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Book review

**Review of Andreas Musolff. 2021.  
*National conceptions of the body politic.  
Cultural experience and political imagination.* Cham, Springer.  
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Рецензия

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Today, after over four decades of conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), it would be hard to deny the importance of metaphor in shaping, expressing and reproducing concepts that resist other forms of explanation. The use of figurative references – particularly those grounded in the human body – to signify mental states or explain abstract notions is widespread across cultures, and is integral to human communication. However, metaphorical language is also

characterized by profound cultural diversity and variation: use of metaphor is clearly subject to variation at a linguistic, cultural, national and social level, as well as being influenced by individual choices and inspirations. Although this variation has been addressed in various ways within the field of conceptual metaphor theory, the preference for “universalist” explanations among member of this school has often led scholars to regard variability as a “surface” phenomenon that distracts us from the “primary” bodily metaphors. Universalist approaches may, of course, have some relevance when we are looking at metaphors used to express (supposedly) shared human phenomena such as certain physical or emotional states. But in most culturally complex contexts it might well be misguided to seek universals. One case in point is the way people think of their country, which is not the product of a physiological state or a universal mental frame, but rather the result of years of education and socialization within a specific national culture. The nation, after all, is an “imagined community” (Anderson 2006), a discursive construction, built up through years of symbolic activity on a societal, group and individual level, and one which is dynamic and subject to historical change.

Against this background, the representation of the nation is obviously a highly relevant topic, with many social and political implications. How people envisage their “fatherland” has a direct impact on the way they feel about it, and by implication also on their sense of its place in the world and its role with regard to other nations. Metaphors of the “nation” are an integral and powerful aspect of political discourse. In this volume, Andreas Musolff sets out directly to research the notion of the “body politic” as used by participants from different cultural backgrounds, with a view to exploring the middle-range (neither completely embedded nor highly inventive) conventional images that ordinary people in different countries have concerning their homeland.

Of course, it is clear that when approaching the phenomenon of cultural differences in metaphors, appropriate analytical tools are needed. For the purposes of this volume, Musolff builds on the useful analytical construct of the “metaphor scenario” that he himself developed previously (2006, 2016). This construct is essentially an elaboration of the notion of “frame”, see Taylor (1995), which is expanded to include narrative, affective and argumentational aspects. Importantly, the “scenario” is not envisaged as part of people’s universal mental apparatus: “the scenario category is only designed as an analytical tool to represent empirically observable usage patterns in a corpus of metaphor data” (p. 9). This makes it a practical tool to use for identifying semantic and pragmatic clusters occurring in the context of particular metaphors, and teasing out the links between observable data and the preferred conceptualizations among different cultural groups.

After setting the scene for his conceptual and methodological approach in the first chapter, Musolff traces the history of the nation-as-body metaphor from Aristotle’s *Politics*, through key texts by the Church Fathers and Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*, via Rousseau, Herder and Marx to the present day, showing how this concept retained some similarities but also took on new aspects from the age of

empires through feudalism to the nation state and beyond. In a stimulating discussion, Musolff points out that over this vast expanse of time our conceptualization of the body has undergone dramatic changes, from Hippocrates' theory of the four humors to decoding the human genome. This, of course, presents researchers with a double dilemma: both source and target domain have changed substantially over time, which means that to research the two together, it is only possible to establish the most plausible source- and target-notations in each example. To this end, the notion of scenario again comes to the fore, as this focus privileges the target meaning, which sheds light on what the metaphor means in context, rather than on different possible complications of the source. In the course of his discussion in this chapter, Musolff identifies three main scenarios that will prove useful to structure the later sections of the book: the need for solidarity among body members, the hierarchical structure of the body (head or heart being in control), and the illness-cure scenario.

Following on from this by way of an illustrative case study, Chapter 3 then examines the pervasiveness of the “body politic” scenarios in the immediate context of the Brexit referendum and aftermath, tracing how they serve as templates for debates about national identity. Using data gathered from newspaper corpora, the author shows how the relationship between Britain and the European Union was problematized in terms of “sickness-health” and “amputation” metaphors. He identifies six key body/person scenarios that proved relevant to the conceptualization of UK/EU relations. On the strength of these data, he shows that body- and health-based metaphors in contemporary British debates about UK-EU relations mainly invoke traditional body concepts and only marginally incorporate more recent scientific research findings (e.g. DNA). Moreover, the metaphors used still bear the hallmark of the “body politic” tradition developed in Western political thought, outlined in the previous chapter, revolving around topics such as hierarchy and control within the body, illness and health, and “personal” responsibility for national decisions. These scenarios were found across all the sectors of the debate, used by Eurosceptics and Remainers alike to structure their arguments or national narratives, suggesting a high degree of pervasiveness and conventionality.

After setting the scene in these preliminary chapters, Musolff then presents what is essentially the main contribution of this book, namely the analysis of his corpus of questionnaire responses collected over eight years from more than two thousand L1 and L2 students of English in 29 countries to investigate differences in the use and interpretation of body- and person-based metaphors for nations across the world (see also Musolff 2019). Chapter 4 introduces the survey, explaining how it came about and providing an overview of the sample, research process and analytical methodology. The findings of a pilot study with local (UK-based) and Chinese students yielded five scenarios featuring the nation as whole body, as a geobody, as part of body, as part of the ego and as a person, and on this basis a grid was constructed to represent these main scenarios and related sub-constructs. Importantly, for the main study to follow, the pragmatic uses of the different

metaphors were also analyzed where possible, including critical, sarcastic and humorous uses. In the remaining chapters, the results of this survey are discussed in terms of language group, which brings out interesting intercultural differences in metaphor use and interpretation. For English-speaking subjects (Chapter 5), the body scenario was found to be the most pervasive, and there was a high frequency of critical, negative or satirical interpretations. The German sample (Chapter 6) (complemented by a small Dutch and Norwegian sample) provided similar results, with the notable difference that the “person” representations dwelled more on serious moral-ethical evaluations alluding to 20<sup>th</sup> century history, which found no equivalent in the English L1 sample. Of the samples in Romance languages, the Italian one was the most sizeable, and was dominated by a range of stereotypes such as the highly emotional “nation as mother” personification. Unlike the German group, the Italian one contained hardly any negatively loaded allusions to history, and only a few references to current problems, which were represented as “illnesses” or “injuries” and generally embedded in scenarios with an overall positive slant. Another relatively large sample was the Russian one (Chapter 7), in which representations centered on the “heart” and sometimes “soul” of the nation. Arabic and Turkish samples (Chapter 10) presented interesting differences from these, with many Algerian participants expressing the relationship between their own country and its neighbours (Algeria is “the lungs of Africa”) and revealing a patriotic slant. The Chinese and Japanese samples (Chapter 11) also showed contrasts, with Chinese students preferring the “person” and “geobody” scenario, and using large numbers of body/health concepts. Many of the Chinese examples quoted here suggest an uncritical approach to political centralism (“I think the central government is like the brain of a body”), with a key role for the security forces as the “immune system”. China was also conceptualized as essential for the participants’ own wellbeing (“my nation China is like my heart”). Of particular interest was the “geobody” representation, including explanations such as “Taiwan is China’s hair”. Unsurprisingly, some respondents from Hong Kong presented a radically different stance, with use of the “geobody” scenario that appeared to justify separate status. The Japanese sample, on the other hand, was distinct in its focus on the figure of the emperor (the “heart” or “face” of the country), and its depiction of the “lower” strata of society as “legs” or “feet”. Temples, shrines and ancestors were variously associated with the “soul” of the country when the “person” scenario was used.

The last chapter (12) sums up the main findings, bringing out some of the different patterns in the various groups, and suggesting some perspectives for further investigation. In the age of globalisation, the proposal that this could be an interesting way to research the attitudes and experiences of minority groups towards their host (and possibly home) countries is particularly relevant. Overall, this book makes a useful contribution to our understanding of the workings of metaphor, and also adds to our knowledge of the way people from different backgrounds understand their own nation and their relationship towards it. Regarding limitations,

it is important to remember that the aim of the study was to open doors rather than provide definitive answers. The survey was expressly not designed to determine whether specific metaphors occur in different languages/cultures like much contrastive metaphor research (e.g. Breeze and Casado-Velarde 2018), but rather to find out about culture-specific preferences in using the various scenarios. Both in its methodology and its results, this study breaks new ground and yields a large number of pointers for future studies.

Of course, the finding that metaphors for the nation are culturally determined does not answer the question in itself, but rather opens the door to inquiring what kind of further questions should be posed in order to learn more. On the one hand, a given example might instantiate the collective worldview that prevails in a particular national culture, might merely reflect a conventionalized mapping that is no longer generative, or could also be a one-off example that is not grounded in the shared worldview, and so a degree of caution needs to be exercised when handling the results. On the other hand, some patterns of representation seem to be strongly associated with participants from particular cultures, and to investigate the reasons for this in any depth could involve wide-ranging philosophical, historical and sociological explorations, such as that undertaken by the same author in previous studies (Musolff 2016). The middle-range approach taken here, homing in precisely on how normal people habitually represent their nation, ultimately proves both tantalizing and, perhaps, somewhat frustrating, since any one of the national analyses presented here would lend itself to considerably deeper investigation. But in the last analysis, this shortcoming is outweighed by the positive contribution of the book itself, which presents a practical methodology for exploring metaphor in discourse across large datasets without losing the human or contextual focus.

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