmötet år 1922. Andra kammaren. Andra bandet*, Stockholm 1922, nr 16, p. 63.

behöver göras. Men så har också denne läkare sitt arbete på tuberkulosbyrån uteslutande bland de mindre bemedlade.<sup>21</sup>

How relevant is this question in medical circles I received new proof of this through a statement made the other day, by the director of the City of Stockholm's tuberculosis bureau, doctor Kjellin. He said: 'If I had money, I would have started such a working colony at my own risk a long time ago.' One is certainly not prepared to sacrifice for the cause even of what one has if one does not feel that it is a necessary thing that needs to be done. But this doctor also has his work at the tuberculosis office exclusively among the less well-off.

The objective and distant style can be linked to the language view that dominated the labour movement and the temperance movement.<sup>22</sup> With the political scientist Kari Palonen, it can also be said that maintaining distance to both the subject under discussion and between members is a fundamental condition for parliamentary work (Palonen, 2019, p. 7). Östlund shows that she masters and adapts to the parliamentary situation. That she accepts the parliamentary order is explicitly manifested when she demands the rejection of her own motion, and thus adapts to the parliament colleagues and the committee's decisions, a committee in which she herself is a member<sup>23</sup>.

### Objectivity and distance as a rhetorical strategy

The objective and distant style can also be linked to Östlund representing a party that wants to achieve respectability in the parliamentary arena. Ever since Hjalmar Branting's entry as the first Social Democrat in the Parliament in 1897, the party's parliamentary work has been characterized by 'formal adaptation, correctness and moderation', according to political scientist Ragnar Edenman (1946, p. 1). The Social Democratic parliamentary group also distinguished itself early on for its willingness to compromise and cooperate, and the Social Democratic members have been perceived as knowledgeable and hard-working, according to the historian Kjell Östberg (1990, p. 274). When Agda Östlund makes her debut as a speaker in the Parliament, the country has been governed since the 1921 election by a Social Democratic government with Hjalmar Branting as Prime Minister. This is the second time that Sweden is governed by a Social Democratic government.

The fact that Ivar Vennerström allows himself to go against the committee, be a little bolder and not adapt in the same way to the Parliament order can, in addition to being a man and more experienced – he has been a member of the Parliament's Second Chamber since 1915 – also probably be linked to the fact that he represents a breakaway party to the left of the Social Democrats who can reserve the right to oppose the parliamentary framework. Shortly before the famine riots of 1917, when workers across the country revolted against a policy they believed disadvantaged them and favored the bread barons, he had in a pamphlet criticized the 'parliamentary superstition of the Social Democratic right' and argued that direct struggle and

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<sup>21</sup> 'Angående lämpligt arbete åt tuberkulossjuka konvalescenter, lördagen den 11 mars' in *Riksdagens protokoll vid lagtima riksmötet år 1922. Andra kammaren. Andra bandet*, Stockholm 1922, nr 16, p. 63.

<sup>22</sup> The language view that dominated the labour movement and temperance movement aimed at increased discipline, order and conscientiousness. It was about learning to argue objectively and restrainedly without getting upset. The distant style could be reconciled with the pursuit of respectability that was important for the early labour movement. (Olle Josephson Olle Josephson, *Mäster Palm talar*, Uppsala 1991, pp. 73).

<sup>23</sup> The Parliament in Sweden traditionally has standing committees whose task is to prepare matters for decision.

direct action through strong trade union and cooperative organizations was the most viable path to what he called the ‘costly misery’ (Vennerström, 1916, p.10). In this context, it can be mentioned that during the violent demonstrations of women in the spring of 1917, Agda Östlund was one of several leading female Social Democrats who actively acted to stop further demonstrations (Östberg, 1997, p. 34)<sup>24</sup>. It should nevertheless be emphasized that Vennerström also follows the Parliament order – the issue is not decided until the vote has been completed. Vennerström thus follows the rules of the game even if he goes against the committee’s statement. The vote gives the result 122–51 in favor of the committee.

Vennerström, who at the time is the editor of the daily newspaper *Nya Norrland* and who was previously a member of the Social Democrats’ party board, had at the party split in 1917 become the leader of the left-wing socialist parliamentarians. Four years later, in 1921, he had belonged to the fraction that opposed the Social Democratic Left Party’s transition to Leninism.

The disagreement, the pro et contra or for and against debate, defines Parliament as an institution according to Palonen and the rhetoric researcher Cornelia Ilie believes that there is an antagonistic spirit in parliamentary rhetoric based on the assumption that there are always two different views on each political issue that can be debated for and against (2016, p. 134). With Palonen and Ilie, it can be said that even though Vennerström, who thus speaks after Östlund, praises her for her ‘feminine warm speech’ and both run with a commitment to the issue itself, they are on different sides in the current debate.<sup>25</sup> While Vennerström demands approval for the motion, Östlund thus chooses not to make any demand but stands behind the committee’s statement. In his speech, Vennerström in fact directly criticizes Östlund when he describes it as a ‘exaggerated formalism, when for purely formal reasons one demands the rejection of such a proposal, which, as I said, received the warmest agreement from the entire committee, who dealt with the motion in question’.<sup>26</sup>

The words ‘formal’ and ‘formalistic’ and similar expressions are used in different ways and are flexible concepts in the debate. At the end of his speech, Vennerström uses further variants when on one occasion he urges members to ‘leave the formalities’ and on another occasion he urges them to ‘leave the formulas’ to instead choose to approve the motion.<sup>27</sup> The right-wing Axel Eurén, who is chairman of the committee and hospital doctor at the Jönköping hospital, opposes Vennerström’s claim that the committee only based its decision on formal reasons. In fact, the committee has had a real reason for its decision because it is aware that the National Association against Tuberculosis is already investigating the issue. From a rhetorical point of view, it can be said that the Eurén makes the formal reason a real reason. Here, Eurén and Östlund agree. It is Vennerström who deviates.

Although Östlund uses a similar wording as Vennerström that the committee only had formal reasons for its rejection request, it takes on a different meaning for her. The committee has assessed the actual issue in the motion as important, she points out and quotes from the report.

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<sup>24</sup> After the violent demonstrations of women in early May 1917, Agda Östlund tries to avert further demonstrations through a statement in *Södertälje Tidning* (11.5.1917).

<sup>25</sup> ‘Angående lämpligt arbete åt tuberkulossjuka konvalescenter, lördagen den 11 mars’ in *Riksdagens protokoll vid lagtima riksmötet år 1922. Andra kammaren. Andra bandet*, Stockholm 1922, nr 16, p. 64.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Angående lämpligt arbete åt tuberkulossjuka konvalescenter, lördagen den 11 mars’ in *Riksdagens protokoll vid lagtima riksmötet år 1922. Andra kammaren. Andra bandet*, Stockholm 1922, nr 16, p. 64.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Angående lämpligt arbete åt tuberkulossjuka konvalescenter, lördagen den 11 mars’ in *Riksdagens protokoll vid lagtima riksmötet år 1922. Andra kammaren. Andra bandet*, Stockholm 1922, nr 16, p. 65.

Men som var och en, som läser betänkandet, själv kan se, så finns det icke en rad i det hela, som tyder på, att utskottet funnit saken för obetydlig eller oberättigad, utan tvärtom möter förståelse och sympati för motionens syfte. Och jag skall be att få citera några ord i utskottsbetänkandet, som bevisar detta. Så säger utskottet alldeles i början av sitt utlåtande: 'Det i förevarande motion avhandlade ämnet är enligt utskottets mening av den vikt och beskaffenhet, att det måste anses vara förtjänt av statsmakternas synnerliga beaktande.' Och när utskottet senare har utvecklat sin tanke om saken, säger utskottet: 'Av vad i det föregående anförts torde vara tydligt, att utskottet finner en utredning rörande lämpligaste sättet att åstadkomma vård åt tuberkulösa konvalescenter vara i hög grad av behovet påkallad.'<sup>28</sup>

But as anyone who reads the report can see for themselves, there is not a sentence in the whole that indicates that the committee has found the matter too insignificant or unjustified, but on the contrary meets with understanding and sympathy for the purpose of the motion. And I will ask to quote a few words in the committee report which proves this. This is what the committee says at the very beginning of its statement: 'The subject matter discussed in the present motion is, in the committee's opinion, of such importance and nature that it must be considered worthy of the special consideration of the government.' And when the committee has later developed its thinking on the matter, the committee says: 'From what has been stated above, it should be clear that the committee finds an investigation concerning the most appropriate way to provide care for tuberculous convalescent centers to be much needed.'

Östlund is ideological in a specific way that differs from, for example, the male communist speakers. Her argument is low-key, factual and logical, which could be seen as a response to the notion that women cannot think logically. She presents her political agenda in a distant way and does not seek confrontation. The rhetorical strategy is about using the mother role as a persona to make the class perspective a matter of care, nursing and compassion.

Jag skall icke säga mer om motionen eller saken, och jag tror, att kanske kammarens ledamöter ändå i grund och botten ha tänkt på denna sak förut och kanske äro eniga med motionärerna. Men jag vill bara säga det, att den starka motiveringen till de motioner, som väckts i denna fråga, är grundad på mångårig erfarenhet och övertygelse, att snart [sic] hjälp är dubbel hjälp. Och jag tror, att ingen, som kommit i någon beröring med tuberkulossjukvård, kan stå likgiltig eller tveksam inför den påtagliga nödvändigheten att snarast bringa denna fråga till lösning.<sup>29</sup>

I shall say no more about the motion or the matter, and I think that perhaps the members of the Chamber have nevertheless basically thought of this matter before and perhaps agree with us who are behind the proposal. But I just want to say that the strong motivation for the motions raised in this matter is based on many years of experience and conviction that soon help

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<sup>28</sup> 'Angående lämpligt arbete åt tuberkulossjuka konvalescenter, lördagen den 11 mars' in *Riksdagens protokoll vid lagtima riksmötet år 1922. Andra kammaren. Andra bandet*, Stockholm 1922, nr 16, p. 62.

<sup>29</sup> 'Angående lämpligt arbete åt tuberkulossjuka konvalescenter, lördagen den 11 mars' in *Riksdagens protokoll vid lagtima riksmötet år 1922. Andra kammaren. Andra bandet*, Stockholm 1922, nr 16, p. 63.

is double help. And I believe that no one who has come into contact with tuberculosis care can be indifferent or doubtful to the apparent necessity of solving this issue as soon as possible.

The mother role and the factual and low-key argumentation have two functions for Agda Östlund in this speech – partly to adapt to the Parliament order, and partly to present the actual issue. After Östlund appealed for an urgent solution to the issue of tuberculosis care, she concludes with the words: ‘Mister Speaker! I therefore have no claim.’

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### Concluding remarks

In her debut appearance in the Second Chamber of the Parliament, the Social Democrat Agda Östlund uses the mother role as a rhetorical strategy, connects the issue of tuberculosis to the home and everyday environment and nursing, which are traditionally female spheres, and highlights class injustice in the possibility of completing convalescence after sanitation.

The mother role and the factual and low-key argumentation have two purposes in this speech – partly to adapt to the Parliament order, and partly to present the actual issue. The rhetorical strategy is about using the mother role as a persona to make the class perspective a matter of care, nursing and compassion.

Östlund’s entry into the Parliament debate can be described as a rhetorically fragile situation because she speaks for the very substance of her own motion while at the same time following the committee’s line, in which she herself is a part, and demands a rejection of it.

The speech can also be seen in relation to the negotiation of the meaning of women’s newly acquired civil and democratic rights in a formative historical stage. It is important for Östlund to adapt to the Parliament agenda to find a position but at the same time do so in a new way through the issue – the class perspective on tuberculosis care – and the way she does it, through the mother role.

### Author Bio

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<sup>30</sup> ‘Angående lämpligt arbete åt tuberkulossjuka konvalescenter, lördagen den 11 mars’ in *Riksdagens protokoll vid lagtima riksmötet år 1922. Andra kammaren. Andra bandet*, Stockholm 1922, nr 16, p. 64.



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