

Palin, Bachmann, Tea Party Rhetoric, and American Politics

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Abstract

Sarah Palin's and Michele Bachmann's rhetoric influences the Tea Party Movement in different ways. Palin's rhetoric unites the Tea Party supporters and propagates the Tea Party vision for America. Bachmann's rhetoric presents her as not only one of the Tea Partiers but also as their leader in her unsuccessful bid for the U.S. presidency in 2012. Their rhetorical leadership in tandem transforms the Tea Party from a vague set of ideologies to a movement with influence. Palin's and Bachmann's speeches, interviews and media coverage are examined in order to gain a better understanding of the Tea Party Movement's momentum in American politics.

Keywords: Tea Party, Sarah Palin, Michele Bachmann, rhetoric, American politics

1. Palin, Bachmann, Tea Party Rhetoric, and American Politics

The first tea party occurred on December 16, 1773 when tea was dumped into Boston Harbor to protest taxes imposed by Britain. On December 16, 2007, supporters of U.S. Representative Ron Paul (R-TX) dumped \$4.3 million into his presidential campaign to protest taxes imposed by the United States government (Levenson, 2007; ronpaulsteaparty.com, 2007). A different kind of tea party was ignited two years later on February 19, 2009 in response to the government's plan to help homeowners refinance their mortgages after the economic meltdown of 2008. Broadcasting live from the floor of the Chicago Board of Trade, Rick Santelli, a CNBC commentator, stated, "This is America! How many of you people want to pay for your neighbor's mortgage that has an extra bathroom and can't pay their bills? We're thinking of having a Chicago tea party in July" (Blackmon, Levitz, Berzon & Etter, 2010, "The Rant," para. #3). The message spread across the country and groups began to coalesce around this shared anger toward government. On April 15, 2009 hundreds of rallies took place across the country to protest big government and its response to the economic meltdown (i.e. stimulus package, bank bailouts, and health-care legislation).

The protest rallies continued throughout 2009 and the first Tea Party Convention was held in Nashville, Tennessee on February 10, 2010. Sarah Palin, former governor of Alaska and the first woman vice-presidential nominee for the Republican Party, gave the convention keynote address. On July 15, 2010, U.S. Representative Michele Bachmann (R-MN) started the House Tea Party Caucus "to promote Americans' call for fiscal responsibility, adherence to the Constitution, and limited government" (Bachmann, 2010, para. #1). By July 12, 2011, 60 members of Congress had joined the Tea Party Caucus. The Tea Party Movement has "spread like wildfire, upending dozens of elections, yet has not coalesced around a single leader, a single agenda or even a common name" (Von Drehle, 2010 para. # 3). Among the many voices of the Tea Party Movement, Palin and Bachmann are widely known among conservatives. Palin and Bachmann also represent a growing development within the Republican Party, specifically, the expanded voice of female leaders within the conservative ranks sometimes labeled "the pink elephants" (Cottle, 2010). It is important to examine this rhetoric because "the mass appeal of these women is already translating into votes and victories. To discount them is to underestimate their growing power" (Elmhirst, 2010, p. 54). Both Palin and Bachmann express the views of many avowed Tea Party members. This research examines Palin's and Bachmann's Tea Party rhetoric through an analysis of their speeches, interviews and media coverage in an attempt to better understand the growing phenomenon of the Tea Party Movement and its momentum as the country heads toward the 2012 elections.

Specifically, this research will approach this examination with the following questions: Why do they appeal to a solid third of the population? What issues do they espouse? What rhetorical styles do they employ?

2. *Appeal of the Tea Party Movement*

The goal of Paul's 2007 Tea Party was to protest taxes which provided money for the government's foreign policy program which his campaign viewed as wrong because it funded wars while limiting individual liberty. Paul's issues took a back seat in 2009 when Santelli aired his anger toward the government's refinancing plan to help homeowners facing foreclosure. The public's anger toward government also increased dramatically. What happened? Between 2007 and 2009 the trigger of the 2008 presidential election occurred and Barack Obama was elected president. Obama serves as the catalyst for this redirection of the Tea Party Movement's focus; the target of its anger; and the bonding agent between previously, loosely-collected individuals who now form what is collectively known as the Tea Party Movement. Ashbee (2011) argues that "ideas only acquire energy and momentum within particular contexts and, in particular, once an 'Other' has emerged, taken shape and been integrated into the narratives upon which a movement draws" (p. 159). For the Tea Party movement, Obama is the "Other" and has become its "chief target" (Jonsson, 2010). Defined by Ashbee (2011) "an 'Other,' which is the subject of stigmatization, confirms identities and bolsters group cohesion" (p. 159). Acknowledging the role Obama plays, Sarah Palin states, "The Tea Party movement wouldn't exist without Barack Obama" (DeVito, 2011, para. #12). The economic meltdown of 2008 is also a contributing factor to the mobilization of the movement (Elmhirst, 2010). In sum, the "perfect storm: the financial crisis, the election of Barack Obama and the consequential birth of the Tea Party have given social and Christian conservatives a wave to ride" (Elmhirst, 2010, p. 52).

Forty-eight percent of voters identify with the views of the Tea Party Movement while one-third of voters have ties to it (Rasmussen Reports, 2011). The Tea Party has been called "the right's version of the 1960s New Left" (Weisberg, 2010). Polls find that Tea Party supporters are Republican, conservative (Saad, 2010), wealthier and more educated than the general public (Zernike & Thee-Brenan, 2010). Tea Party supporters are angry (Zernike & Thee-Brenan, 2010). The expression of their anger and frustration reveals the underlying beliefs and attitudes of the Tea Party Movement. "Tea Partiers detest all things big: big government, big business, big national debt, big taxes" (Rowen, 2007, "Diverse Group," para. #1). Fraser and Freeman (2010) place the Tea Party Movement within the history of American populism describing it as follows:

As a start, the Tea Party movement reminds us that the moral self-righteousness, sense of dispossession, anti-elitism, revanchist patriotism, racial purity, and "Don't Tread on Me" militancy that were always at least a part of the populist admixture are alive and well. For all the fantastical paranoia that often accompanies such emotional stances, they speak to real experiences—for some, of economic anxiety, insecurity, and loss; for others, of deeper fears of personal, cultural, political, or even national decline and moral disorientation (para. #31).

In her crowd rousing speech at the 2012 Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) Palin extols the necessity of the conservative struggle for political might. She states:

Today the conservative movement has never been stronger or brighter with people at the grassroots and yet the federal government has never cast a bigger shadow and so for the past three years we've been waving a banner that shouts 'Don't tread on me' (Thornton, 2012).

However, some interpret the struggle differently. The Tea Party motto, "'Don't tread on me!' is not the deliberate articulation of a well-thought-out political ideology, but rather the expression of an attitude—the attitude of pugnacious and even truculent defiance" (Harris, 2010, p. 4).

The attitude of Tea Party backers can be characterized as an "underlying anxiety about losing one's place in the country, or of losing control of it to someone else" (Weisberg, 2010, para. #7). This anxiety is expressed in the form of nostalgia, resentment and reality denial. First, there is nostalgia for the former glory days. Nostalgia is expressed through such rhetoric as "'restoring honor,' getting back to America's roots, and 'taking back' their country" (Weisberg, 2010, para. #3).

In a similar vein, Stewart, Smith & Denton's (2007) typology of political argument offers reversive argument "that society has gone too far and that the tide must be reversed" (p. 194) and restorative argument urging "a full-scale return to a previous state of affairs" (p. 195) both of which characterize the nostalgic Tea Party rhetoric. In addition, neither reversive nor restorative argument is moderate in tone. Second, Weisberg (2010) argues this anxiety is expressed as resentment toward other groups in society who are "either above or below you in the social hierarchy" (Weisberg, 2010, para. #5) in order to blame them for one's troubles. For example, one citizen who worked for the government and whose wife receives Medicare support voiced his displeasure with the government distributing welfare support. He states, "There's a lot of people on welfare who don't deserve it. Too many people are living off the government" (Taibbi, 2010, "Stay in what truck?," para. #11). In contrast, "The average Tea Partier is sincerely against government spending—with the exception of the money spent on them" (Taibbi, 2010, "Stay in what truck?," para. #14). Klapp (1991) argues this "search for scapegoats and villains" (p. 182) as a target for placing blame is a negative by-product of a social movement exhibiting tendencies of a crusade. Thirdly, the distrust of elites that is held by the populist character is expressed by disbelieving something because someone in the elite group believes it to be true. For example, where President Obama was born is a point of great divide between Tea Party backers and non-Tea Party supporters. Weisberg (2010) calls this distrust of elites as "reality denial" or "choosing your own reality."

Ashbee (2011) argues that Tea Party rhetoric coalesces around three forms of discourse: 1) "intense personal and political antipathy towards President Obama, his administration and Congressional Democrats;" 2) "deep pessimism about the country's economy and its economic future;" and, 3) a dynamic tension intertwining blame for big government on the political parties with a bond forged with the Republican Party (pp. 157-158). Tea Partiers enact these three beliefs in practical terms in the following three ways: 1) "a commitment to limited government"; 2) "a populist character that is firmly directed against political elites, including those within the Republican Party"; and 3) "notions of those who are 'deserving' and those who are 'undeserving'" (Ashbee, 2011, p. 158).

The Tea Party Movement continues to gain momentum even though it does not have a declared leader (it has multiple spokespersons) nor does it have a visible organizational structure. In addition, the movement continues to grow even with multiple, individual organizational names such as the Tea Party Express, the Tea Party Nation, the Tea Party Patriots, the New American Tea Party, and the Tea Party Revolution to name only a few (Von Drehle, 2010). Multiple voices express what it means to be a Tea Party supporter including Sarah Palin, Michele Bachmann, Rand Paul, Herman Cain, and Nikki Haley, to name a few. This research focuses on the voices of Palin and Bachmann as influential leaders of the Tea Party Movement.

3. Appeal of Sarah Palin & Michele Bachmann to Tea Party Supporters

Women leaders are not strangers to political movements. The first women's political meeting was held in Edenton, North Carolina in 1774, one year after the famous tea party in Boston Harbor in which "Mrs. Penelope Barker convened 51 women to support the colony's resistance to British taxation" (Mead, 2011, p. 28). Even though tea was not an element of the meeting it was an influential day for women political leaders who worked together on a mutual cause. In 2011 women leaders of the Tea Party Movement continue to gain momentum as well as the support of the Republican Party on such issues as taxation (Nichols, 2011). According to one Quinnipiac poll "55 percent of voters who identify with the Tea Party Movement are women" (Rosin, 2011, p. 62). In addition, "the movement's scattered national leadership is largely female as well" (Rosin, 2011, p. 62). Campaigns of female politicians and in particular, the rhetorical styles of female politicians have been examined to better understand the political success or failure of female politicians (Anderson, 2002; Dow & Boor Tann, 1993; Hayden, 2003; Heldman, Carroll, & Olson, 2005; Johnson, 2005; Robsom, 2000; Vavrus, 1998). Examining the rhetorical styles of women leaders of a contemporary social movement like the Tea Party offers insight not only into the rhetorical strategies of women leaders but also insight into the rhetorical strategies used by an emerging social movement in its efforts to establish and exert its influence.

The Tea Party base of support for Palin and Bachmann has been called a downscale conservative constituency and "refers to voters who feel as though they're economically insecure. These are voters who have a very strong anti-establishment streak, and they're oftentimes voters who have very strong religious convictions" (NPR, 2011, para. 7). Palin and Bachmann have been described as "...charismatic, mediagenic, oversized personalities and star power" (NPR, 2011, para. #4). Palin became the first woman governor of Alaska in 2006.

Palin gained national notoriety when she became the first female vice-presidential nominee for the Republican ticket. After the loss in 2008 she returned to Alaska but resigned from the Governor's office in July 2009. Palin offered her support to selected Tea Party candidates in the 2010 electoral races often labeling women Tea Party candidates as "Mama Grizzlies." Currently, Palin is a Fox News commentator and sometimes has been called the "chief cheerleader" of the Tea Party Movement (Jonsson, 2010). Palin sometimes even adapts her rhetoric to sound like a cheer as when she states, "We aren't red Americans. We're not blue Americans. We are red, white and blue and President Obama we are through with you!" (Thornton, 2012).

Palin considered running for President in 2012. Palin relies on her husband for political counsel but does have a small, loyal staff (Newton-Small, 2010). Bachmann was first elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2006. She was a "Carter-era evangelical" (Scallon, 2011) but now calls herself a "Constitutional Conservative." "Bachmann is a nationally known and often controversial figure, but one supporters say thinks like they do" (Davis, 2011, para. #6). "The founder of the House Tea Party Caucus, Representative Bachmann has broad grassroots support, a celebrity profile, and vast fundraising capacity. She raised more than \$14 million for the 2010 election cycle alone" (Chaddock, 2011, p. 1). Bachmann suffered one political loss when she ran for the school board in Stillwater, Minnesota in 1999. She attributed this loss to relinquishing control of campaign to the GOP and "Since then, she has never abdicated control of her campaign or her message to anyone" (Taibbi, 2011, para. #21). Bachmann relies on her family for trusted political counsel and she writes her own speeches (Scherer & Steinmetz, 2011). Bachmann also controls her campaign image (Gabriel, 2011). Her staff members ask media to not to "broadcast images of her in her casual clothes" (Lizza, 2011, para. #1) because "her image depends on a carefully groomed glamour" (Lizza, 2011, para. #3). Bachmann made a bid for the office of the president but stepped out of the race after a sixth place showing in the Iowa Caucus in January 2012 (Wheaton, 2012). Bachmann has decided to run for re-election for her congressional seat in Minnesota.

The relationship between Palin and Bachmann and the Tea Party is influenced by pundit viewpoints and media coverage of female politicians. Research has examined the unique challenges female politicians face when dealing with gendered media coverage (Anderson, 2002; Heldman, Carroll, & Olson, 2005; Vavrus, 1998). Examining media coverage of Palin and Bachmann contributes to the understanding of the challenges female politicians face. No matter "their shade of politics or feminism...female politicians of all parties and ideologies are patronized" (Elmhirst, 2010, p. 54). This behavior of patronization is exhibited toward Palin and Bachmann. At various points in 2011, media has compared Palin and Bachmann in ways that are not typical with male political leaders of the Tea Party movement (James, 2011; Lizza, 2011; Nichols, 2011; NPR, 2011; Siegel, 2011; Travis, 2011; Whitlock, 2011). Media reports pit Palin and Bachmann in a battle for the one female leadership position. Siegel (2011) reports that Bachmann made the following comment to a voter: "the media would like her [Bachmann] to dive into a 'mud wrestling fight' with potential presidential rival Sarah Palin" (para. #10). To their credit neither Palin nor Bachmann have responded to this sexist framing by engaging in a rhetorical stereotypical cat-fight as might be seen on a television sitcom. Rhetorical respect is demonstrated. For example, Bachmann refers to Palin as "a lovely, wonderful person" (Hugh Hewitt Show, 2011, para. #10). Bachmann's ability to lead the country as president has been questioned because she suffers from migraine headaches (Kucinich, 2011). Media coverage and coverage of comments from her GOP presidential primary opponent, Tim Pawlenty, suggested that Bachmann would not be able to serve as president because of the medical condition. Media stories that frame women politicians as the weaker sex because of their delicate, frail physical conditions equates this state with an inability to lead. In order to quiet the story, Bachmann produced a note from her doctor clearing her medically.

The intelligence of Palin and Bachmann has been questioned repeatedly by the media. Their frequent misspeaks in the public view have fueled this coverage (Siegel, 2011). Bachmann was called a "flake" in a nationally aired interview with Fox commentator Chris Wallace. Bachmann expressed her outrage at such a question (Lizza, 2011; Steward, 2011). Bachmann's supporters also expressed their outrage. "The 'flaky' comment made him look mean, even sexist, and her refusal to accept his non-apology made her look tough" (Lizza, 2011, "Back on Her Campaign Plane," para. #1). Wallace issued a public apology as well as a private apology in a conversation with Bachmann. The final result of this media interview was a PR victory for Bachmann over Wallace (Lizza, 2011). However, this type of discrediting also affects other female politicians. For example, Christine O'Donnell's rhetoric was described as "nutty" by Karl Rove (Elmhirst, 2010). During a GOP debate in 2011, Bachmann was reminded of her public statements on her religious views of being submissive to her husband and she was asked if this would still be the case if she were elected president.

Even though Bachmann's supporters booed the reporter asking the question, Bachmann stands in an awkward position of reaching out to her religious base while also appearing as a strong leader (Pollitt, 2011). *Newsweek* issued an unflattering cover photo of Bachmann "picturing her with crazed eyes as 'The Queen of Rage'" (Economist, 2011, para. #3). Even though Bachmann ignored the negative coverage, it stirred outrage not only among Bachmann's followers but also from feminist groups, political pundits and other media outlets because the choice of this photograph was seen as an unfair, sexist, editorial statement about Bachmann. More negative coverage on this cover photo was associated with Tina Brown, the editor of *Newsweek*, than to Bachmann (Economist, 2011).

Patriarchal media coverage (Stewart, 2011) that treats women leaders such as Palin and Bachmann as beautiful but unintelligent, as flakes, as physically frail, incapable of making decisions separate from their husbands, and jealous of other women is demeaning to Palin and Bachmann, to women leaders, and to the political process. Seeing how women are portrayed with "paternalistic labeling" (Siegel, 2011, para. #10) might be one reason why "fewer women run for public office" (Siegel, 2011, para. #9). Such coverage does not create a positive framework for perceiving women political leaders nor does it reflect well on the Tea Party Movement. By extension, GOP leaders, political pundits, and media portray the Tea Party supporters as being "out there" as in too extreme to be taken seriously. Palin states, "Opponents of this message, they're seeking to marginalize this movement. They want to paint us as ideologically extreme" (2010a, para. #60). The Tea Party continues to gain influence in spite of such reflections.

4. *Appeal of the Tea Party Message as Voiced by Palin & Bachmann*

The Tea Party message that is voiced by Palin and Bachmann breaks through negative media coverage probably because the supporters view media and political pundits as elites. Since elites cannot be trusted and are not viewed as being part of the movement, Tea Party supporters defy the elites and thus retain their identity and their beliefs. Harris (2010) argues that the "Tea Partiers can escape the otherwise all-pervasive influence of our cultural elite because they are the people who Gramsci called marginalized outsiders" (p. 12). The Tea Party movement remains vocal on issues that are important to them. Economic and social issues overlap significantly (Elmhirst, 2010). Supporters of the movement reward leaders like Palin and Bachmann who vocalize the Tea Party stance on such key issues as lower taxes, limited government, and increasing jobs while also attacking issues the Tea Party opposes such as, the healthcare plan they label as "Obamacare," and the stimulus package. Other issues are understood through the framework of the two dominant elements of the Tea Party message, reducing taxes and the size of government. Both Palin and Bachmann frame issues within the perspective of lowering taxes and government spending in a focused attempt to reduce the power of the federal government. Many issues are addressed in their rhetoric and include such issues as the federal bailout, the stimulus bill, unemployment, the national debt, healthcare, EPA cap and trade, the balanced budget amendment, regulatory burdens on business, unemployment rates, devalued housing prices, increased gas prices, energy policies, socialism, national security, and American values.

While emphasizing the Tea Party message of lower taxes and limited government, Palin and Bachmann also reveal their own rhetorical styles. Describing their electrifying rhetoric Cottle (2010) states, "Forget civility and compromise: These ladies stand out for their ability to rant, rave, name-call, finger-point, and peddle the most outrageous distortions in service to their cause" (p. 6). Palin's Tea Party message emanates from her position as a former politician while Bachmann's message resonates as a politician currently in office and who has a goal of attaining a higher political office. Palin is "someone who distinguished herself as a kind of an anti-ideological political figure in Alaska" (NPR, 2011, para. #8). Bachmann "is someone who has very strongly identified with the most conservative wing of the Republican party" (NPR, 2011, para. #8). This difference suggests a different political and rhetorical ethos between Palin and Bachmann. Palin's rhetoric takes the approach of attacking the Democrats in order to unite the Tea Party supporters and propagate the Tea Party vision for America. Bachmann's Tea Party rhetoric is designed to present her as an effective representative, a capable leader, and a viable candidate for an even higher political office. Palin's rhetoric leads the Tea Party from outside Washington and the political system. Bachmann's rhetoric leads the Tea Party from within the system of governance.

Whereas Palin is seen as “someone who would often stumble” especially in a “confrontational political situation when she was being interviewed” (NPR, 2011, para. # 9) Bachmann is seen as “being very articulate, very sharp, and also very quick on her feet” which means that she is “a much more confident performer in a situation where she’s under intense scrutiny” (NPR, 2011, para. #10). However, her rhetorical style has also been described in this manner: “Michele Bachmann’s rhetoric can strip paint” (Crowley, 2011, p. 14).

Palin’s rhetoric focuses primarily on two policy issues, national security and the economy. Palin attacks the Democrats for their failed policies on these two issues. On the first issue, Palin identifies the threat to national security by the Christmas Day attempted airplane bomber and the inept handling and limited questioning of the accused. She draws attention to threats to the country’s national defense from Iran and North Korea. Palin attacks the Obama administration’s poor leadership in foreign policy decisions. On the second issue, Palin attacks the federal bailout and the stimulus bill as failed economic policies by the Obama administration. Palin blames these failed policies for increasing the already high level of national debt while not being effective in reducing the high levels of unemployment. Palin offers Tea Party solutions in the form of a pro-market agenda to address the economic issue: lower taxes, eliminate government regulations, and cut government spending. Palin hails the Wisconsin economic reforms of 2011 as a model for the rest of the country to follow. In addition, Palin argues that the strength of a strong, effective government lies in following the Constitution. Palin states:

And we have a vision for the future of our country, too, and it is a vision anchored in time tested-truths; that the government that governs least, governs best. And that the Constitution—the Constitution provides the best road map towards a more perfect union. And that only a limited government can expand prosperity and opportunity for all. And that freedom is a God-given right and it is worth fighting for.” (2010a, para. #44).

Palin’s rhetoric triggers a response from Tea Party supporters as she evokes strong, anti-elite messages and elicits a sense of nostalgia for a return to the values of America’s past. Her trademark of “going rogue” in the 2008 election is transformed to an elevated status in the Tea Party Movement. Palin offers a description of the country’s current status as she states, “We’ve transformed from a country of hope to one of anxiety.” (Spiering, 2011, para. #6). Palin identifies a target for blame of this state of anxiety as she states, “...the reality is we are governed by a permanent political class, until we change that” (Spiering, 2011, para. #10). Palin unites the supporters against the elites because the elites denounce the Tea Party Movement (Palin, 2010a). Palin belittles the elite as she states, “Don’t wait for the permanent political class to reform anything for you. They won’t. They can’t. They can’t even take responsibility for their own actions.” (Spiering, 2011, para. #28). Palin explains what is happening in the country from a Tea Party perspective as she states:

We don’t like this fundamental transformation of America—this road that we’re on towards national insolvency; being beholden to foreign countries in so many respects now; being under the thumb of big government with more of a disrespect for life, for the sanctity of life. We don’t like that transformation (2010b, para. #5). Palin urges action in order to reclaim America as she states, “We’re here to stop that transformation and to begin the restoration of the country that we love.” (Spiering, 2011, para. #3). Such rhetoric triggers the nostalgic yearning within Tea Party supporters. Palin reminds supporters of what was at stake in the 2010 elections as she states, “We were about to lose the blessings of liberty and prosperity” (2011, para. #8). Palin congratulates supporters for their 2010 electoral success as she states, “That victory, remember friends, was only one step in a long march towards saving our country” (2011, para. #9). Palin reminds supporters that they need to continue the fight and to “...come out and stand up and speak for common-sense conservative principles” (2010a, para. #8). Palin’s rhetoric makes the case for change using what Steward, Smith, & Denton (2007) label reversive and restorative arguments. She wants to reverse not only the status quo but the future direction of the country and return to a previous era. She offers a vehicle of the winning elections as the means to achieve the Tea Party goals.

Palin distinguishes her rhetorical style within the framework of a feminine rhetorical style in that she uses metaphors and often shares personal experiences to illustrate her message. Palin defines the Tea Party through the use of metaphors, in particular the metaphor of “mother.” Women are the key to the Tea Party’s political strength. The political strength of women who are mothers is compared to nature, specifically, mama grizzly bears who form “a new breed of conservative women...[who are] aiming high in public office and is as tough as they come, like mama grizzlies protecting their cubs” (Feldmann, 2010, para. #11). Palin targets the Washington political and media elites with the wrath and power of mothers. She states:

And Washington, let me tell you: you don't want to mess with moms who are rising up. There in Alaska, I always think of the mama grizzly bears that rise up on their hind legs when somebody's coming to attack their cubs, to do something adverse toward their cubs. No, the mama grizzlies, they rear up. And, you know, if you thought pit bulls were tough, you don't want to mess with the mama grizzlies, and I think there are a whole lot those in this room (2010b, para. #10).

According to Palin's rhetoric, the source of a woman's power lies in motherhood. Women with a focus on mothers are leading the way for a better future for their kids. There is a "mom awakening," a movement of newly empowered conservative women who are anti-government, anti-establishment and seeking to destabilize a political system they perceive as elitist and remote" (Elmhirst, 2010, p. 51). Palin's rhetoric suggests that women do not like the road America is on and they need to change not only the direction but the road itself. In addition, Palin seeks to empower women to take on this task and to do so from a conservative perspective. She uses labels such as, "Commonsense Constitutional Conservative Women" and the "Conservative Feminist Movement" to this end. Palin identifies this form of female empowerment as "Western Feminism." Palin identifies with the strength and resolve of early pioneer women. "By decoupling conservative values from explicit appeals to traditional Christianity—and its teachings about the proper role of women—the Tea Party has helped open up space for an unfettered kind of conservative feminism" (Rosin, 2011, p. 62). "Palin's 'mama grizzlies' form a sisterhood of conservative feminists" (Feldmann, 2010, para. #11). Palin's rhetoric reinvents feminism from a conservative perspective and is part of a larger struggle within the feminist movement (Valenti, 2010).

This female conservative viewpoint of feminism describes "women who feel very strongly about the talents and skills and power of women" (Elmhirst, 2010, p. 52) but who "don't support equal rights, they don't support abortion" (Elmhirst, 2010, p. 52). Palin reframes the argument on abortion from this conservative female empowerment perspective as well as from a personal perspective. She offers her experience and that of her daughter, Bristol, in her argument for pro-life decisions. An activist describes this conservative feminist movement as a "movement that wants our country to be the country we grew up in—we want that for our children and our grandchildren. So it gets to our motherly instincts. It's not about women's issues" (Elmhirst, 2010, p. 52). This type of description used by a Tea Party supporter not only captures the sense of nostalgia that dominates Tea Party rhetoric but is also forms a bond between leaders like Palin and Tea Party supporters since they both use similar rhetoric.

Palin also attacks the media as elites who are against the Tea Party movement because "...the media has tried to portray Tea Party Americans as racist and violent and all those things that they are not, that we are not" (2010b, para. #8). In response to these charges by media Palin states: "We're just average, everyday, hard working, patriotic, liberty-loving American who, again, have said, That's enough, Federal Government, that's enough of your overreach, and we're going to do something about it" (2010b, para. #8). Palin often describes the Tea Party Movement in an attempt to combat negative perceptions of the Tea Party presented by media. She states:

The Tea Party was borne of this urgency. It's the same sense of urgency that propelled the Sons of Liberty during the Revolution. It's the same sense of urgency that propelled the Abolitionists before the Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement during the 20th Century. The Tea Party Movement is part of this noble American tradition. This movement isn't simply a political awakening; it's an American awakening. And it's coming from ordinary Americans, not the politicians in the Beltway. No, it's you who grow our food; you run our small businesses; you teach our children; you fight our wars. We are always proud of America. We love our country in good times and in bad, and we never apologize for America (Spiering, 2011, para# 7).

Palin compares this sense of urgency of the Tea Party Movement to the same sense of urgency of the Abolitionists and Civil Rights Movements. Palin's comparison seeks to raise the ethos of the Tea Party Movement by associating it with the fight for equality by African Americans. In addition, by comparing equality struggles of African-Americans to the Tea Party Movement, Palin struggles to illustrate a commonality between the two movements in order to lessen the charges of racism. Race is also a topic in Bachmann's rhetoric. It has been argued that Bachmann's rhetoric unveils an undertone of racism. "Bachmann said that early European settlers accepted all immigrants and that the color of their skin, language or economic status had no role in keeping them from finding fulfillment in the United States" (Hicks, 2011, p. 16). Bachmann's rhetoric reveals a world view that is considered by some to be a "whitewash of the story of slavery in America" (Hicks, 2011, p. 16) and she has had to defend her stance in interviews (Lizza, 2011).

Like Palin, Bachmann also uses a feminine rhetorical style as she often shares personal experiences. She offers her life story as a framework in her speeches. This life story is used to explain why she entered politics and why she has the credibility to lead. Bachmann taps into the same source of power and credibility that Palin extols to empower women in that Bachmann entered public life “to make life better in our community and education better for our children” (2011c, para. #12). Bachmann’s rhetorical style also incorporates a masculine style in that she stresses her credentials as evidence of experience. Bachmann states:

I’m a tax litigation attorney. I have a post-doctorate degree in federal tax law from William & Mary. I’ve worked for years in the United States federal tax court. We’ve also started our successful company. I have executive experience in the real world in the private sector (Marchese, 2011, para. #15). Bachmann’s rhetoric is also designed to forge a bond between her and the Tea Party supporters. Bachmann states: ...your passion is about fiscal conservatism and I am one of you. And for some of you that are here your passion is about defending the moral values that grounded this country and I am one of you. And some of you who are here are all about national security and making sure that we continue our legacy of peace through strength. I am one of you (2011b, para #3).

While Palin inspires and energizes the Tea Party base, Bachmann wants to be a leader in high political office and she needs the Tea Party vote. She calls herself a “constitutional conservative” which she defines in this statement, “We believe in lower taxes, a limited view of government and the exceptionalism of America” (2011a, para. #15). This labeling is important as it directly connects with the Tea Party perspective: the idea of a limited federal government operating from conservative values. Bachmann’s rhetoric defines the Tea Party movement by focusing on the constitution, fiscal conservatism, and defending the moral values that grounded this country. She defines the mission of the Tea Party by stating, “It is the voice of constitutional conservatives who want our government to do its job and now ours and who want our government to live within its means and not our children’s and grandchildren’s” (2011c, para. #18). Bachmann also calls this “generational theft” as she states, “Generational theft is a moral and ethical issue, and I care deeply about both the present generation and generations to come” (2011d, para. 18). From this foundation, Bachmann defines the Tea Party mission as fiscal conservatism with an obligation to defend the moral values that were used to found this country. Bachmann uses the metaphor of a three-legged stool to characterize a solution to the nation’s problems as she states, “The fiscal conservative leg, the national security leg and the social conservative leg” (2011b, para. #32) are all needed to come together to win and thus solve the country’s problems.

In addition, with this type of rhetoric, Bachmann is tapping into the nostalgia sentiment that characterizes the Tea Party movement. Bachmann energizes the base by calling upon nostalgic yearnings and issues a challenge to supporters to stay the course as she states, “We will push forward to reclaim the greatness of our country and to proclaim the liberty upon which we were founded. And we will do so because we the people will never give up on this great nation” (2011a, para. #17). Bachmann uses what Stewart, Smith & Denton (2007) label “restorative argument” in such rhetoric, as she calls for a return to a previous era. Bachmann calls herself the “voice of the people” (Star Tribune, 2011, para. #3). Bachmann’s rhetoric reveals a self-appointed duty to speak for the people who yearn nostalgically for past values as she states:

In Washington I am bringing a voice to the halls of congress that has been missing for a long time. It is the voice of the people I love and learned from growing up in Waterloo. It is the voice of reasonable, fair minded people who love this country, who are patriotic, and who see the United States as the indispensable nation of the world. My voice is part of a movement to take back our country (2011c, para. #17, #18).

Again, Bachmann’s rhetoric offers the image of a leader who can reform the government and make things “right” again. Bachmann uses the metaphor of family to describe the Tea Party movement as she states, “Our movement is a growing movement, it’s a big movement and I’m excited to be a part of the family” (2011b, para. #2). This rhetoric about the family of the Tea Party mirrors her description of her personal life when she talks about the large family she raised. The connection is that since she raised a large family she is more than capable of leading the large family of Tea Party supporters. The metaphor of family has been used by female politicians in campaigns and on television programs with varying success (Adams, 2011; Hayden, 2003). Bachmann uses the family metaphor to build her political leadership ethos whereas Palin uses the mother of a family metaphor to empower women politically.

Targeting a common opponent is a tactic similar to Palin's rhetoric. Like Palin, Bachmann also uses the tactic of targeting the opposition in the form of Obama because it helps to unify the "broad based coalition" (2011b, para. #3) of the Tea Party Movement. Bachmann strengthens the bonds between Tea Party supporters by attacking Obama as the opponent who weakened the economy through high taxes, gas prices and unemployment rates, and devalued house prices. Bachmann's rhetoric relies heavily on attacks on the recent healthcare law and attacks Obama for trying to socialize this country through "this monstrosity called Obamacare" (2011b, para# 18) which "...is the never-ending liberal gift that keeps on giving towards liberalism" (2011b, para. #18). Bachmann also uses the fear of socialism regarding jobs as she states, "Socialism kills job creation everywhere it rears its ugly head, except for government, it rears its ugly head" (2011b, para. #24). Bachmann attacks Obama for failed economic policies as she states, "And worse, they have stolen from a generation of Americans yet unborn, the consequences of which mean a near certainty of reduced choices and a dramatically downsized lifestyle for future generations from what we enjoy today" (2011d, para. #17). In this attack, Bachmann triggers a response from pro-life supporters with her reference to "Americans yet unborn" and she also triggers a fear response in Tea Party supporters who yearn for the days of economic boom. Bachmann offers solutions to the nation's economic crisis in the form of lowering taxes, reducing regulatory burdens and instituting a balanced budget amendment.

Bachmann compares herself to British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in that both have "firm resolve" in their leadership styles. Bachmann states, "It took two very strong leaders on the world stage, one a woman and one a man, to reverse the course of their respective countries" (Associated Press, 2011, para. # 4). Bachmann identifies Thatcher as "a transformational figure of her era" (Associated Press, 2011, para. #14) and uses this comparison to build a case for Bachmann's ability to lead because both are "...in a similar time period and we need to have strong, viable leadership to see that return again today, both with the military and with the economy" (Associated Press, 2011, para. #14). This comparison to a world famous female leader is a rhetorical attempt to transfer the leadership qualities from Thatcher to Bachmann thereby strengthening Bachmann's ethos within the Tea Party movement and perhaps even beyond to other political supporters.

Scallon (2011) argues that Bachmann worldview combines religion and politics. Yet Bachmann defines her worldview in one word, "liberty." Bachmann states:

That's what inspires me and motivates me more than anything—just the concept of freedom, liberty, what it means. Whether it's economic liberty, religious liberty, liberty in our finances, liberty in being able to choose the profession we have. That's what inspired my relatives to come here back in the eighteen-fifties. It was the concept of liberty. That's what motivates me today as well (Lizza, 2011, "If there was one word," para. #1).

Lizza (2011) argues that Bachmann's choice of "liberty" to summarize her worldview is a deliberate attempt to attract voters who otherwise may steer clear of Bachmann if she emphasizes religion too heavily in her rhetoric "because many voters don't respond well to religious language" ("Bachmann and her political consultants," para. #1). Scallon (2011) argues that Bachmann's rhetorical choices reflect a deliberate campaign strategy. Scallon (2011) states:

Bachmann is trying to unite the Tea Partiers with her socially conservative base by keeping a foot in both camps. She wants to be the bridge between them and believes that whoever can bring these factions together will win the GOP nomination next year (p. 30).

If these rhetorical choices were part of a campaign strategy by Bachmann to win voters it apparently did not come to fruition because it did not work to her advantage in the 2012 presidential election.

5. *Tea Party Rhetoric: Movement or Crusade?*

The Tea Party Movement is a loosely defined collection of people who share a common bond of anger toward the government. This fermenting anger held by the Tea Party supporters existed long before Palin and Bachmann appeared in the public view and the anger will probably continue well into the future. Even though Bachmann believes it is not anger that people are expressing but rather their views that "the country is not working" (Romano, 2011, p. 32), this attempt to reframe the anger issue does not seem effective as anger is still viewed as a dominant characteristic of the Tea Party Movement. The Tea Party Movement continues to gain influence despite media coverage that discredits Palin and Bachmann and their Tea Party supporters. The rhetoric of Palin and Bachmann energizes Tea Party supporters who identify with Palin and Bachmann.

In addition, the Tea Party messages voiced by Palin and Bachmann forge a bond of common interest between individuals who might otherwise not connect with each other. Palin's and Bachmann's Tea Party rhetoric reinforces supporters' anxiety about the current transformation of America and their perceived loss of status along with their perceived sense of the erosion of traditional values. Palin's and Bachmann's Tea Party rhetoric reinforces the populist angst and distrust toward elites in society without distinguishing between media and political elites including from the Republican Party. Palin and Bachmann's Tea Party rhetoric identifies the need to reduce the power of the government by reducing taxes and limiting authority within the boundaries of the constitution. All of these messages serve as a lightning rod for Tea Party anger and trigger a nostalgic yearning for better days that may or may not have actually existed. Obama's election in 2008 created a convenient opponent to serve as the "Other" around whom these generalized feelings of angst and anxiety could coalesce thus giving the Tea Party supporters a movement in which to reside and ride. In addition, an ultimate goal of Tea Party rhetoric as evidenced by Palin and Bachmann might be to reconcile conservative values with feminism. Coupling these to date vastly different perspectives would result in a powerful voting bloc within American politics. By focusing on such issues as the economy and role of government, Palin and Bachmann have used their rhetoric to transform themselves into a new breed of conservative female politicians who are comfortable tackling economic issues while still retaining their roles as wives and mothers. As a result, Palin and Bachmann are rhetorically redefining feminism. In much the same way that compassionate conservatism blurred the distinctions between the major parties (Kuyper, Hitchner, Irwin, & Wilson, 2003), Palin's and Bachmann's Tea Party rhetoric of feminism is also blurring the dividing lines between feminism and conservative views on women.

The Tea Party Movement operates with a fluidity of the leadership mantle which suggests that there is more to the movement than the charisma of an individual or two. Tea Party supporters are loyal to Palin and Bachmann but that does not necessarily translate into votes for a presidential bid as has been made clear by the transfer of support from Bachmann to Texas Governor Rick Perry to businessman Herman Cain to being split between the former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and former Pennsylvania U.S. Senator Rick Santorum. For an organization to last, it must develop its own identity beyond the charisma of an individual. One can look back in recent years to the Independent Party led by Ross Perot. After he abdicated his position, the group foundered for a while before fizzling to complete disarray.

The Tea Party Movement shares some but not all of the characteristics of what Klapp (1991) labels a crusade, namely, militancy, righteous, a sense of uphill struggle, and an unwillingness to compromise. As illustrated by the rhetoric of Palin and Bachmann, Tea Party supporters are engaged in their fight to take back their country and return America to its former glory. Tea Party supporters face an uphill struggle as media and members of their own Republican Party mock their credibility and their views. Tea Party supporters believe their values are right. This sense of righteousness is "absolute enough to withstand contradiction and challenge, and make the fighter unwilling to compromise" (Klapp, 1991, p. 40). Compromise is not an option for Tea Party leaders and approximately 25% of Tea Party supporters (Crowley, 2011). When a social movement becomes a crusade on social policy issues, there are consequences according to Klapp (1991), who argues that "Through a sword of reform, crusading carries moral arrogance and high social costs" (p. 189). One example of a social cost is the breakdown of civil deliberations during the town hall meetings in the summer of 2009.

A Tea Party crusade could transform government from its current entrenched state in society to a minimalist, marginalized entity affecting millions of Americans as government programs are reduced or cease to exist. Whether the Tea Party Movement develops into a full-fledged and long-term crusade remains to be seen. Other considerations must be taken into account. The uncertain outcome of the 2012 presidential election, current stress fractures within the Republican Party, and the rise of other developing movements (i.e. the Occupy Wall Street supporters) suggest the outcome is not clear. Even though third parties do not have a history of long-term viability in America, Republicans and Democrats alike are currently feeling the wrath of the Tea Party supporters and as a result the major parties cannot ignore Tea Partiers or the rhetoric of their leaders like Palin and Bachmann. However, if the Tea Party continues to gain momentum and becomes a full-fledged crusade, then it might cease to exist because as Weisberg (2010) states, "The Tea Party is fundamentally about venting anger at change it doesn't like, not about fixing what's broken. Turn the movement's rage into a political program and you've already betrayed it" (p. 33).

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