



*Working Papers in*

# Urban Language & Literacies

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Paper **288**

**Post-digital communication:  
Chronotopic worlds in Trump's  
discourse on migration**

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2021

# Post-digital communication: Chronotopic worlds in Trump's discourse on migration

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## Abstract

In this article we analyze Trump's discourse on migration based on a study of 915 tweets collected from Trump's Twitter account (@realDonaldTrump) covering a period between 01/25/2015 and 09/26/2019. We align with recent theorizations about political communication in what has been called the post-digital era by underlining the pivotal role of social media in delivering political messages. However, we also argue that what makes Trump's political messages particularly powerful is the ability to construct a coherent narrative through chronotopic frames. We show how different forms of intertextuality play a central role in the creation and dissemination of two versions of a chronotope of war and conflict through constant repetition of words, verbal sequences and images across tweets and with the insertion of hyperlink to far right propaganda across media.

*Key words:* Post-truth, Twitter, Trump, Chronotope, Intertextuality

Attention and interest in Donald Trump's speech and discourse has been growing since his ascent to power in January 2017, as scholars in linguistics, anthropology and communication have started to realize not only that his political success is not reducible to a temporary phenomenon, but also that the influence and power that Trump gained is enormous and much wider than anticipated. Studies of Donald Trump's speech have been focused very much on his style, for example on the richness or lack thereof of his vocabulary or the simplicity of his syntax (Wang and Haitao 2018, Shafer 2015), the evolution or change of these characteristic features over time and variation across speech genres (Wang and Haitao 2018, Savoy 2017), and across platforms (for twitter see Ott 2017), the use of discourse strategies to connect and engage with audiences such as constructed dialogue, interruptions and gesturing (Sclafani, 2018, Quam and Ryshina-Pankova 2016). Many scholars have also underlined his capacity to create a performance and a spectacle (Hall, Goldstein, & Ingram 2016). Lately, work has also started to appear on the insulting nature and sexism (Scotto di Carlo 2020) of his language.

Much of the journalistic output on Trump's language is devoted to showing how his talk is inarticulate, and often violent, and how it reflects his unstable and "crazy" personality and his penchant for losing his cool (see for example Wing 2016, Degani 2016, Rubin 2019). However, possibly the most discussed aspect of Trump's rhetoric is his brazen *disregard for truth*. Indeed, many of the media that circulate in the US devote space to fact checking what Trump says. It is notable, for example, that *The Washington Post* regularly assigned him Pinocchio points for telling lies and to date has attributed to him more than 18,000, and that books have been published on the topic of the president's false statements (see for example Kessler, Rizzo and Kelly 2020).

In this article, we analyze Trump's discourse on migration from a different angle: we discuss his

construction of chronotopic configurations to frame migrants and migrant identities through the use of strategies in which intertextuality has a central role and with a focus on the ways in which political discourse functions within the conditions of post-digital communication. In the first part of the article we review literature on post truth and populism, which we regard as the most important and relevant frames for the analysis of the kind of political discourse produced by Trump. We then discuss some recent views about post-digital political discourse that open up a new perspective on the phenomena that we are studying. In the following sections we introduce our view of the way communication functions in this post-technological era and discuss the notions of intertextuality and chronotopes, two constructs which are basic to our analysis. We then present an analysis of Trump's tweets on immigration in the period that goes from 01/25/2015 and 09/26/2019. The last section is devoted to a discussion of our results.

## Post-Truth

Although journalists try to keep count of Trump's lies, it would be impossible to list all of the distortions and outright fabrications that he has produced in his brief career as President, but that is one of the reasons why he is widely regarded as a champion of 'Post Truth.' In the first publication making use of the term, Ralph Keyes (2004) introduced the notion as follows:

Even though there have always been liars, lies have usually been told with hesitation, a dash of anxiety, a bit of guilt, a little shame, at least some sheepishness. Now, clever people that we are, we have come up with rationales for tampering with truth so we can dissemble guilt-free. I call it post-truth. We live in a post-truth era. Post-truthfulness exists in an ethical twilight zone. It allows us to dissemble without considering ourselves dishonest. When our behavior conflicts with our values, what we're most likely to do is reconceive our values. Few of us want to think of ourselves as unethical, let alone admit that to others, so we devise alternative approaches to morality. Think of them as alt-ethics (p. 13)

In recent years, 'Post-Truth' has attracted the attention of social and cognitive scientists and in 2017, a fascinating and often provocative conversation has unfolded in the *Journal of Memory and Cognition*, initiated by Lewandowsky, Ecker, & Cook (2017a,b). Like Ralph Keyes, Lewandowsky et al. distinguish post-truth circumstances as those in which factuality is not the primary rubric for credibility, but they extend the discussion to encompass a broader range of scales and scopes of activity, including aspects that would be considered 'psychological' and those referred to as 'sociological'. According to Lewandowsky et al (2017a),

In this world, power lies with those most vocal and influential on social media: from celebrities and big corporations to botnet puppeteers who can mobilize millions of tweetbots or sock puppets—that is, fake online personas through which a small group of operatives can create an **illusion of a widespread opinion** (Bu, Xia, & Wang 2013; Lewandowsky 2011) (p.354; emphasis ours).

These authors take the position that Post-Truth “empowers people to choose their own reality, where facts and objective evidence are trumped by existing beliefs and prejudices”, resulting in “processes that render post-truth discourse self-perpetuating” (p. 361). This flexibility, or recourse to preference, is a feature that sets 'post-truth discourse' apart from ostensibly

‘true’ discourse. Lewandowsky, Ecker, & Cook arrive, ultimately, at a characterization of a “Post- Truth Malaise” --a problem deriving from ‘alternative epistemic spaces’ (e.g., ‘echo chambers’, ‘filter bubbles’) enabling sometimes vast segments of the public to inhabit ‘alternative realities’ *together*.

To recap, the ‘Post Truth Crisis’, according to Lewandowsky et al, consists of “a situation in which a large share of the populace is living in an epistemic space that has abandoned conventional criteria of evidence, internal consistency, and fact seeking” (p. 361). These alternative ‘epistemic spaces’ enable the (mass-mediated) cultivation of divergent ‘alternative realities’ taken up and inhabited by media consumers whose worldviews and ‘self- concepts’ (Hyman & Jalbert 2017) are compatible with similar ‘versions of reality’, or *construals*, disseminated strategically by agents of misinformation. Hence it follows, according to Lewandowsky et al., that “the current state of public discourse can no longer be examined through the lens of misinformation that can be debunked but as an alternative reality that is shared by millions.” (p. 361)

Another frame for studying Donald Trump’s discourse has come from discourse analytic studies, particularly within Critical Discourse Analysis, that have focused on populism. Indeed, Trump’s discourse style and practices closely resemble those of other populist leaders. In the next section we turn to how such studies have characterized populism.

## **Populist Discourse**

Rheinhorf (202) and other scholars who have studied the phenomenon (among others see Müller, 2017; Moffitt, 2016 Wodak, 2017) characterize populism as essentially defined by aspects which include: (a) the creation of dichotomies, for example the opposition between ‘the people’ and all established institutions and all parties presented as elitist, (b) the use of violent and divisive language, (c) the large recourse to mediatization and performance, (d) the exploitation of tropes related to crisis and disaster, and (e) the adherence to conspiracy theories. They have also described in detail the kinds of linguistic strategies used in discourse by populists, for example the use of specific forms of nominalization and predication in the creation of enemies and the recourse to schemata and tropes that facilitate the Manichean divisions between friends and foes. All of these elements are present in Trump’s discourse, but what characterizes Trump’s style and mode of communication is, in our view, his use of technology and the fact that he fully operates within what has been called a *post-digital era* in the sense that digital technologies are no longer a novelty but have become an integral part of society’s life (see Davies 2011 on the genesis of this term). Indeed, recent reflections on political discourse in our time point to a dramatic change not only in the way political ideas are put together, but also circulated and received by publics. In a recent paper on this topic, Blommaert (2020b) argues that consensus is no longer created by politicians reaching to “the masses”, but rather through the navigation of a mixed, *hybrid* media world. In his words:

In the new hybrid media system in which old and new media constantly interact, algorithms do not target ‘the masses’, they target a multitude of highly specific audiences (...) in what has become known as ‘micromarketing’ or ‘niche marketing’. ‘Mass’ effects – think of the Brexit

referendum and the election of Donald Trump as US president – are achieved by establishing loose, temporal and unstable coalitions between such micro-audiences. ‘Mass’ media in the 20th century sense of the term (.....) now also operate on the logic of micromarketing algorithms and in close synergy with online platforms and social media (p.393)

From this perspective, political communication has changed radically and is centered on the circulation of messages across media to different micro audiences and on the formation of new coalitions between those targeted. Politicians are required to control and manage this circulation in sophisticated ways if they want to reach their potential targets.

These ideas are reflected in recent research that has started to argue against a view of Trump as alternatively a semi-literate individual or an exceptional phenomenon and have pointed instead to the rather sophisticated ways in which his messages are constructed and circulated. For example, Milani (2019) in a recent paper analyzing Trump’s speech in the frame of the “banality of evil”, states that his apparently simple messages are constructed and circulated through well-crafted means that include constant repetition, the construction of coherent messages, the exploitation of intertextuality and the ability to build “compelling narratives” (p.8) that sound true even though they do not correspond to facts. Similarly, Rheindorf (2020) notes that “populists often excel at *multimodal meaning-making*, combining musical, visual, and performative elements in their campaigns or rallies.”

In the light of the above, some of the post-truth critics are right in observing that truth and falsity are not the point here, since people are not focused on the degree of correspondence of messages to facts. However, post-truth theoreticians have thus far been unable to provide satisfactory analyses of the discursive and semiotic strategies used by Trump. On the other hand, research that is based on the idea that populism can be explained mainly in terms of a set of discourse strategies misses an important point, which is the central role of the construction of coherent narratives (see also Sergeant 2020 on this point) and media manipulation in the success of political ideas that may appear simply banal or untrue. Of course, it is important to note that no politician nowadays has complete control over how their message is circulated, since much of this political communication is circulated through algorithms on the one hand and random message chains on the other. However, as we have been arguing, success in such arena can only come through sophisticated media manipulation.

What models of post-digital political communication (like the one proposed by Blommaert) do not explain is how successful messages are formed and what may make them appealing to wide publics. Part of the appeal of Trump’s messages may be explained by the banality invoked by Milani: they reflect simple and widespread ideas and prejudices. But, as we will argue in this paper, another important aspect of his messages is their presenting coherent views of the world.

We would like to argue that such coherence is ensured by the creation of chronotopic representations which presuppose and subsequently reinforce alternative versions of reality. Such creation is based on the use of strategies that are centered on the manipulation of intertextual connections which also allows for the use of images as effective tools for the fixation of the identities enabled by these chronotopes. In our paper we focus in particular on chronotopes constructed by Trump in relation to immigrants and immigration. But before we get to the chronotope we discuss more in detail how communication happens in hybrid contexts and the

role of intertextuality in the creation and circulation of coherent messages.

### **Political discourse and the emergence of meaning in context**

It is crucial here to distinguish between technology and technique, as we would argue that political discourse is not mediated by merely *technological* means, but rather *hybrid* means developed through the carefully managed integration of *semiotic* (Peirce 1955, Sebeok 1965, Kockelman 2011) and *quasisemiotic*, or engineered, computational (Nöth 2002, Nadin 2011) systems. Semiotic functions, values, and operations, are inextricably bound up in forms, structures, relations, and ‘texts’, which are themselves continuously generated, displaced, invoked, reworked, reconstrued, and otherwise transformed in the very act of their deployment, providing rich frameworks for the *emergence of meaning in context*, a view of communication which contrasts with archaic models dealing with ‘transmission’ of propositionally-bound ‘information’. Semiosis is also inherently *multimodal* (Tomasello 2008, Deacon 2003). Over time, through (re)iteration, uptake, and subsequent engagement, sign processes mediate the construction of --and participation in-- shared ‘versions’ of reality which are structured in the *habitus* of participants (Bourdieu 1990, Scollon & Scollon 2004). Hence in deconstructing mass-mediated, right-wing, post-truth populist discourse as a persistent *interactive system*, we are presented at the outset with two distinct orders of integration: (a) the integration of semiotic and quasisemiotic (engineered, computational) systems in the promotion of and engagement with ‘echo chambers’ and ‘filter bubbles’ on the one hand, and (b) the integration of various (multimodal) semiotic means, in the form of channels, perceptions, affordances, and various other ‘modes of embodiment.’

The previous observations point to the need for a shift in perspective--from the narrow, truth-conditional, propositional semantics still grounding the popular conception of ‘truth’ to a more holistic, multimodal, social semiotic perspective better suited to analyzing political discourse and influence in our time. Thus, we adopt a view of ‘truth’ that hinges on *engagement* with - and subsequent *elaboration* of - particular chronotopic ‘versions’ of reality, such that even entirely fictional representations might be taken up and elaborated as ‘true’ if they correspond with the implications of previous representations now *presupposed* to be true by a cooperating audience. This approach to truth also accounts for the role of an inherent feature of human communication: *intertextuality*, a concept summarized by Bakhtin (1981) when he argued that “an utterance is a link in the chain of speech communication, and it cannot be broken off from the preceding links that determine it both from within and without, giving rise within it to unmediated responsive reactions and dialogic reverberations” (p. 94). Here we distinguish between internal intertextuality (the repetition or taking up of concepts, ideas and words within different tweets and speech by Trump) and external intertextuality (the connections created by Trump between his own texts and texts by others). It is also crucial to recognize that communication, as *text*, is also *recontextualizable*. Here we refer to the construct of ‘*entextualization*’, describing “the process of rendering discourse extractable, of making a stretch of linguistic production into a unit - a \*text\*- that can be lifted out of its interactional setting” (Bauman & Briggs, 1990:74). This “ease of detachment from situational context” (p. 74) allows texts to circulate, to be recontextualized and reconstituted in their (re)deployment, bringing with them traces of prior contexts with each use. In our case, entextualization is evident for example in the embedding of

photos or videos coming from external sources within Trump's own tweets.

In this article we show that the manipulation of intertextual links is a central strategy in the creation and circulation of chronotopes since on the one hand, it ensures a wide distribution of similar messages, and on the other hand creates connections between images, identities and actions that are the very stuff of which chronotopes are made.

## The Chronotope

Before we describe the data and present our analysis, let us briefly discuss the concept of the chronotope. The chronotope was first defined by Bakhtin as follows:

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. The intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope. (p. 84).

Bakhtin used this notion to describe how spaces and times were closely connected in novels and constituted devices around which specific plots would develop. Later work by sociolinguists and anthropologists has expanded the notion of chronotope to capture ways in which historical or recent frames of understanding that are based on these time space connections are mobilized by participants in communicative events to build new understanding of their own realities.

Chronotopic formulations have been invoked for example to explain how people build oppositions between modernity and tradition (Dick 2010), how they bring to bear historical events into the present in mass mourning events (Wirtz 2016), how traditions are exploited to create new images of places of tourism (Wang and Kroon 2019). Work in this area has also pointed to the relationships between chronotopic representations and identities underlining the fact that identities are constructed within and in relation to specific spatiotemporal constellations (see Agha 2007, Blommaert & De Fina 2017, Karimzad & Cathedral 2018, De Fina, Paternostro & Amoroso 2020) in that the latter make specific identities available. Thus space/time coordinates evoke the identification of social personae bearing certain characteristics and of expected scenarios. Blommaert (2020a) has expanded on this idea asserting that chronotopic identities are conceived of as adhering or deviating from particular moral systems such that chronotopic constructions always involve expectations about adequate actions and identities and therefore always imply moral judgments.

Of special significance is the status of chronotopes with regard to *models of reality* ostensibly shared by those who participate in them. Agha (2007) provides a telling example, referring to the ongoing feud between Creationists and Darwinians over which chronotope, 'evolutionary history' or 'biblical time'. According to Agha, each competing chronotope "informs an official picture of the world (linked to canonical texts and institutions) in one circle, and is an object of derision (and sometimes rage) in the other" (p. 322). Goebel (2017) also discusses how chronotopes are formed and circulated through processes of enregisterment which often work thanks to the action of what he calls "interdiscursive hubs", that is interdiscursive practices

through which elements of different stories are recombined into a new story . Such interdiscursive practices take place within mass mediated communication.

Recent work on right wing discourse has started to show the productivity of applying this notion to the study of political discourse and communication. In a recent paper, for example, Jereza and Perrino (2020) studying digital comments posted by far-right social media users argue that they “employ chronotopes (...) and other scalar configurations to order ideologies and social preoccupations in ways that make ‘dangerous’ social types coherent. In doing so, they (re)interpret and (re)produce narratives in ways that justify violent and exclusionary policies leveled against ‘othered’ groups.” (p.2).

Our point here is that chronotopic configurations provide semiotic resources (or infrastructure) for construing - and through engagement further constructing - reported circumstances as conforming to, or contrasting with coherent ‘alternative’ versions of reality. When such chronotopic representations are mass-mediated, they can very easily realize a form of propaganda that functions to (re)shape presuppositional grounds over time, what Ellul (1973) referred to as sociological ‘pre-propaganda’ (or ‘sub-propaganda’): that is, a “continuous, slow, imperceptible” process whereby a person or group is predisposed to act in a certain way through gradual “creation of feelings and stereotypes useful when the time comes” (p. 31)

To this point, our view is that chronotopes can be understood as spatiotemporal worlds in which identities and actions make sense and are morally evaluated by virtue of their *participation* within those frames. Thus chronotopes are frames that make our communicative activities and our identities intelligible, and for this reason they can also be used as resources to propose specific representations of the world. Here we focus on the strategies that allow for the construction and circulation of chronotopes: in particular we look at repetition of key words and ideas (intratextuality) and intertextual connections that link images to identities and to spatiotemporal coordinates thus giving flesh to chronotopic representations.

## **Data and Methods**

As mentioned above, we will focus here on Trump’s discourse on immigration by using quantitative and qualitative analysis of 915 tweets collected from Trump’s Twitter account (@realDonaldTrump) covering a period between 01/25/2015 and 09/26/2019. Tweets were selected through the following keywords: immigrants, immigration, border, caravan, wall. We will also use video and other visual materials embedded in his tweets through links and retweets, plus selected excerpts from his speeches. The rationale for the time period chosen was the idea of covering a time that spans from Trump’s entrance in the political arena to more recent moments in order to ascertain whether there was any evolution in his discourse. For the quantitative analysis data were entered into Antconc and word frequencies and collocations were extracted.

The qualitative analysis is based on discourse and multimodal analysis of the environment in which semiotic material is embedded, the imagery and texts used and their internal and external intertextual connections. We discuss agentive constructions, choice of words, emphasis and repetition across tweets.

## Analysis

The quantitative analysis of the tweets largely confirms the results of a study carried out by UCLA students under the direction of Otto Santa Ana (see Santa Ana 2018) which focused on 300 speeches and 6000 tweets of Trump from July 2015 to September 2017 to investigate ways in which he framed Latinos, immigration and the DACA program. This group of students and Santa Ana concluded that Trump presented immigrants as a clear and present danger to the United States, in that Mexicans and other migrants trying to reach the US were depicted as violent and dangerous criminals.

The nature of the world evoked by Trump in his discourse on immigrants is already clear in the simple counts of word frequencies in his tweets:

*Table 1 Antconc results for word ranks in the corpus*

TOKEN	COUNT
border	671
wall	366
will	325
we	317
immigration	250
security	208
democrats	199
great	189
country	174
illegal	171
Mexico	154
people	150
crime	140
must	137
southern	135
want	134
now	126
very	123
all	117
strong	107
you	100
military	96
more	93
get	85
laws	82
stop	81

A brief look at the most frequent words used hints at a picture where the border and the wall, the military, security and laws figure prominently, together with Mexico, crime, illegal and immigration. If we consider for example concordances for the word immigrants we will find 43 instances of the word and it is notable that in 41 of these tweets the word collocates with illegal.

Figure 1 Antconc results for collocations of the word: immigrants

Concordance Hits 43	
Hit	KWIC
1	a story that was broadcast on @FoxNews concerning
2	immediately ACT to take care of the Illegal
3	on the Border. Thank you Mexico! If Illegal
4	allow our Country to be overrun by illegal
5	s apprehended (captured) large numbers of illegal
6	ent politicians where we will be treating illegal
7	consequences! 23% of Federal inmates are illegal
8	into US Flashback \xD0 Jeb Bush says illegal
9	ow! We are apprehending record numbers of illegal
10	khBWG6AQ3 Hillary has called for 550% more Syrian
11	Cryin\xD5 Chuck Schumer want to protect illegal
12	open and working. Problem is they want illegal
13	ting Sanctuary policies that protect undocumented
14	administration agreed to take thousands of illegal
15	build a barrier to try to prevent illegal
16	Mexico is doing virtually nothing to stop illegal
17	least hear the Drivers License case on illegal
18	d giving strong considerations to placing Illegal
19	glasses to see the crimes committed by illegal
20	for America to have free Healthcare for Illegal
21	old Star families after approving aid for illegal
22	for Governor! Fake News Media had me calling
23	all births in U.S. are to illegal
24	@Macys credit card as a protest against illegal
25	shows more than 3M new legal & illegal
26	t Hillary Clinton now wants Obamacare for illegal
27	ns! Democrats are far more concerned with Illegal
28	Clinton wants to flood our country with Syrian
29	NOTHING to help stop the flow of illegal
30	at the Border. The Dems just want illegal

Besides collocating with illegal, the word is connected to the idea of coming, flooding, flowing, pouring “into our nation” in high numbers. A look at the collocations for criminals also confirms Trump’s continued equation between immigrants and criminality.

Figure 2 Antconc results for the word criminals

Concordance Hits 21	
Hit	KWIC
1	orgia Congressional race tomorrow wants to protect criminals allow illegal immigration and raise taxes! Jobs a
2	talk Open Border High Taxes and Crime. Stop Criminals & Drugs now! Another big Caravan heading our
3	we create a Wall or Barrier which prevents Criminals and Drugs from flowing into our Country Crime
4	n steps to stop releasing unaccompanied minors to criminals and traffickers.\xD3 This was done by the
5	to the Southern Border of the United States. Criminals and unknown Middle Easterners are mixed in. I
6	in 2019.\xD3 People want to stop drugs and criminals at the Border. Want Border Security! Tell the
7	waving Migrants many of whom are stone cold criminals back to their countries. Do it by plane
8	creates a giant amnesty (including for dangerous criminals) doesn't build the wall expands chain
9	to stop Drugs Human TraffickingGang Members & Criminals from coming into our Country. Do the Dems
10	will. Without it our Country cannot be safe. Criminals Gangs Human Traffickers Drugs & so much other
11	lly lost control of illegal immigration even with criminals. <a href="https://t.co/lZgZqr6BgB">https://t.co/lZgZqr6BgB</a> .@AnnCoulter has been
12	Constitution as written! There are a lot of CRIMINALS in the Caravan. We will stop them. Catch
13	been an \xD2Open Wound\xD3 where drugs criminals (including human traffickers) and illegals would
14	there is no Security. Human Trafficking Drugs and Criminals of all dimensionns - KEEP OUT! Our great U.
15	there is no Security. Human Trafficking Drugs and Criminals of all dimensions - KEEP OUT! With Caravans march
16	s Gang Members Drug Dealers Human Traffickers and Criminals of all shapes sizes and kinds. CHANGE THE
17	being invaded with Drugs Human Traffickers & Criminals of all shapes and sizes. That\xD5s
18	that is owed me now - and stop sending criminals over our border Record setting cold and snow
19	laws have enabled MS-13 gang members and other criminals to infiltrate our communities - and Democrats in
20	one other than drug dealers human traffickers and criminals want very badly! This would be so easy
21	Mexico! Our border is being breached daily by criminals. We must build a wall & deduct costs

As we can see, the word “criminals” is connected to caravans, to border and stopping, to protecting, to security, and so forth. The picture being created becomes even more evident if we consider the texts of many of Trump’s tweets and speeches in which migrants are presented as a concrete and present danger. See for example the following tweet

(1)

“If you want to stop the drug smugglers human traffickers and vicious MS-13 gang members from threatening our communities and poisoning our youth you have only one choice — you must elect more REPUBLICANS! #KAG2020 <https://t.co/L4neBV2SEo>” (09-17-2019).

Or

(2)

Democrats don’t care about Border Security. They refuse to give the votes necessary to fix the Loopholes and Asylum. Would be so easy! They want Open Borders which means CRIMECRIMECRIME! (07/27/2019)

In the first tweet (1) people who cross the border are immediately identified with criminals (gang members and traffickers) and are depicted as a present danger in that they can become a corrupting influence on American (our) youth. Trump use of the “if” “then” construction allows him to appeal directly to his audience in order to push them to intervene to avoid this danger. In the second example Democrats are presented as opening the door to danger. Here the equation

between asylum, open borders and crime is openly stated and emphasized through repetition.

Conversely, the Border Patrol and the army are presented in Trump's tweets and discourse in general as guaranteeing the security of the nation as they "apprehend" and "capture" migrants, as in the following tweet:

(3)

More apprehensions (captures)at the Southern Border than in many years. Border Patrol amazing! Country is FULL! System has been broken for many years. Democrats in Congress must agree to fix loopholes - No Open Borders (Crimes & Drugs). Will Close Southern Border If necessary... (4-8-2019)

We see also in example (3) a tone of urgency: the same mechanism of presenting the situation created by the arrival of immigrants as an immediate danger is reproduced here. Trump capitalizes the words 'full' and 'broken', which both evoke the image of something that has to be contained before it is too late. Indeed, the need for closure is invoked at the end of the tweet. At the same time there is the repetition of the same words in example 2: 'open borders' and 'loopholes'. In brief, these tweets show the prevailing image of masses of people in flux towards the United States in a movement that threatens to destroy the country. Such ideas are the basic ingredients of a chronotope of war and crisis that has two versions: one more localized in time and space and one more vague in spatiotemporal coordinates. In the first one, perfectly represented in the tweets quoted above, the US is sieged by immigrants organized in gangs and agents of crime who are ready to invade the country and destroy its civilization and laws.

Frequent references to size such as detailed numbers or expressions such as "thousands" "millions" in reference to migrants serve to create this chronotope as well. Against this horde stands Trump with the border patrol and immigration officials who are literally building a wall to stop it from coming in. Immigrants are mostly identified as Mexicans or at times as central Americans, especially after caravans tried to cross the border.

This chronotope of crisis and war is again evident in the following tweet where the fight against a caravan of unarmed immigrants is presented as a heroic feat requiring the, sometimes fruitless, efforts of border agents:

(4)

Mexico is doing NOTHING to stop the Caravan which is now fully formed and heading to the United States. We stopped the last two - many are still in Mexico but can't get through our Wall but it takes a lot of Border Agents if there is no Wall. Not easy! (01-19- 2019)

As in previous tweets there is an opposition between two groups: one presented as non-agentive and the other one as agentive. There are those who do not want to do anything to stop migrants (democrats, Mexico) and those who are trying to prevent them from passing through the border (republicans, the Border Patrol, and Trump of course). Here stopping the invasion is presented as

a heroic and difficult feat.

These tweets demonstrate the importance of repetition as an intra-textual strategy for the building of chronotopes. Indeed, it is through repetition of the same imagery and words across texts by Trump that chronotopic representations become identifiable and therefore are also able to evoke scenarios in which identities and plots are fixed. However, it is also important to note that such chronotopes are formed through the converging of messages from different semiotic modes. In this sense, Trump’s continuous recourse to intertextual connections to press and propaganda circulated by the alt right through retweets and the embedding of links in his tweets does the job of strengthening those images.

Let’s look, for example, at an image embedded into one of his tweets. The image comes from a link to an article on supposed “loopholes” left by current immigration laws embedded by Trump in one of his tweets complaining about Democrats not wanting to close the “terrible loopholes at the Southern Border”. (05/07/2019). Notice again the repetition of the same theme that he had raised in example (3). The article, a link to which is embedded in the tweet, is published by the National Sentinel:

Figure 3 Article from the Washington Sentinel

The image is a screenshot of a news article from 'The National Sentinel'. The main headline reads: "Loopholes in immigration law allowing MS-13 gang bangers to go FREE so they can continue terrorizing Americans". Below the headline, there is a list of tags: "Posted on January 14, 2019 in Border Patrol, Border Security, Congress, Courts, Crime, Current Events, Democrats, Department of Justice, Executive Branch, Federal Court, Government, Homeland Security, Illegal Immigration, Immigration, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Policy, Trump Administration, White House". To the right of the article is a red banner for "WHATFINGERNEWS" with the tagline "Thumbs Up or Thumbs Down on Breaking News & Commentary" and "THE INTERNET'S CONSERVATIVE HOMEPAGE" with thumbs up/down icons. Below the article is a large photo of a man with extensive tattoos, including a skull on his face, sitting in the back of a truck. To the right of the photo is a smaller image with the text "Do You Stand With Trump Against Democrat Impeachment Efforts?" and "VOTE NOW!" featuring images of Donald Trump and a woman. At the bottom right, there is a "Click to Visit:" section with links to "Trending Politics", "Trending News Videos", and "Censored.news".

<https://thenationalsentinel.com/2019/01/14/loopholes-in-immigration-law-allowing-ms-13-gang-bangers-to-go-free-so-they-can-continue-terrorizing-americans/>

First, let us look at the description of the National Sentinel on its “about us” tab on the website, which presents itself as follows:

**The National Sentinel** is a collective of former military, intelligence, and public service individuals who have come together for the sole purpose of helping President Trump and *real* Republicans take down the assholes in the Deep State who have become a power and entity unto themselves — above retribution, above accountability, and definitely above the law. (<https://thenationalsentinel.com/about/>)

Notice that the National Sentinel is openly presented as a Pro Trump group, therefore just leading to it through a hyperlink gives people access to an echo chamber for Trump’s discourse. Through his tweets then Trump takes the reader to another source that re-estates relevant parts of his message.

Now, let us look at the image: according to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) images communicate meanings through different dimensions: one of them is salience, given by the type of space and position occupied by the figures. Here, the most salient figure, the one that occupies the center of the image is that of an entirely tattooed man with a ferocious expression. Although he is salient, he is part of a group of men also tattooed and also looking angry. The background of the image is occupied by a group of people with guns who look like soldiers. Another element that Kress and Van Leeuwen mention as important in images is the creation of vectors that connect the images with the observers. For example if a figure directs their gaze to the observer there is a possibility of social connection between the observer and the represented figure. Notice that in this image the figures are all looking away from the front of the photo, thus eliminating any possibility for the observer to feel connected to them. This image clearly presents immigrants as identified with members of central American gangs which are physically represented as scary and violent. Such connections are enshrined in the nakedness and the tattoos of the men photographed, in their ferocious expressions. The war trope is emphasized by the presence of armed soldiers to guard them. The image, in other words, enshrines the fear of invasion that is continuously presented by Trump.

As mentioned above there is a second version of the chronotope of war and crisis constructed by Trump. The latter, seems to be well anchored in time and space, but in reality it exploits a high degree of vagueness. This chronotope is used to frame events in the US and abroad and in our view it contributes to the objective of opposing a generalized civilized world against barbaric invaders. The spatial vagueness of this world is represented by the fact that Trump repeatedly presents migrants as a threat in different countries (mostly European but sometimes in different continents such as Australia) or simply along unspecified borders that are attacked by invaders.

This is the case for example with his 2017 speech at a Florida Rally, which was the object of Milani’s analysis (see Milani 2019, p. 5), in which he presented the image of different countries and cities being threatened by migrants including France, Germany, Switzerland and most of all Sweden, which was followed by a “clarification” in which Trump referred a story about immigrants burning a truck on Fox News. Indeed, in the Fox News interview the discourse about immigrants threatening Sweden was associated with images of people burning cars. Notice also that the cities and countries quoted in the speech all belong to northern Europe, an area of the

continent that can be clearly identified as white and economically developed and therefore are apt to enshrine the type of civilized world envisioned by Trump. See another example:

(5)

Germany is going through massive attacks to its people by the migrants allowed to enter the country. New Years Eve was a disaster. THINK! (jan.6 2016)

However, as mentioned above, a key ingredient of Trump's war and conflict chronotopes of the second kind that we identified is the extreme vagueness or deceitful place/time connections in the definition of elements of the chronotope. Thus, for example, in a tweet uploaded on May 30, 2019 Trump declares

*Figure 4 Tweet from @realDonaldTrump (May 30<sup>th</sup> 20189) with video embedded*



As we see, the image seems to refer to a precise location, an exact number of apprehensions and a locality on the southern border. But when the video uploaded unfolds on the screen another picture emerges. There is no clear specification of the source of the images, other than the suggestion, in the text, that these images were captured by a camera in some kind of official facility. The images themselves appear so blurry that it is hard to discern details of place or identity and seem to have been taken from far away. The video is in black and white and it shows a desolate nineteeneightyforesque landscape, which evokes World War images of some kind.

The camera moves on a land (which actually seems to be covered in sheets of snow) with a prominent barrier in the center and a streaming line of people crossing it. The video goes on for around two minutes with the camera fixed on the same point for most of the time, with the exception of a brief moment in which it moves towards the back of the line. The movement also seems to have been altered so as to reproduce the same crossing all over again thus giving the impression of a never-ending stream. If we juxtapose the precision of the text and the vagueness of the images we can appreciate how deceptive the words are with respect to what it is actually shown in the video. At the same time, it perfectly fits the chronotope of a world invaded by hordes of foreigners, and provides a visual support for the grim views that Trump and the alt right are trying to create in connection with this topic. This tweet demonstrates once again the post-truth qualities of Trump's discourse, his disregard for facts and the use of interdiscursive links to support unsubstantiated claims, but it also demonstrates how imagery contributes to the circulation of the chronotope of the civilized world at war with immigrants.

A last example of the use of vague spatiotemporal and identity coordinates in images that are circulated to support this chronotope can be found in another of Trump's tweets, in which he ostensibly is not talking about migration, but about terrorists. The tweet is intended as a proof for the need to build a wall, so the connection with migration is implicitly but directly created. In the tweet he says,

(6)

ISIS is operating a training camp 8 miles outside our Southern border  
<http://t.co/P8arBnc00A> We need a wall. Deduct costs from Mexico! ( 4-17-2015)

Embedded in the text is a link to the Washington Times titled "Islamic State operating in Mexico just 8 miles from U.S. border: report.". Citing sources that include a "Mexican Army field grade officer and a Mexican Federal Police Inspector," the article mentions that "the conservative watchdog group reported that the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, is organizing only a few miles from El Paso, Texas, in the Anapra neighborhood of Juárez and in Puerto Palomas." Notice that the connection to migration is made through the following paragraph which basically relates ISIS terrorists to coyotes serving the Cartels who in turn smuggle people into Mexico.

"Judicial Watch sources said that "coyotes" working for the notorious Juarez Cartel are smuggling Islamic State terrorists across the U.S. border between the New Mexico cities of Santa Teresa and Sunland Park, as well as "through the porous border between Acala and Fort Hancock, Texas."

The photograph accompanying the text shows 4 figures entirely unrecognizable as they are not illuminated, who are seen in a hunched position suggesting that they are sneaking inside an area. They seem to be wearing hoods, or something of the sort, but again the precise spatiotemporal coordinates of the image are not available. What is notable is the juxtaposition between this image and the subtext which reads “four people sneak away from the US/Mexico border fence after illegally crossing into the border town of Nogales on May 31, 2010”. The text clearly shows that the individuals photographed were just “people” not ISIS militants, but the juxtaposition of the image and the words creates a connection between people crossing the border (migrants), the breaking of the law and Islamic terrorism.

Figure 5 Article from the Washington Times



<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/apr/14/islamic-state-operating-in-mexico-just-8-miles-fro/>

Again, what looks like very precise spatiotemporal coordinates, is in fact a device to support a chronotope of war and crisis. We see the same pattern of misinformation, in which Trump uses intertextual connections to make claims that seem to refer to precise space time coordinates and identities (8 miles outside the border, now, ISIS) but that in reality are based on unsubstantiated conspiracy theories. The power of images is significant here, since, as in the case discussed above, the images suggest the presence of hidden enemies taking advantage of any “loophole” in the system to enter into the United States.

## Conclusions

In this paper, we have presented the limitations of post-truth analyses of Trumps’ discourse and of populist studies based on traditional models of political communication. We have advocated for incorporating approaches to political communication that take into account both the hybrid

media and semiotic contexts in which political discourses are circulated and general processes of meaning construction in context. We have also argued for the importance of chronotopes as a tool to analyze ways in which political messages are given coherence and coalesce into consistent world views. We illustrated how Trump's anti-immigrant discourse is built around a chronotope of existential crisis and war. Such a chronotope is construed and solidified through the use and internal intertextual repetition of specific words and semantic connections within his speeches and tweets, and through the use intertextual links presenting images that give enemies a clear face conjuring frightening images. We have also shown that Trump circulates two versions of this chronotope: one with specific spatiotemporal dimensions in which the US, and more specifically the border, is represented as country in state of siege by cartels and criminals and another one in which the contours of the enemies and their precise actions and localization are more vague. This version, which is applied to different countries, including, the US shows them in danger of invasion by unidentified immigrants. In this version, vagueness serves well the objective of increasing the feeling of fear and alarm in the public. Both versions of the chronotope are deployed to justify Trump's racist and anti-immigrant agenda making it appear as a necessary remedy to maintain the security of the country.

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