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Maria Martinez-Mira

University of Mary Washington, mmira@umw.edu

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MARÍA-ISABEL MARTÍNEZ-MIRA, Fredericksburg, VA

The Immigration Debate in the 2012 US Presidential Election and the Role of Rhetoric

1. Introduction

November 6, 2012 was Election Day in the United States. It was the day in which the incumbent candidate, Barack Obama, was elected president of the United States for a second term, defeating Republican candidate Mitt Romney. Although the US domestic economy, together with the country's worldwide significance and global role, were the most prominent issues during the campaign in each candidate's political agenda, it was immigration, especially immigration reform, which became a heated topic of discussion for both political parties and their respective presidential candidates. Initially, it did not seem to be the most important issue of the campaign, as excerpt (1) from the FAIR 2012 Election Report seems to indicate, not even for Hispanics, but somehow the overall perception seemed to be different.

(1) [...] several opinion polls conducted before the election reveal that the economy and healthcare – not immigration – were the dominant issues on the minds of Hispanics who voted in the 2012 election. In fact, multiple polling firms reported that likely and registered Hispanic voters *listed immigration as only the fifth most important issue to them*. According to a USA Today/Gallup poll released in June, only 12% of registered Hispanic voters stated that immigration policy was the issue most important to them, taking a backseat to "healthcare" (21%), "unemployment" (19%), "economic growth" (17%), and "the gap between the rich and the poor" (16%). USA Today/Gallup Poll, June 25, 2012. (FAIR 2012 Election Report; my emphasis)

Even when the percentages in the FAIR report seem to show otherwise, the amount of time devoted to immigration in both the media and the presidential candidates' respective campaigns gave the impression that this topic had turned out to be more relevant than others. There were several factors contributing to this, for example, the discussion of/reaction to several state-based restrictive immigration laws (exemplified by Arizona's SB1070),¹ or the Department of Homeland Security's announcement about extending/implementing measures to allow undocumented immigrants who were brought to the United States as children to stay in the country, thus avoiding deportation. If we consider that Hispanics are currently the largest minority in the US, with a key role as an electorate in any presidential election, it comes as no surprise that both candidates devoted a substantial part of their campaigns to the topic of immigration, more specifically, of immigration reform, since their stance on it could significantly impact Hispanics' final vote at the polls.

The final results of the election are widely known, and in the words of a key current figure within the Republican Party such as senator Marco Rubio, the use of a "*rhetoric* that is harsh and intolerable and inexcusable" when addressing the issue of

1 This makes reference to the "Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act" introduced as "Arizona Senate Bill 1070" and often referred as "Arizona SB 1070." It is considered to be one of the toughest and strictest anti-illegal immigration measures in the recent history of the United States and, consequently, has sparked a lot of controversy and a wide variety of reactions.

immigration might have played a bigger role in Mitt Romney's defeat than expected (Urquhart 2012, n.p.; my emphasis). Whereas both candidates courted the Hispanic population with the topic of immigration reform, Mitt Romney's initial approach to it, embracing the party's hardline stance against undocumented immigrants, resonated more among the Latino population than his later attempts to distance himself from that perspective. With very strong campaigns supporting each candidate, and immigration not being the most important issue for Hispanics during the presidential campaign, according to the Gallup poll, the question that emerges is what exactly made Barack Obama more 'persuasive' than his opponent to get the support of the Hispanic constituency; more specifically, what element in their rhetoric, to use senator Rubio's words, offers a plausible insight as to why only 27% of the Hispanic vote went to Mitt Romney, a noticeable reduction from former Republican candidate George W. Bush who got 44% of the Hispanic vote in 2004. In order to do that, I will elaborate on the main tenets of discursive theory, focusing on the role of language as a distinction-making tool, and thus being able to create dichotomies that, in the case of political candidates, allows them to articulate the basis to distinguish between in-groups and out-groups, as Wodak (2003)² mentions in her discussion of populist political discourses in Austria.³ While explaining these mechanisms, I will provide examples of both Mitt Romney's and Barack Obama's campaigns, mainly their speeches, to illustrate how they use different rhetorical devices linguistically to achieve their ultimate goal: convince their electorate in general, and Hispanics in particular, when discussing, among others, immigration reform. Throughout the following paragraphs, I will show how the combined use of rhetorical elements such as metaphors, 'tabloid discursivity' (Debrix 2008) and intertextuality, myths, and (calculated) ambiguity (Wodak 2003) has an important cognitive dimension, thus significantly contributing to the activation of specific mental schemata whose ultimate goal is the successful persuasion of constituents. This analysis will allow some plausible conclusions as to why Barack Obama's election rhetoric turned out to be more effective and successful than Mitt Romney's among the Hispanic population.

2. Theoretical Background: Discourse, Discursive Practices and Rhetorical Devices

In his discussion of rhetoric, metaphors and their role in persuasive political speech, Charteris-Black defines persuasion⁴ as a "*speech act*"; this means that it is a type of

2 In her 2003 article, Wodak discusses the 'rhetoric of discussion' in "written genres from the media and coalition agreements in Austria" so as to explain "the success of rightwing populist parties in the European Union member states" (2003, 133). The aim of my paper is not the analysis of populist discourses and how they contribute to enhance the rightwing agenda; however, Wodak's discussion of how these discourses are structured linguistically offers a very powerful and useful insight as to how linguistic structures can be used to enhance persuasion, which is a crucial element in any political campaign, hence the discussion of this topic.

3 Because of this, my approach is closer to Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 1989; Fairclough and Wodak 1997; van Dijk 1984, 2001; Wodak 1989; Wodak and Meyer 2001), although my goal is not to unveil hierarchical inequalities in the political discourse of both candidates. While the notions of power, its relation to language/discourse, and the creation of hierarchical inequalities are present in some political ideologies and the speeches reflecting them, the goal of this paper is only to examine what rhetorical devices are used by these candidates in their articulation of their immigration discourse.

4 It is important to mention that my emphasis is on the use of rhetoric for persuasion purposes. I will not be discussing whether the discourse of both candidates is manipulative or not. As noted by van Dijk, "the boundary between (illegitimate) manipulation and (legitimate) persuasion is fuzzy, and context

language that *changes* cognition" (2005, 13). He then defines rhetoric as the set of strategies used "when we want to focus on *how* persuasion is undertaken: it refers specifically to the *methods* that the speaker uses to persuade" (2005, 13). Expanding on Aristotelian classical views of rhetoric, Charteris-Black explains how a successful speaker needs to establish himself/herself in the eyes of their potential audience as someone with integrity (ethos), i.e. "having the right intentions" (2005, 14). Once this is established, (s)he needs to communicate his/her political arguments (logos) and show that the latter are well-founded, right and solid, i.e. what the author calls 'thinking right.' The most effective way to convey these two ideas and persuade an audience is by means of effective discourse, i.e. with the help of structures and tools that heighten "the *emotional impact* by '*sounding right*' [...] the ability to engage emotionally with an audience through empathy, humour or arousing feelings such as fear or hate" (2005, 15; my emphasis). Last but not least, any political leader, especially during a presidential election, needs to be able to articulate powerful and effective mental representations in order to influence how an audience understands the message they want to convey. This is what Charteris-Black refers to as "telling the right story:" this happens with the help of powerful images that will make the audience establish form-meaning associations between what the political leader says and "the audience's previous experience and assumptions about how the world works" (2005, 15). When all these elements successfully come into place, a political leader is able to persuade his/her audience that (s)he is right.

As it can be inferred from the previous paragraph, the goal of political leaders during election time is to use [different types of] tools and rhetorical devices to accomplish their goal of creating a persuasive discourse, thus guaranteeing more votes than his/her opponent. Discourse theory posits that meaning can only be achieved through discourse, and everything we think and/or say is conditioned by external, constantly modified and transformed discourse(s) which, inevitably, impact(s) the shaping of our own (Torfinng 2005). As claimed by Wodak "the situational, institutional and social settings shape and affect discourses, and [...] discourses influence discursive as well as non-discursive social and political processes and actions" (2003, 135). Because of this influence, choosing the appropriate rhetoric to 'tell the right story' and be successfully persuasive is so crucial in a presidential election; as a linguistic social practice, the analysis of the different (rhetorical) structures by means of which this right-telling is expressed discursively deserves proper attention.

Another key issue with regard to discourses is the fact that, since external influences (i.e. 'other discourses') constantly contribute to shaping their form, they can never be fully-formed: they are living, articulated, and constantly transformed entities through which meaning is mediated and conveyed. These articulatory devices, and the actors who accomplish them, are key elements to create what all discourses aspire to, although in reality it can never be fully accomplished: the status of discourses as complete, fully-fixed entities or hegemonic projects. Since discourse requires some sort of articulation, such articulation is never politically neutral, but instead part of a wider "hegemonic strategy" (Jeffares 2008, 47). In order to create a specific political

dependent" (2006, 361), so similarly to the claims of this author, I assume that both Mitt Romney and Barack Obama just try to persuade and not manipulate their electorates, since manipulation implies that "people are being acted upon against their fully conscious will and interests" (van Dijk 2006, 361); although it might have been the case with some individuals, it does not seem plausible to assume that this is what happened with the vast majority of Hispanic voters during the 2012 election.

discourse, a "political and moral-intellectual leadership" (Torfing cited in Jeffares 2008, 47) [i.e. hegemony] needs to be forged by articulating different ideologies/elements onto a common project. This shapes the form and content of the different types of political discourse and, ultimately, the different political ideologies or hegemonic projects are created (e.g. the ones supported by the Democrats or Republicans, respectively). Actors are in charge of crafting or articulating different elements from different discursive origins into a particular political project, eventually forging a hegemonic discourse, and it is in process that rhetoric becomes a powerful resource for persuasion purposes.

This definition of hegemonic project mostly coincides with what Charteris-Black characterizes as ideology. Specifically, he defines ideology as a "coherent set of ideas and beliefs adhered to by a group of people that provides an organised and systematic representation of the world about which they can agree," thus bringing individuals together "for the purpose of some form of *social action*" (2005, 21-22).⁵ A powerful way to do this is by means of metaphors, since they "constitute verbal evidence for an underlying system of ideas – or ideology – whose assumptions may be ignored if we are unaware of them" (2004, 28);⁶ it can also be enhanced by the implementation of myths (i.e. stories that provide explanations for everything that needs to be explained) in the sense that although they are not originated in language, myths provide the appropriate platform for politicians to exploit rhetorical devices that will activate the appropriate schemata and make their respective hegemonic projects/ideologies persuasive (i.e. they will significantly contribute "to tell the story right," in Charteris-Black's words). It is precisely the cognitive dimension of metaphors, myths, and other rhetorical devices that significantly contributes to a persuasive discourse.

As stated before, discourses can never be fully fixed, but there is the illusion that they are. This is also achieved by determining what discourse theory defines as 'antagonistic discourse,' i.e. in their articulation of a particular discursive project, actors need to articulate/give entity to an antagonistic element. This antagonism is substantial to the discourse's very essence. Paradoxically, this could potentially menace and threaten a hegemonic project, but such otherness needs to be identified and given entity to so that the limits and configuration of a particular hegemonic project can be outlined; this is what allows a particular hegemonic project to differentiate between 'us' and 'them,' thus excluding anything that could dislocate it. This is why, despite being so substantial to the very basis of discourse articulation, the antagonistic element has to be presented as a threat and be left aside so that it cannot contribute to any form of dislocation that would eventually cause 'trauma' within a hegemonic speech. The way

5 In van Dijk's words, ideology is "the foundation of the social representations shared by a social group" (2006, 729). According to this author, not all socially shared beliefs of a group are ideological in nature. He thus distinguishes between 'group knowledge,' i.e. "beliefs held to be true by a group according to its own truth criteria," and 'common knowledge,' i.e. "more general, culturally shared knowledge that is taken for granted, undisputed, and generally (and discursively) presupposed, across groups, within a given culture or historical period" (2000, 94), the latter not being ideological in nature within the particular culture that holds them.

6 Charteris-Black's Critical Metaphor Analysis, in fact, attempts to expose "surfaced evidence of implicit conceptualizations" (Meadows 2007, 2) and unveil ideologies that are conveyed, sometimes without people realizing it, in metaphors, myths and other rhetorical devices that make a particular discourse persuasive, like in the expected discourse(s) of an election campaign. For my analysis of Mitt Romney's and Barack Obama's rhetoric, I will also address the cognitive dimension to explain the rhetorical mechanisms employed by both candidates when delivering their immigration perspectives.

this is done rhetorically by both Mitt Romney and Barack Obama will be discussed in the following sections. To that end, the following paragraphs will show how each candidate articulates the in-group ('us') and out-group ('them') entities rhetorically, and how this distinction is enhanced and complemented by the following resources: use of metaphors and myths, tabloid discursivity (Debrix 2008), and (calculated) ambiguity. The degree to which these elements are combined and articulated in each candidate's presidential campaign did determine the degree of persuasiveness of each candidate when dealing with immigration reform discourse, offering some insights as to why candidate Obama was more successful than his Republican opponent.

3. Mitt Romney's and Barack Obama's Rhetoric: Exclusion of the Other with the Help of Intertextuality, Metaphors and Ambiguity

As Meadows observes, language, as a semiotic system, allows to make distinctions (2007, 3), which turn out to be essential in the articulation of the "us vs. them" dichotomy upon which hegemonic projects/ideologies are based. Although this binary articulation might seem reductionist and questionable at the very least, "it is precisely in the way that dichotomous thinking simplifies and compresses complex political realities into neat, easy-to-remember campaign slogans that we begin to see the political influence of *us vs. them* dichotomies (van Dijk 2001)" (Meadows 2007, 4).⁷ Both Mitt Romney and Barack Obama use this dichotomy in their discursive articulation of immigration reform as part of the 'referential/nomination' stage (Wodak 2003), i.e. people, situations or notions are named and referred to linguistically as the basis of the positive, in-group ('us') and negative, out-group ('them') construction. Here we have some examples from Mitt Romney's and Obama's speeches during the campaign (all emphasis mine).

(2) Mitt Romney opposes amnesty because he believes that it acts as a *magnet* encouraging *illegal immigration*. The last amnesty law passed in 1986 granted legal status to 2.7 million *illegal immigrants*. In the decades since, *the illegal immigrant population* has quadrupled. Mitt believes that an amnesty should not be permitted to happen again. *Illegal immigrants* who apply for legal status should not be given any advantage over those who are following the law and waiting their turn. Mitt absolutely opposes any policy that would allow *illegal immigrants* to '*cut in line*.' (Mitt Romney for President Campaign Website, November 1, 2012)

(3) Governor Romney opposes all '*magnets*' that entice *illegal immigrants* to come to our country. As governor, he vetoed in-state tuition benefits for *illegal immigrants* and opposed driver's licenses for *illegal immigrants*. (Mitt Romney for President Campaign Website, November 1, 2012)

(4) Today there are fewer *illegal crossings* than at any time in the past 40 years. We focus and use discretion about whom to prosecute, focusing on *criminals who endanger our communities* rather than students who are earning their education. And today *deportation of criminals is up 80 percent*. We've improved on that discretion carefully and thoughtfully. (Barack Obama, Remarks by the President on Immigration, June 15, 2012)

⁷ This is also the pivotal point of Sacks's Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA) (see Sacks 1992). Under this approach, categorization allows individuals to digest and interpret huge amounts of social interaction to which we are exposed on a daily basis; because of this, we tend to interpret other human beings as members of a particular category rather than as individuals, since this significantly facilitates categorization and requires less cognitive effort.

(5) The most significant step we can now take to secure the borders is to fix the system as a whole so that fewer people have the incentive to *enter illegally in search of work* in the first place. This would allow agents to focus on the *worst threats* on both sides of our borders, from drug traffickers to those who would come here to commit acts of violence or terror. That's where our focus should be. (Barack Obama Remarks, El Paso, TX, May 10, 2011)

Several linguistic strategies and rhetorical devices are used in the speech of both candidates. In the first Mitt Romney excerpt, he uses the 'magnet' metaphor to refer to the reasons that encourage some immigrants to come to the United States without proper documentation. A magnet does not necessarily need to have a negative connotation (think, for example, of a clearance sale that successfully attracts people at a particular department store, thus making the owners obtain benefits and contributing to money circulation, which eventually improves the economy), but as Wodak claims, "through allusions [...] one can suggest negative associations without being held responsible for them. [...] associations are only suggested. Allusions depend on shared knowledge. The person who alludes to something counts on resonance" (2003, 140). Thus, the cognitive dimension of the metaphor is quite powerful, as are the implications for common knowledge and schemata activation. The message seems to allude to the fact (and further interpretation) that if an amnesty is the 'easy way' to get citizenship in the United States, those who came to the country without following proper procedure because they expected to get jobs, for example, will cause harm to those hardworking immigrants or Americans who do their best to accomplish their goals of reaching a better life for them and their families: when immigrants are seen this way, it is a reminiscence of the IMMIGRANT AS VILLAIN metaphor. What lies beneath is the belief that these immigrants are causing harm to the United States economy, taking jobs that Americans could be taking, not paying taxes, and not contributing to the general welfare, thus damaging the country's economy and positing hardships on those Americans who work hard to achieve their goals. That is why the former need to be penalized, which is probably the reason behind Romney's opposition to granting driver's licenses and tuition benefits.

This also seems to be the reasoning behind one of the best-documented sentences that haunted candidate Mitt Romney's presidential campaigns: self-deportation. When asked about how he would handle immigration during a Republican candidate debate in Tampa, FL, on January 23, 2012, Romney answered: "The answer is self-deportation, which is people decide they can do better by going home because they can't find work here because they don't have legal documentation to allow them to work here [...] We're not going to round them up." Such comment clearly resonated within the Hispanic community, and was fiercely criticized from different fronts, even by members of his own party (cf. Blake 2013, n.p.), and was believed to have hurt the chances of the Republican Party to win the election significantly.

If referential/nomination is the stage at which "persons are named and referred to linguistically" and involves "membership categorization," in Wodak's words (2003, 139), the 'predication stage' is also worth noticing. In excerpts (2) and (3), taken from Mitt Romney's campaign website, the candidate talks about 'illegal immigrants' without making any distinctions between those who cause harm ('them'), and those who came here as children and might be as hardworking as any legal American citizens. In both excerpts, the use of the word 'illegal immigrant' keeps being repeated

which, in some contexts, has been highly criticized⁸ because it has been interpreted as a racialized and dehumanized term to refer to immigrants. Because of this, it is more likely to trigger the IMMIGRANT AS VILLAIN conceptual metaphor in people's minds with the explicit use of this word, given the negative and based-on-fear associations to the word 'illegal.' Interestingly, when examining Obama's excerpts (4) and (5), the word 'illegal' is present, but it is not directly associated with individuals, but with actions and events. It is quite obvious in the first paragraph: it is not the individual who is illegal, but the action of crossing the border without proper documentation is. Agency has been displaced: it is not the people who are illegal, but their actions, which allows Obama to articulate the 'them' part of the 'us vs. them' dichotomy on a different domain. Whereas Romney's examples highlighted 'illegal immigrants,' treating them equally without establishing any distinction/specification within this rather large group, Obama's excerpt focusses on establishing an initial distinction based on 'discretion/thoughtfulness:' not all of those defined as 'illegal immigrants' by Romney should be deported, and it is examination of each case which will determine whether a particular immigrant can be categorized within the 'us' or the 'them' groups. In fact, this 'discretion' works perfectly to convey and strongly supports Obama's articulation of 'them,' because it is those referred to in the previous paragraphs as 'criminals who endanger our communities' and 'worst threats' who need to be kept away from US borders. Thus, neither the choice of words, nor the structures in which these are contained, is arbitrary. The focus is not on agency, but on the action itself: verbs imply activities, but there are not explicit participants specified. The emphasis is not on immigrants entering the country, but on the reduction of cases of illegal entering. Whereas Romney talks about 'magnets enticing illegal immigration' (and the connotations stirred by that idea), Obama talks about 'enter[ing] illegally in search of work:' the former can be mentally construed very negatively, whereas the latter can also trigger the thought of people coming to the United States to look for the job that will allow them and their families a better life, although it might have implied entering illegally. While this can arouse some feelings of compassion, the former cannot, and thus it is plausible to understand why Obama's use of specific linguistic structures to articulate the 'us vs. them' dichotomy 'sounded right,' whereas Romney's might have been interpreted as a threat to those who saw themselves as hard-working immigrants, not as villains. Therefore, Obama's articulation of 'us vs. them' allowed listeners, and especially the Hispanic community, to be able to recognize themselves within the construct of IMMIGRANT AS AMERICA, as those who would be accepted either because they have legal status, or because they belong to the group

8 An example of the debate can be found in the following link, which discusses the implications of using 'illegal:' <http://www.npr.org/blogs/itsallpolitics/2013/01/30/170677880/in-immigration-debate-undocumented-vs-illegal-is-more-than-just-semantics> (retrieved November 14, 2014):

Undocumented' and 'illegal' seem to be signaling one's stance when it comes to immigration reform than it is about characterizing the situation in a precise way," [...] the State Department's definition of immigrant explicitly refers to lawful status, making the term "illegal immigrant" a contradiction. But undocumented immigrant does not quite fit either because the term "makes it seem as though there's [just been] an administrative mistake, as if a document wasn't issued." [...] the fight over the terminology isn't trivial, since the ways people use language can have social consequences. (Rosa cited in Demby 2013)

For further information, also see <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/06/17/illegal-undocumented-unauthorized-news-media-shift-language-on-immigration/>; (retrieved November 1, 2013).

that would be able to participate in that construct after the government exercised the aforementioned discretion and allowed them to stay.

3.1 The Role of Tabloid Discursivity and Ambiguity: The Myth of the 'American Dream' in Immigration Reform

The 'us vs. them' discursive distinction is enhanced by other rhetorical devices to highlight and heighten the persuasive goal of both campaigns, especially when discussing immigration. As substantially mentioned in both campaigns, the United States is a nation of immigrants, so the concept of immigration as such is crucial to understand some of the most cherished values within US society. When Mitt Romney's campaign suffered a noticeable backlash due to his previous use of the term 'self-deportation,' he saw himself in a situation in which he had to regain credibility among Hispanics, 'establish integrity (ethos),' and show he was the right candidate to defend their interests. Because of how Barack Obama had articulated the 'us vs. them' dichotomy with regards to his immigration reform discourse, he did not have to reposition himself to establish integrity and be persuasive as noticeably as Romney did; therefore, the following paragraphs will show how, in addition to the use of metaphors, the articulation of the 'us vs. them' discursive dichotomy in both candidates is enhanced by the use and intertwining of the following rhetorical devices: tabloid discursivity, the myth of the American dream, and (calculated) ambiguity.

As mentioned in the previous section, for a candidate to be persuasive and convincing, his discourse (in this case, the [implementation of successful] immigration reform) has to 'sound right' and be appealing to the listener's ethos, i.e. sounding right is necessary to stir the intended emotional impact on a particular audience. A crucial element to obtain this effect is the efficient use of intertextuality as part of what Debrix (2008) defines as 'tabloid discursivity,' i.e. the creation of a highly believable, largely coherent, and often emotion-inducing reality that is completely self-referential and yet endowed with meaning through an appearance of "truth, factuality and historical accuracy" (Debrix 2008, 7). By blending different narratives, the resulting discourse sensationalizes reality to make sure that narratives are "readily understood and instantly recognizable" (2008, 38). Thus, tabloid discursivity creates a discourse which is "eye-catching, awe-inspiring, and emotion-stirring" (2008, 22) and is presented as a believable narrative which is self-referential: it becomes its own source to be cited and used to support a particular claim without having to be checked against any sources,⁹ thus becoming 'truth' and granting authority and ethical value to the person who uses this particular narrative.

Whereas it is plausible to argue that a significant part of manipulation in political discourse is enhanced by the use of tabloid discursivity,¹⁰ this way of presenting information also plays a role in the process of rhetorical persuasion that is found in presidential campaigns. Both candidates used it in 2012 with two aims in mind. Firstly, to create some sort of 'emergency discourse' (Debrix 2008), elaborating on the idea

9 In fact, this is not possible, because it is a collage of different narratives and it cannot be compared to anyone in particular.

10 See Debrix (2008) for his discussion of the impact of tabloid discursivity to explain how the Bush administration used the exploitation of the fear and insecurity caused by 9/11 events, and how all this was represented in US media outlets.

of 'peril and 'distress' that each candidate would eliminate¹¹ if chosen president, as the following excerpts show (all emphasis mine).

(6) The country we love is *peril*, and that's why I'm running for president. [...] And when Barack Obama became to office, America wished him well and hoped for the best. Three-and-a-half years later, over 23 million Americans are *out of work*. *Unemployed*. *Underemployed*. Or simply quit looking for a job. At a time when we should be gaining momentum in the economy, we are actually seeing us lose a little bit of it right now. Job growth slowed and this week we learned that the number of job openings has fallen yet again. And as you know, Hispanics have been *hit disproportionately hard*. While the national unemployment is still above 8 percent and has been for 40 straight months, Hispanic unemployment is at 11 percent. (Romney, NALEO remarks, Orlando, FL, June 21, 2012).

(7) And let's face it, part of the reason why we had so much energy in the 2008 campaign was because we understood that we had seen a decade where *that basic bargain wasn't being met*. Families were working harder and harder, but their incomes were actually *stagnating*, while the *costs* of everything from health care to college were *going up*. We went from a surplus to a *record deficit* because of tax cuts we didn't pay for and because of two wars that we put on a credit card. And it all culminated in the *worst financial crisis since the Great Depression*. (Barack Obama, Remarks at Campaign Rally in Leesburg, VA, August 2, 2012)

From the explicit mention of 'peril' in (6), to the use of 'augmenting' adjectives and adverbs in the speech of both candidates ('disproportionally,' 'worst,' 'record'), it is clear that both try to accentuate the 'rhetorical situation' (Bitzer 1968), i.e. a sense of emergency created by a particular situation (e.g. lack of jobs, the financial crisis) that is reflected discursively and demands to be solved because it is presented as a problem to overcome. Because of the 'exigence'¹² demanded by the situation, both candidates will describe this bleak horizon discursively, and persuasively position themselves as the only and most appropriate option to solve it.

Secondly, and in combination with other rhetorical devices, by using tabloid discursivity, both candidates can outline the emergency to make changes to the current, negative situation and, consequently, 'sound right' and make people relate to the content of their message so that they can make it their own. To this end, they appeal to personal experiences, family members facing difficulties, or the description of current people's misfortunes. They are all true events, but both candidates play with people's emotions in the way in which they have been selected, inserted in the discourse, and presented. These might be personal experiences of the candidates, but thanks to self-referentiality and tabloid discursivity, they are anyone's experiences. Listeners can empathize with what is being described and apply it to their own personal situation. This also works in combination with two other powerful rhetorical devices: (calculated) ambiguity (Wodak 2003) and, as pointed out by Charteris-Black (2005), the use of myth to convey a particular, persuasive ideology.

11 Obviously, this is a substantial part of discourse theory, as explained above: because of its very essence, discourses can never be fully-flexed and complete, although (different sets of) agents articulate it in such a way as to give the impression of completion and final resolution, hence the need to incorporate and define the antagonistic element in order to create the illusion that it can be traced, identified, and eliminated, thus not causing distress to a particular hegemonic project/ideology.

12 I.e. "an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be" (Bitzer 1968, 6).

Both candidates use this extensively, focusing on the myth of the American dream and how it can apply to immigrants. The following excerpt is taken from the speech Barack Obama gave in Roanoke, VA, July 13, 2012.

(8) When I was traveling across Illinois [...] you meet people from every walk of life: Black, White, Latino, Asian, Native American. [...] no matter where I went, no matter who I was talking to, *I could see my own life in the life of the people whose vote I was asking for*. So I'd meet an elderly vet, and I'd think about my grandfather who fought in World War II and my grandmother who worked on a bomber assembly line during the war. And I'd think about how, when my grandfather came back home, because of this country, he was able to get an education on the GI bill, and they were able to buy their first home using an FHA loan. And then I'd meet a single mom somewhere and I'd think about my mom. I never knew my dad. He left when I was just barely a baby, and so – and my mother didn't have a lot of money, and she was struggling, and she had to go back to school raising a kid, later raising my sister, and she had to work while she was in school. But despite all that, because she was in America, she was able to get grants and scholarships. And her kids were able to get grants and scholarships. And they could go as far as their dreams could take them. And then I'd talk to some working folks, and I'd think about Michelle's family – her dad who was a blue-collar worker, worked at a water filtration plant in Chicago, and her mom was a secretary. And yet, despite never having a lot, there was so much love and so much passion – and her dad had MS, so he had to wake up an hour earlier than everybody else just to get to work because it took him that long to get dressed, and he could barely walk. But he never missed a day's work, because he took pride in the idea that, you know what, I'm going to earn my way and look after my family. (my emphasis)

Barack Obama's remarks are deeply rooted on his personal experience, thus emphasizing the 'perspectivation' stage mentioned in Wodak (2003), but it is done in such a way that it can be the experience of anyone who listens. It focuses on the main idea of the "American dream:" work hard to accomplish what you aspire to, even when difficulties pave the road to achieve your goals. As Charteris-Black notices, "it is this combination of *who he is* with *who he has become* that enabled his vision of the American dream to sound as if he was telling the right story" (2005, 280). By positioning himself as part of the point he is trying to make, he makes his discourse more appealing to others, since they can empathize with the issues Barack Obama discusses, as they are probably part of their daily experience.

The myth of the American dream is particularly appealing to the immigrant population, since it proclaims that regardless of social, ethnic, or personal background, anyone can achieve his/her goal if (s)he is a motivated individual who works hard. This is exemplified by the previous excerpt in which Barack Obama gives examples from his own personal life, and how they relate to difficult situations that were overcome because of this driving force that makes good things happen to those who work hard for them, and he is the living example of that. By using expressions like "you meet people from every walk of life: Black, White, Latino, Asian, Native American," he makes his message inclusive, something that everyone, regardless of his origin, can tune to. Because of his personal experiences, he introduces himself as someone who is authorized to make such claims, and his narrative is full of examples to support this point, making him the poster child of the American Dream.

When discussing immigration reform, Obama defended the tenets of the DREAM Act¹³ and therefore was in favor of allowing certain immigrants who came to the United States as children if they complied with certain requirements. The way he reflects this in his discourse is straightforward. He had previously mentioned the IMMIGRANTS ARE VILLAINS metaphor to refer only to those actions carried out by 'criminals' who caused 'the worst threats on both sides of the border.' That allows him to refer to another group of immigrants, even when technically 'illegal,' under the metaphor IMMIGRANTS ARE AMERICA, thus making the American-immigrant construct work to its fullest, sounding-right potential, as shown in the following excerpt; consequently, they are entitled to the American dream, as any legal immigrant and regular American citizen would.

(9) These are young people who study in *our* schools, they play in **our** neighborhoods, they're friends with *our* kids, they *pledge allegiance to our flag. They are Americans in their heart, in their minds, in every single way but one: on paper.* They were brought to this country by their parents – sometimes even as infants – and often have no idea that they're undocumented until they apply for a job or a driver's license, or a college scholarship. Put yourself in their shoes. Imagine you've done everything right your entire life – *studied hard, worked hard*, maybe even graduated at the top of your class – only to suddenly face the threat of deportation to a country that you know nothing about, with a language that you may not even speak. That's what gave rise to the DREAM Act. [...] And I have said time and time and time again to Congress that, send me the DREAM Act, put it on my desk, and I will sign it right away. (Barack Obama, Remarks by the President on Immigration, June 15, 2012; my emphasis)

Elaborating on the IMMIGRANTS ARE AMERICA metaphor, Barack Obama identifies these technically illegal immigrants as part of the 'us within the US'¹⁴ because they share the same goals, expectations, and objectives of those hard-working Americans and the legal immigrants who have the necessary documentation (i.e. the in-group) who, like him, are entitled to accomplish their dreams because of their perseverance and willingness to improve their lives and those of their families. In (8), the calculated choice of words to exemplify hard work and making progress in spite of difficulties is also worth noting. Obama's speech mentions examples of single motherhood, blue-collar workers with multiple sclerosis, Federal Housing Administration loans, and war veterans making progress after their comeback to civil life. They are the very essence of the American dream, an ideal that is inclusive as long as the 'work hard' and 'perseverance' components are met, and because of that, it

13 The DREAM Act ("Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors") is a legislative proposal first introduced in the US Senate on August 1, 2001. Its main goal is to create legislation in order to provide permanent residency to certain immigrants, specifically those who graduate from US high schools, arrived in the United States as minors, and lived in the country continuously for at least five years before the bill's enactment. After completing two years in the military or two years at a four-year higher learning institution, these immigrants would obtain temporary residency for a six-year period, after which they may qualify for permanent residency provided that they have "acquired a degree from an institution of higher education in the United States or [have] completed at least 2 years, in good standing, in a program for a bachelor's degree or higher degree in the United States" or have "served in the armed services for at least 2 years and, if discharged, [have] received an honorable discharge" (<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-108s1545rs/pdf/BILLS-108s1545rs.pdf>, section 5(D); retrieved 30 January 2014).

14 US has a double meaning here. By 'US' in capital letters I refer to the American-born citizens that, like those mentioned in (7), worked hard to accomplish their goals. It is also the acronym for 'United States.' Therefore, 'US' symbolizes the idea that 'immigrants are also like us Americans.'

definitely incorporates the immigrant population that is worth staying. Unlike the articulation of 'them' that his opponent Mitt Romney had relied on (they were all illegal), Obama's shows more nuances and does not consider all immigrants under the same category, as seen in the repeated use of 'our' and the use of 'working/studying hard' in (9).

Another cognitive dimension that can be observed in this discussion is the (IMMIGRATION) SYSTEM CAN BE FIXED. Both candidates agree on the (IMMIGRATION) SYSTEM IS BROKEN: that is the reason why, in Mitt Romney's words, illegal immigrants are allowed to enter the United States, and in Barack Obama's, the reason why family members of hard-working immigrants might be separated if facing the threat of deportation. By proposing their vision of the immigration reform, both candidates are introducing a set of principles that can fix the 'broken' parts of the immigration system, as if it were a car that needs to be taken to the mechanic. Although none of the candidates use vocabulary or resources that would indicate car-related images, there is one part in which this idea can be implemented on a metaphorical/ cognitive dimension. If a car is broken, it cannot fulfill its duties with regard to one of the main reasons why people use them: to coordinate and facilitate family activities, for example. Families' regular routines are jeopardized. They cannot 'make progress,' they are 'separated'¹⁵ from their daily routines (also, family members can be stranded and, consequently, separated from the rest) because they are unable to get to the places where they need to go, which creates distress for everyone involved. When the car is fixed, they can accomplish their goals and continue with their lives. They can 'move forward' and continue with their daily, hard-working lives. That is the idea expressed in (10).

(10) We're not going backwards when it comes to immigration. My opponent says the Arizona law could be "a model for the Nation." [...] I believe we are a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants. I believe we can secure our borders and give opportunities to people who are striving and working hard, especially young people who have been raised in this country and see themselves as Americans. That was the right thing to do. *We're not going backwards; we're going forwards.*¹⁶ (Remarks at a campaign rally in San Antonio, TX, July 17, 2012; my emphasis)

15 The role of family in metaphors is also present in both candidates' discourse, whether within the NATION AS A (UNITED) FAMILY metaphor, accentuated by constant references to their own striving families that stayed together and hopeful during hard times, or as an example of tabloid discursivity in order to heighten the emotional component of distress caused by family separation, as the following excerpt from Barack Obama exemplifies: "We should make it easier for the best and the brightest to not only stay here, but also to start businesses and create jobs here [...] We need to provide our farms a legal way to hire workers that they rely on, and a path for those workers to earn legal status. And our laws should respect families following the rules – reuniting them more quickly instead of splitting them apart. Today, the immigration system not only tolerates those who break the rules, but it punishes folks who follow the rules. [...] while applicants wait for approval, for example, they're often forbidden from visiting the United States. Even husbands and wives may have to spend years apart. Parents can't see their children. I don't believe the United States of America should be in the business of separating families. That's not right. That's not who we are. We can do better than that" (Barack Obama Remarks, El Paso, TX, May 10, 2011).

16 Interestingly, notice that the two examples Obama mentions in (9) directly address two of the 'magnets' that Mitt Romney is opposed to, as seen in his campaign website: granting driver's licenses and college tuition to those immigrants whose legal status is irregular. The excerpt in (9) alludes to a metaphorical 'moving forward' that could be literally originated by driving after getting a driver's license.

In the case of Mitt Romney, his stance on immigration reform changed when compared to his initial remarks on immigration. As previously stated, he did elaborate on the (IMMIGRATION) SYSTEM IS BROKEN and the necessity to fix it; firstly he talked about vetoing the DREAM Act, supporting self-deportation, and implementing stricter laws to stop illegal immigration. Throughout the campaign, his views were more toned down and, similar to his opponent, his discourse on immigration included references to the 'us within US' construct, as well as the American dream to which immigrants are entitled. This can be seen in (11), an excerpt from Mitt Romney's speech to The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO).

(11) Now, throughout my campaign, I have often had the chance to speak about my dad and how proud I am of him. He was born, as Scotty said, to parents, American parents living in Mexico. When he was 5, they left everything behind and started over in the United States. His dad, my grandfather, was a builder, and he *went bust* more than once. *My grandfather didn't make much money. There were times in my dad's life when he lived in poverty.* But my grandfather had *big hopes* for my dad and tried to help him as best he could. My dad didn't finish college. But he believed in the country where the *circumstances of one's birth were not a barrier to achievement.* And he was not afraid of *hard work*. He held odd jobs, putting up plasterboard, selling paint. He was lucky enough to live in America where hard work can turn aspirations into realities. [...] This is my father's story. But it could be the *story of any American.* [...] You are here because you have benefited from the land of opportunity, and you want to give back to this country, to fight for its people so they have the same chance to succeed. [...] We are *truly one America.* (Orlando, FL, June 21, 2012; my emphasis)

Here we can see how the Republican candidate tries to make his speech more appealing to his Hispanic audience by using first-person examples of his own life narrative that include references to his family, his immigrant past, his belief in hard work, perseverance and hope and, finally, the idea that regardless of origin, everybody is entitled to the American dream. The use of 'poverty,' 'went bust,' or 'hard work' certainly have a specific emotional impact on the listeners, as they can see themselves empathizing with the hardships that even prominent politicians had to endure in the past, eventually overcoming difficulties. With this particular articulation of the IMMIGRANTS ARE AMERICA in both candidates, there is another rhetorical device that is used in combination with metaphors and tabloid discursivity: (calculated) ambiguity (Wodak 2003). Because both candidates' discourse uses self-referentiality/tabloid discursivity (enhanced by the use of powerful metaphors), ambiguity is a great tool to unify differences and create an appealing narrative that can move the audience to vote for one candidate or another. In fact, this is the idea behind Eisenberg's (1984) discussion of the role and impact of ambiguity in discourse. According to this author, it is "preferable to omit purposefully contextual cues and to allow for multiple interpretations on the part of receivers" (1984, 230), especially if we consider that "strategic ambiguity promotes unified diversity" (1984, 230). Consequently, the use of ambiguity "allows for multiple interpretations to exist among people who contend that they are attending to the same message – i.e. perceive the message to be clear" (1984, 231). Strategic/calculated ambiguity contributes to create the idea that groups "appear to speak in a single voice. Group members appeal to a repertoire of increasingly ambiguous legitimations which both retain the appearance of unity and reasonably represent the opinions of the group" (1984, 232).

Mitt Romney's comments on (11) elaborating on the American dream are a good example of this, since he uses his family's history to appeal to anyone, regardless of

his/her birth circumstances, to consider him/herself 'one America.'¹⁷ In the case of the Republican candidate, and given his previous backlash with regard to self-deportation, ambiguity is a useful resource trying to appeal to Hispanic voters while, at the same time, trying not to alienate more conservative members of his own party who might demand more drastic measures to control immigration. Thus, we find examples in which he fully supports the IMMIGRANTS ARE AMERICA, like (12):

(12) We can find common ground here, and we must. We owe it to ourselves as Americans to ensure that our country remains a land of opportunity – both for those who were born here and for those who share our values, respect our laws, and want to come to our shores. Liberty's torch can burn just as brightly for future generations of immigrants as it has burned for immigrants in the past. (Romney, NALEO remarks, Orlando, FL, June 21, 2012)

In (13), however, we can see how he shows a stricter view on those immigrants by backing the contents of SB 1070:

(13) I would have preferred to see the Supreme Court give more latitude to the states, not less [...] And the states, now under this decision, have less authority, less latitude, to enforce immigration law. (Mitt Romney, private fundraiser in Scottsdale, AZ, June 25, 2012)

Given the fact that he wants to be equally appealing to different types of audiences, the use of metaphors and intertextuality enhanced by the calculated use of ambiguity seems to be his best option to convince the America that he so seamlessly unifies in his immigration discussion in the NALEO speech. As Eisenberg points out, "[...] strategically ambiguous communication allows the source to both reveal and conceal, to express and protect, should it become necessary to save face" (1984, 239); this is exactly what the Republican candidate was trying to do, since "there is often even more to be gained by giving the appearance of venturing something which, on closer inspection, may be made to seem like nothing" (1984, 236). See, for example, Romney's team statement about the Supreme Court's ruling on Arizona's immigration law.

(14) Today's decision underscores the need for a President who will lead on this critical issue and work in a bipartisan fashion to pursue a national immigration strategy. President Obama has failed to provide any leadership on immigration. This represents yet another broken promise by this President. I believe that each state has the duty – and the right – to secure our borders and preserve the rule of law, particularly when the federal government has failed to meet its responsibilities. As Candidate Obama, he promised to present an immigration plan during his first year in office. But four years later, we are still waiting. (June 25, 2012)

While it seems that the candidate is delivering a strong stance on immigration, his message is conveniently vague. The excerpt in (14) does not explain, for example, whether Romney agreed with the 5-3 majority that ruled several critical points of SB 1070 unconstitutional. Nothing is said about whether the Romney administration would revoke Barack Obama's plan to stop deporting those immigrants who can benefit from the DREAM Act; last but not least, Romney's campaign does not provide a

17 This particular use of ambiguity is also present in Barack Obama's excerpts (8) and (9).

fully developed position on a matter that was interfering with his efforts to make constituents focus on the economy.¹⁸

Barack Obama's discourse also uses calculated ambiguity as a rhetorical device. While he might not be in such need to use ambiguity in order to (re)position himself on the topic of immigration, he certainly does not provide many specifics as in (15) to how immigration reform should be implemented, or how exactly Congress must act.

(15) I am pleased that the Supreme Court has struck down key provisions of Arizona's immigration law. What this decision makes unmistakably clear is that Congress must act on comprehensive immigration reform. A patchwork of state laws is not a solution to our broken immigration system – it's part of the problem. At the same time, I remain concerned about the practical impact of the remaining provision of the Arizona law that requires local law enforcement officials to check the immigration status of anyone they even suspect to be here illegally. Going forward, we must ensure that Arizona law enforcement officials do not enforce this law in a manner that undermines the civil rights of Americans. (White House Press Release, June 25, 2012)

4. Conclusions

As shown in the previous sections, both Mitt Romney and Barack Obama used a significant amount of rhetorical devices during their presidential campaigns to persuade voters in general, and Hispanics in particular, to vote for them, thus presenting, among other topics, an apparently unified, clear-cut view on the topic of immigration, and how each candidate would deal with it should they become the next president of the United States. Relying on the IMMIGRANTS ARE AMERICA metaphor, plus the American-immigrant construct, and heightened by the use of intertextuality/tabloid discursivity, both candidates tried to articulate a discourse that communicated this metaphor effectively and, by using the myth of the American Dream, let the electorate 'fill the gaps' created by a strategic use of ambiguity in order to make them direct participants of their views on immigration, especially if we consider that none of the candidates offered a full-fledged proposal of what specific legislation they would implement to carry out the (according to them) much needed immigration reform.¹⁹ It was clear that Barack Obama, the incumbent candidate, was much more successful in persuading constituents to vote for him; as seen in previous sections, Obama appeared to be more successful in his use of rhetorical devices, using them appropriately and timely and (mostly) without activating negative schemata/triggering extremely negative reactions from the Hispanic community, which significantly contributed to his victory on November 6, 2012. The fact that Mitt Romney was unable to persuade Hispanics as much as his opponent did reinforces the importance of the discursive dimension to communicate political ideologies. Having initially chosen to align with the most conservative section of the Republican party to get their support, and showing this choice in the management of rhetorical devices and

18 This was also mentioned in the media: "As he did during a speech to a Latino group last week, Romney offered a *vague pledge* to coax Congress into a lasting solution on a complex issue. [...] Romney has outlined a few of what Republicans term 'pro-legal immigration' policies [...] But for the most part, he has studiously *skirted specifics*"; (<http://swampland.time.com/2012/06/26/arizona-ruling-deepens-romneys-immigration-muddle/>; retrieved October 1, 2013; my emphasis).

19 This use of ambiguity even disguised some possible inequalities on immigration speech (e.g. Romney would consider a path for citizenship should the illegal immigrant serve in the military, and 'staple a green card' to those highly qualified students completing post-secondary education, but he only mentions granting work permits to temporary agriculture workers).

how his message was being communicated, Mitt Romney's attempt to change and soften his stance on immigration reform did not appeal to the Hispanic community and, consequently, the Hispanic support for Romney turned out to be quite unsuccessful.

This is indeed an issue that currently worries the members of the Republican Party. It is in their own self-analysis where we find cues that, in fact, emphasize the need to be persuasive, to 'strike a chord' within the electorate in general (especially focusing on new, younger generations, and on Hispanics in particular). Living proof of this is the "Growth and Opportunity Project" commissioned by Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus in December 2012. In the report, filled with useful metaphors that showed the lack of credibility and persuasiveness of the Republican Party,²⁰ some of the most important findings were related to the lack of appeal of the Republican candidate, how non-persuasive he had been, and how his rhetoric might have contributed to highlight important issues negatively, as specified in excerpt (16).

(16) If we want ethnic minority voters to support Republicans, we have to *engage them* and show our sincerity. President George W. Bush used to say, 'Family values don't stop at the Rio Grande and a hungry mother is going to try to feed her child.' When Hispanics heard that, they knew he cared and were willing to listen to his policies on education, jobs, spending, etc. Because his first sentence struck a chord, Hispanic Americans were willing to listen to his second sentence. [...] President Bush got 44 percent of the Hispanic vote, a modern-day record for a Republican presidential candidate. If Hispanic Americans perceive that a GOP nominee or candidate does not want them in the United States (i.e. *self-deportation*), they will not pay attention to our next sentence. It does not matter what we say about education, jobs or the economy; if Hispanics think we do not want them here, they will close their ears to our policies. In the last election, Governor Romney received just 27 percent of the Hispanic vote. [...]. As one conservative, Tea-Party leader Dick Armey, told us, 'You can't call someone ugly and expect them to go to the prom with you.' We've chased the Hispanic voter out of his natural home. (Republican National Committee 2013, 8; my emphasis)

Thus, Barack Obama was the candidate that most successfully combined rhetorical devices to 'sound right' when discussing immigration reform. He showed a more effective command in the crafting of the immigration discourse during his campaign and, thanks to the way in which metaphors, myths, and calculated ambiguity were articulated within linguistic and conversational structures, he successfully managed to make his immigration discourse more successful than his opponent's, even when the latter used similar devices, as shown in this article. Since his views on immigration remained unchanged throughout the campaign, it is plausible to claim that Obama's ethos was perceived more positively than Romney's, who was unable to trigger the appropriate mental representations that would have allowed him to 'tell the right story,' as Obama did.

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20 E.g. "Public perception of the Party is at record lows. Young voters are increasingly rolling their eyes at what the Party represents [...] When someone rolls their eyes at us, they are not likely to open their ears to us" (Republican National Committee 2013, 4).

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